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Ghosts of the Past:
Lessons from Local Force Mobilisation in Afghanistan and Prospects for the Future

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The international military and the Afghan state have returned to the local force model again and again since 2001, mobilising a range of locally drawn forces to fill security gaps and defend territory from insurgents. The rationale is that local forces know their area, get tip-offs and intelligence from local people and fight harder to defend their own communities and land. In some instances, this has proven to be the case; in others, local forces have been co-opted by ethnic, factional or criminal interests and abused the local population. Such problems contributed to the decision to wind up what has been the main local force for the last ten years, the Afghan Local Police (ALP), which at its peak approached 30,000 forces and was mobilised in 31 of 34 provinces.

However, while the ALP may be ending, the turn to local forces is not. In February 2018, President Ghani authorised a new local force: the Afghan National Army Territorial Force (ANA-TF), under Ministry of Defence control, is set to reach 10,000 men and be mobilised across districts in 32 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces in 2020. For the US, the idea of marshalling local communities to address international security priorities is not limited to Afghanistan, and it may become even more prevalent given the US enthusiasm for working "by, with and through" local partners as its predominant operating mode. As this paper was published, the outcome of efforts to negotiate an end to the war were uncertain. However, whether local forces continue in their role of fighting the Taleban insurgency or, as the United States has proposed with regard to the ANA-TF, are used as a vehicle for reintegrating Taleban fighters in a post-peace-deal Afghanistan, an exploration of what makes local forces work is still important.

Given the importance of this question in Afghanistan and in other contexts, AAN and GPPi undertook a three-year research project examining cases wherelocal forces worked well and cases where they did not, in terms of both securing territory and protecting – not abusing – the local population. The inquiry comprised some 283 interviews, several focus group discussions, a review of documentation and other evidence on the effects of different local force models, and the development of case studies of local forces across seven provinces. AAN has already published many of these findings and case studies as dispatches. This paper summarises the broader findings from that research, focusing primarily on the ALP, but also considering the record of the Uprising Forces, which are supported by the Afghan intelligence agency, and presenting some preliminary observations about the ANA-TF. With regard to the latter, the authors looked at how effective the programme's model and roll-out were in creating a local, professional arm of the ANA, rather than a 'second ALP'.

In summary, the major findings of the paper are:

Finding: A conflicting body of evidence about the ALP suggests that local force models can work, but that their effectiveness is highly variable and context specific:

- Most independent research evaluations and journalistic reports have been negative, suggesting that ALP forces were prone to abuse and political capture, and frequently exacerbated community divisions and conflict.

- UNAMA, while detailing abuses perpetrated by some ALP units, also reported that many communities felt that ALP improved their security.

- In 2013, a US Special Operations Forces evaluation found that one-third of ALP units were "causing more harm than good to the counterinsurgency," while another one-third were deemed "highly effective."

- Research suggests that the Taleban show a particular animus towards local forces such as the ALP and the Uprising Forces, suggesting that they pose a greater threat to the local Taleban than regular Afghan or even international forces. Where local forces have the backing of the community, they could shut down insurgent action and avenues for attack.

Finding: Better- or worse-performing ALP cluster at the provincial level, but it is often the local elements or dynamics that determine whether or not a given ALP unit is likely to work well:

- Where local strongmen with pre-existing militias are dominant or present in an area, there is a higher risk that they will co-opt or subvert the ALP, particularly where they are connected to factional networks (eg Takhar, Kunduz, Baghlan).

- Deploying ALP has proven risky in areas with a strong history of multi-ethnic or intra-tribal division, because where units are mobilised from one side over another, they may deepen or exacerbate divisions.

- Access to natural and/or illicit resources makes co-option more likely.

- ALP are more likely to succeed in places where local communities are organised, representative and actively engaged in establishing the force (eg Yahyakhel in Paktika, Kunar).

Finding: When ALP guidelines were overridden, the likelihood of failure increased:

- Perceived urgent security needs led to a policy of rapid expansion of the ALP in its early years; shortcuts in implementing the ALP model as well as Afghan political pressure led to disastrous selections of locations and commanders in many places (for example, Takhar, Kunduz, Andar in Ghazni).

- ALP safeguards required community consent and input into recruitment, but such rules were frequently ignored; ALP units were often forced on communities, and positions went to pre-existing commanders and their forces with little community input.

- Plans to prevent ALP mobilisation in areas with strong factional competition and problematic conflict histories were overridden; ALP units were created in response to political and factional pressure, and also sometimes to reintegrate former insurgents.

Finding: Mobilising local forces can lead to greater, more persistent violence:

- Local force mobilisation often pits one side of a community against another (pro- versus anti-Taleban, or one faction or ethnicity against another in divided communities). Where this happens, violence can intensify and be more prone to breach 'red lines' of conflict norms (eg, Andar and Muqur districts in Ghazni, Shajoy in Zabul, Arghandab in Kandahar).

- Mobilising one side against another as well as the more brutal and personalised nature of the conflict can deepen existing divisions and generate new and persistent cycles of violence and retaliation.

- Repeated cycles of mobilising local forces have contributed to the larger degradation of community structures and intensification of conflict; this can be seen in how few places still have strong, organised, representative community structures (as in Yahyakhel and Kunar); instead, in many places, commanders dominate and ethnic, tribal or factional conflict is entrenched. Establishing new local forces can therefore worsen conflict and result in greater harm to local civilians.

CONCLUSIONS

Overall, our research suggests that while local defence forces can bring benefits in securing territory and protecting communities, they will not work in all areas. Despite some recognition of the risk of co-option at the outset, pressure to roll the ALP out in areas where it was not appropriate, as well as failure to develop it slowly enough to enable meaningful institutional or community controls, led to more negative than positive examples of local forces. Where the ALP has been mobilised in environments to which it is not suited, or where it has been mismanaged, it has brought significant harm to local people, and they have suffered lasting damage.

The continual cycles of conflict and mobilisation in Afghanistan over the last few decades have contributed to a greater prevalence of the sort of community divisions, erosion of community-protective structures and dominance of predatory commanders and factional networks that spoil local defence models. The relatively small number of places in Afghanistan where local forces might work well is likely not sufficient to achieve a larger strategic effect. The risk remains, however, of expanding this model to places where this model is unlikely to work, and where it risks worsening rather than improving security. In areas where this happens, the local forces model will further militarise local spaces, worsening micro-and macro-conflict dynamics and proving counterproductive to both local and national aspirations for peace and stability.

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Cover page photo:
Local men in Nazyan district of Nangrahar mobilised as Uprising Forces to fight the Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP), which had captured large swathes of territory in the province in 2015. By mid-2018, Uprising Forces, supported US and other Afghan forces, had pushed the ISKP out of most of the district. Three different local defence forces are now mobilised in Nazyan, each with a different sponsor: Uprising Forces, under the National Directorate of Security (NDS), Afghan Local Police, under the Ministry of Interior, and the Afghan National Army Territorial Force, under the Ministry of Defence.
Photo: Andrew Quilty, 2019.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ALP	Afghan Local Police
AMF	Afghan Military Forces
ANA	Afghan National Army
ANA-TF	Afghan National Army–Territorial Force
ANAP	Afghan National Auxiliary Police
ANP	Afghan National Police
AP3	Afghan Public Protection Programme
APPF	Afghan Public Protection Force
ASF	Afghan Security Forces
CBSS	Community-Based Security Solutions
CDC	Community Development Council
CFSOCC-A	Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command–Afghanistan
CIPP	Critical Infrastructure Protection Programme
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
ISCI	Intermediate Security for Critical Infrastructure
LDI/CDI	Local Defense Initiative/Community Defense Initiatives
LHSF	Local, Hybrid and Sub-State Security Forces
MoD	Ministry of Defence
MoI	Ministry of Interior
NDS	National Directorate of Security
PSC	Private Security Company
RS	Resolute Support
SOF	Special Operations Forces
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
VSO	Village Stability Operations

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

ALP men in Kapisa province, pictured just after having fought off Taleban fighters on the main road between the provincial capital and Tagab district centre. The ALP, in existence since 2011 and present in 31 provinces, is due to be defunded in September 2020.

Photo: Andrew Quilty, 2014.

AFTER 10 years of both controversy and fanfare, the Afghan Local Police (ALP) is coming to an end. As of the time of writing, it was set to wind up by September 2020.[1] When it was initially proposed and formalised, in 2009 and 2010, the ALP was promoted as a lynchpin in the counter-Taleban military strategy, as a way of mobilising local communities against the Taleban and improving gaps in state services by enrolling communities into local community defensive forces (eventually in 31 of 34 provinces).[2] However, the ALP was controversial from the start. Although only a fraction of the larger Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) – official ALP numbers have hovered between 25,000 and just under 30,000 since the end of 2013[3] – the ALP has been a lightning rod for attention, as loved by its proponents as it has been pilloried by its critics. Due to hasty and problematic implementation as well as significant power broker manipulation, the ALP in many cases empowered groups who undermined, rather than advanced, local security and stability and who proved indifferent or directly abusive towards the community.[4] The significant record of abuses, corruption and criminality attached to the ALP ultimately contributed to the decision to wind up the force.

Although the ALP may be ending, the idea of leveraging local communities into the counter-insurgency fight is not. A new local force, the Afghan National Army Territorial Force (ANA-TF or TF), was created in 2018 under the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and is currently 10,000 strong, while the even more thinly regulated Uprising Forces, managed by the Afghan intelligence service, the National Directorate of Security (NDS), have also been mobilised in various provinces. As a result of all of these different strands of mobilisation, by the closing stage of this research, it was not at all difficult to find areas in which three different types of local forces operated – the ALP, the ANA-TF and the Uprising Forces, each beholden to a different institutional master, the Ministry of Interior (MoI), MoD and NDS, respectively, and with different international backers.[5] The lessons from the ten years of experimentation, missteps and learning from the ALP are thus still ripe for the moment in Afghanistan and very relevant for the many other theatres of conflict where international actors continue to support or even create local forces. For the US, for example, the idea of marshalling local communities to address international security priorities is not limited to Afghanistan and may become even more prevalent given the US embrace of working "by, with and through" local partners as the predominant operating mode.[6]

As the ALP's closure might suggest, its public image and much of the existing analysis of its record is broadly negative.[7] However, this is not universally so. Research into Taleban views of the ALP revealed a particular animosity towards both the ALP and the Uprising Forces (elaborated in the first case study in chapter 4), which suggested that these local forces have at least lived up to their intended mission of posing a threat to the Taleban at the local level. In addition, even some of the ALP's critics or opponents have noted that many communities continue to ask for their own local ALP and embrace the idea of being protected by their own. In a number of its annual reports since 2011, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) human rights unit both called out instances of problematic behaviour by the ALP and, simultaneously, noted that many communities embraced the ALP and its stabilising effects.[8] Such positive reporting, despite very credible

and damning accounts of bad behaviour, posed a puzzle: if the ALP model was successful in at least some areas in improving security and protection, to both security actors' and local communities' satisfaction, where were those areas? In theory, these 'best-case' scenarios should offer as valuable a lesson as the many missteps, in terms of understanding the true challenges or promise of the new local force, the ANA-TF. In particular, to the extent that ALP units were working, did this have anything to do with the local, community-based model that was supposed to distinguish the ALP from other types of forces?

To explore these questions, this paper is organised as follows:

Chapter 2: The Past as Prologue: Militia Mobilisation, Demobilisation and 'Re-hatting' in Recent History provides some background on the militias and factional interests that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s and that still persist, despite some attempts at disarmament and security sector reform in the post-2001 period. These dynamics and lines of solidarity still affect local force mobilisation and control up to the present and feature in many of the current local forces that have gone awry.

Chapter 3: Emergence of the ALP, Quick Expansion and Divergence from the Model then summarises some of the reasons why the ALP came to be created in 2009, including the various local forces that came before and influenced the prevailing thinking about local force models at the time. It outlines the initial model of the ALP and describes how its rapid expansion and Afghan institutionalisation significantly affected the way in which it was implemented.

Chapter 4: Local Forces in Practice: What Makes an ALP Succeed or Fail? presents the heart of this research project: a series of case studies illustrating some of the key factors and dynamics which appear to predispose an ALP unit to perform better or worse, from both a security and a community protection perspective:

> **4.1 The Taleban and the ALP: Enemy Number One** explores the Taleban's animosity towards and more dedicated attacks against the ALP and the Uprising Forces and what that says about the threat local forces pose to insurgents. It also explores how local mobilisation can lead to more brutal and intimate inter-communal violence.

> **4.2 Community Controls and a Successful ALP: Yahyakhel, Paktika** looks at a best-case ALP, one that protects local civilians against the Taleban and does not abuse them. It asks what community or provincial dynamics might contribute towards a 'good' ALP emerging. It also looks at how violence can decline when a well-supported local force is established.

> **4.3 Strongmen Capture and the Political Economy of Militias: Takhar Province** illustrates how underlying conditions, in this case the local political economy and factional politics, can predispose an ALP to fail. In Takhar, these dynamics led to re-hatting partisan militias into the ALP, with the result that the ALP in Takhar are barely distinguishable from unofficial pro-government militias in terms of engagement in criminality and abuse.

> **4.4 An Uprising and Worsening Violence: Andar, Ghazni** offers another contrast with the Paktika and Takhar examples by exploring how hasty mobilisation and inattention to local dynamics can lead to a failing and abusive ALP. As in Yahyakhel, counter-insurgency forces were established as a local initiative. However, Afghan

political interests and massive external funding and support eroded any potential community influence over the new force.

4.5 Lessons Learned? The Afghan National Army – Territorial Force gives a preliminary assessment of Afghanistan's newest local force to explore whether the lessons of the ALP, which were very much in the minds of the ANA-TF planners, could be addressed by better safeguards in the model or improved implementation.

Chapter 5: Conclusion Our research suggests that, while a local defence force can bring benefits, the model will not work in all areas of Afghanistan, and indeed, possibly not in many. The continual cycles of conflict and mobilisation over the last few decades have contributed to a greater prevalence of the sort of community divisions, erosion of community-protective structures and continuing dominance of predatory commanders and factional networks that spoil local defence models. The case studies suggest that community willingness not only to support but to lead such initiatives is crucial, but that this cannot be instigated or manufactured from the outside. Where the ALP has been mobilised in environments not suited to it or where it was mismanaged, local communities have suffered lasting damage. Even when local forces fight well, if their mobilisation entails some members of a community fighting other members (ie, local pro-government forces versus local insurgents), then the result can be particularly bloody for civilians and combatants alike. The planners at the MoD and RS who set up the ANA-TF have taken care to design a model of local force mobilisation that is more accountable, sustainable and effective than the ALP. However, even if the ANA-TF overcomes some of the missteps of the ALP, it will struggle to overcome the overall patterns of militia mobilisation that have recurred, ad nauseam, since the 1980s.

METHODOLOGY, DEFINITIONS AND OBJECTIVES

This paper is part of a three-year project (from August 2016 to August 2019) exploring the role and impact of local, hybrid and sub-state security forces (LHSFs) in Afghanistan and Iraq.[9] It was funded by the Netherlands Research Organisation (NWO) and implemented by the Global Public Policy institute (GPPi) in Berlin, the Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN) and the Institute for Regional and International Studies (IRIS) at the American University in Sulaimani in Iraq. The overall goal was to explore LHSFs in each country from a comprehensive security perspective – not only how well these groups addressed security issues, but also the impact on community dynamics, civilian rights and protection and other state-building or rule-of-law objectives.

There has been extensive research and documentation of the ALP already, by both military and civilian authors, by researchers, academics, human rights practitioners, civil society organisations and journalists. Given this substantial record, a fair question may be: Why another report on the ALP? One reason is that much of the literature, both military and civilian, relates to the early implementation period (2009 to 2012) or the period up through the major withdrawal and transition of international forces in 2014. This paper follows not only what happened with the early expansion and implementation of the ALP, but also where it has ended up after ten years, just before its dissolution. The ALP and other related local force models have arguably been tested more in Afghanistan than in any

other location, making analysis of the lessons learned and the missteps important both for Afghanistan and for the literature more broadly.

In addition, this report aims to contribute to the existing literature by reflecting on one particular aim or legacy of the ALP, which has to do with its local or community nature. The promise of the ALP was that it would distinguish itself from previous LHSFs by being both more inclusive of and more accountable to local communities, which was thought to make the ALP stronger counter-insurgents as well as more protective and not abusive of local people. This paper particularly examines whether those assumptions were borne out.

As an initial step, AAN and GPPi jointly conducted a literature review to assess what had already been written on LHSFs in Afghanistan, specifically with regard to the key themes identified above. This literature review was published in January 2017.[10] It both helped to shape the focus of the subsequent research, including the selection of case studies and key questions to pursue and directly informed some of the findings in this report. Chapters 2 and 3 include some of the key points from this literature review; the full findings and a wider number of references and sources is available in the full literature review.

AAN led the subsequent field research and data collection in Afghanistan, pursuing some of the research gaps or open questions identified in the literature review through its regular investigative reporting and publishing the findings as a series of ten 'dispatches' on AAN's website.[11] Some of these publications took the form of situation or force updates, for example, providing information on ALP reforms in 2017 or tracing the implementation of the ANA-TF.[12] Others identified and documented examples of better- or worse-performing ALP or Uprising Forces and analysed the local factors or elements influencing their development.[13] Still others examined a particular thematic issue with ALP across a region or at the national level, including a dispatch on Taleban attitudes towards the ALP and the Uprising Forces as well as others on efforts to hold the ALP accountable.[14]

As such, the original research was initially organised as a series of related but distinct inquiries. At the conclusion of the project, AAN and GPPi decided to try to synthesise broader lessons by summarising and extracting some of the key findings and learning from these different research strands into one summary report. The chart below (Box 1) summarises some of the methodology and sources for each of the original case studies, as well as provincial or district-level research in a few other provinces that were not processed and published as separate case studies (namely Nangrahar and Kunar). In addition to this case-study research, the lead researchers conducted an estimated 104 interviews on the general subject of the ALP, the ANA-TF and the Uprising Forces with officials from the Afghan ministries of defence and interior as well as the National Security Council; Afghan politicians; Afghan commanders; senior international military leaders, international military and civilian personnel working with local forces; other US State Department or Defense Department personnel and staff at the National Security Council; US congressional staff; as well as Afghan and international security and human rights experts, journalists, members of NGOs, Afghan civilians living in the research areas and Taleban fighters.

Although the background research included an extensive review of the academic literature related to the ALP and other local forces – including those related to security sector reform and assistance, counter-insurgency theory, state-building and peace-building, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR), as well as other protection and development debates – engaging with this literature fully is beyond the scope of this report.

Box 1: Summary of research & methodology for case studies

	Qualitative interviews and focus group discussions	Other important sources and notes on methodology
Shajoy, Zabul	17 interviews with local government officials, tribal elders, other community members, civil society and Taleban, between July 2016 and August 2017.	Most interviews were conducted by phone and some in person.
Taleban and the ALP – five case-study districts: Arghandab and Panjwayi districts in Kandahar; Shajoy district in Zabul; Andar and Muqur districts in Ghazni.	70 conversations and interviews with Taleban fighters and officials, members and commanders of ALP and Uprising Forces, and civilians as part of ongoing research since 2010.	Interviews conducted either during field research (13 visits since 2010), through interviews by telephone or WhatsApp, or with individuals from the districts being studied who were visiting or living in Kabul. Qualitative findings were compared with an analysis of security incidents in a database maintained by a western security expert.
Andar, Ghazni	42 interviews with local government officials, provincial council members, former ALP members, Taleban sources, civilian advisors who had previously worked at ISAF headquarters and at the Ghazni Forward Operating Base, local journalists, tribal elders, community representatives and other local residents, between October 2017 and May 2018.	Most interviews were face-to-face, either in Kabul or during one of six field visits. Some were conducted by phone or WhatsApp. Six previous AAN dispatches informed the analysis.[15]
Yahyakhel, Paktika	14 interviews with parliamentary representatives, tribal elders, an ALP commander, civil society and community representatives, between June 2016 and December 2017.	Interviews were conducted over the course of five field visits to Paktika. Qualitative findings were compared with an analysis of security incidents in a database maintained by a western security expert.
Takhar	24 interviews (including two rounds of follow-ups) between January 2011 and May 2018, including with ANP commanders, district governors, international and Afghan security and human rights experts, provincial council members and local residents.	Interviews variously conducted in person in Kabul or by telephone, Skype or email.
Nangrahar and Kunar	Three focus group discussions with community members from Achin, Bati Kot, Khas Kunar and Kunar over the summer of 2019. 12 interviews with security and government officials, community elders and district leaders from these five districts, local researchers and Western security analysts.	Some focus group discussions were conducted by a partner Afghan research organisation at the location. These findings were not published as a separate case study, but they informed the general analysis in this report.

With regard to terminology and underlying assumptions, the overall approach of this project has been to view LHSFs through a comprehensive or human security lens. The authors interpret this as requiring an evaluation of these forces not only in terms of whether they could hold ground against the Taleban, but also how much they lived up to the original rhetoric of population protection. This typically came down to whether the forces protected local people – and did not abuse them. This decision to evaluate ALP equally on both counts – that is, holding ground against the insurgents and protecting the population – creates some tension with some military appraisals of the ALP, which give greater weight to their ability to hold ground against the Taleban, even if their behaviour or selection raise other concerns.[16] As Mark Sedra has aptly framed the issue: "This is perhaps the crux of the dilemma facing the SSR [Security Sector Reform] model in the post-September 11 era. Whose security does it seek to advance? The model is built upon the principles of human security, but the Afghan and Iraqi agendas appear to be driven by external security interests rather than by advancing the security of individual Afghans and Iraqis."[17]

As the case studies will elaborate on in greater detail, the degree to which local forces treated the local population well was often related to how embedded they were in their local communities, whether forces were recruited from the actual local population, were responsive to community leaders or elders, and whether they respected community norms and requests. This element of the 'community' or that of 'local ownership' (as it is sometimes framed) is itself a difficult element to pin down in Afghanistan, and this is not an uncontested term across the wider range of academic literature dealing with these issues.[18] In Afghanistan, as many of the case studies illustrate, many communities are divided across different tribal, ethnic or other solidarity lines, and even in more uniform communities, who actually speaks for community interests can be hard to define. A substantial criticism – not only of the local forces initiatives, but also of similar 'bottom-up' or community-focused trends in the governance or rule-of-law sectors – has been that there is a tendency to muddle, romanticise or reify the idea of community, particularly in outside analyses or treatments.[19] Critics have argued that looking to community or local elders as sources of authority for a community can also be problematic because it reinforces existing, often inequitable power structures that are not actually representative. Nonetheless, the idea of community acceptance or accountability still held significant traction in much of the local research and interviews, and it stood out as an important element in whether local forces performed better and were less abusive. Thus, while recognising the etymological limitations of the concept of community, the term will still be used within this report.

Lastly, as noted, the focus of this report is predominantly on the ALP, and to a lesser extent on the Uprising Forces and the emerging ANA-TF. Chapter 3 also discusses several precursor forces that began in 2008 and 2009 – essentially the initial experiments with the local force model that would eventually become the ALP. These will mostly be described using their original acronyms, although in a few places this paper describes them as precursors to the ALP or references the theories underlying them in discussions of the original ALP model. This paper frequently uses the term 'local forces' or 'local defence forces' to refer to all of these different variants of locally recruited, defensive or hold forces, thus encompassing the ALP and its precursors, the Uprising Forces and the ANA-TF. This is useful as a shorthand, despite the fact that in many cases, these forces went beyond their defensive mandate or included members recruited from outside their areas. Other types of LHSFs, for which the local or community mobilisation is not the defining element

– for example, private security companies and local forces acting as auxiliaries to CIA and US Special Operations Forces, known in Afghanistan as 'campaign forces' – are briefly introduced in the historical overview in chapter 2. These are not the focus of this paper, but are discussed at greater length in the literature review. Nonetheless, it is important to keep in mind that, as with all of the forces in Afghanistan, there may be significant fluidity between these different categories. Forces tend to switch patrons, allegiances and forms frequently. Forces that are a CIA paramilitary force one day may later be re-hatted as the ALP, or for that matter, forces that are insurgents one day may be ALP the next.

With regard to terminology, the most commonly used term, 'militia', tends to have a pejorative connotation in English, Persian and Pashto, conjuring an image of unruly, undisciplined and thuggish forces often connected to a local commander or warlord, with at best a loose connection to or control by the state. However, it is hard to have a discussion about either state or non-state forces in Afghanistan without using the term 'militia'. It is widely used, particularly as many of the local forces were designed not to resemble the militias of the past. As such, references to the militia-like attributes of some of the current local defence forces and comparisons between them and the militias of the past becomes somewhat inevitable. Thus, this paper does use the term militia, although it does not embrace it as the best one for all the forces in question. Another term for local forces, which is not used in this paper but comes into some of the case studies, is *arbakai*. Before 2009, this word referred to a geographically specific, temporary, unpaid local defence force, mobilised by tribal *jirga*s in Loya Paktia.[21] Since 2009 and the mass mobilisation of local forces across the country, it has come to be used to refer to the ALP, the Uprising Forces and other pro-government militias, usually pejoratively.

CHAPTER 2
THE PAST AS PROLOGUE: MILITIA MOBILISATION, DEMOBILISATION AND 'RE-HATTING' IN RECENT HISTORY

Uprising Forces in Kot district of Nangrahar guarding the frontline against ISKP – whose forces had been pushed back, but were still less than two kilometres away at the time. Local forces have been repeatedly mobilised in Afghanistan since the initial formation of the mujahedin in the 1980s, with each iteration tending to mobilise along pre-existing factional and ethnic and other solidarity lines.

Photo: Andrew Quilty, 2016.

AFGHANISTAN'S history has long been shaped by the interaction of local forces with the

state – from dynastic rulers' co-option of tribal forces, to the emergence of partisan and mujahedin forces following the Soviet invasion, to the anarchic militia contests that stood in for politics in the 1990s.[22] The legacy of the last several decades of mobilisation and militarisation, of shifting allegiances and re-hatting (when an armed group gets a new patron or label, but retains its identity and coherence) continues to be one of the strongest factors shaping Afghan forces and their associated political dynamics today. Although a full history is beyond the scope of this paper (see the literature review for a more robust timeline and sourcing),[23] it is important to provide a brief history, as some of the commander networks and patterns that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s will reappear as significant factors in the later case studies. The immediate post-2001 security sector reforms and waves of demobilisation never really broke these down. Instead, they became new avenues for re-hatting or legitimating these factional networks and patronage relationships, or in some cases supporting new political-security entrepreneurs and strongmen.

MILITIA AND SOLIDARITY LINES IN THE 1980S TO EARLY 2000S

In the 1980s, a range of local forces mobilised as mujahedin (fighters in a jihad), in resistance to the Soviet occupation.[24] At first, the resistance grew organically, with people organising together with those they knew and therefore, typically, along clan, tribe or ethnic lines. However, these forces quickly became organised into political-military factions, and with foreign funding (alternately Pakistan, Iran, the United States, Saudi Arabia and others), they became autonomous from these more organic community or other traditional power structures.[25] A new 'commander class' emerged at the expense of non-military leaders, tribal elders and other community actors.[26] The factions were differentiated partly by ideology – Islamist, conservative or monarchist – but also came to be coloured, albeit never exclusively, by particular solidarities, for example, with the majority of members being largely Pashtun, Tajik or Hazara. Militias were also mobilised on the side of the state during this period. With Soviet support, the ruling communist PDPA administration established its own type of pro-government armed group, known as *kandak-e qawm* (in English-language literature, 'regional guard brigade' or 'tribal militia'), further militarising and operationalising competing patterns of solidarity.[27]

As more power accrued to these non-state and quasi-state forces, both those aligned with the state and those challenging it from outside, Afghan state control and legitimacy was further weakened, contributing to its collapse in 1992.[28] Many members of the former government armed forces joined their co-ethnics in the various mujahedin factions and tribal militias. With no state and a host of competing armed groups, Afghanistan was consumed by internecine violence.[29] Civilians suffered from indiscriminate rocket and

artillery fire that decimated cities such as Kabul. Militias on all sides engaged in ethnic violence, looting, extortion and even sexual assault – a degree of abuse and impunity that would eventually pave the way for the Taleban to take power.[30]

When the Taleban came to power, they presented themselves as a supra-tribal and supra-ethnic movement that prevailed over the chaos of all of this militia violence and would rein in other actors; in reality, they were essentially a rural, southern, Pashtun, largely Kandahari faction. Most were mullahs or madrassa students who had previously fought against the Soviet occupation, either in Taleban 'fronts'[31] or as members of other mujahedin factions.[32] After the Taleban captured the capital in 1996, the mujahedin factions and tribal militias that had been fighting over Kabul mostly realigned themselves into the anti-Taleban Northern Alliance (aka the United Front).[33] As the Taleban moved north, they co-opted or disarmed local commanders, establishing a monopoly on violence in the vast majority of the country. Many of the Northern Alliance commanders fled, and their sources of funding for armed men dried up, leading to the effective demobilisation of many fighters. After the 2001 attacks on America, when the US turned to the factions of the Northern Alliance and other anti-Taleban commanders to help overthrow the Taleban, US funding and arms effectively drove a fresh recruitment of fighters.

The 1979–2001 period, characterised by militia mobilisation, violence and counter-violence, is important for understanding subsequent issues and patterns in post-2001 local force mobilisation for two reasons. First, the memories of the damage wrought by these militias – on the personal, community and national levels – are fresh in many Afghans' minds when the idea of mobilising (or often effectively remobilising) local forces is proposed.

Second, this period of factionalisation and conflict had a lasting impact on the social structures and conflict dynamics in communities across Afghanistan. The armed groups that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s were drawn along existing ethnic, tribal, sectarian and clan lines, but these solidarity patterns deepened as a result of repeated cycles of mobilisation and the effects of the conflict (including ethnic violence). Gilles Dorronsoro argues that while ethnicity and to some extent political affiliation were important fault-lines in the civil war and conflict cycles that followed the Soviet withdrawal, the "ethnicisation of the parties was a consequence of the war" (rather than ethnic divisions engendering the conflict).[34] Moreover, while the Taleban's disarmament drive weakened the armed factions and networks, the nature of the 2001 intervention reinvigorated them. What this meant was that in the post-Taleban era, members of the 'commander class' were the strongest and best-placed actors in most parts of the country.[35] The basis of their strength was military, tied to a capacity to mobilise along solidarity lines, although their power more typically found expression in the political and business spheres as the decade progressed.

In addition, and particularly important for this paper, any efforts to exert state authority or mobilise local forces would do so against the backdrop of these competing factional lines and commander structures. The factions and solidarity lines that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s displaced prior organising structures and hierarchies. In the north and west, the political-military factions which emerged through the war, known as *tanzims,* have remained dominant, with access to arms and militias as much a part of their hold on power as their co-option of official positions and resources. Elsewhere, while *tanzims* are a factor, they have not fully displaced tribal affiliation as an organising principle. Nonetheless, the long years of conflict corrupted and mutated traditional patterns and structures of tribal

authority in many areas in ways that would make them more vulnerable to co-option and militarisation in later years.[36]

POST-2001 MILITIA MOBILISATION AND DEMOBILISATION

After the US and its Afghan allies ousted the Taleban government in 2001, military and civilian leaders of the various factions of the Northern Alliance, as well as commanders, tribal leaders and political figures who had joined the anti-Taleban cause, took over most of the country. Commanders took prime spots in the new Afghan government as ministers, provincial and district governors, and commanders in the police, NDS and military. Hamed Karzai, chosen as the new Afghan leader at the Bonn conference in late 2001, was in the early years of his rule, less powerful than the panoply of commanders, north and south. All used their access to state positions and international aid and military support to rebuild their own patronage networks, typically packing government offices and forces with their own people. This had the consequence of boosting the clout of many of the *tanzims*, as well as fuelling the emergence of a new generation of commanders and strongmen who would go on to generate their own patronage networks and militias.[37] State positions and forces – including in the Afghan National Police (ANP), NDS and the newly created Afghan National Army (ANA) – were most valuable for patronage and in terms of corrupt practice. However, a string of initiatives that provided state or international funding to a range of local or quasi-state forces also proved helpful in sustaining militias or preventing their demobilisation; this range of post-2001 LHSFs were the immediate precursors to the ALP and helped inform both the suspicion of the idea of mobilising local forces when the ALP was proposed and some of the attempted checks or improvements that would be built into the ALP model.

The numerous commander-driven militias that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s and fought on the side of US and international forces were largely recognised as the new government's army and renamed the Afghan Military Forces AMF.[38] The newly re-established MoD (under the control of the Shura-ye Nizar network of the Jamiat-e Islami faction of the Northern Alliance)[39] imposed a notional, formal structure on the AMF. However, in practice, these were little more than formalised militias, still loyal to their pre-2001 commanders and subject to little central command and control. In addition, US attention soon moved southwards, where it believed 'Taleban remnants' still needed to be eradicated; funding and arms provided to Afghan partners enabled militias there to thrive.

There were subsequent efforts to regularise these forces, break patronage ties and demobilise armed groups operating outside of state control. By 2003, the first Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programme was underway.[40] DDR was supposed to be a complement to parallel efforts to establish the new ANA and was aimed at addressing the issues presented by the militias within the Afghan Military Forces; some of these were integrated into the ANP and, to a lesser extent, the ANA, while others were demobilised.[41] A second DDR programme – the Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups Programme – kicked off in 2005 and attempted to demobilise illegal or otherwise undesirable armed groups on the pro-government side. These efforts largely failed to get rid of Afghanistan's militias. As Deedee Derksen wrote, DDR "could not break the link between mid-level commanders and their men — its primary goal. Often, it actually

reinforced patron-client relations between commanders and their men."[42] Although the ANP is not the subject of this report, it is worth bearing in mind its continuing similarity to many of Afghanistan's LHSFs. In 2011, Antonio Giustozzi could still write that the uniformed police "was still more like a fragmented coterie of militias than either a paramilitary police or a civilian police force";[43] later research points to only some professionalisation of the cadre.[44]

More broadly, DDR as a whole was continually undercut both by the structure of the 2001 settlement – with many of the leading warlords and commanders holding key positions of power – and by repeated initiatives by both the Afghan government and international military to remobilise or protect the particular armed groups closest to them.[45] From 2001 onwards, US Special Operations Forces (SOF) and the CIA relied on particular militias as auxiliary forces, known in Afghanistan as 'campaign forces'.[46] These covert forces have remained virtually untouchable in terms of both demobilisation and accountability for the many abuses they have been accused of carrying out; some still operate at the time of writing with a chain of command beyond the control of the Afghan state, and operating effectively outside domestic law.[47] As NATO's 'stabilisation' mission, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), expanded from 2003 onwards, ISAF forces also tended to hire guards belonging to local strongmen to protect their bases; these became known as the Afghan Security Force (ASF). The ASF was largely disbanded in 2006, when reporting suggests there were about 2,500 fighters, 90 per cent of whom joined the ANA or ANP.[48] Many Afghan power brokers (including those holding high public office) also preserved or created their own militia forces by forming private security companies, which then often won lucrative contracts from either international forces or the Afghan state to secure everything from military bases, to major transit points, to elections.[49] Regional power brokers, including Afghan governors, also maintained their own unauthorised armed men to help them retain order and/or power.[50] Militias and local forces have often also made a more dedicated appearance just ahead of elections, nominally to protect voters, but often being used to intimidate or defraud voters.[51]

In 2006, a new route for putting power brokers' militias, primarily those of President Karzai's southern governor allies, on an official payroll emerged with the creation of the Afghan National Auxiliary Police (ANAP).[52] It was supposedly created to help Afghan forces counter the rising Taleban threat, particularly in the south, but in practice, it is a collection of unruly, undisciplined militias in uniform.[53] ANAP forces were disbanded by 2008, only to be followed by another state security force programme. The Afghan Public Protection Force (APPF) was created in 2009 to be a nationalised private security force under the Ministry of Interior (MoI) that could replace the growing numbers of private security companies.[54] In August 2010, Karzai declared that all private security companies were to be dissolved and replaced by the APPF. A total ban on private security companies never went through, largely due to opposition from powerful international players who did not trust the protection of their embassies, bases and other facilities to the Afghan government.[55] It is worth noting that, as with the ANAP, Karzai did back militias under his or his allies' control; the issue with the private security companies was not about state versus non-state armed forces, but rather who controlled them.[56]

What stands out in this brief review is that the militias never really went away: they were transformed into different publicly or privately funded entities and re-hatted under different initiatives, but the solidarity lines and commander structures and hierarchies were never really dismantled. Moreover, as will be discussed immediately below,

an emerging counter-insurgency strategy and greater focus on the community level of engagement would also energise a new round of quasi-state mobilisation, this time driven by international military forces, especially the United States. The strategy proved immediately controversial, with the international military accused of taking Afghanistan backwards and ignoring the lessons of Afghanistan's militia-ridden past.

CHAPTER 3
EMERGENCE OF THE ALP, QUICK EXPANSION AND DIVERGENCE

A renewed interest in local force mobilisation from 2009 onwards sparked a number of new forces. Here fighters from two of them, the Afghan Local Police and Uprising Forces coordinate in the fight against ISKP in Kot district, Nangrahar province.

Photo: Andrew Quilty, 2016.

BY 2008,

some of Afghanistan's international backers were looking for a new strategy in Afghanistan. In the US, President Barack Obama had just been elected and signalled that he would refocus US attention from Iraq back to the 'good war' in Afghanistan. The situation on the ground was also deteriorating. The Taleban were making a comeback,[57] and the Afghan government was not only too weak to stop them, but was part of the problem. Corrupt, feckless and often predatory Afghan officials and forces were blamed for driving communities towards rebellion – and into the arms of the Taleban.[58] The top-down focus of previous state-building efforts – focusing on developing formal institutions and on Kabul-centred reforms – appeared to have contributed to the problem by enabling elite capture and corruption at the top,[59] while neglecting the informal actors and institutions that had traditionally provided governance, security, dispute resolution and other services in rural Afghanistan.[60] Afghanistan's international backers began to look for ways to leverage these alternatives to the state, mostly by deputising local community actors and their informal collective bodies (known as *shuras* or *jirgas*) to make decisions on local governance, development and dispute resolution.[61]

This greater focus on bottom-up state-building and development was also partly driven bythe United States' emerging counter-insurgency strategy.[62] The new commanding general whom Obama brought in to revamp the Afghanistan strategy, General Stanley McChrystal, embraced a more full-throated counter-insurgency strategy in Afghanistan, which aimed to win back communities by providing protection and government services, and by preventing the sorts of misconduct, corruption and civilian casualties that had often turned them to the Taleban. It would do so in particular by embracing a more bottom-up view of both security and governance – McChrystal's first major review of the situation in the summer of 2009 argued that the "top-down approach" had failed and that weak and abusive Afghan government institutions and a "widespread sense of political disenfranchisement" had created fertile ground for the Taleban.[63] Among other recommendations, he concluded that greater attention and support needed to go to "traditional community governance structures" of historical importance to Afghan communities.[64] Within the security sector, that came to mean mobilising tribal or other local fighters into self-defence forces.[65]

Proponents of local community forces believed that Afghans would prefer their 'own people' to outsiders policing or defending their areas. They frequently pointed to historic structures of local governance and autonomy in Afghanistan, in particular the south-eastern Pashtun tradition of *arbakai*, in which a tribal *jirga* (a Pashtun conflict-resolution mechanism) organises an unpaid, temporary armed force under its authority to enforce *jirga* decisions, ensure law and order, and defend the tribe's boundaries.[66] There were major warning signs from the onset, casting doubt on whether local forces could be activated and leveraged as counter-insurgents in this way. The *arbakai* tradition was not universal across Afghanistan.[67] Even where it had existed, many of the tribal or community structures that had supported these relatively egalitarian and protective local security

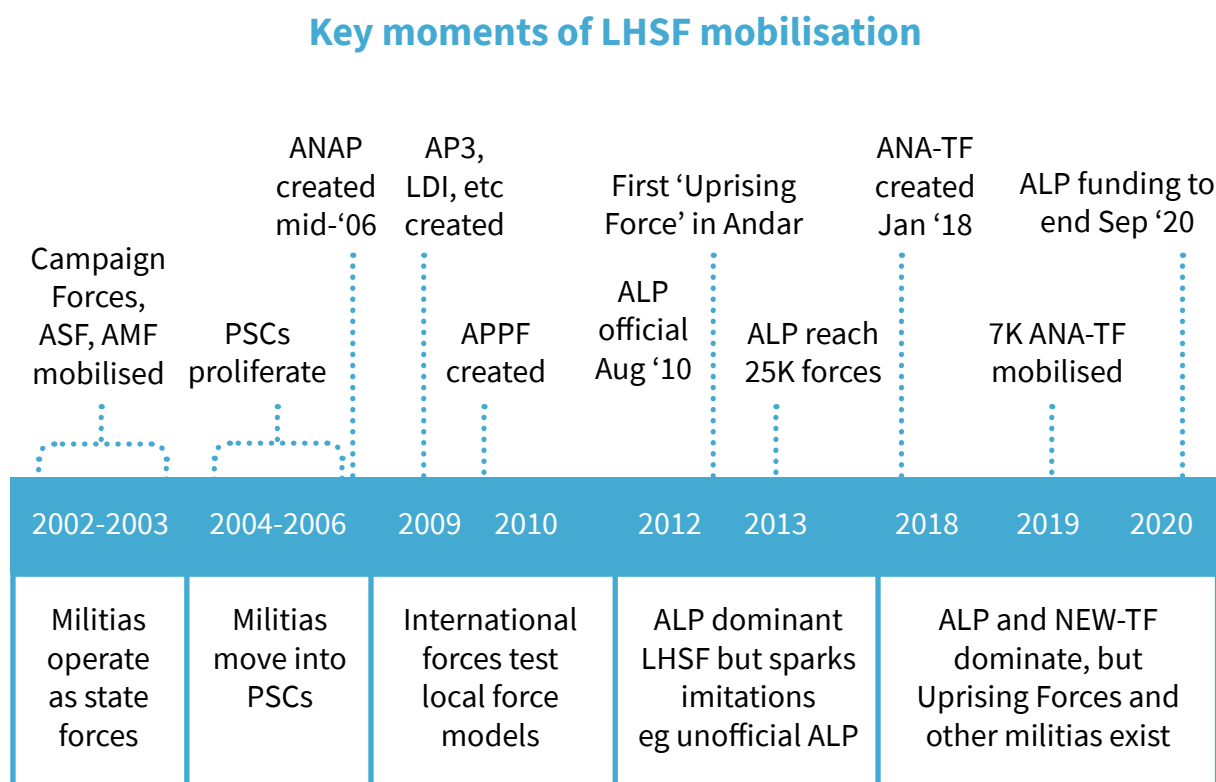structures in the past had been displaced by the commander class and warlord dynamics described above.[68]

Nonetheless, in 2009 and 2010, US Special Operations Forces (SOF) began a series of experiments in mobilising tribal and community forces in areas deemed to be of strategic value.[69] The first was the Afghan Public Protection Programme (AP3) in Wardak province in late 2008/early 2009,[70] followed a few months later by the Local Defense Initiative (LDI), sometimes alternately known as Community Defense Initiatives (CDI), mostly in southern Afghanistan.[71] Although these grew out of different initiatives and deployed different operational and institutional frameworks, both the AP3 and the LDI/CDI "emerged from the same conceptual and political soil," as Matthieu Lefèvre writes.[72] Both were intended to improve community security and extend the government's hold in strategic areas held or threatened by the Taleban by deputising community members to act as local counter-insurgents or community 'guardians'.[73] They both borrowed heavily from the conceptions of Afghan tribal *arbakai* and, encouraged by theories of bottom-up state-building, constituted a more open embrace of the historical reality that local matters had traditionally been dealt with by locals.[74]

Both the AP3 and the LDI/CDI programme tried to limit the risks that had materialised in previous militia or quasi-state force experimentation, albeit with slightly different approaches. The AP3 was formally linked to the ANP and co-managed by the MoI, thereby retaining an overlay of state control and oversight over these local forces. The LDI/CDI forces had no link with the state, but were developed and supported by one of the US Special Forces commands, Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command–Afghanistan (CFSOCC-A). Arguing that it was more consistent with historical relations between tribal militias and the Afghan state, and would prevent Afghan government "mismanagement" of the programme, those planning the LDI/CDI forces thought they should be "largely autonomous, taking orders from local *shuras*," as Mark Moyar framed such early thinking.[75] The CFSOCC-A plan involved embedding US SOF in target communities to not only mobilise and mentor counter-Taleban local forces but also to engage in other governance support activities, generally referred to as "Village Stability Operations" (VSOs).[76] Citing a June 2009 CFSOCC-A briefing, Seth Jones, an advisor to the programme at the time, describes the general operational pattern as follows:

> *The teams would focus on three tasks: improve informal governance by actively supporting village jirgas; establish or co-opt already-existing "village-level defensive forces through tribal or other local institutions to protect population"; and improve development "through jirgas to improve infrastructure, health services, education and other sectors."*[77]

Notwithstanding these different institutional structures, both programmes gave primacy (at least in theory) to community preferences and engagement. Both the AP3 and the LDI/CDI models gave a role to local community councils or elders in selecting or approving the forces.[78] As one key advisor to the initial pilots, Seth Jones, described the initial vision for the LDI/CDI programs, they sought to support militias that were "under the immediate oversight of village *jirgas* (not warlord commanders)."[79] As one key advisor described it, vetting in the early stages meant: "If the *shura* was OK with them, we were OK with them."[80] Lastly, in line with the vision of this being a programme to help local communities resist the Taleban, a key criteria of the LDI/CDI was that these initiatives were only supposed to be initiated in communities that wanted one. As one early advisor to the programme

Figure 1: Timeline of local force mobilisation in Afghanistan, 2001-2020

Key moments of LHSF mobilisation

	ANAP created mid-'06	AP3, LDI, etc created		First 'Uprising Force' in Andar		ANA-TF created Jan '18	ALP funding to end Sep '20
Campaign Forces, ASF, AMF mobilised			ALP official Aug '10		ALP reach 25K forces		
	PSCs proliferate	APPF created				7K ANA-TF mobilised	

2002-2003	2004-2006	2009	2010	2012	2013	2018	2019	2020
Militias operate as state forces	Militias move into PSCs	International forces test local force models		ALP dominant LHSF but sparks imitations eg unofficial ALP		ALP and NEW-TF dominate, but Uprising Forces and other militias exist		

Key LHSF trends

Afghan Security Forces (ASF) and **Afghan Military Forces (AMF)** Pre-existing militias 're-hatted' as state and private security forces

Campaign Forces Militias acting as auxiliaries to SOF or foreign intelligence units, still in existence

Private Security Companies (PSCs) Some militias continued to operate as private security companies

Afghan National Auxiliary Police (ANAP) Militias or paramilitary forces converted into auxiliary forces for the police in the south

Afghan Public Protection Force (APPF) PSCs brought under state (Ministry of Interior) management

Local force experiments that were pre-cursors to or, by 2012, subsumed into the ALP:

- **Afghan Public Protection Programme (AP3)** Local counter-insurgency force mobilised by US forces in Wardak province
- **Local Defense Initiative (LDI)** aka **Community Defense Initiatives (CDI)** Local counter-insurgency forces mobilised by US forces mainly in the south
- **Critical Infrastructure Protection Programme (CIPP)** Local counter-insurgency force mobilised by US forces in the north
- **Intermediate Security for Critical Infrastructure (ISCI)** Local counter-insurgency force by US Marines in Helmand
- **Community-Based Security Solutions (CBSS)** Local counter-insurgency force by US forces in the east

Afghan Local Police (ALP) Local counter-insurgency force mobilised by the US SOF under the Afghan Ministry of Interior

Uprising Forces Local counter-insurgency forces supported by the NDS

Afghan National Army Territorial Force (ANA-TF) Local counter-insurgency force mobilised by the MoD (with other Afghan ministries' and international forces' input) as part of the ANA

remembered, one of the key criteria was that "the population has to support it and agree to it."[81]

US forces in other parts of the country also developed their own versions of this local forces model apart from the AP3 and the LDI/CDI, including the Critical Infrastructure Protection Program (CIPP) in the north, the US Marines' Intermediate Security for Critical Infrastructure (ISCI) in Helmand and the Community-Based Security Solutions (CBSS) in the east, as well as other initiatives that were never branded under any particular acronym.[82]

These different local force experiments were instantly controversial. The Afghan government had jointly managed the AP3 programme, but had not been consulted on the other local force experiments.[83] This was in part because many US special operations personnel considered the groups to be more effective counter-insurgents and less corruptible if they had no links with the problematic Afghan central government.[84] The effort to go around the Afghan government triggered frustration in the security institutions and with President Karzai. The Minister of Interior at that time, Hanif Atmar, would later call the LDI programme illegal.[85] Leading diplomats and other international actors also raised concerns, arguing that building up forces that were not controlled by the state would undo the years of effort put into strengthening Afghan state control and would reverse the gains from DDR.[86] Afghan civil society and human rights groups warned that this local mobilisation would result in the same abuses and rise in conflict as support to militias had in the past.

By the summer of 2010, General David Petraeus replaced General McChrystal as commander of US and ISAF forces. He was fresh from a hugely lauded counter-insurgency campaign in Iraq, where 'flipping' Iraqi tribes was seen as key to turning the tide against al-Qaeda in Iraq. He saw a similar potential in Afghanistan and not only wanted to keep the programmes, but also to scale them up dramatically.[87] This set up a heated standoff between him and President Karzai – Petraeus raised this in his first meeting with Karzai, which caused the latter to storm out, according to reports by those present.[88] President Karzai was wary of forces outside central government control and only relented when Petraeus agreed that they would be established and regulated on Afghan terms. The Afghan Local Police (ALP), formally established in August 2010, would come under the MoI, with local ALP units reporting to district and provincial chiefs of police.[89] All other local defence forces or initiatives would be folded into the ALP or disbanded, a process that proved slow, but was ultimately completed by 2012.[90]

3.1 THE ALP MODEL IN THEORY: COMMUNITY BUY-IN AND TIGHT CONTROLS

The core theory and model underlying the Afghan Local Police was roughly the same as its predecessors. The international military, now together with the Afghan government, would identify locations of significant strategic value where communities also indicated that they wanted to resist the Taleban. Once selected, US SOF (and later some conventional forces) would deploy to the village to mentor the local forces for a period of weeks or months. Other Afghan institutions and US civilian development agencies provided additional

stabilisation and development support alongside this local force mobilisation in what were broadly framed as 'Village Stability Operations' (VSOs).[91] As with the AP3 and the CDI, those mobilising the forces tried to ensure they were linked to their local communities, as a check against past abuses and to increase these forces' legitimacy and traction as counter-insurgents.[92] To achieve that community buy-in, local elders were supposed to be a key part of screening and selecting which individuals would take part.

Now that it was formally part of the Afghan state, the ALP also came with more formal controls and checks than the original local defence models had proposed. There were to be background checks and an extended training period.[93] ALP candidates were subject to a code of conduct with specific restrictions – not operating checkpoints more than one kilometre from their village, restrictions on engagement in offensive or detention operations and general good conduct prescriptions, as well as any other MoI regulations.[94] The vast majority of these restrictions continue to be written into ALP guidelines up to the time of writing, even if they were not always (or even usually) followed.[95]

Given the controversy surrounding the ALP's authorisation and expansion, proponents of the programme were on the defensive and tended to emphasise the number of additional in-built safeguards to prevent these forces from becoming yet another version of powerful, unconstrained militias.[96] Reflecting such arguments, a RAND consultant who worked with Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command – Afghanistan (CFSOCC-A) during this period, Lisa Saum-Manning, summarised the combined formal and informal checks as follows:

> *The vetting process relies on the local Shura to nominate candidates and is a prerequisite to being accepted into the ALP program. The aim is to avoid some of the pitfalls experienced by previous programs that maintained rather loose vetting standards. The local Shura serves as a first filter by leveraging traditional Afghan mechanisms of accountability. The approach capitalizes on Afghan cultural norms which underscore family honor and respect for local community elders. [....] MOI provides further vetting (via a GIRoA in-processing team and the NDS) using background and drug tests as well as biometric enrollment in the program. All weapons issued to the ALP are registered and must be presented in order to receive the monthly MOI authorized funding. MOI requires ALP candidates to be 18–45 years of age.*[97]

The ALP was promoted as not just a security, but also a governance solution, a key route for empowering communities and helping remove fundamental blockages between state and society. As Seth Jones described the initiative, "Whereas past efforts focused on short-term priorities such as protecting US military units […] VSO/ALP addresses fundamental political, tribal, ethnic and socioeconomic challenges that impede sustainable progress."[98] Another of the key military advisors to the programme put it in only slightly less ambitious terms: "SOF quickly realised this was a governance programme, not a security programme. It was about rebuilding the *shura* to the point where it could make collective decisions about security."[99] One former US intelligence officer said the way that SOF or their advisors described the initial VSO/ALP was almost "utopian" in nature, and "infused with [the ideals of] good governance and civilian protection."[100] As the subsequent section will illustrate, these good governance and community empowerment ideals did not materialise for the most part, even in the early stage. Nonetheless, it is important to highlight this larger governance framing in order to understand both why certain elements were established in the model and the substance of the later critiques focussed on governance shortfalls.

Reflecting the general atmosphere at the time, Human Rights Watch's Rachel Reid, writing in 2011, observed that the Afghan government and the US, "say they have learned the lessons of the past and that this time things will be different. Supporters point in particular to what they describe as more rigorous measures to involve the local community in selecting and vetting recruits, as well as efforts to avoid empowering pre-existing militias and heavy oversight by US special operations forces for most of the new forces." [101] In sum, the post-2008 local defence initiatives offered a promise – or, alternately framed, a gamble – that it was possible to have the benefits of local forces (local know-how, cheap and quick mobilisation, local ties and legitimacy) without the risk associated with militias.

## 3.2 THE ALP MODEL IN PRACTICE: HASTY MOBILISATION AND LOOSE OVERSIGHT

Despite initial hopes, the programme's rapid development and Afghan institutionalisation of it would in practice change the model in fundamental ways. Those who designed the ALP model promoted it as something that would only work under certain conditions: "It was meant to be location-specific, and meant to be grown slowly," one of the key civilian advisors developing the model said.[102] Units had to be in a strategic location and feasible to support logistically, but also had to meet certain 'community criteria'. The initial local defence forces, such as the CDI and the LDI, and later the ALP, were only supposed to be established in communities that wanted a unit and where the local community structures would be strong enough to support them and hold them in check. The criteria that they should be under the direction of local *shuras*, not local warlords, also suggested either an implicit ban on mobilising forces in areas where they would likely be captured by local strongmen and/or that measures (such as SOF oversight) would be taken to prevent this.

This model would have demanded significant time, resources and knowledge, as well as the option to reject locations – something that was foreclosed by perceived strategic demands. Under increasing pressure to demonstrate success in Afghanistan, Petraeus and other military leaders wanted immediate results, with effects similar to those of the Sons of Iraq programme (which grew in one year from zero to an estimated 77,000 forces).[103] The ALP programme was pushed to grow from a force of just over one thousand when it was authorised at the end of 2010 to a force of 17,000, covering 84 districts across most Afghan provinces, by the end of 2012.[104] By 2011, the programme was authorised to grow to 30,000 – a goal it quickly approached but never quite reached.[105] By the end of 2013, the ALP comprised just under 25,000 members, and by January 2015, it had increased to just over 29,000 members, with units spread across 29 of the 34 provinces.[106]

Mark Moyar notes that as the ALP expanded, the sites were increasingly chosen based not on popular desire or support, but on where it would be good to have a unit, a factor he correlated with the ineffectiveness of many of the later ALP sites.[107] However, the imperative to expand the programme to a wider number of areas – and fast – shifted the criterion from whether an ALP unit *should* be mobilised in a given area to simply whether it *could* be, even if standing up a unit was likely to be counter-productive. In the rush to mobilise, the slow, deliberate and careful nurturing necessary to pick the right locations and forces was not an option. As the military advisor quoted above noted, after the programmes were regularised and expanded, there was constant pressure to mobilise

local forces "immediately, without considering the site" or the key criteria.[108] One western security consultant who analysed ALP dynamics for ISAF said that in this phase, the SOF team was often given only a week or ten days to stand up an ALP unit in a given area.[109] He said that while SOF made good faith efforts to organise a *shura* and consult the community, if the *shura* members did not show up, or if a fully representative *shura* did not manifest, the ALP would still be mobilised based on whatever suggestions they had.[110]

Figure 2: District-level overview of ALP presence in 2011 and 2017

2011

District Level Activity
ALP Present
No ALP

AAN, CC BY-SA 4.0 (derived from GPPi)
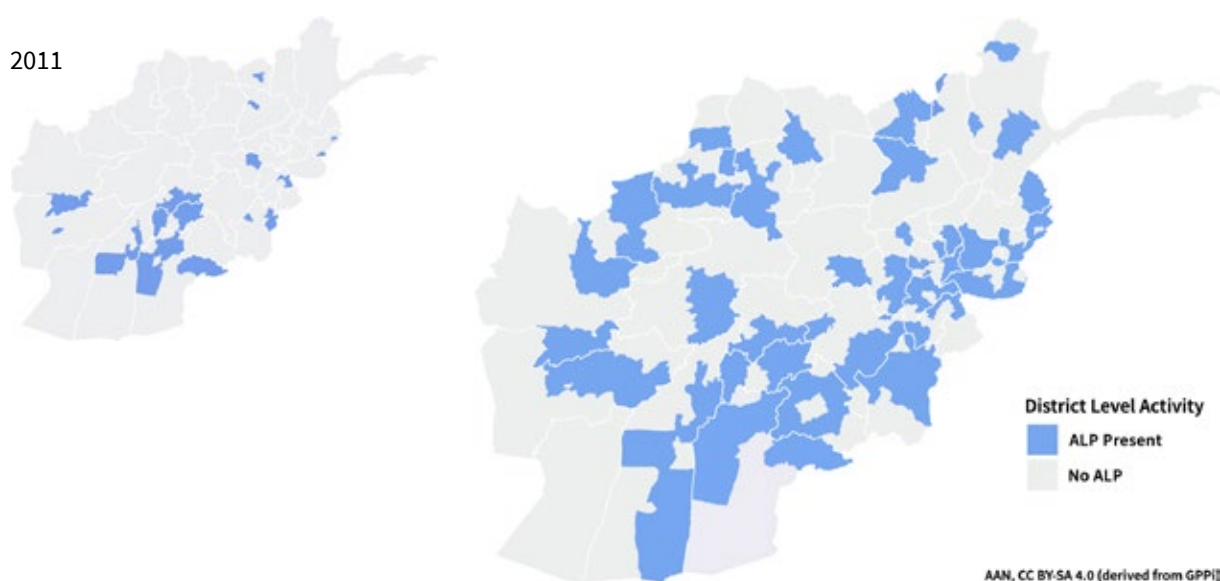
Once the ALP was formalised, there was a pressure to rapidly expand it, including to regions and districts where it was initially deemed either unnecessary or unlikely to succeed. The comparison of where ALP units were located in 2011 versus 2017 illustrates how the programme expanded from a mainly south/southeast-focused initiative to a nation-wide project. However, this district-level map still shows the greater weight of the programme in the south/southeast. In southern and eastern provinces, ALP tend to be spread across most districts, while in the north, centre and west of the country, ALP tend to be clustered in limited areas of a province, often near a border or major transit route.

Even when red flags appeared, the pressure to roll out this programme quickly overrode the concerns; one SOF advisor gave the example of an emerging ALP site in which a local warlord offered what the advisor called his 'farmhouse' as the embed location for SOF mentors.[111] Although SOF protested that this made the programme susceptible to subversion from the get-go, they were eventually pressured to go forward. Matthew P Dearing, a former military advisor in Ghazni, provided another example from an early ALP mobilisation in Andar district:

> At an individual level, there were US commanders who realised and wanted to know if there were abuses going on, realising that there needs to be accountability and disciplinary measures. There were people at battalion or company level in Ghazni, dealing with these things on a daily basis and meeting '[Andar] Uprising' leaders, but they were getting a lot of pressure from above to make [the ALP] happen. [They were told]: "There needs to be ALP. We have to have X number of ALP by such and

such a date." The need to get the numbers up took precedence over micro-level local concerns.[112]

Amid this pressure to expand the programme quickly and to more areas, one of the signature elements of the programme – community control and selection – immediately fell by the wayside. Communities that did not want a local defence force were pressured to accept one. Rather than being given a choice of who would serve in the ALP, elders described being forced to rubber stamp or ratify force selection made by SOF or local commanders, and in many cases they were not consulted at all.In 2011, the Associated Press visited 12 of the first 25 districts which had ALP, and most of the community officials and elders they interviewed said the programme had been forced on them by Afghan or international officials.[113] When they visited Shindand district in Herat province, District Governor Lal Muhammad Omarzai told the Associated Press that "police officials consulted community leaders for the first three days, then dumped the procedure." The district police chief for Shindand also said it was all imposed by the MoI at the beginning, and then by US SOF.[114] The AP also quoted a provincial councillor in the Barmal district of Paktika province: "The international troops wanted to just impose this. They were pushy. It is not fair to force this on people."[115] A southern Afghan researcher who spent extensive time researching the ALP in Helmand said that while some communities were willing to support the ALP, where they were not, their interests were disregarded. He gave the example of Maiwand in Kandahar, where locals were told they could either mobilise an ALP unit or leave the area. The way that international forces operated, he said, was to "pretend to be led by local preferences, but actually they were leading policy, doing as they felt was important."[116]

AAN investigations into the formation of an ALP unit in Shajoy, Zabul province, which began in 2011, found that although US forces and the district governor organised a community *shura* promoting the narrative that the community would select forces of 'good character', the ALP commander – a police chief who had been working in another district – was chosen and installed based on his contacts with US SOF and local provincial officials.[117] He brought his own men with him, with no visible vetting or community consultation as far as the community and local officials recalled (see the case study in Box 2).

SOF and military advisors' accounts of how they selected forces do not necessarily contradict those of community representatives. They suggest that, notwithstanding the rhetoric of community empowerment, force selection came down to the same commander contacts and relationships that had dominated previous force mobilisations. One senior SOF commander, who was a member of a team mobilising the early ALP forces in Kandahar and Uruzgan, described the process as first identifying a local commander or figure whom they trusted – which could be a tribal leader, a local police commander, or a source or commander they had worked with who knew the area – and then "hav[ing] them go with us into a village and pick out 20 guys."[120] Other accounts of ALP mobilisation offered a similar narrative.[121] One former British Royal Marine who was involved in ALP development in Gereshkh in Helmand province said that selection came down to a "trust and hope" type of arrangement, with international forces trusting an elder or mullah to nominate a commander, and then hoping that he picked trustworthy men for the rest of the force.[122] Similarly, in Andar in Ghazni, there was an 'outsourcing' of 'community consultation' to a single local figure with good ties to the US military.[123] While relying on local commanders or known figures may have been expedient, it increased the risk of the ALP being dominated by local power brokers or commanders (as discussed in the section 3.3) rather than

Box 2: A case study in local agency, Shajoy, Zabul

The ALP in Shajoy[118] was set up without meaningful community input or vetting. A US military public relations account at the time documented US forces' organisation of community *shura*s to discuss establishing an ALP unit, reporting that US forces and the district governor emphasised that there should be community accountability and telling district leaders to nominate recruits of "good character" for the force.[119] However, the view from the ground told a different story. Local residents and the district governor said that US Special Operations Forces introduced a former ANP commander they had worked with in another district as the ALP commander. This commander, Muhammadullah, also had the backing of other key provincial officials, although not necessarily for reasons of good character (locals said a key MP supported him in exchange for ensuring his help in getting votes in the forthcoming election). Locals reported that he brought with him his own forces, with no visible vetting or community consultation.

The community members alleged that after his appointment, Muhammadullah and his forces engaged in extrajudicial killing, mistreatment of detainees, beating and abusing civilians, abduction and sexual assault of girls and women; theft, bribery, extortion and corruption; and pilfering salaries of ghost soldiers supposedly under his command. Interviewees said that from the start of Muhamadullah's command, they repeatedly complained to officials in Qalat, albeit quietly because they feared repercussions from the ALP back home. When a national delegation from Kabul visited the district in 2015, community members also raised their concerns (as attested by an MP who was part of that delegation). However, this resulted in no action; Muhammadullah continued to be protected by the provincial officials who had supported his appointment.

US forces withdrew from active deployments in Shajoy in 2013, and the district police chief was replaced in 2015. With both Muhammadullah's international and local backers gone, the community finally succeeded in having him removed and replaced with a leader they proposed, Haji Gul Agha. He had no military experience but was well-respected for his skill in dispute resolution. He agreed to the job, but only after gaining assurances from other elders that they would support him with advice, intelligence and recruits. Since the replacement, locals reported, security improved, both in terms of the ALP no longer committing crimes and in terms of a reduction in Taleban attacks.

This is an account of just one community's experience with the ALP, but it does illustrate the larger point that where communities are able to influence the process, they might actually represent a meaningful check on forces' behaviour. The negative takeaway from this example in Zabul is that the local turnaround was only possible once the foreign and Afghan government actors who backed Muhammadullah left or were demoted. This is one example of a larger dynamic in Afghanistan – that community wishes have not won out where they clashed with state or foreign actors' preferences. Such an environment limits the degree to which community accountability can work.

beholden to the community – exactly the opposite of what the ALP model was supposed to do differently from what had been done in the past.

Instead of the vision of home-grown, community counter-insurgents with local roots and checks, the ALP came to look much like any of the other Afghan forces, but with a local recruitment and deployment model and lighter training and oversight. Although the ALP was originally promoted as a defensive force, only 'holding' cleared territory, they frequently found themselves on the frontline, deep in heavily contested areas and performing whatever security tasks their own commander or other local officials (or power brokers) saw fit.[124] One of the military advisors who helped design the initial ALP model commented: "The way they are used today is profoundly different from how it began […]. Once it became regularised, it became less about governance and more about security, and less about defence and more about offence."[125]

As noted, the ALP came under MoI control and oversight and, at the local level, under the chief of police and the ANP. However, in many rural, Taleban-contested areas, the ALP had been mobilised precisely because other ANSF – especially the ANP – were not present. Where the ANP were present, ICG found they often lacked the men and the firepower to challenge local ALP units, making them "powerless to modify the behaviour" of the ALP. ICG quoted a senior police commander in Kunduz who said that "his roster of 1,000 regular ANP would need to expand by 700 for any serious effort to control the ALP" and other pro-government militias in the province.[126] As will be discussed at greater length below, efforts to check the ALP were also sometimes overruled by officials in Kabul who had personal or factional ties to particular ALP commanders.

The MoI in general does not have a strong record on accountability, and the ALP was no exception.At the national level, the ALP was to be monitored and kept in check by the ALP Directorate, a thinly staffed unit in MoI headquarters in Kabul. Its ability to investigate allegations of abuse was hampered not only by its lack of presence outside Kabul (with staff sent out to investigate only when allegations came in, as staff time allowed), but also by the fact that the ALP Directorate does not hold command authority over ALP units. They fall under the regular ANP chain of command (under the immediate command of the provincial police chiefs, who are subordinate to an MoI deputy minister). One head of the ALP Directorate in Kabul noted that when it observed ALP being used in inappropriate ways, or in ways that violated their mandate (for example, engaging in offensive operations or outside their home area), he would try to issue a warning but was frequently overruled by ANP zone commanders who outranked him.[127] Although UNAMA's human rights unit noted that the ALP Directorate made increasing efforts over the years to investigate allegations of misconduct or abuse and forward credible allegations to prosecution, the rate of successful arrest or prosecution remained low.[128] For example, in 2015, only one-third of the ALP referred to prosecution for alleged crimes were actually arrested, and in 2013, only four of the 68 ALP personnel they managed to arrest on credible charges were convicted.[129] ICG's investigation into the ALP in Kunduz adds some colour to the challenges of arresting ALP and holding them accountable to the law: "In [one] case, the MoI tried to capture an ALP commander accused of beatings and summary killings but was thwarted for months by his refusal to surrender. 'I don't have control of my own men,' an MoI official said."[130]

As the sole funder of the ALP and its main proponent, the US has kept a finger on ALP oversight and had its own informal and formal accountability requirements, both in

terms of ALP conduct (with US funding barred for those who committed gross violations of human rights) and basic pay and equipment accountability.[131] However, trying to exert accountability in areas that were outside Afghan government control and where there were vested interests – on all sides – in non-enforcement proved to be largely beyond the reach of what were ultimately Washington, DC-based accountability mechanisms.[132]

These external accountability mechanisms became even more difficult to apply after the major draw-down of international forces in 2014 and the so-called transition to full Afghan responsibility for security.[133] The initial ALP model was premised on a high degree of SOF oversight and engagement in the communities where ALP were mobilised. Even though the

## Figure 3: ALP per 1000 people, 2017
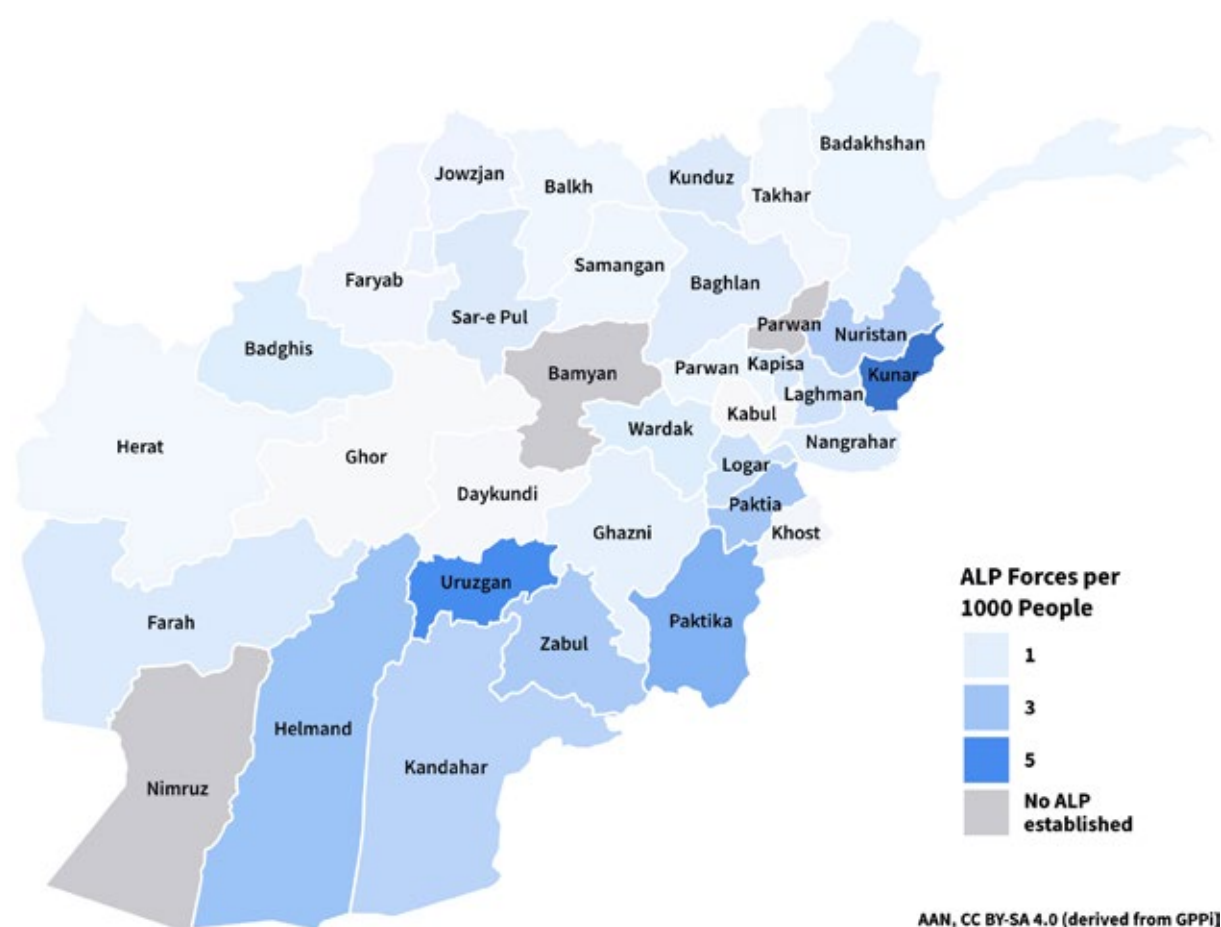
The ALP expanded rapidly, from just over one thousand men when authorised at the end of 2010, to 17,000 by the end of 2012.[1] By January 2015, it had expanded to roughly 28,000 and was found in 29 out of 34 provinces. By the end of 2017, when the data for this map was obtained, there were ALP units in 31 out of 34 provinces.[2] Sources suggest that this ALP distribution has stayed roughly the same since the data was obtained, although the number of units per province may vary somewhat from one year to another and the overall number of ALP formally on the roster has declined after payroll and accountability reforms in 2017 and 2018.

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1 Lisa Saum-Manning, *VSO/ALP: Comparing Past and Current Challenges to Afghan Local Defense*, RAND Corporation, Washington, DC, 2012, 9.

2 UNAMA, *Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2011*, 6; UNAMA, *Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2014*, 79; UNAMA, *Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2017*, 49.

evidence suggests that such oversight never fully lived up to the model, and that it was not all that effective from communities' perspectives in any case, after the 2014 transition, it virtually disappeared.[134] The only remaining connection was an SOF advisory cell in Kabul, the Special Operations Advisory Group, with a mission to train, advise and assist the ALP Directorate.[135] One of the military officers assigned to this unit was interviewed in 2017 and noted that, as a result of this change in roles, SOF's ability to monitor local forces – whether in terms of behaviour or pure military effectiveness – was very low. "We no longer have touch points at the tactical level," he noted, meaning that much of their information came from either the ALP Directorate itself or from ad hoc reports by limited numbers of SOF in the field.[136] Another international advisor to the force admitted that US leverage was limited to 'housekeeping' – for example, ensuring personnel existed and were paid, and that equipment was accounted for.[137]

Figure 4: Distribution of ALP per province, 2017

AAN, CC BY-SA 4.0 (derived from GPPi)
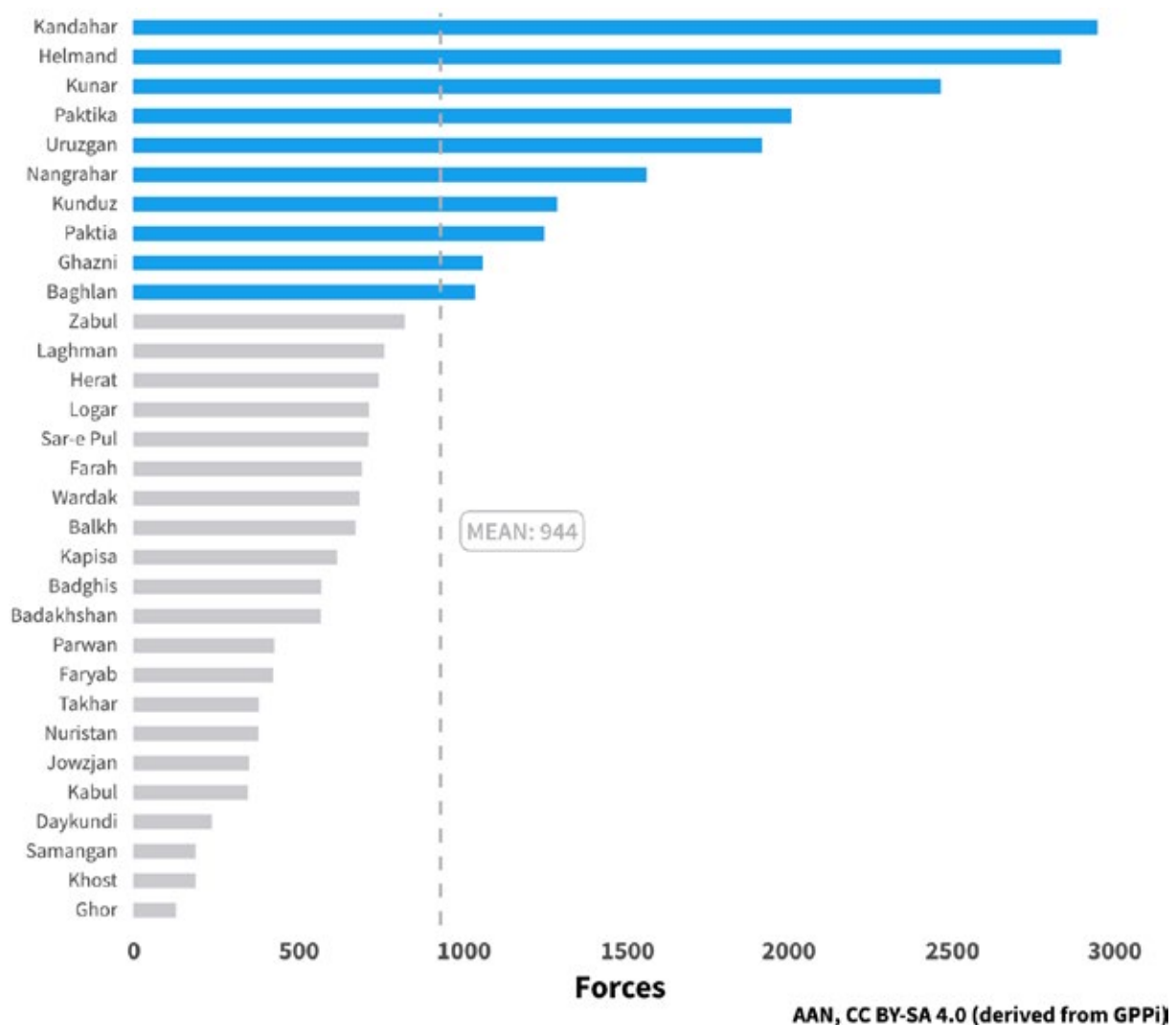
The number of ALP in each province illustrates where the programme has been most active, with the greatest number of ALP in the south and southeast. Provinces like Kandahar, Helmand and Kunar were the focus of local force mobilisation from the earliest pilot projects. This data is based on both international and Afghan tracking of ALP in December 2017.

3.3 POWER BROKERS AND FACTIONAL INTERESTS TAKE HOLD

Haste to mobilise forces was not the only reason that the initial criteria and model were derailed. As noted in the introduction to this paper, since 2002, Afghan power brokers have consistently sought to capture government postings and salaries (at both national and local levels), particularly those that would allow them to put fighters on a payroll.[138] It was inevitable that greater Afghan institutionalisation of the ALP would further open up the new force to those seeking to use it for patronage or to control this latest element of the country's armed forces.

From the very beginning, Afghan stakeholders – from government officials in the Karzai administration, to regional power brokers, to local strongmen, including MPs – tried to manipulate both site selection (where ALP units would be) and force recruitment (who would be on the force). The US military's initial proposals for the ALP would have kept it mostly in 'Taleban-heavy' areas, which were more in the Pashtun south and southeast.[139] US SOF and advisors deliberately avoided mobilisation in the north, both because it was known for strong ethno-political factionalism (a potential risk factor for the programme) and because there was a lower Taleban threat in the north at that time, making the need for additional forces far less urgent in their view (although this view would change later on, as security began to deteriorate in the north).[140] However, the Afghan government objected to this geographic tilt and argued that it should not be a "Pashtun handout programme," as one international advisor framed their objection.[141] With official authorisation came the decision to expand the programme to a broader range of areas, including the north, which made it more susceptible to the interests of a wider range of stakeholders. Once established, senior government officials, parliamentarians and other power brokers continued to try to get ALP units established in their districts or regional areas of influence throughout the life of the programme.[142]

Power brokers were not only able to manipulate which regions or provinces ALP would be established in, but also used their influence to subvert the selection model within particular districts or local areas to ensure that their local affiliates or commanders were put in charge. Colonel Charlie Getz, director of the SOF advisory unit in 2016, said the ALP was too frequently used by MPs or other Afghan officials as a "jobs creation programme," which could also be used to help get out the vote in their home areas.[143] At the local level, the 'commander class' of strongmen and local power brokers sought to take over or dominate whatever ALP force would be stood up. There were, in a sense, both bottom-up and top-down efforts at subversion. As Jonathan Goodhand and Aziz Hakimi write:

> Provincial elites, including members of parliament (MPs), provincial governors, and regional strongmen, saw the ALP as another resource flow that could be captured to consolidate their power bases. Further down the political chain, local commanders and ALPers, who were trying to access resources and employment, drew on the ALP for this purpose. This attitude can be understood as part of a complex core-periphery bargaining relationship. For example, local commanders elected to parliament felt the need to maintain their power base in their districts and tried to use the ALP to reinforce their power but ended up clashing with former interior minister Bismillah Mohammadi, who refused to recruit some groups into the ALP.[144]

What commonly emerged was a national-to-local patronage arrangement, with most local commanders and units maintaining vertical ties back to factions and power brokers at the centre. These national stakeholders protected their local forces or actors, ensuring that they received force positions and resources, in exchange for the ability to influence events in the local area.

The channels through which co-option and capture occurred varied from one region to another, or even one province to another. In the north and west, this often played out as a larger *tanzim* rivalry, with the same militias that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s regenerating or re-hatting themselves as ALP units.[145] In other more predominantly Pashtun areas, the *tanzim* or factional influence was usually not the predominant feature; instead, the competition for control of the ALP (and getting men onto the force) would fall along tribal lines, with one tribe, sub-tribe, or simply tribal leaders trying to use the ALP to enhance their position and marginalise others. The new commander class, especially those who had become dominant locally or provincially in the post-2001 period through connections to Karzai or other major national figures and/or the international military, also actively latched onto the utility of the ALP in getting their men on the payroll and advancing their interests. Derksen notes that Matiullah Khan's co-option of the ALP in Uruzgan province, for example, was just one element in his consolidation of provincial security and business interests.[146]

The effects of this sort of factional or strongman capture were multiple. At a local level, commanders and power brokers who had successfully captured ALP positions tended to be less interested in stabilising an area than in advancing their own agendas or those of their affiliated backers in Kabul. Because of these vertical linkages up to power brokers and factions in Kabul, any tension between factions at the national level, said an MoI official, "spreads" to the ALP units controlled by different factions.[147] Such patterns of strongman capture also tended to go hand-in-hand with criminal networks and trafficking, with local or regional power brokers using armed men under their control (in official or unofficial forces) to command local resources and enable illicit economic activities.[148] In addition, in many communities, the capture of the ALP by one faction or tribal interest over another had the effect of deepening community enmities and rivalries, and provoking conflict and instability. Those ALP that were recruited from and comprised of members of one part of a community – for example, one tribe or sub-tribe, one ethnic group or one faction– to the exclusion of others used the power that came with local force dominance to marginalise, exact revenge or prey upon rival factions or groups in the community.[149] Control of the ALP, and of the government and international funds that went with it, was both a lucrative resource and a potential weapon (or defence) against rivals, thus sparking competition for control. One Afghan official who is an expert in governance observed that this was particularly likely to spark conflict in areas where there were multiple competing *tanzims*, factions or commanders: "What has happened in these commander-filled areas is that the formation of local forces has created a rivalry. Those who are placed in these positions use their position to pursue resources and support their own patronage," while at the same time, "other commanders who were left out" become spoilers.[150] The existence of factional networks is thus important not only because it helps highlight the deeper, force-driven, political-economic structure distorting the incentives of many of those involved in the ALP, but also because it helps explain how the ALP got caught up in wider conflict arcs.

The vertical linkages – the local-to-national patronage networks – also tended to short-circuit efforts at local accountability. ALP commanders who gained their positions through

links to national figures and factions rather than through local nomination, for example, were beholden to these larger benefactors rather than to the community, or even to the formal institutions and the ANP chain of command.[151] This gave them effective impunity – even where communities raised objections, the problematic ALP units could leverage their national backers to override those objections. In its Kunduz case study, ICG noted: "Even minor changes to the payroll roster in a district can provoke phone calls from Kabul, overruling the modifications."[152] In such situations, formal hierarchies and community controls are ultimately meaningless.

Figure 5: Powerbroker capture and commander-to-unit ratios, 2017
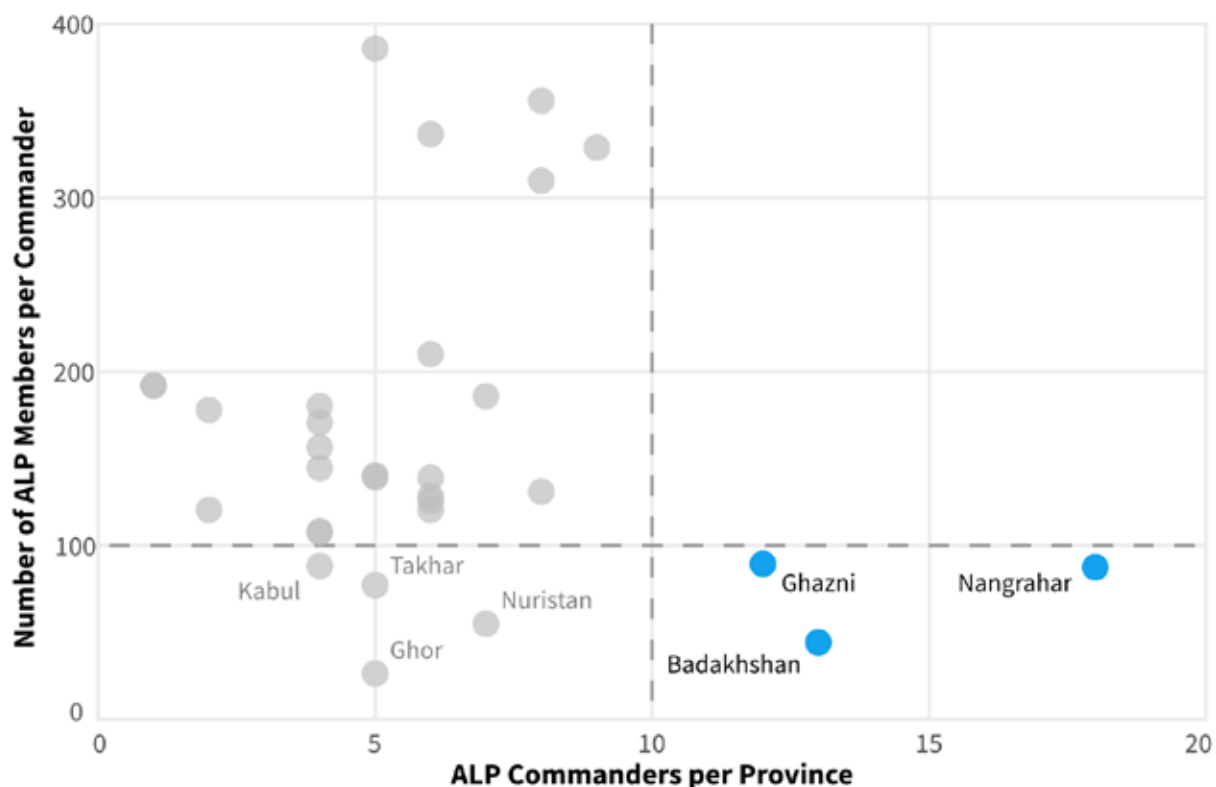
The number of ALP units mobilised in each province has varied markedly, with about half of the provinces having one to five ALP units, while the data suggests Nangrahar had 18, Badakhshan 13, Ghazni 12 and Kandahar 9. The ratio of ALP commanders to men, ie the unit size per commander, also varied, from fewer than 100 ALP members per commander to almost 400. While factors like geography, terrain, and community cohesion could account for this, patronage politics might also be behind some of the outliers. Throughout the ALP experience politicians and power brokers have used the ALP as a 'jobs creation' programme. Provinces with lots of commanders may reflect successful lobbying by powerbrokers to get commanders and militias loyal to them on salary. It was notable that some of the provinces with a bad reputation for such powerbroker politics and for ALP capture stand out in terms of commander-to-unit ratios, including Nangrahar, Badakhshan and Ghazni, as well as Kabul and Takhar.

Although there are many examples, Kunduz provides perhaps the starkest and best-documented example of such factional capture, and so it is worth discussing in some detail. It also provides some background for the later case study on Takhar, given that many of the same interests and factions influenced ALP mobilisation in both provinces. In Kunduz, after 2001, the rival Northern Alliance factions of Jamiat-e Islami and

Jombesh-e Milli divided up control of formal governance and security positions in Kunduz between their associated commanders. Although the province has a substantial Pashtun population, they were "largely excluded from the political settlement" and associated patronage resources.[153] These same patterns of exclusion replicated themselves in the ALP established in Kunduz from late 2010 onwards. As Goodhand and Hakimi write, the ALP was "disproportionately captured by Tajik (mainly Jamiat) and Uzbek commanders, especially in central Kunduz, which is ethnically mixed."[154]

The Tajik- and Uzbek-dominated ALP used their position of power through the ALP to further disadvantage, harass and prey upon the Pashtun population, perpetuating existing lines of conflict and contributing to the momentum of the Taleban there.[155] ICG notes that there were frequent reports of abuse in Pashtun areas patrolled by non-Pashtun ALP, including "killing, maiming, and disrespecting the locals."[156] Such abuse ultimately "provoked uprisings along many of the infiltration routes that were later employed by insurgents for their 2015 advance on Kunduz city," ICG concluded.[157] Linking this to the short-lived Taleban takeover of Kunduz in 2015, Borhan Osman argues that, "[i]n Kunduz, it was not so much that the Taleban were attractive, but rather that the pro-government militias and Afghan Local Police have behaved so badly as to make the state look unattractive."[158] Vanda Felbab-Brown is even more trenchant in her critique of how militias instigated instability in Kunduz:

> *Far from stabilizing Kunduz, militias, including many of the ALP brand, have contributed dangerously to the cauldron of ethnic and tribal rivalries, instability, and political exclusion and favouritism that Kunduz has been for years. Instead of the militias succeeding in expelling the Taliban from Kunduz, it is this insecurity, augmented and perpetuated by the presence of militias, that has consistently pulled the Taliban into the province and enabled the insurgency to persist there.*[159]

Kunduz is often cited as a particularly bad example of political capture and power broker interference, with particularly harmful consequences. However, this sort of one-sided capture of the ALP and the way that it fuelled partisan and predatory behaviour and provoked local conflict was a common pattern in ALP mobilisation across many provinces and regions.[160] Due to the many consequences and fallouts, one SOF commander involved in multiple phases of the ALP and VSO mentoring noted that this issue of power broker capture had, in his view, proved to be the significant predictor of where a poorly performing ALP would emerge. "Where you have the issue of bad actors as local power brokers, trying to co-opt ALP, that's where you'll get a bad ALP, and where you don't have them, then you tend to get a better ALP."[161]

The issue of ALP forces falling under the influence of power brokers and skirting formal institutional control was so widespread that, beginning in late 2015, the ALP Directorate was required to track this issue and report on it.[162] The exact methodology that the ALP Directorate used has never been disclosed and appears questionable. For example, in the reporting on powerbroker influence that was shared with and reported in quarterly reports of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) there are wide variations from one reporting period to the next in terms of the numbers of personnel and provinces affected (ranging from a high of 1,395 to a low of 70 personnel, and varying from 5 to 12 provinces). Such significant swings that they are less likely to be caused by actual changes in influence, and more likely due to uneven reporting.[163] Nonetheless, the fact that this was one of the few affirmatively tracked and consistently reported facets of

ALP performance illustrates the significance of the issue. The US also used its position as the sole funder to pressure for "lessen[ing] the strongman influence on the force."[164] Nonetheless, the old pressures of power brokers trying to control the ALP never went away.

Since 2001, Afghanistan's security sector has been the best funded and most lucrative for officials seeking to utilise public assets for private benefit, including utilising men in uniform to carry out extortion or other crimes. It was inevitable that the ALP, like the ANP and the MoI as a whole, would attract those wanting to use it as a means to employ clients; secure income through corrupt contracts, ghost personnel and selling posts; and engage in crime, including smuggling and extortion. Although not the sole culprit, the ALP became yet another way for forces to be funded or for existing militias to be re-hatted. As one State Department official interviewed in 2017 put it: "You suddenly have poorly organised, loosely identified individuals in a community [who are] paid little, not trained well and extremely exposed from a security perspective […They are] easily corrupted because some warlord can pay them more. And they are getting paid by the government, so [they are] free labour or discounted labour [to that warlord]. I don't see how it could not have expanded the available ranks of militias or warlords."[165]

3.4 UPRISING FORCES AND OTHER IRREGULAR FORCES

A last important note in this chapter is that embracing the local force model, which in effect legitimised it, may have contributed to the proliferation of other copycat forces that tended to be far less carefully regulated than the ALP. Some have no legal mooring at all. As noted, once the initial local force pilots took off, this encouraged the US military in different regional commands or at the local level to establish their own local forces – programmes such as the CIPP Special Forces initiative in the north, the Marines ISCI programme in Helmand or the CBSS, a similar local force programme in the east.[166] Afghan commanders, both within and outside the government, also took their own initiatives. In the north, many of the factional militias that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s had never been demobilised – Goodhand and Hakimi estimate that despite the different DDR initiatives, some 4,500–10,000 militiamen remained in Kunduz alone in the late 2000s.[167] Because factional militias were already such a problem in the north, some Afghan central authorities as well as international forces initially resisted mobilising local defence initiatives there.[168] However, commanders on the ground took matters into their own hands, and beginning in 2009, militias in Kunduz, Takhar and other northern provinces began reorganising, rebranding themselves as a local defence against the Taleban and even sometimes calling themselves ALP.[169] While these forces were outside any regular (or legal) process, they were not necessarily without government support. These faux ALP received some informal or ad hoc government support from *tanzim*-affiliated power brokers within the MoI and the NDS.[170] The de facto existence of these forces and the deteriorating security situation eventually created enough pressure to put many of these informal militias on the CIPP payroll, and later to make them fully formalised ALP.[171]

An even more significant spinoff of the local force idea embedded in the ALP are the Popular Uprising Forces *(wulusi patsunin* in Pashto; *khezesh-e mardomi* in Persian). The name 'Uprising Forces' was coined by a group of Taleban who rebelled against the movement in Andar in Ghazni province in 2012, events which are described fully in the

Andar case study below. Since then the term 'Uprising Forces' has come to describe local, counter-insurgency forces that are supported by the NDS; this programme is far less transparent than the ALP. In some areas, Uprising Forces appear more active and present than the ALP. For example, since mid-2017, they have proliferated in Nangrahar province as part of an overall ramp-up in Afghan and international operations against the local 'franchise' of the Islamic State, known as the Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP). As of the summer of 2019, there were Uprising Forces in ten districts of Nangrahar, and they appeared to be much more visible and active than the ALP units in the province (in theory, some 19 units).[172]

The Uprising Forces have been used more frequently since 2015, under the National Unity Government. Their greater proliferation and activity might suggest some tacit policy decision to make them more than an ad hoc response to Taleban violence. They do not appear to have risen to a systematised, nation-wide programme like the ALP. However, there is little publicly available information about this force in terms of force strength, cost, weaponry, training, locations, or how commanders and locations are chosen. There is also no known formal mechanism of accountability and, as UNAMA has pointed out, they "have no legal basis under the laws of Afghanistan."[173] The NDS' main sponsor is the CIA, and so it is assumed that some of these CIA funds go to NDS-backed Uprising Force units, although it is unclear how much.[174]

CHAPTER 4
LOCAL FORCES IN PRACTICE: WHAT MAKES AN ALP SUCCEED FAIL?

The ALP has been a lightning rod for attention, with an equal share of critics and proponents. Critics note the ALP's long record of abuse and that many units are actually re-hatted militias. Proponents point to ALP units like the one pictured above in Helmand's Nad Ali District. They defended their communities, holding the line against the Taleban, who were in villages only a few hundred metres away. One month after this picture was taken, the Taleban surged toward Helmand's provincial capital, Lashkargah and this ALP unit was forced to withdraw, along with an ANA company that had been stationed in its village.

Photo: Andrew Quilty, 2016.

AS THE PREVIOUS chapter suggests, by the time the research for this project commenced

in autumn 2016, the ALP was already a very different type of force from that presented in 2009. It looked significantly more like an institutionalised Afghan force, albeit with local recruitment and deployment, than the organic, local counter-insurgency groups that US SOF originally envisioned. In addition, reports by journalists, international and non-governmental organisations and other civilian academics and researchers suggested that the ALP experiment had largely not lived up to its population protection and good governance ideals. Instead, the force as a whole appeared to come closer to what its critics had feared than what its proponents had hoped – with a long record of ALP units captured by criminal or factional interests and engaged in abusive, predatory or destabilising behaviour.[175] According to the findings of a high-level working group commissioned in 2013, SOF's own assessment at the time was that two-thirds of the ALP sites had failed to produce the desired security gains, and in one-third of the districts, the force had been detrimental, "causing more harm than good to the counterinsurgency" through their ineffective or predatory behaviour, or because they were colluding with the enemy.[176]

As time has gone on and problems with the ALP have surfaced, even former proponents of the ALP have become more critical. Although the military literature as a whole remains more positive about the ALP than civilian analyses,[177] most of the military officers and advisors whom AAN and GPPi interviewed during this project were either openly negative about the way the ALP had evolved or were candid about the programme's flaws.[178] Independent US governmental reviews have highlighted the many flaws across the force, from ghost soldiers and inadequate accountability mechanisms for pay and equipment, to the widespread issues of ALP units committing abuse and generating instability.[179]

Despite this largely negative record, as the introduction to this paper suggested, there were some countervailing trends. UNAMA's human rights units has diligently documented the many rights abuses and accountability issues with the ALP, but has also repeatedly noted that many communities welcomed the model of local forces and the stability they brought with them. For example, in its 2012 annual Protection of Civilians report, UNAMA wrote: "The majority of communities reported improvement in the security environment in those areas with ALP presence which coincided with expansion of ALP throughout Afghanistan in 2012."[180] In its annual report the following year, it noted: "Many authorities and communities also told UNAMA they considered the deployment of ALP to be a more desirable alternative for provision of security than armed groups."[181] The 2014 annual report included a perspective that will be particularly important for some of the case studies in chapter 4. It noted that "many communities continued to welcome the stability, enhanced security and local employment they attributed to the ALP – *particularly in those areas where ALP was locally recruited and deployed*" (emphasis added).[182]

Another positive point frequently reiterated by the military was that local forces play an important security role. As the Taleban increasingly contested territory after the withdrawal of most international forces at the end of 2014, the ALP was often one of the

few forces left trying to hold their ground (primarily because, as local forces, they had nowhere else to go).[183] In many places, the ALP fought tenaciously, as one security expert who previously served with the British army in Helmand described:

> They are more local than the ANP. It's usually their village that's on the frontline and they often do the majority of the fighting. In Helmand, when I was with the British army, the ALP fought like dogs. [...T]he worst trained have the bigger incentive to fight, I've noticed [...]. And [if the ALP are overrun], they have nowhere to go – unlike the ANA.[184]

A senior international officer commented that, for Afghan special forces, "ALP is often the partner of choice in operations"; they knew the terrain and were better at holding territory because, unlike the ANA and the ANP, they "have to stand because it's their village."[185] One of the experts from the high-level US working group sent out to assess the ALP also affirmed that some ALP units fought well, and that "those that were carefully stood up with sufficient time to make sure they were really integrated into the community were often the ones most targeted by the Taliban."[186] One of the ALP directors speaking in April 2017, also said that where the ALP had popular support, they were strong and could "prevent the enemy getting access to the villages."[187]

Given this record and significant pressures to make the Afghan security forces more cost-effective and better at holding territory,[188] in 2017, President Ghani and the then-head of international forces, General John Nicholson, proposed creating yet another local force.[189] The Afghan National Army Territorial Force (ANA-TF), shared some similarities with the ALP, but planners made significant changes to the institutional structure and command and control, and the way the force was mobilised and rolled out. The final case study assesses these efforts aimed at improving on the very mixed record of the ALP and other previous local forces.

The decision to introduce a new local force along the same lines as the ALP, but with an emphasis on lessons learned, suggested that a significant part of the Afghan and international leadership thought the general model behind the ALP was good, but that its actualisation was problematic, and that correcting issues with the model could yield the benefits of local forces without the consequence of strongmen capture and predatory militias. This research has attempted to test those assumptions by looking retrospectively at the ALP and other local force models, and also by following the implementation of the ANA-TF as planners tried to apply these lessons learned. The following case studies explore how different risk factors or dynamics – including the political and social dynamics, political economy, past history of conflict in the local area and the community attitude towards this local force – might contribute to establishing a better- or worse-performing ALP force. The final case study reflects on the ANA-TF and whether there is evidence that the mistakes of the ALP have been corrected in this latest attempt to mobilise community defence forces. As noted in the methodology section, each of the following case studies were published previously as AAN dispatches; the information below is only a condensed summary, with more information, sourcing and detailed analysis in the original publication.

As a starting point, to understand whether local forces could present a strong counter-insurgent threat and be a relatively resilient local hold force, researchers explored how the Taleban have responded to and treated the ALP and other local forces. As will be discussed in the first case study, they have generally treated them as 'enemy number one', suggesting that local forces can indeed pose a serious threat.

Figure 6: Geographic trends in ALP performance

AAN, CC BY-SA 4.0 (derived from GPPi]
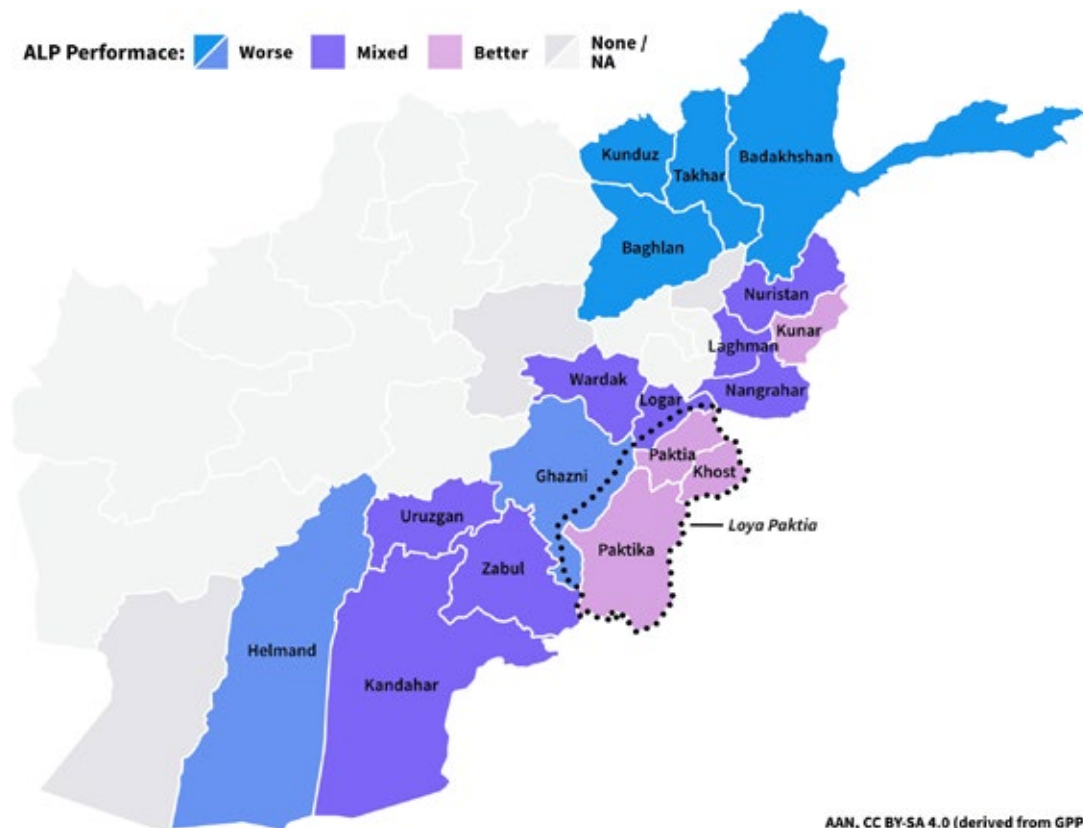
Researchers asked Afghan government officials, international forces, researchers and local figures for their impressions of where ALP had performed better or worse, in terms of both improving security and treating the population well. These were compared with literature on ALP performance and national statistics and documentation of ALP-perpetrated abuses and criminal activity. Clear geographic trends stood out in the data and responses. ALP in Kunduz, Takhar, Baghlan and Badakhshan generally appeared to be the worst, both in terms of rates of abuse and other destabilising or counterproductive behaviour. By contrast, most thought that the stronger traditions of tribal defence and more intact social structures in Loya Paktia – a historically distinct region comprising Khost, Paktia and Paktika, as well as some adjacent districts in Logar and Ghazni – had created more opportunities for sound local defence forces to be established in those provinces.

The provinces across the eastern, central and southern regions tended to fall within these two extremes. No one described ALP in these areas as performing as badly as those in the north. However, there were numerous examples of local defence forces not working as intended, not providing stability and being imposed – more often than was the case in the southeast.

Notwithstanding these larger geographic trends, there were outliers and exceptions both at the provincial and the district level. Kunar in the east was widely extolled for having better functioning ALP, whilst there has been significant reporting of abusive commanders and forced recruitment in some places in Paktika. One Afghan researcher who had evaluated ALP and community dynamics in the east and north framed the issue of better or worse performance as a relative question: "Goshta [Nangrahar province] is a bad case compared with [the ALP you find in] Kunar. But Goshta will look like a best case if you compare it to [ALP in] Takhar and Kunduz."[1]

A 2013 evaluation of the ALP (which was not made public) cited a contemporary SOF internal assessment that the ALP were effective in one-third of the sites, ineffective or counter-productive in another third, and somewhere in-between in the final third – a rough division for which the map illustration in Figure 5 provides some colour.[2]

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1 Interview with local researcher, 21 July 2019, Jalalabad, Afghanistan.

2 Mark Moyar, Ronald E. Neumann, Vanda Felbab-Brown, William Knarr, Jack Guy, Terry Corner & Carter Malkasian, *The Afghan Local Police Community Self-Defense in Transition*, Center for Special Operations Studies and Research, Joint Special Operations University, 2013, 4 (not available publicly; copy on file with authors).

Second, assuming that the local force model has potential, researchers looked for both best- and worst-case examples of the ALP, in terms of both their anti-Taleban and civilian protection goals. Capturing both ends of the spectrum – examples of success as well as failure – offered the chance to compare how this local force model performed in different communities and contexts in Afghanistan, and whether it was the location, the implementation, or particular aspects of the model that most contributed to its success or failure. Researchers asked officials and senior commanders across both the Resolute Support mission and Ghani's administration if there were any comprehensive studies or findings suggesting where the ALP had worked (or not worked), but such metrics did not appear to be available. Nonetheless, most military and civilian experts tended to agree that there were some provinces and communities where it had worked relatively well, and some where it had gone badly, with virtually uniform consensus on which provinces fell into which categories.[190] The ALP in the north-eastern provinces of Kunduz, Baghlan, Badakhshan and Takhar have continually presented issues, ranging from thuggish and abusive behaviour to corruption, criminality and collusion with the Taleban. By contrast, it was easier to find positive examples of the ALP in Kunar, Paktia and Paktika.[191] Kunar, for example, was once considered one of the most kinetic and violent provinces; however, once international forces withdrew, leaving only a slim ANSF presence and the ALP in predominant control, the situation stabilised. Shahmahmoud Miakhel, the governor of Nangrahar and the former deputy interior minister, who is originally from Kunar, said that although he was initially publicly critical of such bottom-up initiatives,[192] he attributed the positive changes in Kunar to the ALP: "They picked the right people, and they have challenged the Taleban [...] when the community is motivated to deal with the problem, they do know who the local Taleban are and they can challenge them."[193]

Just based on this short list, 'abusive ALP' appear more likely to present in northern, multi-ethnic provinces and 'protective ALP' in south-eastern and eastern, predominantly Pashtun provinces. Spelling this out explicitly in 2017, the then-ALP director, General Ali Shah Ahmadzai, said, "In Pashtun places – Kunar, Nangrahar, Paktia, Laghman, we have some problems, but only a few. In Badakhshan, Takhar, Faryab, Baghlan, Kunduz, we have many problems."[194] However, correlation is not always the same as causation, and the case studies suggest that while these trends are not coincidental, what underlies them has more to do with elements present in the local communities than purely with the geographic location or ethnic make-up. ALP are never mobilised against a blank slate, and the local historical fault lines and conflict dynamics can be more pernicious or more conflict-prone in some areas than in others. ALP units established in areas with strong pre-existing conflict fault lines have often been mobilised within those pre-existing divisions and animosities, leading to a higher risk of predatory or retaliatory behaviour, tit-for-tat violence and conflict. The past history and nature of conflict in an area, as well as other community dynamics and social structures, also lead to variance in two other key factors that appear to predispose for better- or worse-performing ALP: 1) the prevalence of relatively powerful factional commanders and hierarchies (including but not exclusively via *tanzim* competition) or power broker dominance and capture; and 2) the presence of potential countervailing elements, such as the resilience of community structures that might stand up to pernicious power brokers, incentivise community protection or otherwise restrain conflict or competition.[195] During the 1980s and 1990s, each region, indeed each locality, followed its own conflict trajectory, which affected the degree to which these two factors existed in a particular community, or more broadly within a province or region as a whole.

Many of those interviewed – from academics, to local community members, to Afghan and international officials – argued that the way conflict devolved in the north in the 1980s and 1990s, combined with pre-existing social structures, resulted in a plethora of armed commanders and factional interests, often mapped onto ethnic divisions. Such dynamics create greater risks for capture and problematic behaviour by local defence forces. Reflecting these views, a senior Afghan government official with experience in regional governance effects argued that variations in communities and their social organisation affect the degree to which local forces might work well. In the north, he said, "the [social] structure is more hierarchical" and more predisposed to the emergence of major commanders and warlords and, further down the line, less likely to produce 'protective' ALP.[196] The dominance of the commander class in the north has also had a stronger tendency to erode or completely displace other community or local structures. As early as 2003, ICG noted differences in the resilience, coherence and arguably the representativeness of local structures in the north versus in more tribal areas, especially Loya Paktia: "In the north, *shuras* at the provincial and district levels were often seen as totally under factional control and no more than a device for legitimating the decisions of commanders."[197] ICG noted a greater tendency for "rule by the gun" to displace other traditional governance or security structures in the north and west.[198] Conrad Schetter, Rainer Glassner and Masood Karakhail provided the example of Kunduz, where they note that the demographic divisions and history of frequently changing conflict lines meant that there were "no universally accepted communal forms of organization and institutions that are capable of checking and balancing the power of individuals."[199] Whether genuine community defence forces could have been set up in provinces with a history of conflicting and often ethnically based militias, controlled by men with excellent political and business relations to the centre, is questionable. The case study of Takhar provides an illustration of these dynamics and the way they can predispose an ALP to be harmful.

The official quoted above noted that the basis for local defence forces tending to do better in Pashtun areas is that "tribes had a historical function of self-defence," viewing the protection of communities as "a question of honour," so with adequate monitoring and oversight, "there is no reason you can't have accountability" over an ALP force raised in such areas.[200] However, while protective and effective ALP were more likely to be present in mono-ethnic Pashtun tribal communities, such characteristics are not a silver bullet. Local history is again significant. Afghanistan's south-eastern Loya Paktia region has a particular history of self-government anda tradition of self-defence via tribal *arbakai*.[201] ICG's research in 2003 found that that the tribal structures of Loya Paktia had helped it to avoid the rise of the commander class during the 1980s and 1990s.[202] Tom Gregg also noted that, as a result of these dynamics, the tribal structures in this region remained "stronger and more unified than in other parts of the country" post-2001.[203] Such factors appear to have contributed to more instances of effective, less abusive forces, not only in Loya Paktia, but also in the east: ALP in Kunar province, for example, are often mentioned positively. The second case study, of Yahyakhel district in Paktika, helps illustrate some of these dynamics, as well as what is possible when communities are meaningfully consulted and want to mobilise against the Taleban.

Pashtun-majority areas have also always varied between places under greater or less government control, with strong or weak links to the state, with an economy based on large landholdings and tenant farmers or many small landholdings, and with long-settled residents or migrants brought in by previous rulers *(naqilin)*.[204] This means

that not all Pashtun tribal areas had the same traditions or relatively egalitarian tribal structures as those that exist in Loya Paktia. Moreover, as Thomas Ruttig has noted, the long years of conflict and state collapse have "weakened and dissolved traditional social political relations" everywhere in Afghanistan.[205] Mass displacement and socio-economic changes (including those brought about by foreign funding) have undermined the writ of traditional elders.[206] A variety of warring parties – the Taleban, international forces and the civil war elite, as well as the post-2001 commanders – have alternately co-opted or targeted (through assassination or detention) tribal elders as part of their efforts to gain influence over a community or to eliminate those supporting the other side.[207] This has consequences for those wanting to set up local defence forces based on the rubric of attaching them to local *shuras* or *jirgas*, institutions which have themselves changed, as different authors have warned. Ruttig cautions that the egalitarian, consensus-finding Pashtun tribal *jirga* has often been replaced by more permanent *shuras*, which may still "represent a form of 'traditional' self-organisation" but are "hierarchical in structure" and are often "convened by [the] new strongmen […] to demonstrate their own influence vis-à-vis foreigners."[208] Goodhand and Hakim comment on the problem of basing the local force model on an "outmoded set of assumptions about the capacity of tribal leaders to command the loyalties of local villagers" when, they say, it is the militia commanders who hold "the real power in post-2001 Afghanistan."[209] The fourth case study shows how even in a mono-tribal, overwhelmingly Pashtun district like Andar in Ghazni, local force mobilisation can go awry – in this case, partly because of existing dynamics, and partly because of how the local force was set up.

The three case studies comparing better and worse examples of ALP – in Yahyakhel district in Paktika, Takhar province and Andar district in Ghazni – illustrate some of these dynamics. Collectively they offer a more nuanced picture of how the history of conflict, the presence of factional interests, and other economic or social dynamics can predispose an area to a better or worse local defence force. These factors do not entirely decide the question of what makes for a successful local force, but they do point to the importance of community buy-in and leadership of the mobilisation effort. This happened exceptionally well in Yahyakhel, but not in the other two locations; where the ALP was not tied to the community, local civilians had little prospect of holding the force to account.

The final case study, of the emerging ANA-TF, rounds out this analysis by considering whether these contextual factors can be overcome by the design of local forces and the way they are mobilised. One 'control' factor in the ANA-TF is careful site selection and not rushing to get 'boots on the ground'. However, given the size projections for this force, planners may struggle to find enough sites like Yahyakhel that represent a 'best-case' community. An additional questions then is: Do the additional institutional controls over the ANA-TF make it possible to have better functioning local forces in a wider variety of areas? The full verdict on these questions is not yet in, given that the ANA-TF was still being actively mobilised at the time of writing, with the oldest units not yet two years in the field. However, this last case study shares some of the preliminary findings from the initial roll-out of the ANA's Territorial Force as a partial response to this question.

4.1 THE TALEBAN AND THE ALP: ENEMY NUMBER ONE

A major premise of the ALP was that local fighters would pose a greater threat to the Taleban because of their local knowledge and ties, and because local communities might perceive them as preferable to either foreign forces or Afghan security forces hailing from other parts of Afghanistan. A first crucial data point on whether they have posed a greater threat comes not from the military or the ALP themselves, but from the Taleban. It is one of the few 'truths' of the Afghan insurgency that the Taleban hate *arbakai*. From the ALP's inception, the Taleban denigrated them in a fierce propaganda campaign (among other insults, they disparaged the ALP as "Petraeus' bastards"). However, Taleban animosity against the ALP and the Uprising Forces has gone far beyond words. The evidence suggests that the Taleban have been more violent towards the local forces than towards the ANA, the ANP, or international forces – in large part because they viewed them as a greater threat.

Figure 7: Map of Kandahar, Ghazni and Zabul provinces
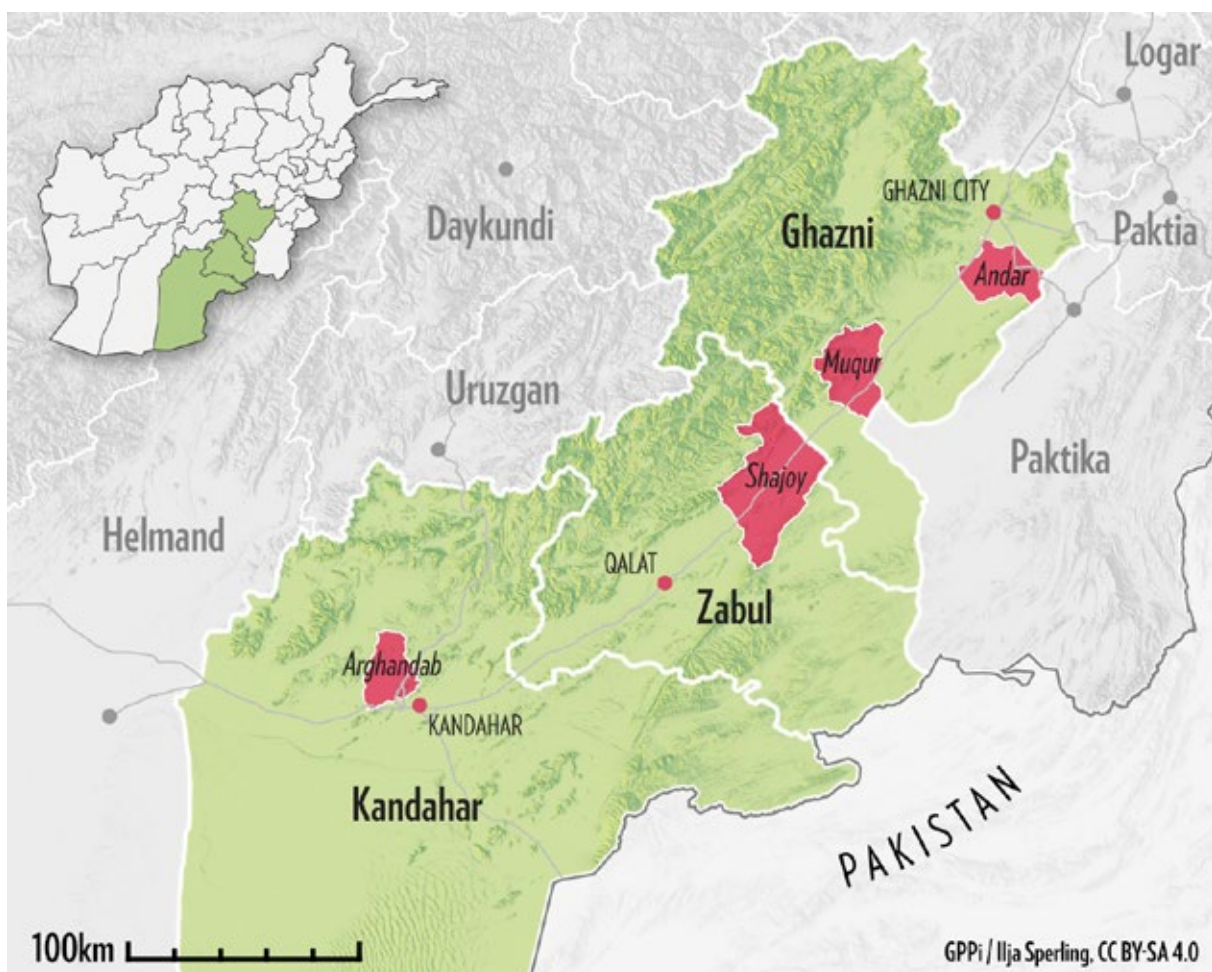
AAN looked at the Taleban's treatment of and evolving strategies towards the ALP and the Uprising Forces in five case-study districts across the Taleban's heartland: Arghandab and Panjwayi districts in Kandahar province; Shajoy district in Zabul; and Andar and Muqur districts in Ghazni.

Additional information, analysis and sources were published in the original AAN dispatch on the Taleban and the ALP, available at:https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/enemy-number-one-how-the-taleban-deal-with-the-alp-and-uprising-groups/.

There has been no clear, top-down Taleban policy towards the ALP, and as always in Afghanistan, local dynamics vary. Nonetheless, the approach the Taleban have taken to the ALP and other local forces appears to have gone through several phases: first denial, then all-out war. Although the Taleban initially dismissed the ALP, as the force become institutionalised and expanded from 2012 on, they came to view them as their most dangerous enemy. In 2012 testimony to the US Congress, the then-ISAF commander General John Allen claimed their intelligence suggested that the Taleban placed greater value on killing ALP than on international forces:

> There have been signals intelligence cuts that we have gotten where Taliban commanders have said: "If you can kill an ALP commander, so an Afghan local policeman who is leading his own tribesmen in that particular village, if you can kill an ALP commander, it's worth 10 coalition soldiers."[210]

ALP were as close to the community as Taleban. ALP members, Uprising Forces and the local Taleban knew each other by name. They knew each other's families, clan networks and sympathisers. Members of the new forces knew the insurgents' places of shelter, their usual ambush points and escape and supply routes – normally unknown to outside forces. Some were former Taleban members. Even when the new forces were not universally popular with the communities in which they operated – for example, in Andar,where they only had partial support – they were still able to pose a threat because of the backing of their particular clan and family networks.

In addition to this local knowledge, the ALP were different from other members of the ANSF because they were fighting over local turf. While the ANSF could (and often did) retreat when under attack, the ALP tended to stand their ground: as local fighters, they had nowhere else to go. Once mobilised, community defence forces, whether ALP or Uprising Forces, were defending their home area, and having made themselves a target, also defending their lives. It was an existential fight for them as much as it was for local Taleban – and both sides fought harder because of this.

From roughly 2012 onwards, Taleban fighters were bent on eliminating the new community defence force – not just putting pressure on them, but also seeking to maximise fatalities.[211] The evidence suggests there were much higher levels of violence against ALP forces and the communities that supported them than were deployed against other elements of the ANSF. Whereas the Taleban frequently sought to pressure ANSF to retreat and encouraged surrenders, the attacks against ALP units were more violent. This included not only direct attacks on ALP posts, but a rash of insider attacks and a campaign of threats and intimidation. As one international security expert with data sets tracking security incidents, who analysed the security trends in this early period, observed:

> My sense at the time and looking at the stats is that [the intensity of the violence] was deliberate determination to challenge a force that was set up to deny them physical access to much of the rural hinterland. The way in which they were dealt with, much more brutally than other parts of ANDSF [Afghan National Defence and Security Forces], suggest that this was not just an increase in line with increasing general levels of violence [from 2012 onwards].[212]

Another sign of the differential treatment during this initial period was that, whereas the Taleban frequently left ANA and ANP captives alive (often bartering them for any of their own men who had been detained, or sending them home after they promised to

stop fighting), they tended to execute ALP members. The same international security expert was consulted to see whether any of the statistical evidence supported community observations of greater Taleban targeting of and animosity towards the ALP. He found that, compared to the ANP, the number of ALP killed after abduction was far higher in every year from 2012 to 2017.[213] This was the case even though the ALP is tiny compared to the ANP – its force strength has ranged from one-fifth to one-sixth the size of the ANP. Additionally, the data showed that, relative to the size of the force, far greater numbers of ALP than ANP were assassinated (about half as many ALP as ANP were assassinated in 2013, four-fifths in 2014, half in 2015 and one-third in 2016 and 2017). The statistics were starkly clear: an individual member of the ALP was far more likely to be assassinated than a member of the ANP, and to be killed if the Taleban captured him.

A further distinguishing factor was not just the differences in how the Taleban treated ALP members compared to the ANSF, but the nature of the violence and the repercussions for communities. Taleban attacks on ALP members frequently resulted in such disproportionate levels of civilian casualties, targeting ALP members at civilian events without regard to the inevitable wider harm, that communities viewed this as a form of collective punishment. For example, in Arghandab in Kandahar province, one of the districts where the ALP was established in the earliest period, a bomber blew himself up at an ALP commander's wedding party in 2010, killing 40 guests, only some of whom were ALP members.[214] Similarly, a roadside bomb hit a convoy of guests, mainly women, travelling to an ALP member's wedding in Andar district in 2013, killing at least 19 people.[215] More than a dozen influential community elders were killed by the Taleban from spring 2012 to the end of 2013 in Andar, Muqur and Shajoy districts – most of them, locals believed, because of their (alleged or actual) support for the ALP.

The violence went both ways, with both ALP and Uprising Forces as well as Taleban committing atrocities, killing civilians and targeting members of the wider community – family members of the enemy or others known or believed to support the opposing side. In Andar, six mullahs were killed over the course of 2012 because they had violated a ban on providing Islamic burial for slain fighters, a ban that both sides enforced. Such incidents were viewed as extreme not only because of the degree of civilian harm, but also because they transgressed local norms – for example, around marriage and burial. The fact that both sides knew each other bred a particular, localised form of violence that was brutal and intimate in nature. The Taleban responded very differently to the local forces than when they were pitted against either foreign forces or ANSF 'outsiders': they gave no quarter.

The Taleban later shifted their tactics, and from roughly 2014 onwards, they appeared to have decided they could not eliminate the ALP, and so pragmatically opted for de-escalation and, where possible, co-option or cooperation.[216] Violence levels dropped off, and the Taleban increased their efforts to cultivate and woo local ALP members and their families to their side. This counter-counter-insurgent push, as it might be framed, proved most effective in the areas where the ALP or local forces lacked full community buy-in and support, either because they had only been mobilised from one faction or subdivision within the community or because their behaviour and brutality had sparked outrage.

The Taleban's early reaction to the ALP, and even their deliberate efforts to target the ALP with persuasion rather than force later on, does say something about the ALP model. It suggests that the framers of the ALP did get at least one thing right – community-supported, pro-government local forces could present a significant threat to the Taleban.

However, as subsequent case studies will also consider, mobilising local forces risks incurring high, long-term costs, because it leverages one part of a community against another and in doing so, may increase the level and transgressive nature of inter-communal violence.

4.2 COMMUNITY CONTROLS AND A SUCCESSFUL ALP: YAHYAKHEL, PAKTIKA

The findings from the study of Taleban perspectives on the ALP suggest that local forces can indeed resist insurgent control and that the model might work. Surprisingly, one of the strongest examples came from a province with a problematic record of local force mobilisation[217] and in a district where blowback against international forces' operations had driven Taleban mobilisation. The district of Yahyakhel in Paktika nonetheless represents a strong case study of where local forces might work better: when community dynamics are ripe for it, and when the model of local consultation and control is actually followed.

Yahyakhel is a small, almost exclusively Pashtun district that sits along a major supply route into and out of South Waziristan in Pakistan's Federally Administrated Tribal Areas (FATA). It was long a smuggling route for men and materiel, first for the mujahedin, then for the post-2001 Taleban. It has always enjoyed strong intra-tribal relations, something which hampered the emergence of mujahedin factions and strongmen and the sort of severe intra-factional conflicts that arose in other districts in Paktika and elsewhere in the 1980s and 1990s. Most importantly, Yahyakhel itself managed to escape the conflict for many years. It was not fought over during the 1980s, and both the transition to Taleban control in 1994 and the fall of the Taleban in 2001 were almost bloodless in this district. It also avoided the political infighting and power broker disruption that characterised other areas in the post-2001 period, in part because local autonomy was historically greater in Loya Paktia, and in part because of its relative marginalisation in the post-2001 division of power.[218] This long period of peace left an important legacy – unlike most other areas of Afghanistan, where old social structures have been changed by war, displacement, mobilisation and assassination, the tribal structure in Yahyakhel remained intact and resilient. It still had the capacity to assert itself to protect community interests.

Locals argue that it was international forces who first brought the war to Paktika, with a spate of aggressive night raids and arrests (particularly of local religious figures) from 2004 onwards. Outraged by this behaviour, people in Yahyakhel easily slipped into support for the Taleban. In 2009, a particularly charismatic and respectful 'native son' – a former madrasa student named Qudrat – took over as the local Taleban commander, and by 2010, "Yahya Khel largely belonged to the insurgents," in the words of an American anthropologist embedded with US forces.[219] Taleban commanders walked the streets openly, and Yahyakhel was a prominent transit point for Taleban weapons and fighters. Locals said that security incidents were so constant that shops and businesses remained shut for half the day, and schools were closed.

However, in 2011 Qudrat was killed, and two significantly less-enlightened leaders took over. Omar and Qader started using civilian houses to attack government and

Figure 8: Map of Paktika province

Research suggested that the ALP in the Yahyakhel district of Paktika exemplified the model working to plan: the ALP were supported by members of the local community, and have prevented Taleban incursions into the district since 2011.

Additional information, analysis and sources were published in the original AAN dispatch on Yahyakhel, available at: https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/how-to-set-up-a-good-alp-the-experience-of-yahyakhel-district-paktika-and-how-it-became-more-peaceful/.

international forces, harassed civilians and engaged in what locals described as "immoral activities." The tipping point came when they threatened 170 local people, among them 70 tribal elders, accusing them of spying for the government and ordering them out of the district. By expelling these elders, Omar and Qader created the nucleus of a counter-insurgent movement.

Although international and local accounts differ on the timeline and who reached out to whom, shortly after this event, tribal elders worked with international forces to form an ALP unit that would resist the Taleban. By mid-2012, the ALP, together with international and Afghan forces, had successfully expelled the Taleban from the district. Yahyakhel became an island of relative stability and pro-government allegiance in a province where most districts were either firmly under Taleban control or at least sharply contested.[220] Schools and businesses were no longer shut, and pro-government forces appeared to have the upper hand. Within two years, Yahyakhel went from ranking in the top third of the most violent districts in Paktika to the bottom third of the least violent, according to security statistics.[221] Notably, the local ALP still has primary responsibility for security in the district.

What was behind this success story? Yahyakhel's history and local dynamics were part of it. Because of its long history of escaping conflict, the tribal system in Yahyakhel was still intact and was therefore a potent framework for organising a community militia. The *arbakai* tradition native to this part of Afghanistan was still strong and lent itself to the idea of a community-protective force.[222] Once mobilised, the coherent community structures also acted as a strong control mechanism, constraining ALP men from behaving badly towards their own people. These factors, plus the *absence* of other, more negative forces – strong *tanzims,* or ethnic factionalism, or local commanders who could corrupt or co-opt ALP forces in other areas – created the right environment for this type of force to be stood up successfully.

However, the development of this strong, protective pro-government force was not inevitable. Given that the actions of international forces had spurred the community

to support the Taleban, it was in fact unlikely. Credit for the turn to counter-insurgency goes in large part to particular Taleban members – their poor behaviour, crowned by the expulsion of dozens of elders, which created a nucleus of angry opponents who were able to leverage those community structures into meaningful resistance. Local people supported the force because they had come to fear and dislike the Taleban – and this despite, not because of, American support or government action. This also underlines the importance of community support and engagement, and that it is both the Taleban and the government's to lose.

In addition, while Yahyakhel did not have a history of factional infighting, its split tribal make-up might have been a source of division had an internationally imposed force been recruited from only one tribe (as happened in other areas). However, locals were in control and recognised the danger. In interviews, local leaders who were involved in the initial mobilisation said they took steps to include recruits from each of the three dominant tribes residing in Yahyakhel district, so that no tribe would be "sidelined" and so support or join the Taleban.

In many respects, the ALP in Yahyakhel worked because it operated according to the model envisaged by those who set up the ALP and its predecessors. The findings from Yahyakhel suggest that community support and control are as important and distinctive as the original ALP designers suspected. However, genuine community involvement and control heavily depends on the existence of the right underlying conditions and on local people genuinely wanting and initiating the force. The Yahyakhel case study also suggests that a place has to be 'ripe' for local force mobilisation.

The Yahyakhel experience is not unique, and somewhat similar community dynamics have led to more protective and resilient ALP in other parts of Paktika as well as in the neighbouring Paktia and Kunar provinces.[223] However, while there are some positive case studies, there have been far more examples of communities in which the local conditions and conflict dynamics were not ripe for a community-protective force to emerge. The subsequent two case studies provide illustrations of this, in two different regions and community subtypes: in Takhar and Ghazni provinces.

## 4.3 STRONGMEN CAPTURE AND THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MILITIAS: TAKHAR PROVINCE

In stark contrast to the 'best case' in Yahyakhel, all of the Takhar province ALP units provide examples of what a 'worst-case' ALP can look like. Takhar ALP units appear to be entirely corrupted and, in the words of one senior MoI official, "warlord-infiltrated."[224] They routinely engage in human rights abuses and appear less intent on promoting stability or fighting Taleban affiliates than in furthering their own criminal enterprises. The Takhar ALP have proven problematic for reasons which were fairly predictable and which the original ALP designers had feared: local dynamics made them prone to co-option by criminal networks, local strongmen and rival factions, all of which tended to be detrimental to community interests.[225]

Takhar province is a small, largely agrarian province in north-eastern Afghanistan. Because it is on the Tajik border, it is a common transit point for illicit goods, including narcotics,

arms and alcohol, which makes the control of armed men and state positions potentially very lucrative.[226] Very few insurgent attacks took place before 2010, but the potential for insurgent activity has long been there. Sandwiched between Kunduz, Badakhshan and Baghlan, it is easily accessible to insurgents in these neighbouring provinces. More importantly, after the fall of the Taleban regime, as Christoph Reuter and Antonio Giustozzi describe it, Takhar came under the grip of "the often-brutal control of former mujahedin commanders who rule[d] like feudal lords" and who exercised power through the capture of government positions and forces, as well as maintaining their own private militias.[227] Reuter and Giustozzi described a litany of abusive behaviour by such figures and their men:

> *Qazi Kabir [a local strongman] exemplifies their position above the law; he prevented Pashtun refugees' attempts to return from Pakistan to their land in Khwaja Bahauddin district in Northern Takhar in 2006 by imprisoning more than 80 families in an old castle. For years, all attempts by the police and the Kabul government were simply ignored to the benefit of local Uzbek and Tajik commanders. Other cases of arbitrary behaviour include murder, rape, the theft of land, kidnapping and forced marriages. Between 2005 and 2008, this led to numerous demonstrations against those commanders – but not one was removed.[228]*

Figure 9: Map of Takhar province
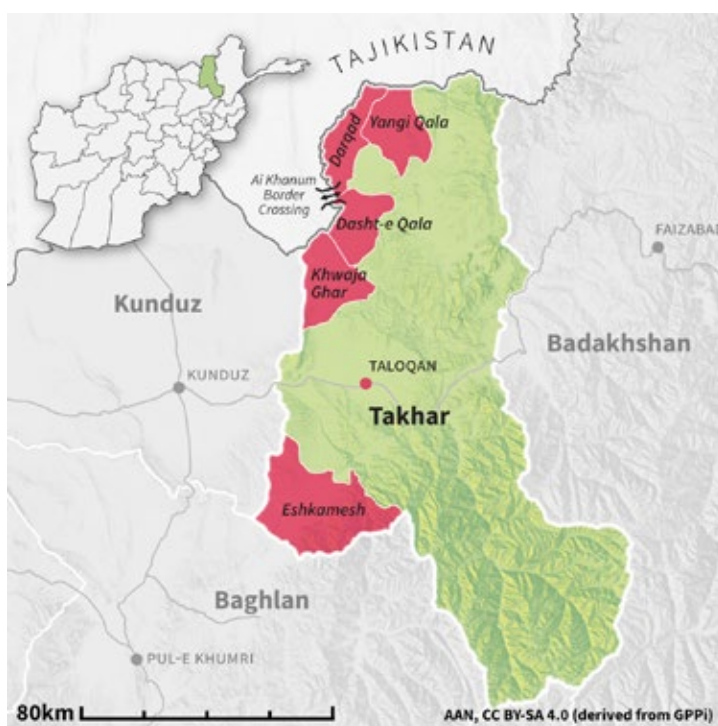
Takhar epitomised the sort of situation the ALP's original planners feared: a force that was co-opted by criminal networks and commanders, using the ALP to re-hatexisting militias.

Additional information, analysis and sources were published in the original AAN dispatch on the ALP in Takhar, available at: https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/a-maelstrom-of-militias-takhar-a-case-study-of-strongmen-co-opting-the-alp/.

Reuter and Giustozzi noted that interviewees in Takhar repeatedly said that "the Taleban do not succeed because they are strong – but because the government is weak."[229] In post-2001 Takhar, the line between the authorities at the provincial and district levels, the ANSF and NDS, and militias, smugglers and drug-runners was porous.[230]

These pre-2010 dynamics are worth describing because the ALP would ultimately be created from this stew of militias. Moreover, as ICG noted in 2003, the dominance of commanders throughout the north had almost completely corroded the power of other, traditional community figures and elders to resolve disputes peacefully or take part in local governance, for example.[231] In short, Takhar had the sort of environment that was least likely to produce community-accountable and controlled forces, and most

likely to replicate the sort of destabilising and pernicious militias that the ALP's proponents hoped to avoid.

The first signs of a Taleban insurgency became apparent in 2010, when Taleban fighters began infiltrating Takhar from the neighbouring Kunduz province.[232] Because of its demographics – Takhar is mostly split between Tajiks and Uzbeks (Giustozzi and Reuter give figures of 44 per cent Uzbek and 42 per cent Tajik) – the Taleban could not solely rely on leveraging Pashtun communities to gain support, as had been the trend in other majority-Pashtun and mixed provinces.[233] Instead, they sought to mobilise non-Pashtuns through religious messaging and propaganda, as well as by co-opting existing armed networks.[234] Reuter and Giustozzi note that the Taleban successfully "co-opt[ed] local armed gangs linked to Jamiat in the southern and central districts of the province"[235] and also struck a deal with powerful drug-smugglers in Takhar, giving the Taleban a share of the revenue and a way to smuggle in fighters.[236] As early as 2012, the UNODC estimated that the drug trade provided insurgents in Takhar with 30 per cent of their revenue.[237]

In 2010, as the Taleban began to encroach on the province, the many commanders and factions that had benefitted from the previous status quo pushed back. Although they typically described themselves as 'defending' their communities, these were not the sort of community-centric forces envisaged by the local defence models. Nearly all of them drew from pre-existing militias linked to the factions prevalent in the area, including Shura-ye Nizar/Jamiat-e Islami, Ettehad-e Islami and Jombesh-e Milli, as well as some *kandak-e qawm* forcesdating back to the Najibullah era. From the start, militia commanders and local government officials alike tended to refer to these armed groups as 'ALP', but most and possibly none of them were formally ALP in the beginning.[238] As noted in the previous chapter, many ALP forces in the north had self-mobilised from 2009 onwards, initially with some state support or US Special Forces funding, and were later able to convert this into official ALP status.[239] Takhar appears to fit this pattern. The forces in Khwaja Gar, Darqat, Eshkamesh, Dasht-e Qala and Yang-e Qala that mobilised in 2010 were also eventually officially incorporated into the ALP; all of the locations cited above – except Yang-e Qala (which was subsequently disbanded) – were the locations of ALP in Takhar at the time of writing.[240]

There is no evidence that these forces underwent any sort of vetting or scrutiny when they were converted into ALP, as was required by ALP guidelines.[241] Like the pro-government militias in Kunduz and Baghlan, the forces in Takhar appear to have been re-hatted as ALP expediently, without regard for ALP regulations on community preferences and selection.[242] UNAMA's 2012 annual report noted that a significant side effect of incorporating commanders and their militias wholesale into the ALP in the northeast was that these armed groups maintained their previous activities and affiliations.[243] It cited Takhar as an example, quoting a health worker as saying that these groups functioned as "ALP by day, militia by night."[244] This skirting of the rules and regulations, and of deep political capture, extended beyond the initial phase of mobilisation. In a more recent interview, one local expert noted that the current composition of the ALP is not substantially different from that of the original groups, despite some changes in command in 2019. He noted that ALP rules, procedures and vetting criteria were "done only on paper" in both Takhar and Badakhshan:

> *Mostly, ALP belong to MPs, former commanders, drug dealers and some police or NDS commanders who say [to the Ministry of Interior]: "Please appoint my brother,*

my uncle, my father," to protect their influence. Some ALP are also involved in illegal mining, drugs and illegal taxation.[245]

As in neighbouring Kunduz, the pro-government militias and ALP forces in Takhar did initially help to constrain and push back the Taleban.[246] Local officials continued to rely on them to support operations in Takhar up to the time of writing.[247] However, in Takhar, as in many north-eastern provinces, the result has not been stability or greater security for the province's inhabitants. Commanders and militias with a predatory and abusive reputation were catapulted into an official position – which, given their perceived affiliation with the government and with international forces, was in practice untouchable. Their misconduct continued after they were vested as ALP. In AAN interviews, civilians described regular shake-downs and illegal taxation, as well as land-grabbing. Often this behaviour has been confined to 'low-level' violence, intimidation and abuse of power – which were serious issues for the community, but which did not always catch the attention of the media or human rights reporting. Nonetheless, on several occasions, UNAMA reporting used vignettes from Takhar to illustrate the consistent problem of unruly and militia-like ALP behaviour. An incident in which a group of Takhar ALP beat old men and children with their rifle butts and shot at houses in a village they suspected of Taleban sympathies headlined the section on ALP abuses in the UNAMA 2015 annual report on the protection of civilians in the conflict.[248] In its 2016 mid-year report, UNAMA singled out two incidents in which Takhar ALP harassed or attacked civilian vehicles on the road: ALP forces stopped a bus, pulled a passenger off and carried out a beating based on allegations that his family had a Taleban connection;[249] and ALP forces also attacked a civilian vehicle because of a personal dispute with one of the passengers, who was no less than the director of the Kunduz Justice Department.[250]

In addition to this type of regular harassment of the population, ALP and associated forces in Takhar have proven destabilising in other ways. Given deep and long-standing enmities between different commanders in Takhar and commander infiltration across the different types of armed forces, ALP and other armed forces (formal and informal) are frequently caught up in local conflict and armed rivalries between different commanders and factions. In the same district, two rivals may both have men in the ALP, the Uprising Forces and in other non-recognised militias and would use those forces to further their own agenda and ambitions, or to attack rival groups. "If there is a big external threat," said one expert, "they do come together, for example re-taking Khwaja Ghar in October 2015 – there were 700 militiamen and 50 ANSF. Then, they resume fighting each other."[251]

ALP forces and the strongmen who control them also continue to be heavily involved in illicit trafficking and the drug trade in Takhar. In part, control of the ALP has been one element in the post-2001 trend towards co-opting or controlling local security forces and officials in order to maintain access to and free passage for illicit smuggling activities. However, it is also important to note that control over the drug trade likely animated the feud between local pro- and anti-government groups, more so than loyalty or hostility to the state. One of the Taleban's first moves when it entered Takhar was to co-opt armed gangs with significant connections to the drug trade,[252] and this was likely a more significant drive towards the anti-Taleban arming and mobilisation than was protecting local people or the Afghan state. To the extent that there was a local grievance against the Taleban, it was on the part of factionally aligned commanders and smugglers, who saw their revenue and turf being threatened by a new armed group.

Given this dynamic, it is hard to differentiate pro-government from anti-government groups; both are deeply entwined in the dynamics of factional infighting, ultimately driven by access to power and the illicit economy. Four experts on security and/or human rights in Takhar, who were interviewed about the ALP in 2017 and 2018, all described both the ALP and other pro-government and Taleban commanders as intent on making money from the cross-border drugs trade. "The only difference," one said, "is that the Taleban get weapons [in exchange] for drugs, rather than [ketamine] tablets or alcohol."[253]

In conclusion, the establishment of the ALP and other local forces in Takhar did not create the province's problem with militias or the capture of state armed forces. Rather, the ALP provided a new opportunity to capture salaried positions and external resources, reinforcing the commanders' power and their autonomy from the people they claimed to serve. The ALP built on and reinforced existing patterns of abusive governance and weak rule of law. It did not stabilise or protect civilians. Indeed, as one expert observed of armed men in both Takhar and Kunduz, they are "hard to define: what are random guys with guns, what are criminals, what's ALP, *tanzim*, Uprisers. It shifts and changes."[254] This experience in Takhar also points to a larger takeaway: where the wider political economy makes gaining influence or control over armed forces particularly lucrative – for example, because of smuggling, illegal mining or other illicit activities – and where there is already the sort of militia capture that would enable that, the hijacking of a local force by malign elements would seem virtually inevitable. The Takhar ALP thus proved to be a quintessential example of what can go wrong when local forces are mobilised.

4.4 AN UPRISING, NEW LOCAL FORCES AND WORSENING VIOLENCE: ANDAR, GHAZNI

The findings from Takhar and Yahyakhel in Paktika might lead one to the conclusion that the recipe for a better- or worse-performing ALP depends primarily on geography (ie southeast versus northeast) or on the demographic trends associated with those areas (Pashtun tribal areas versus more ethnically mixed areas, respectively). However, the reality is more complex, and while 'bad' versus 'good' ALP may cluster in certain regions or provinces, the causal reasons for this have to do with the prevalence (or absence) of certain dynamics at the local or provincial level. The Andar district of Ghazni is, like Yahyakhel, in the Taleban 'heartland' – those rural communities, especially in the south and east of Afghanistan, which have long served as the Taleban's bedrock, supplying the insurgency with almost all of its needs, from fighters to food and shelter. As in Yahyakhel, a local counter-insurgency force also emerged in Andar in 2012, in response to abusive Taleban behaviour. However, like the Takhar ALP, the interests of local strongmen and past conflict dynamics ended up sidelining civilian interests. In addition, in Andar's case, foreign support (in extreme amounts) helped undermine the possibility of local forces having to seek the consent of local civilians to establish themselves.

Andar district is a predominantly Pashtun district in Ghazni province that sided with the Taleban insurgency very soon after the collapse of the Taleban regime. Although it is almost completely mono-tribal, that tribe, the Andar, is famous for its sub-tribal disputes. Andar district has also been a centre of the fighting since the jihad against the communist regime started in the 1980s and has a record of atrocities against the civilian population.

Five mujahedin factions were active during the war,[255] the most significant of which were the largely clerical Harakat-e Enqelab, many of whose members would go on to join the Taleban, and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hezb-e Islami; these factions clashed with each other during the jihadi period in certain areas. Such divisions and history of conflict would affect the later prospects for community defence mobilisation. The nasty and divisive rule by mujahedin commanders in the 1990s also helped weaken many of the pre-war social structures and left a strong legacy of competing power brokers, most with factional alliances and networks. Also significant is the enduring influence of clerics in Andar; the district's Nur ul-Madaris madrassa is of national importance, and several key Taleban figures studied there.[256]

Figure 10: Map of Ghazni province

The 'Andar uprising' against the Taleban in 2012 was quickly exploited by foreign military and local strongmen, helping to scupper any chance of an accountable or civilian-protective ALP or Uprising Force emerging. Instead they were abusive, and the ensuing conflict with the Taleban was especially brutal.

Additional information, analysis and sources were published in the original AAN dispatch on Andar district in Ghazni, available at: https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/uprising-alp-and-taleban-in-andar-the-arc-of-government-failure/.

Andar was peacefully handed over to the Taleban in 1995, with local clerics urging Andaris to support the movement, regardless of their past factional affiliation. As early as 2003, it was Taleban students from madrassas, rather than former fighters from the Islamic Emirate regime, who began to mobilise a local resistance to the new Afghan government. By 2012, Andar had been solidly held by the Taleban for years. Yet in May and June of that year, a group of fighters within the Taleban became unhappy with the local leadership, particularly its decision to close the district's schools (in retaliation for a government ban on motorbikes, which were being used by the Taleban to launch attacks). The group called themselves *De Melli Patsun Ghorzang* (the National Uprising Movement), while members referred to themselves as *patsunian*, roughly translatable as 'uprisers'. In a rapid and unexpected campaign, they gained outright control of 46 out of the district's 480 villages and ended or reduced Taleban influence in others, constraining the insurgents' freedom of movement over about half of Andar.[257]

At the time of what became known as the 'Andar Uprising', international forces were looking for a success story, and Andar seemed to fit this image in every conceivable way.[258] On the surface, this was a story about young men spontaneously taking up arms against

the Taleban in the name of education. Even the name of the district was strikingly similar to Anbar, the province where the successful Iraqi tribal mobilisation strategy had begun – the experience that helped inspire the United States' ALP strategy. Yet, beneath the surface, what was actually going on in Andar was an intra-militant struggle in a very fraught local context.[259] Those who revolted against the Taleban were from the Hezb-e Islami tradition and remained anti-government. Local civilians, however, were not directly involved in the uprising, and from the beginning, many were worried that it would spark a new phase of factional violence and internecine conflict among the already divided Andar tribe.[260]

Some within the international military saw the situation for what it was – as one internal ISAF memo put it baldly, "Andar is not Anbar" – and warnedthat the local conflict fault lines merited caution, according to one interviewee who was advising ISAF forces at the time.[261] However, the desire to read the situation in Andar as a parallel success story meant that warnings were ignored by those at the very top, including the man in charge of US and NATO forces at the time, General John Allen, who told the media that the uprisings in Andar and elsewhere marked "a really important moment for this campaign because the brutality of the Taliban and the desire for local communities to have security has become so, so prominent — as it was in Anbar — that they're willing to take the situation into their own hands to do this."[262] Andar rapidly turned into one of the most heavily militarised zones in Ghazni, with not only a full range of international military forces and ANSF, but two forms of local defence forces – both the original Uprising Forces and the ALP.[263]

Those on the ground who were tasked with setting up the ALP found willing partners, but not the sort that matched the community-based ideals of the ALP model. Local politicians, who were former commanders aligned to different mujahedin factions (Hezb-e Islami, Harakat-e Enqelab-e Islami and Ittihad-e Islami), were eager to take advantage of the influx of international funds and enthusiasm for arming local men. They wrestled for control of the Uprising and ALP forces, and the US funding that went with it, and in doing so created divisions in the local forces along sub-tribal and factional lines.[264] "They spoiled the dish from the beginning," one international advisor working in Ghazni said. "There was no chance of a genuine, endemic, local rebellion from the bottom up that had legitimacy from local people to develop."[265] Contrary to the ALP model and rules, these forces were formalised and armed with little scrutiny as to their competence or how the community viewed them. The results were predictably bad. This fed the mobilisation of unruly militias answerable to local power brokers and ignited a particularly ugly and internecine period of violence, even by Andar standards.

The intensification of the local conflict was immediate, with significant repercussions for civilians: according to UNAMA, 45 civilians were killed or injured in Andar in the second half of that year, the majority directly or indirectly related to the uprising. "While the uprising movement did not involve the direct targeting of civilians," UNAMA said, "the presence of a new fighting force, an increased presence of ANSF counter-insurgency activities and the establishment of ALP combined with increased numbers of Taliban sent to counter the uprising, all contributed to civilian casualties."[266] By November 2012, AAN was reporting that the violence in Andar had become "increasingly savage," with local elders and notables estimating that more than 300 people had been killed since the start of the uprising, far exceeding the number killed in the conflict between summer 2003 and summer 2012.[267]

What was striking in Andar was not just the level, but the nature of violence. Arming one part of the community (the Uprising Forces and the ALP) against another (the Taleban) poisoned intra-tribal relations among the Andar and led to extreme acts of reprisal. At the height of the struggle between the Taleban and the militias, the level and nature of the violence was worse than anything seen before. The case study of Taleban perspectives on the ALP has already noted the Taleban's tendency towards more transgressive forms of violence in communities seen as supporting the ALP. This included Andar. Such violence was also perpetrated by the pro-government forces. The ALP and the Uprising Forces carried out reprisals against those they believed belonged or were sympathetic to the other side, including civilians. Residents reported armed youth arresting people coming from Taleban-controlled villages and those whom they suspected of being pro-Taleban.[268] Frequently, the detainees were released only after paying money or being robbed of their goods. Some were beaten. There were even more serious allegations concerning the Uprising Forces, which were singled out in a 2014 UNAMA protection of civilians report. This report described "an incident of collective punishment and alleged crimes involving more than 40 civilians that involved severe beatings, including with metal chains," which had been carried out in January 2014.[269] Other news outlets reported multiple incidents of abuse by both the ALP and the Uprising Forces over the course of 2014 and 2015, including extrajudicial arrests and killings, abuses and the desecration of bodies.[270] Locals accused them of breaking into homes and abusing women. Communities did try to hold these pro-government armed forces to account; although public protest is rare in Andar, civilians took to the streets to protest against the behaviour of the *arbakai* and to call for their removal, with no success.

Popular support ultimately proved crucial to what happened in Andar. Support was initially divided between the pro-government local forces (the Uprising Forces and the ALP) and the Taleban. This community support is what helped the Taleban hold on in Andar, despite the onslaught of military force directed against them, with operations carried out by the ALP, the Uprising Forces, the ANA, the NDS and American and Afghan Special Operations Forces. The ALP and the Uprising Forces also had their own local backing, although this was largely lost due to their predatory behaviour and criminality, their alliance with the hated foreign forces and the mercenary behaviour of local politicians who backed them. This gave the Taleban an opening to shift the tide of popular opinion, which they successfully did. Having withstood and broken the momentum of the counter-insurgency in 2012 and 2014, the Taleban embarked on a more 'softly softly' approach (in Andar and elsewhere), attempting to persuade those who had stood against them to switch sides. They offered amnesties to ALP men and Uprising Forces, and tried to address the grievances of civilians who had supported the counter-insurgency. From 2014 onwards, it was the Taleban who saw military gains in Andar. By late 2017, they had captured the last areas taken by the Uprising Forces in 2012, and in October 2018, the government finally lost control of the district completely.[271]

To further parse the lessons regarding what helps produce a better- or worse-performing local force, it is helpful to compare the experiences in Yahyakhel and Andar. In both cases, abusive behaviour by the Taleban was the impetus for setting up anti-Taleban militias. Both districts are also predominantly Pashtun tribal areas, with some history of self-organisation. However, there were also key differences that lay below this surface description.

On paper, Andar should have been much more tribally coherent than Yahyakhel, given that most of the population is from one tribe, the Andar. However, it had a much more violent and divided experience during the mujahedin period, which created local conflict dynamics and factional interests that would make local mobilisation – particularly by those ignorant of these dynamics or seeking to exploit them – much more likely to trigger divides and reactivate conflict lines. By contrast, in Yahyakhel, the previous decades of relative peace meant there was both an absence of such divisions and intact tribal structures and mechanisms that could both mediate conflict and enable district-wide action.

The difference in outcomes was not only due to these underlying differences, but also to the way that community dynamics and fault lines were managed. Yahyakhel elders were cognizant of the potential for excluded and therefore disgruntled tribes to support the Taleban or otherwise derail local security. To prevent this, they deliberately ensured equity in the ALP force. In Andar this did not happen – although it possibly could have. The Andar can organise when they need to, including across frontlines. For example, in 2013, gatherings were held – without government involvement – on both sides of the frontline to set a district-wide bride price after people felt that marriage had become too expensive and, separately, to organise the building of river bridges. The level of outrage sparked by the local Taleban – for example, when it closed down all the schools – might have been enough to mobilise collective Andar action against them. However, the mobilisation of a cohesive and balanced local force was not attempted in Andar. By relying primarily on local politicians and power brokers who were already deeply embedded in factional conflicts, the mobilisation of local forces reinforced and exacerbated existing divisions, promoting the opposite of an inclusive force.

The role of international engagement in tipping a community towards a more inclusive or less inclusive strategy is not clear. In Andar, there appears to have been a wilful ignorance of the risk of escalating local conflict dynamics and no meaningful attempt to consult communities about whether they wanted a local force or how to form one that would be less divisive and abusive. The US mobilisation in Yahyakhel did not appear particularly deft or situationally aware – local elders appeared to do most of the inclusive recruiting, across tribal lines, on their own initiative. It may be that US mobilisation strategies were simply not savvy enough on the whole to support the mobilisation of an inclusive force in anything less than ideal circumstances. However, one important difference is that, compared to Yahyakhel, the Andar 'uprising' wasmuch higher profile, attracting many more resources. It became a 'honey pot' and was thus all the more attractive to local politicians from rival factional backgrounds. At the same time, the US military's haste to secure a success story led it to 'outsource' recruitment to a few local individuals, to fund forces despite their takeover by pernicious local figures and to disregard voices from the field warning of the consequences.

Lastly, regardless of which factors led to more- versus less-inclusive forces, the results of community controls – both for civilian protection and for the staying power of these forces – appear clear. The local forces in Andar ended up aligned with pre-existing factional interests and were also beholden to outside backers rather than to the whole local community for support. As a result, accountability for their actions was poor to non-existent, and their brutality over time was not only significant from a population-protection standpoint, but also eroded their long-term staying power against the Taleban. In Yahyakhel, those behind the ALP managed to get the entire community's support for the new force, and the community then kept the newly armed men in check. Getting such

full support appears important: in Yahyakhel, because the Taleban lost virtually all of their local backing, they could not even launch a counter-attack against the ALP, because their freedom of movement was so impeded. They were prevented from even beginning to try to persuade people that they were a better alternative. The result of establishing the ALP in Yahyakhel has been a far more peaceful and secure district, according to both locals and security statistics.

4.5 LESSONS LEARNED? A NEW LOCAL DEFENCE FORCE – THE AFGHAN NATIONAL ARMY TERRITORIAL FORCE

Additional information, analysis and sources can be found in two original AAN dispatches on the Territorial Force, one published in January 2019, available at: https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/uprising-alp-and-taleban-in-andar-the-arc-of-government-failure/and the second forthcoming.

Across the case studies and literature reviewed so far, there is a sort of nature versus nurture debate: Does the mobilisation of local forces – at least in certain areas – inevitably produce unruly militias, benefitting strongmen, exacerbating inter-communal tensions and leaving civilians vulnerable? Or can many of the problems with the ALP and the Uprising Forces be traced back to carelessness in mobilisation? Is it an issue of poor design or poor implementation? As previous sections have detailed, the ALP was intended to be a community-protective and state-supporting force, but the rapid expansion of the ALP meant that those in charge bypassed many of the steps and checks built into the model: ALP units were placed in areas that seemed almost doomed to fail, with little attention to either community or institutional controls. The design and implementation of the ANA-TF was intended to prevent a repeat of these mistakes. Much more attention was paid to expanding less rapidly, to more institutional controls and oversight, and to more careful recruitment and selection of sites. It is too early to judge whether such efforts have worked, and whether the new force is succeeding in either protecting the local population or defending territory. However, this case study will provide at least some evidence on how this has gone so far. Many of the issues with the ALP that manifested in the first year of its roll-out had to do with hasty expansion and problematic force and site selection. Thus, how many of these issues have been prevented from recurring in the first two years of the ANA-TF is an important inquiry itself. In addition, these early results may offer some evidence, albeit not a definitive answer, on the larger question of whether the issues with local forces are preventable by changes in the model, or whether some of the factors identified in other case studies – the local history of conflict, the prevalence of factional networks and divisions, and tendencies to view forces as sources of patronage – would also undermine this fresh effort.

The record of the ALP – both good and bad – was very much on the minds of planners in the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and Resolute Support (RS) when, in 2017, they began thinking about how to stand up a new local defence force, the Afghan National Army's Territorial Force (ANA-TF). On the Afghan side, MoD officials were adamant that they would not have their national army contaminated by militias. They were alert to the failings not only of the ALP, but also of the 'tribal militias' that proliferated under President Najibullah, which were funded by, but autonomous from the state, and which plagued citizens with

their lack of discipline, as well as their crimes and abuses.[272] On the international side, there were similar concerns. No one wanted a repeat of the issues that had manifested with the ALP. As one international advisor to the ANA-TF said, "We spent more time thinking about 'don't do this' than the 'dos.'"[273]

The model established for the ANA-TF was in some ways very similar to the ALP – a local defensive force, set up with local agreement and involvement, with local men recruited and with a mandate to fight only in their home areas. However, there were also significant differences. From the planning stages through to initial mobilisation, the ANA-TF was a much more Afghan-driven programme than the ALP had been, even though the influence of the US – which pays for the bulk of ANA, including the Territorial Force – was still significant; despite extreme reluctance initially from within the ANA and MoD to embark on the programme, Afghan officials, especially at the MoD, eventually led on everything from design and planning to selecting locations, commanders and recruits.[274] There were also a number of changes in the model aimed at preventing a repetition of the mistakes of the ALP. To improve command and control and limit the potential for strongmen to take over command of units by re-hatting their own militiamen, ANA-TF units were district-level rather than village-level forces, commanded by serving or retired ANA officers who could not be from the district. Recruits were given the same 'basic warrior training' as regular army recruits (four months, as opposed to one month for ALP recruits). The MoD also insisted on additional measures to make ANA-TF companies *(tolais)* more like professional, regular ANA than ad hoc tribal or community militias – for example, having them live in barracks wherever possible, or at least not at home, as ALP do. (Box 3 offers a detailed comparison of ANA-TF and ALP design.) Most significantly, those implementing the programme appeared to take a much more deliberative approach – at least in the initial stages – to selecting appropriate sites and recruits; the "agonising" whittling down of the sites was aimed at avoiding the mistakes that had come with the rapid expansion of the ALP,[275] described by one RS advisor as its "wholesale industrialisation."[276] Describing their thinking, one international advisor said, "We shared the view that institutionalisation was important, that accountability was central, and that rapid expansion could undermine both. We believed that the community conditions were crucial, and so selection was critical."[277]

An initial pilot phase was rolled out in the first half of 2018, with a plan to then pause and evaluate. However, General Nicholson decided that phase 1 of the project should begin immediately, with more ANA-TF units established in dozens of new locations. General Miller, who took over in November 2018, continued with the existing planned locations but re-introduced a more cautious approach to expansion. Rather than having non-specialised officers advising on the force, as Nicholson had done, he also set up a special ANA-TF advisory cell in RS, staffed by veterans of the ALP and/or LDI and VSO programmes to sharpen RS expertise; these advisors appeared personally invested in not seeing the ANA-TF side-tracked and derailed, as the ALP had been. Miller also advised bringing in the IDLG to bring a local, civilian perspective to the programme. An inter-ministerial National Steering Committee, established in early 2019, helped institutionalise a multi-agency approach to the new force, although the MoD remained in the lead role.[278]

As phase 1 ended, in summer 2019, the Afghan government, and especially the MoD, decided to move directly to phase 2, again without evaluating phase 1, and increased the pace of the roll-out. By mid-December 2019, 76 companies with more than 7,000 soldiers had been mobilised, with a further 21 companies in training or with recruitment underway.

Box 3: Lessons Learned? Changes in programme design from the ALP to the ANA-TF

The list below summarises some of the key programme elements designed to ensure that issues that manifested with the ALP would be less likely to recur with the ANA-TF.

Past problem	Proposed remedy	Implementation and effects
Lack of command and control, disciplinary measures and oversight; institutional corruption	ANA-TF is placed under the MoD, as opposed to the MoI, under the direct command of ANA officers. ANA-TF is part of the regular ANA structure; recruits get regular ANA training and do not live at home, as ALP do; all personnel are subject to military law and code of conduct.	The MoD has control and the heightened regulations have been implemented. Additionally, there has been a preference for former or serving ANSF in recruitment, which might increase the overall level of training and institutionalisation of ANA-TF recruits. However, it is too early to identify the effects on discipline and accountability.
Forces unwanted by or forced upon local people	Planners insisted that communities must be consulted (of note: similar claims were made for the ALP).	Implementation is a mixed bag: there are no clear mechanisms and safeguards to implement this; in practice, consultation is ad hoc.
Co-option by national powerbrokers, politicians or strongmen, skewing site selection or forcing selection of affiliated commanders/fighters (another form of re-hatting forces)	More precise criteria on site selection were developed, including: 1) site has strategic/military value; 2) district is relatively safe enough for local forces not to be overrun (coded 'green' or 'yellow', rather than heavily contested 'red'); 3) site is near enough to regular ANA to be logistically supported; and 4) factors likely to result in capture or other local conflict are not present (ie existing factional, ethnic or tribal conflict). Planners insist that politicians and powerbrokers will not be able to influence the recruitment of ANA-TF soldiers.	Overall, site selection appears more considered. In the early stages, many sites were rejected due to not meeting criteria, but later phases show some evidence of political interference and sites being selected despite being 'red' districts or otherwise not meeting criteria. Resistance to national powerbroker interference shared a similar record – initially there was strong resistance, but later some examples surfaced of inappropriate influence and units 'given over' to powerbrokers. There were proposals to mitigate both of these issues by standing down units where problematic site or force selection had occurred.
Co-option by local strongmen or commanders, including local commanders mobilising their own men (re-hatting existing militias)	Commanders must be serving ANA officers and come from outside the district so that a local commander cannot be appointed. Units are organised at the district, not the village level, which might prevent drawing all members from a single village or constituency.	Both have been largely implemented, although some commanding ANA-TF officers were from the districts where they were serving. Also, in some districts, recruitment has drawn disproportionately from certain locations (undermining meaningful district-wide recruitment). The effects of the change from village to district level are unclear – certainly it does not preclude co-option by district, provincial or national-level strongmen.
ALP established in very remote areas with no ANSF backup sometimes overcome by the Taleban or forced to surrender	Regular ANA must be located near enough to support ANA-TF units (of note: feasibility of support/back-up was also a criterion for ALP units, but was overrun as force deployments shifted).	Proximity to regular ANA was a key factor in site selection and led to the rejection of some sites. The real test will be whether assistance is received in critical 'troops in contact' situations.

Planners expected phase 2 to be completed in early 2020, and to have 10,000 ANA-TF soldiers active, with companies present in 32 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces (all but Nimruz and Bamyan).[279]

A first question in evaluating whether the ANA-TF has stuck to the model, and otherwise avoided the mistakes of the ALP, has to do with community consultation, buy-in and representation: Did Afghan officials and MoD forces meaningfully consult with communities about organising an ANA-TF company in their area, and in doing so, were they able to get the sort of equitable and broad-based community buy-in that was illustrated by the Yahyakhel case study, but was absent in many other ALP locations? This element is certainly part of the model for the ANA-TF – all of the Afghan and international interlocutors interviewed said that a fundamental tenet of the ANA-TF is that communities want and support the force. However, the exact procedures of how the consultation would happen and who would be involved were opaque. They were not specified in the presidential decree that set up the force, and officials gave very different versions of how the consultation was done. The ideal appeared to be for the corps commander and provincial governor to meet representative district leaders to see if there was buy-in for the establishment of an ANA-TF company, and if there was, for them to produce a list of potential recruits (which would then be vetted by the NDS and others).[280] However, there was a great deal of variation in how and whether communities were consulted, and community input in establishing companieswas not always evident.

In Shakar Dara district, just to the north of Kabul city, AAN interviewed members from 23 out of roughly 100 Community Development Councils (CDCs), as a proxy for the wider community,[281] about the ANA-TF company newly establishedin their district; only two of the interviewees had heard of the new force. The views from Shakar Dara bring this issue into relief. One of the two interviewees whose CDC hadbeen consulted reported that they had told the district governor they did not want a "militia force" in their district; it was already safe, and they did not "want to attract the Taleban."[282] The immediate response of one member of another CDC was shock at learning that a new force had been set up in his district. He referred to enmities *(doshmani)* in the district that dated back to the 1980s and 1990s and were still playing out: "People would welcome national forces, ANA or ANP establishing posts in the villages to protect them from thieves," he said, "but not locally drawn forces. People here have differences, enmities, so they don't want such a force [which could be used to] try to get revenge."[283] The one interviewee who reported that his CDC was consulted and supported the new force said, "Security is good in Shakar Dara. This force can help it to be even safer."

With such limited community consultation, it is perhaps not surprising that the force mobilised in Shakar Dara was not broadly representative. Recruits were roughly evenly split, with 50 per cent Pashtun and 50 per cent Tajik (roughly reflecting the district's demography) and came from about one-third of the district's villages. However, one village supplied about one-third of all recruits and half of all Pashtun recruits. A representative force with broad-based buy-in is important because the company otherwise risks creating or deepening rifts in the community, and the force risks being used by one faction or constituency against another. This is why the elders in Yahyakhel tried to ensure equal balance on their local ALP between the three tribes in their area and is the sort of balance that ALP and Uprising Forces in Andar failed to achieve. The fact that recruitment was skewed in Shakar Dara may be innocent – perhaps the members of one village had better contacts with ANA recruiters – or it may point to possible co-option. At the very least,

it undermined the potential for the company to be a representative force. Although it is only one district, the apparent lack of community buy-in and skewed recruitment in Shakar Dara may have been replicated in other ANA-TF sites. For example, other officials reported that the ANA-TFcompanyin Dara-ye Suf Payin in Samangan was in the hands of a commander who had ensured recruitment solely from one or two villages, while rival MPs in Ghor, the authors were told, had been 'given' ANA-TF companies, who had also ensued recruits came only from their tribes rather than representing "the variety of people" in those districts.[284]

In other areas, community consultation and support for the ANA-TF was evident. In Nangrahar, where locals had already earlier mobilised against the ISKP, and in some instances also against abusive Taleban, elders were ready to volunteer local sons fro the new force. It was not clear that community nomination was either a prerequisite or the main driving factor behind which forces were recruited in Nangrahar – for example, preference was given to retired ANP or ANA personnel in the district – but some level of consultation and community nomination did appear to take place.[285] Nearly all the community elders interviewed were enthusiastic about having local forces and appeared to prefer doing so via the ANA-TF, which is better paid and supported than either the ALP or the NDS Uprising Forces in the district.[286] Some locals described outreach by governorate officials (the governor, district governors or MoD staff) in the months prior to the emergence of the ANA-TF. In Paktika – a strongly tribal, Pashtun-majority province in Loya Paktia – people in Gomal district were pleased because they said their elders had been lobbying for a local defence force for some years.[287] There and in Khairkot district,[288] interviewees described elders organising recruitment and ensuring it was tribally inclusive. In Urgun district, one recruit provided a similar picture, although another said he had been tipped off about the job opportunity by an ANA commander from his village and had managed to get 34 friends and relatives recruited.[289]

A second issue relates to a key aspect of ANA command and control, and to ensuring that the loyalty of a company is to the ANA and not to local interests: the rule that ANA-TF commanders must be from outside the district in which they work. AAN interviewed 15 commanders, all of whom were serving ANA officers, as per the regulations, and half were from outside the province in which they were serving. Of those serving in their home provinces, one, the Shakar Dara commander, admitted to serving in his home district, and of the four others who declined to specify where they were from, AAN was told by other sources that two were local men; government officials told AAN of a fourth. Appointing 'outsider' commanders is such a basic safeguard against co-option, also mentioned explicitly in the presidential decree that set up the force, that it is surprising there were so many exceptions (more than a quarter of our sample). A government official agreed it was worrying:

> If we don't face this issue, it will be a problem as in the ALP and Uprising Forces. Commanders from their own district will work for their own benefit, or if they have a problem with some tribe or people, they will come as a powerful commander and abuse that power.[290]

A third key issue in evaluating the ANA-TF relates to the crucial issue of selecting locations, which in the case of the ALP was undermined both by a perceived need to expand the programme rapidly and to more areas, and by powerbroker manipulation. Avoiding poor site selection was a major focus of the early part of ANA-TF implementation. Criteria

included that units should only be mobilised in districts where they could succeed; where they were necessary; in relatively safe districts coded 'green' or 'yellow', rather than heavily contested 'red' districts; where there was regular ANA support; and where the force could not be used to exacerbate existing factional, ethnic or tribal conflicts, or come under political or criminal control. The pilot and at least the early part of phase 1 appeared to have been rigorous in terms of enforcing these criteria: officials cited exhaustive deliberations stretching over months to find appropriate locations and provided examples of ruling out locations that did not meet the established criteria. Out of the original phase 1 list, only 41 of the 55 companies were actually mobilised.[291] The rejected locations included those likely to result in powerbroker capture, such as those where politicians or powerbrokers had been actively pressing for ANA-TF units in their districts. One Afghan official said they also used the 'threat' of an RS veto to help deal with senior politicians putting pressure on them "to have a quota like the ALP."[292] He said support from RS to ensure the programme remained apolitical, however, was "not always 100 per cent."[293] Both he and others involved in the programme pointed to instances of powerbrokers and officials successfully manipulating the choice of locations; how badly they thought the compromises were varied.[294]

Figure 11: Number of ANA-TF units per province, December 2019

GPPi / Ilja Sperling. CC BY-SA 4.0
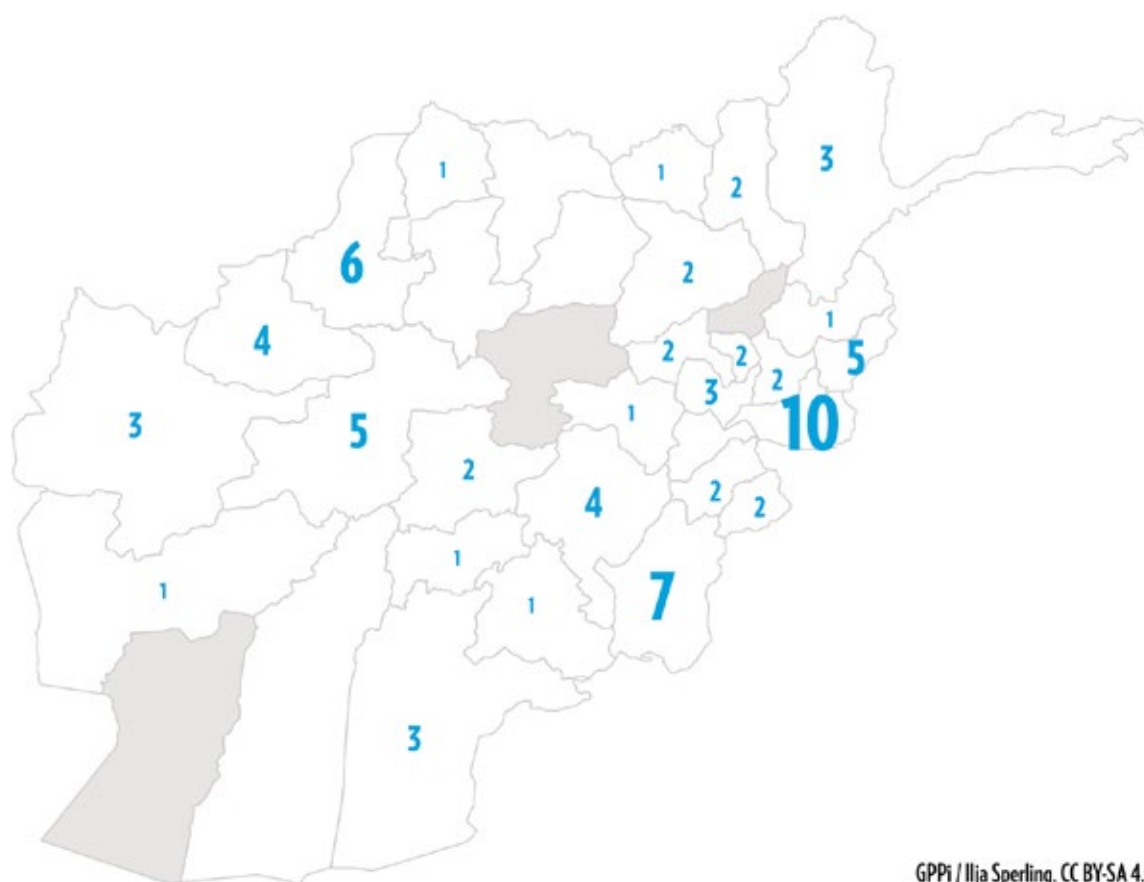
Afghan officials, with support from US forces, mobilisedANA-TFcompanies on a pilot basis in 2018 and then across a wider range of provinces and districts in 2019 and 2020. By August 2019, there were 46 units trained and mobilised in 20 provinces; by December 2019, there 81 units trained and mobilised in 26 provinces. This data is based on ongoing inter-ministerial tracking and planning numbers and was provided to GPPi/AAN in late July 2019, and in December 2019.

During both phase 1 and phase 2, at least some sites were chosen as a result of battlefield exigencies and/or political influence, leading to diversions from the model. Others so clearly fell outside the criteria that their inclusion also rang alarm bells. In phase 1, for example, Andar and three other 'red' districts in Ghazni were selected for ANA-TF companies. Reportedly, they were pushed by the newly appointed Minister of Defence, Asadullah Khaled, who wanted the ANA-TF in this nationally strategic district in his home province. Another district in Ghazni, Jaghori, which is overwhelmingly Hazara and where local people wanted the force, was considered for phase 1 and initially "put on the back burner";[295] the district was deemed too far from regular ANA support, and there was a risk that the company would exacerbate ethnic tensions. Nevertheless, Jaghorigot the go-ahead after senior Hazara officials and MPs successfully argued that the district was vulnerable to Taleban attack and that Hazaras, like people elsewhere in the country, needed jobs. The Taleban assault on Jaghori and neighbouring Malestan in November 2018, before the companywas established, accelerated its mobilisation, as well as triggering the establishment of Uprising Forces and the deployment of regular ANA.[296]

Other sites were selected in clear breach of the criteria. They included districts with no history of locally accountable forces, but rather where all previous local forces have been co-opted, used for illegal ends and/or have abused the population, and/or are riven by long-standing factional, ethnic and commander rivalries. Takhar has three ANA-TF companies, despite, as the case study in this paper shows, the ALP and the Uprising Forces there basically being militias controlled by abusive strongmen. Ruyi Du Ab in Samangan has an ANA-TF company that is dominated by a group of mujahedin commanders notorious for past abuses, including murder, rape and forced marriage.[297] Kiran wa Minjan in Badakhshan, the site of Afghanistan's main lapis lazuli mines, also has an ANA-TF company. According to a 2016 Global Witness Report: "The competition for these resources among armed groups and political elites is part of a long-standing pattern," which involves former mujahedin commanders, MPs, Taleban and ISKP.[298] The 'insurgency' in that district is a conflict over natural resources; the line between supposedly pro- and anti-government forces is unclear. Shakar Dara was also a questionable choice, given the lack of an active Taleban presence there. One government official told AAN the Shah wa Arus Dam, as a "crucial piece of infrastructure" in the district, needed the ANA-TF to guard it. However, another senior government planner said he had questioned the need for companiesin both Shakar Dara and another Kabul district, Paghman, and had argued for clearer and more logical criteria to determine the need for a company: "I suggested a number of criteria: insecurity, [the presence of] highways and safeguarding important infrastructure and vulnerable groups."[299] He feared that the lack of clarity on what constituted a need for an ANA-TF company had helped open up decision-making on locations to political influence. In all the instances of companies highlighted in this paragraph, it is easy to point to the likely political heavyweights behind the questionable site selection.

Unsuitable site selection also sometimes stemmed from a desire to rapidly scale up the ANA-TF in response to security threats. The rapid roll-out of phase 2 resulted in an increase from just over 4,000 soldiers in operation in mid-July to more than 7,000 by mid-December.[300] It is perhaps not coincidental that, as with the phase 1 expansion, both took place during the summer, when the conflict always peaks, and when one might expect the most pressure to deploy forces to strategic areas. One Afghan government official involved with ANA-TF mobilisation described the rapid growth in 2019 as "a response to the insurgency" during "a difficult year," and also as a consequence of greater general

"awareness of the programme."[301] More communities and influential figures, he said, were asking for units in their areas, and this was matched by greater confidence in the military utility of the ANA-TF on the part of the ANA and the MoD. Another official described heightened pressure from powerbrokers keen to have companies in their districts.[302]

In addition to questionable site selection, the pressure to expand and form ANA-TF units in particular areas (often quite rapidly) also resulted in other divergences from the initial model, from lack of full training and institutionalisation, to hasty selection and vetting of recruits. In the late spring and summer of 2019, several units were deployed without a full company, or without an ANA commander who had been trained and prepared for the task in charge.[303] The MoD also pushed through the rapid mobilisation of ANA-TF units to two highly dangerous locations after government forces made gains against the Taleban. In Belcheragh district, in Faryab province, acompany was so expeditiouslystood up that it was deployed without training (Afghan Special Forces were supposed to do this in the field). It proved highly vulnerable to the Taleban; within weeks, the insurgents had killed more than 30 of its men. Another red district given an ANA-TF company was Qarabagh, one of the four districts in Ghazni (mentioned above) which were heavily contested or Taleban controlled; despite pledges of support from elders, no one had wanted to join any of these companies – a strong indication that there was no genuine community support.[304] Despite this, the MoD struggled on with Qarabagh and managed to form a company during phase 2; it was fielded after only one or two weeks of training, which also meant that it lacked the necessary time for proper screening: seven men from outside the district who had fake IDs had succeeded in getting into the force, and they killed 23 soldiers while they slept on 14 December 2019.[305]

Those managing the programme said that inappropriate site selection or other issues in mobilisation could be corrected by abandoning or putting on hold poorly selected, unwanted or failing sites, by re-training certain units or appointing different commanders. An RS advisor interviewed in January 2019, for example, said that there had been a 'circling back' towards the end of 2018 to reassess companies authorised over the summer, when phase 1 was being rapidly expanded, to ensure that there was AAN support, that all the 'accountability pillars' – agreement from elders as well as provincial and district governors – were in place and that they had "smart growth, not growth at all costs."[306] After the same pattern manifested the following year, another RS advisor, who recalled the disasters of rapid ALP expansion, said in September 2019 that there were efforts to try "to slow down and not repeat mistakes because of expediency."[307] By the end of the year and the near-completion of phase 2, those who had expressed concerns about the rapid expansion of the force at the end of the summer said they were somewhat reassured – partly, it seems, because the consequences of taking shortcuts had been so immediate and so disastrous that they were not repeated. "When we go against the policy," one government official said, "things go badly."[308]

The possible repercussions of mobilising local forces without proper community consultation or in places which fall outside the criteria set to safeguard ANA-TF companies from becoming militias are not yet evident. Indeed, any assessment of ANA-TF mobilisation can only, as yet, be preliminary. It may be that the ANA-TF's additional institutional controls and different command structure prove better than the ALP's in terms of creating a more effective, accountable, local component of the ANSF. It seems the ANA-TF will look less like an 'ALP version 2.0' and more like a local recruitment arm of the ANA, allowing

it to have a number of forces that would be locally recruited, locally deployed and more locally rooted, but still ANA forces in other respects; this will be the case if ANA discipline, command and control are effective. Elsewhere, where there was organised community consultation and recruitment, ANA-TF companies may look like more like the original model intended.

Nonetheless, although the ANA-TF has developed differently from the ALP so far, some of the same issues that manifested in past local forces may yet repeat themselves. There has already been the temptation to create forces at a pace that would limit some of the institutional controls, and in areas that did not meet the criteria and were therefore at risk of powerbroker capture or inadequate community support, as in the past. It seems inevitable that pressure to find new 'tools' with which to face the insurgency, as well as pressure from pro-government actors to mobilise in their areas, will continually pull the force into areas and situations for which it is inappropriate. These demands may be too great for even the best-intentioned Afghan or international military planner to resist.

The future trajectory of Afghan peace talks may also shift some of the strategies for and the model of the ANA-TF. Some of the security pressures on the force may diminish if the 29 February 2020 agreement between the US and the Taleban proves to be the first step in ending the war in Afghanistan. Or, if peace talks do not move forward between the Taleban and the Afghan government, the ANA-TF may be even more pressed to hold territory against a continuing Taleban insurgency. In addition, the prospect of peace and reconciliation has raised another potential issue for the ANA-TF's role. For many months now, as talks between the US and the Taleban progressed, government officials in Washington had already been looking at another option: using the ANA-TF to reintegrate Taleban forces in a post-peace-agreement Afghanistan.[309] SIGAR's January 2020 quarterly report noted that, "Following a potential peace deal, DOD assesses that the ANA-TF or similar construct may serve as a potential vehicle for reintegration of insurgent fighters as one part of a whole-of-government approach."[310] This will likely prove unpopular with Afghan officials. Those asked about this possibility, at both national and local levels, opposed the idea of integrating Taleban fighters or units into the ANA-TF. As one planner at the Ministry of Defence said, "The ANA is very intent [on maintaining] its code of conduct, uniform and integrity. The ANA-TF will not be used for the reintegration of enemy combatants or ex-combatants."[311]

Nonetheless, the idea seems likely to emerge if peace negotiations continue; the idea of using local and other forces to reintegrate former insurgents and fighters as well as members of illegal armed groups has been attempted repeatedly in Afghanistan. From the earliest stages of and planning for the ALP, for example, it was discussed as a reintegration vehicle, and reconciled insurgent fighters were indeed brought into the ALP, particularly in the north.[312] This was not widespread and more often constituted informal or de facto integration, but some senior Kabul-based politicians pushed for it.[313] The four DDR and reintegration programmes rolled out in Afghanistan since 2001 have all been accompanied by high levels of corruption, the marginalisation of local civilian interests and often the re-hatting of militias. There is a strong risk that this will happen again, that new ANA-TF companies will be set up just to reintegrate Taleban, and that they may be located near existing companies which they were recently fighting. Yet one fundamental lesson from our ALP case studies is that local forces are most likely to be harmful when they are set up as a result of political pressure or perceived security exigencies, rather than the needs and wants of the local community.

CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

At the time of publication, the future of local defense forces in Afghanistan was in doubt. Uprising Forces, like this group in Nazyan district of Nangrahar province, have no clear basis in Afghan law, nor sustained funding. The United States is also due to stop funding the ALP in September 2020. As to the newest force, the ANA-TF, it might expand further. The US Department of Defence also considers it a possible 'reintegration vehicle' for Taleban fighters, should there be a successful peace deal.

Photo: Andrew Quilty, 2019.

THE FINDINGS from this research suggest that the ALP model can work in some circumstances. Indeed, local

forces, if they are rooted in communities, may be a more effective counter-insurgency presence and less likely to abuse the local population. The study of Taleban views on the ALP and the Uprising Forces suggest that local forces do present a potent threat to the insurgency. The Yahyakhel case study, as well as evidence drawn from more general research on and focus group discussions in Kunar, found that some communities preferred to be protected by a locally mobilised force and also found them more effective. However, there are many more areas where the local force model has not worked well. Hasty mobilisation, inattention to local politics and simply not taking the step of consulting the local community have led to fake 'community mobilisation', which does not reflect community desires or appropriately balance competing community interests. The demand for rapid formation and the scaling up of the ALP across Afghanistan created a situation in which more ALP formation experiences look like those in Andar – with no consultation and inadequate time for balanced buy-in – than those in Yahyakhel, where the community was behind the local force. Where this has happened, abusive ALP have fed greater violence and conflict in the area, undermining both local civilian protection and counter-Taleban goals.

The quality of local leadership strongly contributed to determining where a protective versus a harmful ALP manifested. The case of the Shajoy ALP in Zabul illustrated both sides of this coin – when US special forces and corrupt local politicians and officials forced an unruly ALP commander on the community, it produced abuses and instability, but when locals were allowed to take charge, they chose a commander who ensured a protective force. However, the background conditions in a particular community – the political and security dynamics, the nature of community structures and the local history of conflict and mobilisation – were arguably even more critical. The local force model does not work well everywhere in Afghanistan, and is particularly unsuited to areas where the community structures and local traditions do not lead towards accountability, where those traditions and structures are no longer intact or have been corrupted, and/or where historical divisions and conflict mean that local forces inevitably mobilise along pre-existing conflict fault lines. Even in areas that might seem predisposed to a local defence model, the particular local history is important. Although the mono-ethnic, mono-tribal Pashtun community in Andar might have seemed well suited to a local defence force, past cycles of violence and mobilisation meant it was highly factionalised and fractious, creating a strong tendency for local forces to entrench and fuel these conflict fault lines; the arrival of power brokers and international forces then aggravated local conflicts within the overall fight against the Taleban.

This means that the number of places in Afghanistan where a local force might work is limited. The continual cycles of conflict and mobilisation over the last few decades have contributed to a greater prevalence of the sort of community divisions, erosion of community-protective structures, and predatory warlords, commanders, and factional networks that spoil local defence models. Districts with the sort of background conditions

(local conflict history, nature of community structures and relations) that would enable them to field a protective, accountable and state-supportive local defence force do still exist, but they are very much in the minority. There are more places like Andar or Takhar than Yahyakhel or Kunar. The number of communities where local forces might work is even lower when community willingness and buy-in is considered. The case studies suggest that community willingness not only to support but to lead such initiatives is crucial. In those communities that fully supported and participated in local counter-insurgency initiatives, there was also typically a tipping point – an event like the Taleban's expulsion of elders in Yahyakhel, or ISKP atrocities in Nangrahar, which made the community decide to take up arms.[314] This could not be prompted by outside Afghan government or international initiatives. Indeed, these often attracted self-interested commanders and powerbrokers rather than widespread community support.

When all of these factors are taken into account, the number of places where local forces might work well is likely insufficient to achieve a larger strategic effect. Too often, instead of heeding this reality, the temptation has been to run with security demands and push the local force model into places where it is unlikely to work. This happened with the ALP and its hasty mobilisation, and there is a risk of it happening again with the ANA-TF, despite an even greater awareness of the risks, and dedication to avoiding them. In addition, even where there is local support for a defence force and where the force helps with the overall defence of state-held territory, if this means that one part of a community is mobilised against another – as was seen in Andar, where the initial recapture of territory by the Uprising Forces was impressive – the end result may be a much uglier and more intimate form of violence, with potentially longer-term consequences. Thus, whatever the short-term gains in security, there may be longer-term consequences of militarising local spaces.

Instead of focussing on innovating new local defence forces or tweaking existing models, a more important mandate for the next few years in Afghanistan may be to renew attention to demobilisation. Although the demobilisation of the ALP or its 'transition' to regular ANSF has been raised continually since the ALP began, when the decision to wind down the programme was made, there were no plans for how to responsibly dissolve or transition the 25,000-strong ALP force.[315] As of the publication of this report, with approximately two months until salaries would stop, there was still no DDR or transition plan in place for the ALP. Instead, significant attention was focused on the prospects for the DDR of Taleban fighters (should a peace deal be concluded), including by integrating them into local forces. Although no doubt a substantial challenge, the prospect of full Taleban reconciliation and reintegration is far more distant at the moment than what will happen when US support for ALP runs out in September.[316] With some 19,000 officially on the roster, and another 5,000 to 10,000 other armed men either not officially registered but acting as ALP or in some affiliation with the programme, the number of demobilised ALP may well exceed the number of prospective Taleban reintegrees, and yet DDR of pro-government forces appears barely on the radar.[317]

In terms of potential challenges and routes for demobilization or transition of the ALP, many would not meet the literacy, age, or other basic standards of the ANA-TF, much less the regular ANSF. Given the problematic background of many of these forces and their factional ties or criminal interests, many *should not* be integrated into other ANSF. Yet this does leave open the question of what these 20 to 30,000 armed men will do if left to their own devices. When the original ALP proposals (then conceptualized as the CDI and LDI) were being floated in November 2009, AAN's Thomas Ruttig already foresaw some

of the present issues. His comments to *The Guardian* warned that the US "risked losing control over groups which have in the past turned to looting shops and setting up illegal road checkpoints when they lose foreign support."[318] Lack of any transition plan for these forces could result in more extra-legal behaviour, including abuse and criminality, of illicit trafficking and enterprises, and weaken the overall rule of law environment. In addition, ALP forces have tended to be deeply entrenched in and key to armed powerbrokers and factional networks. The sudden lapse in their funding stream may prompt counter-measures or other unintended side effects, including motivating some of these powerbrokers and factional networks to act as spoilers to the peace process or to block the reintegration of Taleban forces in lieu of their own (should that moment materialise).

The still unanswered challenge of what responsibly demobilising ALP might look like underlines one last, larger risk of these sort of local force initiatives. Even if care is taken in the initial mobilisation and design, and locations are selected where local forces are wanted and are likely to do better than outside forces, what happens to them in the endgame, once the initial attention and funding for them has decreased? Although DDR has certainly been tried at multiple points in Afghanistan, it has involved re-hatting forces as much as actually standing them down. The result can be seen in the riven landscape of many Afghan communities. "The same communities have been bombarded with different shapes and forms of militias," one government official involved with ANA-TF mobilisation said, "The ALP, local strongmen forces, the Uprising forces, and now the ATF."[319] He described a trend towards 'militia-isation', including to anti-government groups, which meant that in some communities there were no men left unaffiliated. Given this history and environment, the major challenge on the horizon might not be how to build better local forces, but how to finally answer the unmet challenge from 2001 of rationalising and standing down the many varieties of armed forces that already exist in Afghanistan.

ENDNOTES

1   The exact means of dissolution, disbandment or transition had not yet been decided at the time of writing. Interview with Khosna Jalil, Director of Security Policy, Ministry of Interior, 25 July 2019; interview with ALP Special Operations Advisory Group officer, 25 July 2019.

2   Julian Borger, 'US reliance on Afghan paramilitaries in rural areas worries European allies', *The Guardian*, 8 January 2012, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jan/08/afghan-local-police-us-europe; Jim Gant, *One Tribe at a Time: A Strategy for Success in Afghanistan*, Nine Sisters Imports, Los Angeles, 2009; Seth G Jones, 'Going Local: The Key to Afghanistan', *The Wall Street Journal*, 7 August 2009, http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052970204908604574336402390524212; Alissa J Rubin & Richard A Oppel, 'U.S. and Afghanistan Debate More Village Forces', *The New York Times*, 12 July 2010, https://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/13/world/asia/13afghan.html?_r=2&ref=world.

3   UNAMA's annual protection of civilians report has recorded ALP numbers nearly every year since the 2011 annual report. It reported 11,066 members of the ALP in the 2011 annual report, but 25,277 by the end of 2013. UNAMA, 'Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2011',2012, 6, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unama_poc_report_final_feb_2012.pdf; UNAMA, 'Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2013',2014, 50, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/feb_8_2014_poc-report_2013-full-report-eng.pdf. Since then, the numbers, as reported both in UNAMA's reporting and in public reporting by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), have ranged between 27,000 and 29,000 members. All of UNAMA's mid-year and annual reports, including these figures, are available at https://unama.unmissions.org/protection-of-civilians-reports. SIGAR's quarterly reports are available at https://www.sigar.mil/quarterlyreports/.

4   For example, in a 2018 retrospective report on lessons learned from stabilisation in Afghanistan, the US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR)'s overall verdict and summary of the ALP was as follows: "The ALP grew at an unsustainable rate […] militias that operated outside of government control were absorbed into the ALP without the vetting that ALP units had initially received. […] VSO sites often transitioned to Afghan control before they were ready, and some were overrun, while others reverted to the influence of strongmen and the chaos of a predatory or absentee government. With little oversight, some militia commanders coopted the program [ALP] and simply continued their predatory practices with the appearance of government sanction, ultimately undermining the government's legitimacy." SIGAR, 'Stabilization: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan',2018, xi, https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/lessonslearned/SIGAR-18-48-LL.pdf. Further discussion of the issues in implementation and results is discussed at length in chapter 3.

5   This was the case in Nangrahar in the second half of 2019, with 18 ALP units in the province, 11 NDS-backed Uprising Forces, and 8 newly created ANA-TF units. In at least five districts, all three types of local forces existed simultaneously (at least on paper), and in another five districts, two of the three types of forces existed. This is based on a comparison of information provided in multiple interviews. Interview with NDS official, 20 July 2019, Jalalabad; interview with ANA general overseeing the ANA-TF, 22 July 2019, Jalalabad; email correspondence with ALP Special Operations Advisory Group officer, 5 August 2019.

6   For further discussion of the 'by, with, and through' strategy, seeJim Mattis, 'Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy', US Department of Defence, 2018, https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf; Mark Moyar, 'Choosing Partners and the Moral Responsibility of Consequence', in Emily Spencer (ed), 'By, With, Through': A SOF Global Engagement Strategy, Canadian Defence Academy Press, Kingston,

Ontario, 2014, 143–54; Joseph L Votel & Eero R Keravuori, 'The By-With-Through Operational Approach', Joint Force Quarterly 89, no 2, 2018, 40–47, https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/1491891/the-by-with-through-operational-approach/.

7   For a discussion of the differences in evaluations and conclusions between military, which is broadly more positive about the ALP, and civilian literature, as well as how this has evolved over time, see *infra* notes 175–179 and the introduction to chapter 4. Proponents of the ALP have contended that the degree of criticism the force has received is unfair; as an SOF officer involved in ALP oversight argued, "ALP don't have an effectiveness problem. They have an image problem." Interview, 12 November 2017, Kabul. Those working in human rights also point out that, as one international expert put it, "[i]n terms of problematic behaviour, the ANP has a much bigger impact." Interview, 29 September 2019, Kabul. The ANP and MoI undoubtedly have a much greater and more influential involvement in crime. See Kate Clark, 'Reforming the Afghan Ministry of Interior: A way to 'tilt' the war?', Afghanistan Analysts Network, 9 June 2017, https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/reforming-the-afghan-ministry-of-interior-a-way-to-tilt-the-war. It is also worth mentioning that, although UNAMA documents incidents attributed to any party to the conflict that result in civilian damage, including cases of threats/intimidation/harassment, abductions and civilian property damage for its protection of civilians reports, it considers the ANP to be a civilian law enforcement agency, which, "in some instances, takes part in hostilities"; unlike the ALP, which it considers to be "a de facto part of the armed forces," it only captures incidents of civilian damage perpetrated by the ANP if police were carrying out combat functions at the time. UNAMA, 'Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018',2019, 58.

8   See further discussion of such mixed reporting in the introduction to chapter 4, specifically footnotes 180–82 and the accompanying text.

9   For further information on the project, see the background information available at https://www.gppi.net/media/Project-Backgrounder.pdf, and the project website at https://www.gppi.net/issue-area/peace-security/militias.

10   Erica Gaston & Kate Clark, 'Backgrounder: Literature Review of Local, Community or Sub-state Forces in Afghanistan', Afghanistan Analysts Network, 2017, https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/special-reports/backgrounder-literature-review-of-local-community-or-sub-state-forces-in-afghanistan/.

11   An AAN dispatch (since January 2020 renamed as 'reports') is a publication based on substantial research, usually 4,000 to 8,000 words long, which has been reviewed by at least two editors. For a full list of dispatches and research related to this project, see https://www.gppi.net/issue-area/peace-security/militias/afghanistan-community-defense-or-just-another-militia.

12   Kate Clark, 'Update on the Afghan Local Police: Making sure they are armed, trained, paid and exist', Afghanistan Analysts Network, 2017, https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/update-on-the-afghan-local-police-making-sure-they-are-armed-trained-paid-and-exist/; Kate Clark, 'More Militias? Part 1: Déjà vu double plus with the proposed "Afghan Territorial Army"', Afghanistan Analysts Network, 21 September 2017, https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/more-militias-part-1-deja-vu-double-plus-with-the-proposed-afghan-territorial-army/; Kate Clark, 'The Afghan Territorial Force: Learning from the lessons of the past?', Afghanistan Analysts Network, 15 January 2019, https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/the-afghan-territorial-force-learning-from-the-lessons-of-the-past/; Kate Clark & Borhan Osman, 'More Militias? Part 2: The proposed Afghan Territorial Army in the fight against ISKP', Afghanistan Analysts Network, 23 September 2017, https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/more-militias-part-2-the-proposed-afghan-territorial-army-in-the-fight-against-iskp/.

13   Fazal Muzhary, 'How to Replace a Bad ALP Commander: In Shajoy, success and now calamity', Afghanistan Analysts Network, 21 September 2016, https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/how-to-replace-a-bad-alp-commander-in-shajoy-success-and-now-calamity/; Fazal Muzhary & Kate Clark, 'How to Set Up a "Good ALP": The experience of Yahyakhel district, Paktika and how it became more peaceful', Afghanistan Analysts Network, 20 December 2018, https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/how-to-set-up-a-good-alp-the-experience-of-yahyakhel-district-paktika-and-how-it-became-more-peaceful/; Fazal Muzhary & Kate Clark, 'Uprising, ALP and Taleban in Andar: The arc of government failure', Afghanistan Analysts Network, 22 May

2018, https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/uprising-alp-and-taleban-in-andar-the-arc-of-government-failure/.

14 Erica Gaston, 'The Leahy Law and Human Rights Accountability in Afghanistan', Afghanistan Analysts Network, 6 March 2017, https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/the-leahy-law-and-human-rights-accountability-in-afghanistan-too-little-too-late-or-a-model-for-the-future/; Borhan Osman & Kate Clark, 'Enemy Number One: How the Taleban deal with the ALP and Uprising Groups', Afghanistan Analysts Network, 19 July 2018, https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/enemy-number-one-how-the-taleban-deal-with-the-alp-and-uprising-groups/.

15 Emal Habib, 'AAN Reportage: Who Fights Whom in the Andar Uprising?', Afghanistan Analysts Network, 10 August 2012, https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/war-and-peace/aan-reportage-who-fights-whom-in-the-andar-uprising/; Emal Habib, 'AAN Reportage (2): The Andar Uprising – Has the tide already turned?', Afghanistan Analysts Network, 3 September 2012, https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/2012/09/; Emal Habib, 'Guest Blog: The Andar Uprising – Co-opted, divided and stuck in a dilemma', Afghanistan Analysts Network, 30 October 2012, https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/2012/10/; Emal Habib, 'The Morphing of the Andar Uprising: transition to Afghan Local Police', Afghanistan Analysts Network, 2 April 2013, https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/war-and-peace/the-morphing-of-the-andar-uprising-transition-to-afghan-local-police/; Emal Habib, 'Killing Mullahs and Wedding Guests, Banning Last Rites: The worsening Andar conflict', Afghanistan Analysts Network, 6 November 2013, https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/war-and-peace/killing-mullahs-and-wedding-guests-banning-last-rites-the-worsening-andar-conflict/; Fazal Muzhary, 'Finding Business Opportunity in Conflict: Shopkeepers, Taleban and the political economy of Andar District', Afghanistan Analysts Network, 2 December 2015, https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/finding-business-opportunity-in-conflict-shopkeepers-taleban-and-the-political-economy-of-andar-district/.

16 For an example, see Mark Moyar's discussion of the problematic Pashtun commander Nur ul-Haq in Baghlan province. Noting serious misconduct before and after ul-Haq became an ALP commander, he writes, "His empowerment may nonetheless have been an acceptable price given that the Tajiks despised the Taliban and were never going to join forces with them." Mark Moyar, 'Village Stability Operations and the Afghan Local Police', Joint Special Operations University, 22 October 2014, https://www.socom.mil/JSOU/JSOUPublications/JSOU14-7_Moyar_VSO_FINAL.pdf. This contrasted with other reporting that gave greater weight to civilian harm and to the long-term consequences for stability and local conflict, which considered ul-Haq's appointment to be a mistake. For example, AAN reporting on the ALP in Baghlan in 2011 cautioned that Special Forces appeared so interested in "hitting the Taleban hard now" that "[t]he future grief which the ALP may bring seems not to be on their minds." Gran Hewad, 'When the police goes local: More on the Baghlan ALP', Afghanistan Analysts Network, 2011, https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/political-landscape/when-the-police-goes-local-more-on-the-baghlan-alp/. For other critical reporting on Nur al-Haq's empowerment and the ethnic security politics in Baghlan that made it worrying, see Deedee Derksen, 'Non-State Security Providers and Political Formation in Afghanistan', Center for Security Governance, 2016, 22–23, http://secgovcentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/CSG_Paper_3_NSSPs_in_Afghanistan_March_2016.pdf; Jonathan Goodhand & Aziz Hakimi, 'Counterinsurgency, Local Militias, and Statebuilding in Afghanistan', United States Institute of Peace, 2013, 27–32, https://www.usip.org/publications/2013/12/counterinsurgency-local-militias-and-statebuilding-afghanistan; Rachel Reid, 'Just Don't Call it a Militia': Impunity, Militias, and the 'Afghan Local Police', Human Rights Watch, , 2011, 58–69, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/afghanistan0911webwcover.pdf.

17 Mark Sedra, 'Security Sector Reform in Afghanistan and Iraq: Exposing a Concept in Crisis', *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* 3, no 2, 2007, 7–23, 21.

18 Discussions of community in Afghanistan frequently return to the solidarity unit of qawm, which can be based on kinship, tribal or ethnic affiliation, location (village or broader geographic unit) or profession, and are not always so precisely circumscribed. For further discussion, see Gilles Dorronsoro, Revolution Unending: Afghanistan, 1979 to the Present, Columbia University Press, New York, 2005, 10–14; Olivier Roy, Islam and Resistance in

Afghanistan, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1986, 12–13, 22–23; Barnett R Rubin, The Fragmentation of Afghanistan, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2002, 22–23, 42–43. A sample of some of the literature discussing concepts of community or local ownership as it relates to ongoing peace-building, state-building, governance or security-sector interventions might include: Daniel Bendix & Ruth Stanley, 'Deconstructing Local Ownership of Security Sector Reform: A Review of the Literature', African Security Review 17, no 2, 2008, 93–104; Noah Coburn, 'The International Community and the "Shura Strategy" in Afghanistan', in Peter Albrecht, Helene Maria Kyed, Deborah Isser & Erica Harper (eds), Perspectives on Involving Non-State and Customary Actors in Justice and Security Reform, 2011, 53–64; Timothy Donais, 'Local Ownership and Security Sector Reform: Inclusion or Exclusion', Studies in Social Justice 3, no 1, 2009, 117–131; Kate Meagher, 'The Strength of Weak States? Non-State Security Forces and Hybrid Governance in Africa', Development and Change 43, no 5, 2012, 1073–1101.

19   See, for example, Sam Vincent, Florian Weigand & Hameed Hakimi, 'The Afghan Local Police – Closing the Security Gap?', Stability: International Journal of Security and Development 4, no 1, 2015; Ali Wardak & Humayun Hamidzada, 'The Search for Legitimate Rule, Justice and a Durable Peace: Hybrid Models of Governance in Afghanistan', Journal of Peacebuilding & Development 7, no 2, 2012, 79–88.

20   In academic literature, the functions carried out by these local forces are sometimes described as 'home guards', 'community watches' or 'community defence forces', among other terms. For discussions of these distinctions, see, for example, Huseyn Aliyev, 'Strong militias, weak states and armed violence: Towards a theory of "state-parallel" paramilitaries', Security Dialogue 47, no 6, 2016, 498–516; Sabine C Carey, Michael P Colaresi & Neil J Mitchell, 'Governments, informal links to militias, and accountability', in Corinna Jentzsch, Stathis N Kalyvas & Livia Isabella Schubiger (eds), Journal of Conflict Resolution 59, no 5, 2015, 850–876, 251; Govinda Clayton & Andrew Thomson, 'The enemy of my enemy is my friend… The dynamics of self-defense forces in irregular war: The Case of the Sons of Iraq', Studies in Conflict & Terrorism 37, no 11, 2014, 920–935; Govinda Clayton & Andrew Thomson, 'Civilianizing civil conflict: Civilian defense militias and the logic of violence in intrastate conflict', International Studies Quarterly 60, no 3, 2016, 499–510; Antonio Giustozzi, Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop, Hurst, London, 2007, 173; Geraint Hughes & Christian Tripodi, 'Anatomy of a surrogate: Historical precedents and implications for contemporary counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism', Small Wars & Insurgencies 20, no 1, 2009, 1–35; Corinna Jentzsch, Stathis N Kalyvas & Livia Isabella Schubiger, 'Militias in Civil Wars', Journal of Conflict Resolution 59, no 5, 2015, 755–769, 757; Neil J Mitchell, Sabine C Carey & Christopher K Butler, 'The impact of pro-government militias on human rights violations', International Interactions 40, no 5, 2014, 812–836; Goran Peic, 'Civilian Defense Forces, State Capacity, and Government Victory in Counterinsurgency Wars', Studies in Conflict & Terrorism 37, no 2, 2014, 162–184; Idean Salehyan, 'The Delegation of War to Rebel Organizations', Journal of Conflict Resolution 54, no 3, 2010, 493–515.

21   Mohammed Osman Tariq, 'Tribal Security System (Arbakai) in Southeast Afghanistan', Crisis States Research Center, London School of Economics, 2008.

22   Thomas Barfield, Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History, Princeton University Press, Princeton & Oxford, 2010, 337; Neamatollah Nojumi, Rise of the Taliban, Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2012, 7–9; Rubin, Fragmentation, [see FN 18], 14–21.

23   Gaston & Clark, 'Backgrounder', [see FN 10], 4–13.

24   Roy, Islam and Resistance, [see FN 18], 13–14; Rubin, Fragmentation, [see FN 18], 196, 201–225.

25   The fact that funding for the jihad was external – western and Gulf Arab funding of the mujahedin and, to a lesser extent, Soviet and government funds to the tribal militias, both until 1992 – meant that commanders became much more autonomous from the communities from which they were drawn. Inevitably, they became more powerful than the 'traditional' local political leaders (if these leaders had not themselves become commanders) and other civilian members of the communities. As Deedee Derksen wrote in 2016, even in this early period, outside support had a tendency to "undermine that influence and weaken the legitimacy of the non-state security providers. This already became clear in the 1980s, when commanders funded by jihadi commanders could capture local power regardless of approval by local

communities. This was a break from traditional non-state security provision led by khans, who were dependent on the approval of communities. The often predatory nature of the new militias undermined their legitimacy in many places, as became clear by the widespread local support for the Taliban movement in the south in the early 1990s." Derksen, 'Non-State Security Providers', [see FN 16],35. On prior patterns of mobilisation, prior to foreign supported initiatives in the 1980s and 1990s, see Dorronsoro, Revolution Unending, [see FN 18], 119; Rubin, Fragmentation, [see FN 18], 11.

26 See, for example, the description of national-to-local control dynamics and foreign support in Barfield, *Afghanistan*, [see FN 22], 254.

27 Antonio Giustozzi, 'Auxiliary irregular forces in Afghanistan: 1978-2008', in Michael A. Innes (ed), *Making sense of proxy wars: States, surrogates & the use of force*, Potomac Books, Washington DC, 2012, 89–108, 89–107; Rubin, *Fragmentation*, [see FN 18], 158.

28 Giustozzi, 'Auxiliary irregular forces in Afghanistan', [see FN 27], 89–108, 89–107.

29 Barfield, *Afghanistan*, [see FN 22], 252–54; Rubin, *Fragmentation*, [see FN 18], 258–65, 274–78.

30 Afghanistan Justice Project, 'Casting Shadows: War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity: 1978–2001', 2005, 64–80.

31 A front – or *mahaaz* – a large formation made up of multiple sub-commanders and groups under an overall leader who is associated with a geographic area or, more often, a senior commander, has been the standard way for fighters to organise in Afghanistan from the early years of the jihad to the current insurgency.

32 Thomas Barfield, 'Statebuilding, counterinsurgency, and counterterrorism: complementary or contradictory strategies?', in Scott Smith & Colin Cookman (eds), *State Strengthening in Afghanistan: Lessons Learned 2001–14*, United States Institute of Peace,2016, 255–258, https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/PW116-State-Strengthening-in-Afghanistan-Lessons-Learned-2001-14_0.pdf; Alex Strick van Linschoten & Felix Kuehn, *An Enemy We Created: The Myth of the Taliban-Al Qaeda Merger in Afghanistan, 1970–2010*, Hurst, London, 2012, 43–44.

33 For a description of the Taleban's rise and conquest or co-option of different groups and areas, see generally, Barfield, *Afghanistan*, [see FN 22], 258–62; Nojumi, *Rise of the Taliban*, [see FN 22], 24–79.

34 Barfield, *Afghanistan*, [see FN 22], 246; Dorronsoro, *Revolution Unending*, [see FN 18], 257–71; Rubin, *Fragmentation*, [see FN 18], 273–74.

35 Barfield, *Afghanistan*, [see FN 22], 282; Dorronsoro, *Revolution Unending*, [see FN 18], 123–25; Rubin, *Fragmentation*, [see FN 18], 256–7.

36 See, generally, Rubin, *Fragmentation*, [see FN 18], 240–45. For other examples of the erosion of tribal authority in response to mujahedin infighting and corruption, see Barfield, *Afghanistan*, [see FN 22], 256; Carter Malkasian, *War Comes to Garmser: Thirty Years of Conflict on the Afghan Frontier*, Hurst, London, 2016, 41–51; Roy, *Islam and Resistance*, [see FN 18], 150–153; van Linschoten & Kuehn, *An Enemy We Created*, [see FN 32], 111–13.

37 Michael Vinay Bhatia & Mark Sedra, Afghanistan, Arms and Conflict: Armed Groups, Disarmament and Security in a Post-War Society, Routledge, New York & London, 2008; Martine van Bijlert, 'The Taliban in Zabul and Uruzgan', in Peter Bergen (ed), Talibanistan: Negotiating the Borders between Terror, Politics, and Religion, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2011, 94–127; Kimberly Marten, 'Warlordism in Comparative Perspective', International Security 31, no 3, 2007, 41–73; M. Nazif Mohib Shahrani, Modern Afghanistan: The Impact of 40 Years of War, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indiana, 2018.

38 'A Force in Fragments: Reconstituting the Afghan National Army', International Crisis Group, 2010, 6–7; Antonio Giustozzi, 'Military Reform in Afghanistan', in Mark Sedra (ed), 'Confronting Afghanistan's Security Dilemma, Reforming the Security Sector', Bonn International Center for Conversion, Bonn, 2003, 23–31, 24–26, https://idl-bnc-idrc.dspacedirect.org/bitstream/handle/10625/31021/119547.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

39 Shura-ye Nizar was built up by Jamiat-e Islami commander Ahmad Shah Massud in the 1980s and became the most coherent and formidable part of the resistance against the Soviet occupation. Officially dissolved in 1993, it has nonetheless remained as a recognisable

and coherent network of commanders and politicians from the environs of Kabul and the northeast. It was the most powerful group within the anti-Taleban Northern Alliance. 'A Force in Fragments', [see FN 38], 1–6; Deedee Derksen, 'The Politics of Disarmament and Rearmament in Afghanistan', United States Institute of Peace,2015, 8–11, https://www.usip.org/publications/2015/05/politics-disarmament-and-rearmament-afghanistan; Giustozzi, 'Military Reform in Afghanistan', [see FN 38], 23–31.

40 For a concise overview of four different waves of DDR, see Kate Clark, 'Graft and Remilitarisation: A look back at efforts to disarm, demobilise, reconcile and reintegrate', Afghanistan Analysts Network,2018. For more in-depth discussions, see Derksen, 'Politics of Disarmament', [see FN 39]; Antonio Giustozzi, 'Bureaucratic Façade and Political Realities of Disarmament and Demobilisation in Afghanistan', *Conflict, Security & Development* 8, no 2, 2008, 169–192.

41 Derksen, 'Politics of Disarmament', [see FN 39], 8–11; Deedee Derksen, 'Commanders in Control: Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration in Afghanistan under the Karzai Administration', King's College London, 2016, 70–72, https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/files/74662477/2017_Derksen_Linde_Dorien_0946805_ethesis.pdf; Giustozzi, 'Bureaucratic Façade and Political Realities of Disarmament and Demobilisation in Afghanistan', [see FN 40], 169–192, 169–192.

42 Derksen, 'Politics of Disarmament', [see FN 39], 10.

43 Antonio Giustozzi & Mohammed Isaqzadeh, 'Afghanistan's Paramilitary Policing in Context', Afghanistan Analysts Network,2011, 18. See also Andrew Wilder, 'Cops or Robbers? The Struggle to Reform the Afghan National Police', Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2007.

44 See Clark, 'Reforming the Afghan Ministry of Interior', [see FN 7]; Antonio Giustozzi & Mohammad Razaq Isaqzadeh, 'Senior Appointments and Corruption within the Afghan MoI: Practices and Perceptions', Integrity Watch Afghanistan, 2015, https://iwaweb.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/moi_senior_appointments_and_corruption_english.pdf.

45 Derksen, 'Politics of Disarmament', [see FN 39]; Derksen, 'Commanders in Control', [see FN 41]; Jonathan Goodhand & Mark Sedra, 'Rethinking liberal peacebuilding, statebuilding and transition in Afghanistan: an introduction', *Central Asian Survey*, 32, no 3, 2013, 239–254.

46 See, for example, Kate Clark, 'Khost Protection Force Accused of Fresh Killings: Six men shot dead in Zurmat', Afghanistan Analysts Network,2019; Gaston & Clark, 'Backgrounder', [see FN 10],7, 5–6, 28–29; Mujib Mashal, 'C.I.A.'s Afghan forces leave a trail of abuse and anger', *The New York Times*, 31 December 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/31/world/asia/cia-afghanistan-strike-force.html?action=click&module=Top Stories&pgtype=Homepage; Sudarsan Raghavan, 'CIA runs shadow war with Afghan militia implicated in civilian killings', *Washington Post*, 13 December 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/cia-backed-afghan-militias-fight-a-shadow-war/2015/12/02/fe5a0526-913f-11e5-befa-99ceebcbb272_story.html.

47 See Kate Clark, 'CIA-backed Afghan paramilitaries accused of grave abuses: New Human Rights Watch report', Afghanistan Analysts Network, 31 October 2019, https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/cia-backed-afghan-paramilitaries-accused-of-grave-abuses-new-human-rights-watch-report/; Patricia Gossman, ''They've Shot Many Like This': Abusive Night Raids by CIA-Backed Afghan Strike Forces', Human Rights Watch, 2019, https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/10/31/theyve-shot-many/abusive-night-raids-cia-backed-afghan-strike-forces; UNAMA, 'Protection of Civilians 2018',[see FN 7], 5–6, 28–29.

48 Joseph Giordono, '300 more Afghan Security Force members demobilized', *Stars and Stripes*, 11 January 2006, https://www.stripes.com/news/300-more-afghan-security-force-members-demobilized-1.43441.

49 Matthieu Aikins, 'Contracting the Commanders: Transition and the Political Economy of Afghanistan's Private Security Industry', Center on International Cooperation, 2012, https://www.ciaonet.org/attachments/21916/uploads; Steve Brooking, 'Private Security Companies in Afghanistan, 2001–11', Afghanistan Analysts Network,Afghanistan, 2011; John F. Tierney, 'Warlord, Inc.: Extortion and corruption along the U.S. Supply Chain in Afghanistan', US House of Representatives, 2010, https://www.worldcat.org/title/warlord-inc-extortion-and-corruption-along-the-us-supply-chain-in-afghanistan/oclc/642929052.

50   Derksen, 'Politics of Disarmament', [see FN 39].

51   See, for example, Jon Boone, 'US pours millions into anti-Taliban militias in Afghanistan', *The Guardian*, 22 November 2009, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/nov/22/us-anti-taliban-militias-afghanistan; Goodhand & Hakimi, 'Counterinsurgency', [see FN 16], 3, 9, 15, 27; Reid, 'Just Don't Call', [see FN 16], 7; Thomas Ruttig, 'Militia Sightings', Afghanistan Analysts Network, 29 November 2009, https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/war-and-peace/militia-sightings/.

52   Wilder writes: "ANAP was to provide a mechanism for the international community to pay militia salaries that currently the government had to pay through the governors' 'Special Operating Funds.' According to one interviewee, 'Special Operating Funds' were being provided to about half of the provincial governors, mostly in the Pashtun provinces in the south and east of the country most affected by the insurgency. Each month approximately $2 million was provided, with the governors of some provinces, such as Kandahar, receiving as much as $300,000 per month." Wilder, 'Cops or Robbers?', [see FN 43], 16. He also noted another report that ANAP was a "money-making scheme," with the initial proposal for $120 million.

53   Wilder, 'Cops or Robbers?', [see FN 43], 13–17.

54   Aikins,'Contracting the Commanders', [see FN 49], 2–3; Brooking, 'Private Security Companies', [see FN 49], 1–4.

55   Aikins, 'Contracting the Commanders', [see FN 49], 10–11.

56   Brooking, 'Private Security Companies', [see FN 49], 2–4.

57   For more on the Taleban resurgence, beginning significantly from 2006 onwards, see Alia Brahimi, *The Taliban's Evolving Ideology*, London School of Economics, 2010, https://perma.cc/9NJ3-WRV3; Giustozzi, *Koran,*[see FN 20], 72.

58   Goodhand & Hakimi, 'Counterinsurgency', [see FN 16], 6–12; Matthieu Lefèvre, 'Local Defence in Afghanistan: A Review of Government-backed Initiatives', Afghanistan Analysts Network 2010, 3–4, https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/publication/aan-papers/local-defence-in-afghanistan-a-review-of-government-backed-initiatives/; William Maley, 'Statebuilding in Afghanistan: Challenges and pathologies', Central Asian Survey 32, no 3, 2013, 255–270, 255–270; Astri Suhrke, 'The long decade of state-building in Afghanistan', in Chester A Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson & Pamela Aall (eds),'Managing Conflict in a World Adrift', United States Institute of Peace, 2015, 563–64.

59   See, for example, Goodhand & Sedra, 'Rethinking liberal peacebuilding, statebuilding and transition in Afghanistan', [see FN 45], 239–254, 243; Astrid Suhrke, When More is Less: The International Project in Afghanistan, Hurst, London, 2011, 117–40; Suhrke, 'The long decade', [see FN 58]; Sam Vincent et al, 'The Afghan Local Police – Closing the Security Gap?', Stability: International Journal of Security and Development 4, no 1, 2015, 6–8.

60   See, for example, Thomas Barfield, Neamat Nojumi & J Alexander, *The Clash of Two Goods: State and Non-State Dispute Resolution in Afghanistan*, United Institute of Peace, 2006, https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/file/clash_two_goods.pdf; Jones, 'Going Local', [see FN 2].

61   There had been some degree of engagement with local or community mechanisms prior to the surge, including notably in the National Solidarity Programme, with community or dispute resolution, or with different forms of local forces; however, all of these initiatives would see significantly more attention and increased funding from 2009 onwards. Some literature documenting this shift includes: Frances Z Brown, 'The U.S. Surge and Afghan Local Governance', United Institute of Peace, September 2012, https://www.usip.org/publications/2012/09/us-surge-and-afghan-local-governance; Noah Coburn, 'Informal Justice and the International Community in Afghanistan', United States Institute of Peace,2013; Erica Gaston & Erik Jensen, 'Rule of Law and Statebuilding in Afghanistan: Testing Theory with Practice', in *State Strengthening in Afghanistan: Lessons Learned 2001–14*, United States Institute of Peace, 2016, 69–80; Goodhand & Hakimi, 'Counterinsurgency', [see FN 16], 69–80; Geoffrey Swenson, 'Why U.S. Efforts to Promote The Rule Of Law in Afghanistan Failed', *International Security* 42, no 1, 2017, 114–151, 114–151.

62   Goodhand & Hakimi, ‚Counterinsurgency‘, [see FN 16].

63   Stanley McChrystal, 'COMISAF's Initial Assessment (unclassified)', 30 August 2009, ISAF, 2009, 2–9, http://media.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/documents/Assessment_ Redacted_092109.pdf?sid=ST2009092003140. See also Christine C Fair & Seth G Jones, 'Securing Afghanistan: Getting on Track', United States Institute of Peace,10 April 2009, 1, https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/February2009.pdf%3E.

64   Jones, 'Securing Afghanistan', [see FN 63].

65   See, generally, Seth G Jones, 'The Strategic Logic of Militia', RAND Corporation,2012, https://www.rand.org/pubs/working_papers/WR913.html; Mark Moyar, Ronald E Neumann, Vanda Felbab-Brown, William Knarr, Jack Guy, Terry Corner & Carter Malkasian, 'The Afghan Local Police Community Self-Defense in Transition', Center for Special Operations Studies and Research, Joint Special Operations University, 2013.

66   For an example of seeing *arbakai* as a model for contemporary local forces, see Gant, *One Tribe*, [see FN 2]; Jones, 'Strategic Logic',[see FN 65], 21–26. For a deeper discussion of the history and traditions surrounding *arbakai* see Tariq, 'Tribal Security System'[see FN 21].

67   See Tariq, 'Tribal Security System',[see FN 21]; Rubin, *Fragmentation*, [see FN 18], 45–80.

68   Goodhand & Hakimi, 'Counterinsurgency', [see FN 16], 30–31; Aziz Hakimi, 'Getting savages to fight barbarians: counterinsurgency and the remaking of Afghanistan', *Central Asian Survey* 32, no 3, 2013, 388–405, 389.

69   These local defence initiatives were not exclusively tribal in nature, but because many of them were focused on developing counter-insurgent forces in areas where the Taleban was dominant, they frequently sought to mobilise militias from Pashtun tribal communities.

70   The AP3 programme had been fully mobilised in Wardak with 243 candidates as of March 2009, but planning and discussions on it reportedly began at the end of 2008, followed by recruitment throughout early 2009.'Progress toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan', US Department of Defence, 2009, 37, https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/1230_June-2009Final. pdf; Goodhand & Hakimi, 'Counterinsurgency', [see FN 16], 11.

71   Lefèvre notes that LDI units were mobilised in Arghandab, Kandahar; Nili, Daikundi; Achin, Nangrahar; Gereshk, Helmand; and Chamkani, Paktia.A SIGAR retrospective lessons learned report noted that by mid-2009, CDI pilots existed in "Nili (Daykundi), Achin (Nangrahar), Gereshk (Helmand), Arghandab and Khakrez (Kandahar), and parts of Paktika," and that "[s]ix more sites were added to areas across the south and east." SIGAR, 'Stabilization', [see FN 4], 110.

72   Lefèvre, 'Local Defence, [see FN 58], 1.

73   Jones describes the initial planning and goals of the CDI/LDI as follows: "The program's explicit goals were to 'identify local communities that seek outside help against insurgents' in rural Afghanistan and to 'assist [the] local population to provide their own security with defensive 'neighborhood watch' type programs.'" Jones, 'Strategic Logic',[see FN 65], 29–30.

74   Goodhand & Hakimi, 'Counterinsurgency', [see FN 16], 11; Jones, 'Strategic Logic',, [see FN 65], 29–32; Lefèvre, 'Local Defence, [see FN 58], 1.

75   Jones, 'Strategic Logic', [see FN 65], 29–30; Moyar, 'Village Stability Operations',[see FN 16], 10–11.

76   Goodhand & Hakimi, 'Counterinsurgency', [see FN 16], 11–12; Lefèvre, 'Local Defence, [see FN 58], 1–4/; Lisa Saum-Manning, 'VSO/ALP: Comparing Past and Current Challenges to Afghan Local Defense', RAND Corporation,2012, 4–7, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/ working_papers/2012/RAND_WR936.pdf.

77   Jones, 'Strategic Logic', [see FN 65], 30.

78   Goodhand & Hakimi, ‚Counterinsurgency', [see FN 16], 10–20; Jones, ‚Strategic Logic',[see FN 65], 30–31; SIGAR, 'Stabilization', [see FN 4], 49; final draft, Local Defence Initiative Strategy, March 2010, cited by Lefèvre, ‚Local Defence, [see FN 58], 15.

79   Jones, 'Strategic Logic',[see FN 65], 30.

80   Interview with Rebecca Zimmerman, RAND advisor, 20 June 2018, Washington DC.

81 Documentation of these early programs suggest the conditions that were repeatedly emphasised were that communities wanted to resist the Taleban, the area was of strategic importance, and it could be feasibly supported. Interview with Rebecca Zimmerman, RAND advisor, 20 June 2018, Washington DC.

82 On these other programmes, see, for example, Gaston & Clark, 'Backgrounder', [see FN 10]; Malkasian, *War Comes to Garmser*, [see FN 36],164–65, 170; Moyar, 'Village Stability Operations', [see FN 16], 14–15; Matthew Rosenberg & Allissa J. Rubin, 'Afghanistan to Disband Critical Infrastructure Police', *The New York Times*, 26 December 2011, https://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/27/world/asia/afghanistan-to-disband-critical-infrastructure-police.html. Two different sources provide summary charts comparing some of the different aspects of these programmes: Gaston & Clark, 'Backgrounder', [see FN 10], 11–13; and Saum-Manning, 'VSO/ALP', [see FN 76]*,* 12. On troop confusion and lack of coherence, see Reid, 'Just Don't Call', [see FN 16], 22–23.

83   US DoD, 'Progress toward Security 2009',[see FN 70], 37; Goodhand & Hakimi, 'Counterinsurgency', [see FN 16], 14.

84 See, for example, Goodhand & Hakimi, 'Counterinsurgency'*,* [see FN 16], 14; Moyar, 'Village Stability Operations', [see FN 16], 10, 13.

85 Goodhand & Hakimi, 'Counterinsurgency', [see FN 16], 12.

86 Karl Eikenberry, '[Leaked US Embassy diplomatic cable] Unconventional security forces – what's out there? (09kabul3661)', Wikileaks,11 December 2009, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09KABUL3661_a.html; Rubin & Oppel, 'U.S. and Afghanistan Debate', [see FN 2].

87 One DoD advisor privy to the negotiations between Petraeus and Karzai in 2010 described the meeting as two conflicting visions based on their own historical or personal experiences: "Petraeus was looking to recreate the Iraq model in Afghanistan," while Karzai was worried about "a redux of what happened when the Soviets backed militias." Interview with former DoD advisor, 15 June 2018, Washington DC. On Sons of Iraq lessons transferred, see Stephen Biddle, 'Lessons Learned in Afghanistan and Iraq', in Seyom Brown & Robert Scales (eds), *US Policy in Afghanistan and Iraq: Lessons and Legacies*, Lynne Rienner, Boulder, 2012, 221; Vanda Felbab-Brown, 'Hurray for militias? Not so fast: Lessons from the Afghan Local Police experience', *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 27, no 2, 2016, 258–281, https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2015.1129169.

88 Interview with former Afghan presidential advisor, 2 September 2017, Washington DC. See also Rubin & Oppel, 'U.S. and Afghanistan Debate', [see FN 2].

89 General Petraeus and President Karzai reached an agreement to move forward with the ALP in July 2010; it was formally instituted with a presidential decree in August 2010. Alissa J. Rubin, 'Afghans to Form Local Forces to Fight Taliban', *The New York Times*, 14 July 2010, https://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/15/world/asia/15afghan.html.

90 Department of Defence reporting on the initiation of the ALP describes it as the product of lessons learned from all the past local defence programmes, including the APPF, the AP3 and the CDI. US DoD, 'Report to Congress on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan 2010', 68, https://archive.defense.gov/pubs/November_1230_Report_FINAL.pdf.

91 As part of the VSO component, the SOF providing on-the-ground mentoring to the ALP would also link them with governance and development actors and funding through 'Village Stability Platforms'. SeeSee also US DoD, 'Report to Congress on Progress 2010'*,* [see FN 90], 67.

92 Moyar, 'Village Stability Operations', [see FN 16], 12–14, 17–26; Saum-Manning, 'VSO/ALP', [see FN 76]*,* 10–11.

93 As a point of comparison, the 2006 ANAP programme provided ten days of training. The AP3 and the LDI/CDI all received 21 days of training, which was continued for the ALP. At least for the ALP (and possibly also for the AP3 and the LDI/CDI), this included training on human rights and the laws of war.

94 For accounts of the record of the MoI and the ALP Monitoring and Investigations unit, see, for example, Gaston & Clark, 'Backgrounder', [see FN 10]; International Crisis Group, 'The Future of the Afghan Local Police', International Crisis Group, New York, 2015, https://www.crisisgroup.

org/asia/south-asia/afghanistan/future-afghan-local-police; UNAMA, 'Afghanistan Mid-Year Report 2016: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict', 2016.

95 Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Office of the National Security Council, 'ALP Establishment, Organization and Activities Procedures' 5/2015 (as of 24 May 2015), English version, signed by theDeputy Minister of Strategy and Policy, IDLG Director, NDS Chief, Minister of Defence, Minister of Interior Affairs' (electronic copy received from the Ministry of Interior, on file with the authors).

96 Saum-Manning, 'VSO/ALP', [see FN 76].

97 Saum-Manning, 'VSO/ALP', [see FN 76].

98 Jones, 'Strategic Logic', [see FN 65], 30–31.

99 Interview with Rebecca Zimmerman, RAND advisor, 20 June 2018, Washington DC. For similar perspectives on these governance aspects, see Robert Hulslander & Jake Spivey, 'Village Stability Operations and Afghan Local Police', *Prism* 3, no 3, 2012, 125–126; Saum-Manning, ,VSO/ALP', [see FN 76].

100 Interview with former US intelligence officer, 15 July 2018, Washington DC.

101 Reid, 'Just Don't Call', [see FN 16].

102 Interview with civilian military advisor, 20 June 2018, Washington DC. One former US intelligence analyst said that when speaking with the SOF standing up these forces in 2009 and 2010, their mantra seemed to be: "You should only do it where you had the right conditions, with right level [of SOF personnel] to support and mentor." Interview with former intelligence officer, 12 November 2017, Kabul.

103 Stephen Biddle, 'Iraq After the Surge', statement to Committee on Armed ServicesOversight and Investigations Subcommittee, 23 January 2008, 2008, 2, ttps://cdn.cfr.org/sites/default/files/pdf/2008/01/Biddle%20Testimony%20-%20Iraq%20after%20the%20Surge%20-%20HASC%202008.pdf.

104 Saum-Manning, 'VSO/ALP', [see FN 76].

105 In December 2011, Head of United States Special Operations Command Admiral Harry McRaven announced military plans to increase the force to 30,000, while an April 2012 DoD report noted that the Afghan government had authorised this. Ernesto Londono, 'U.S. military acknowledges abuse by Afghan militias it trains', *The Washington Post*, December 2011; US DoD, 'Report to Congress 2010', [see FN 90], 64.

106 UNAMA, 'Protection of Civilians 2011', [see FN 3], 6; UNAMA, 'Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2014',2015, 79, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/2014-annual-report-on-protection-of-civilians-final.pdf. The number of ALP has remained between approximately 27,000 and 29,000 since 2015, [see FN 3]. By the end of 2017, it had expanded to 31 provinces and has since remained in those provinces, according to MOI and international military sources. UNAMA, 'Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2017',2018, 49, http://unama.unmissions.org/protection-of-civilians-reports.

107 Moyar, 'Village Stability Operations', [see FN 16], 17, 62–66.

108 Interview with civilian military advisor, 20 June 2018, Washington DC.

109 Interview with civilian consultant, 11 January 2018, via Skype.

110 Interview with civilian consultant, 11 January 2018, via Skype.

111 Interview with civilian military advisor, 20 June 2018, Washington DC.

112 Interview with Matthew P Dearing, 11 April 2018, via Skype. See also Matthew P Dearing, 'A double-edged sword: The people's uprising in Ghazni, Afghanistan', *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 28, no 3, 2017, 576–608.

113 Heidi Vogt, 'Afghans see warlord footprints in new police force', Associated Press, February 2011. In interviews for this project, AAN and GPPi gathered further examples of either superficial or a total lack of consultation, resulting in an inappropriate commander, in numerous districts, including in the Shajoy, Takhar, and Andar case studies in this report, as well as in additional interviews and focus group discussions in Achin, in Nangrahar province. For further examples of bypassing community wishes or lack of consultation see Goodhand &

Hakimi, 'Counterinsurgency', [see FN 16]; Lefèvre, 'Local Defence, [see FN 58]; Moyar, 'Village Stability Operations', [see FN 16]; Reid, 'Just Don't Call',[see FN 16].

114 Vogt, 'Afghans see warlord footprints', [see FN 113]. See also Reid, 'Just Don't Call' [see FN 16], 75–76.

115 Vogt, 'Afghans see warlord footprints', [see FN 113].

116 Interview with Afghan researcher, 9 July 2018, via Skype.

117 Muzhary, 'How to replace a bad ALP commander', [see FN 13].

118 Full sourcing for this case study, which was originally published in 2016, is not replicated here but, as with all subsequent case studies, can be found in the original published AAN dispatch. See Muzhary 'Shajoy ALP', [see FN 13].

119 Brian Wagner, 'Press Release: ALP Program Starting in Shah Joy', Defense Visual Information Distribution Service, Provincial Reconstruction Team Zabul, 26 January 2011, https://www.afcent.af.mil/News/Article/219735/alp-program-starting-in-shah-joy/.

120 Interview with senior SOF commander, 10 March 2019, Baghdad.

121 For documentation of this phenomenon of tapping existing local commanders in Wardak, Kunduz, Baghlan, and Uruzgan (among others), see Derksen, 'Non-State Security Providers',[see FN 16]; Goodhand & Hakimi, ‚Counterinsurgency', [see FN 16]; Lefèvre, ‚Local Defence, [see FN 58]; Moyar, ‚Village Stability Operations', [see FN 16]; Reid, 'Just Don't Call' [see FN 16].

122 Interview with former British Royal Marine, 20 September 2018, Istanbul. See also a similar account in Malkasian, *War Comes to Garmser*, [see FN 36],162–178.

123 Muzhary & Clark, 'Uprising, ALP and Taleban in Andar', [see FN 13].

124 With ALP units in 31 of 34 provinces and covering some 40 per cent of Afghan territory – according to one ALP advisor's 2017 estimate – they were inevitably pushed into the frontlines. This point was made in multiple interviews. Interview with Special Forces Commander involved in ALP oversight, 12 November 2017, Kabul; interview with Afghan National Security Council staff member, 14 October 2017, Kabul. ALP units operating in kinetic or contested areas also increased after 2014 because the Taleban increased their control or influence in a wider range of districts. See FN 183 for some descriptions of expanding Taleban contestation and control.

125 Interview with civilian military advisor, 20 June 2018, Washington DC.

126 International Crisis Group, 'The Future of the Afghan Local Police', [see FN 94], 16.

127 Interview with head of ALP Directorate, 13 November 2017, Kabul.

128 From the start of UNAMA's tracking of the ALP as an armed actor, it has found inadequate levels of oversight and accountability for crimes and violations of the laws of war, and has registered this issue in every one of its annual reports from 2011 through 2016. However, in most reports from 2012 through 2017 (excepting 2015), it also noted that gradual improvement had been made in monitoring and oversight, and from 2012 through 2016, it noted a generally increasing trend towards investigations into allegations of abuse leading to arrests and prosecution of ALP members. The number of investigations leading to referral for prosecution was as follows: 19 in 2012, 58 in 2013, 68 in 2014, 148 in 2015, and 108 in 2016. UNAMA, 'Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2012', 2013, 44, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/2012_annual_report_eng_0.pdf; UNAMA, 'Protection of Civilians 2014', [see FN 106], 81; UNAMA, 'Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2015', 2016, 67, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/poc_annual_report_2015_final_14_feb_2016.pdf; UNAMA, 'Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016', 2017, 97, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/protection_of_civilians_in_armed_conflict_annual_report_8feb_2016.pdf.

129 UNAMA, 'Protection of Civilians 2014', [see FN 106], 4; UNAMA, 'Protection of Civilians 2015', [see FN 128], 67. For a discussion of evolving accountability mechanisms, including UNAMA appraisals of them, see Gaston & Clark, 'Backgrounder', [see FN 10], 31–34.

130 International Crisis Group, 'Future of the ALP', [see FN 94], 16.

131 On US efforts to ensure accountability over pay and equipment issues as well as issues of ghost soldiers, see Clark, 'Update on the ALP', [see FN 12]. On US prohibitions on providing funding to units where there are credible allegations of gross violations of human rights, see Gaston, 'The Leahy Law', [see FN 14]; Nina M. Serafino, June S. Beittel, Lauren Ploch Blanchard & Liana Rosen, ''Leahy Law' Human Rights Orovisions and Security Assistance', Congressional Research Service,2014, https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R43361.pdf.

132 The vested interests were not just on the part of the forces themselves or their controlling power brokers, but also among US forces. One former US commander who worked on the issue of ANSF development for more than a decade observed: "[F]rom what I've seen the US forces have never cut off Afghan forces on misconduct grounds. They have occasionally been under such pressure, that they were forced to let some commanders go – but only when under such pressure that there was no wiggle room to not do something. In Afghanistan, the argument of operational expediency has always trumped." Interview with Jon Schroden, 13 June 2019, Washington DC. For more on the challenges of applying these different US-based mechanisms and of their failure to do so, see .

133 International forces would remain, but in limited numbers and primarily in a training and support role, rather than a combat role. This press release includes a map illustrating the four phases or time periods of transition to Afghan forces across Afghanistan: NATO, 'Press Release: NATO Secretary General Welcomes Afghan Transition Announcement', 31 December 2012,https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_93429.htm?utm_source=tik&utm_medium=social+media&utm_campaign=130618+T4.

134 The level of close mentorship ended up being much lower than the original model suggested. Vanda Felbab-Brown found that in parts of Kunduz, SOF may only have visited the ALP once a week. Felbab-Brown, 'Hurray for militias?', [see FN 87], 258–281. Other former military officers interviewed suggest that at many sites, oversight or mentoring may have been even less regular, or may not have happened at all after an initial training. One military advisor said that as the programme was pressurised to scale up, there were many sites where US forces (SOF or conventional) would "go in anyway [without community buy-in] and do a quick training and leave it." Interview with senior US military advisor, 13 June 2019, Washington DC.

135 The Special Operations Advisory Group is part of NATO Special Operations Component Command-Afghanistan (NSOCC-A), and its mission is to provide training, advice and assistance to the ALP through the ALP Directorate in Kabul.

136 Interview with Special Forces Commander involved in ALP oversight, 12 November 2017, Kabul.

137 Interview with RS advisor, 16 September 2019, Kabul.

138 For further discussion of this type of patronage and powerbroker capture more broadly in the security sector, see 'A Force in Fragments', [see FN 38], 1–6; Derksen, 'Politics of Disarmament', [see FN 39], 8–11; Giustozzi, 'Military Reform in Afghanistan', [see FN 38], 23–31.

139 For example, Lefèvre's interviews with military officials in March 2010 found that the LDI/CDI had been attempted in "parts of Arghandab (Kandahar province), Khakrez (Kandahar), Nili (Daikundi), Achin (Nangrahar), Gereshk (Helmand) and 'areas in Paktia', among others." Lefèvre, 'Local Defence, [see FN 58], 3. Jones noted that as of August 2009, CFSOCC-A SOF managed local defence 'militias' in Arghandab in Kandahar; Chamkani in Paktia; Shindand in Herat; Pusht-e Rod in Farah; and Nili in Daikundi. Jones, 'Strategic Logic', [see FN 65], 30.

140 Moyar, 'Village Stability Operations', [see FN 16], 17. One civilian advisor attached to SOF noted that SOF were aware of the political risks of mobilising forces in the north and west, in terms of ALP capture. Even after it was authorised, the reality that they were working with existing militias with other agendas was obvious. She noted that when SOF began recruiting ALP in the northeast, "You could snap fingers and get 500 overnight, and that suggests they pre-exist, and that you have to question who they worked for before." Interview with Rebecca Zimmerman, RAND advisor, 20 June 2018, Washington DC.

141 Interview with SOF advisor, 21 June 2018, Washington DC. Moyar notes that a significant factor in expanding ALP sites was the "insistence of Tajik leaders, inside and outside the government, for VSO and ALP in predominantly Tajik provinces. The insurgents were weak in most of these

areas, but the Tajiks argued that VSO and ALP belonged there nonetheless because the Tajik communities deserved resources as much as Pashtun communities did […] and the obligation of the national government to divide resources equitably." Moyar, 'Village Stability Operations', [see FN 16], 17. He gave the example of Muhammed Atta Nur, the powerful governor of Balkh province, pressing to have affiliated militias incorporated into the program. He notes that Nur was "told that the central government could not afford to move resources to the relatively secure north, given the insecurity elsewhere." 89 n. 27.

142 In interviews for this project, government officials and the international military noted that the practice of MPs and other senior government officials exerting pressure to have ALP in their area was a persistent issue continuing up to the present. Interview with former Afghan government official, 29 November 2018 (location withheld due to confidentiality); interview with ALP Directorate staff, 13 October 2017, Kabul. Such pressure, especially from MPs, is common throughout the government; see, for example, the experience of the Ministry of Interior more broadly. See Clark, 'Reforming the Afghan Ministry of Interior', [see FN 7].

143 Interview with Charlie Getz, 4 October 2016, by Skype, cited in Clark, 'Update on the ALP', [see FN 12].

144 Goodhand & Hakimi, 'Counterinsurgency', [see FN 16], 16.

145 For example, ICG noted examples of clashes between ALP backed by competing *tanzim* factions in the northwest, such as between Jamiat-e Islami and Jombesh-e Melli. Often these were initiated or spurred on by warlords and members of parliaments affiliated with these factions. International Crisis Group, 'Future of the ALP', [see FN 94], 12.

146 Derksen, 'Non-State Security Providers',[see FN 16],13.

147 Interview with MoI official, 11 April 2018, Kabul.

148 See, generally, Aikins, 'Contracting the Commanders', [see FN 49]; Kate Clark, 'A Maelstrom of Militias: Takhar, a case study of strongmen co-opting the ALP', Afghanistan Analysts Network, 14 November 2019, https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/a-maelstrom-of-militias-takhar-a-case-study-of-strongmen-co-opting-the-alp/; Derksen, 'Non-State Security Providers', [see FN 16],22–26.

149 Derksen provides the example of Matiullah Khan in Uruzgan appointing members of tribes that supported him to the ALP and other prominent positions, and excluding tribes who did not, effectively disenfranchising 45 to 50 per cent of the population: "Matiullah was successful in centralizing the use of force in Uruzgan in the hands of the Popalzai; more specifically, a small group of friends and family he grew up with in his home village near Tirin Kot […]. Many now occupy top positions in the ANP and ALP […]. Very few commander positions are occupied by members of the Achekzai and Barakzai commanders." Derksen, 'Non-State Security Providers',[see FN 16], 13. Additional examples of ALP control enabling factional, ethnic or other sub-group conflict, retaliation and predation include HRW's reporting on Shindand, Badghis and Wardak; ICG's case study on Kunduz; Goodhand and Hakimi's case studies of Baghlan, Wardak and Kunduz; and Martine van Bijlert's reporting on Ghizab district in Uruzgan. Van Bijlert, 'The Taliban in Zabul and Uruzgan', [see FN 37], 94–127; Goodhand & Hakimi, 'Counterinsurgency', [see FN 16]; International Crisis Group, 'Future of the ALP', [see FN 94]; Reid, 'Just Don't Call'[see FN 16].

150 Interview with former senior Afghan official, 23 July 2019, Kabul.

151 For discussions and examples of this power broker control and short-circuiting, see Derksen, 'Non-State Security Providers',[see FN 16]; Felbab-Brown, 'Hurray for militias?', [see FN 87], 258–281, 261–62.

152 International Crisis Group, 'Future of the ALP', [see FN 94], 16.

153 See also International Crisis Group, 'Future of the ALP', [see FN 94], 14.

154 Goodhand & Hakimi, 'Counterinsurgency', [see FN 16], 35; International Crisis Group, 'Future of the ALP', [see FN 94], 14–17.

155 A longitudinal study of attitudes toward the ALP in Kunduz and other northern provinces found some immediate security gains, but significant side effects for security and governance. Kristóf Gosztonyi, Jan Koehler & Basir Feda, 'Taming the Unruly: The Integration of Informal Northern

Afghan Militias into the Afghan Local Police', *Sicherheit & Frieden* 33, no 4, 2015, 46–52; Jan Koehler & Kristóf Gosztonyi, 'The International Intervention and its Impact on Security Governance in North-East Afghanistan', *International Peacekeeping* 21, no 2, 2014, 231–250.

156 International Crisis Group, 'Future of the ALP', [see FN 94], 15.

157 Ibid. ICG also noted that "safeguards against ethnic and tribal imbalances are built into the protocols for creating ALP but were circumvented in parts of Kunduz where U.S. Special Operations Forces could not find Pashtun volunteers." Ibid., 15–16.

158 Borhan Osman, 'The Fall of Kunduz: What does it tell us about the strength of the post-Omar Taleban?', Afghanistan Analysts Network, 2015.

159 Felbab-Brown, 'Hurray for militias?', [see FN 87], 258–281, 272. Felbab-Brown continues by noting: "The militias hastily recruited in Kunduz in the spring and summer of 2015 so compounded the pre-existing predation and ethnic and tribal discrimination of the ALP and other militias in the province that ultimately even some Hazara and Tajik communities, traditionally victims and enemies of the Taliban, joined the Taliban there during the September 2015 Taliban takeover of the province." Ibid.

160 Similar patterns have been documented, for example, in Goodhand and Hakimi's studies of Baghlan and Wardak, van Bijlert's reporting on Gizab in Uruzgan, and in the Andar case study below, among other provinces.Goodhand & Hakimi, 'Counterinsurgency'*,* [see FN 16].

161 Interview with SOF commander, November 12, 2017, Kabul.

162 The ALP Directorate was forced to semi-annually identify ALP personnel under the influence of powerbrokers, something which was subsequently reported in SIGAR quarterly reporting. According to one UNAMA report, this was at the directive of President Ghani. UNAMA, 'Protection of Civilians 2015', [see FN 128], 68.

163 For a representative range of such reporting, see SIGAR, 'Quarterly Report to the United States Congress July 2018',2018, 101–03, https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/quarterlyreports/2018-07-30qr. pdf; SIGAR, 'Quarterly Report to the United States Congress January 2018', 2018, 100, https:// www.sigar.mil/pdf/quarterlyreports/2018-01-30qr.pdf; SIGAR, *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress July 2019*,2019, 96, https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/quarterlyreports/2019-07-30qr. pdf.

164 US pressure to reform followed a scathing SIGAR report in October 2015 and was mostly focused on issues such as pay, equipment and absentees (including weeding out ghost soldiers), but also included other accountability reforms. SIGAR, 'Afghan Local Police', [see FN 132].

165 Interview with State Department official on Afghanistan, 1 September 2017, Washington DC.

166 See FN 82 and the accompanying text.

167 Goodhand & Hakimi, 'Counterinsurgency'v, [see FN 16], 32–36.

168 Moyar, 'Village Stability Operations', [see FN 16], 89 n. 27.

169 Philipp Münch, 'Local Afghan Power Structures and the International Military Intervention: A review of developments in Badakhshan and Kunduz provinces', Afghanistan Analysts Network 2013, 36–38, https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/20131110_ PMunch_Kunduz-final.pdf; Goodhand & Hakimi, 'Counterinsurgency', [see FN 16], 32–36.

170 Goodhand & Hakimi, 'Counterinsurgency', [see FN 16].

171 Münch, 'Local Afghan Power Structures', [see FN 169], 36–38. There continued to be faux ALP or other informal militias alongside regular ALP in Kunduz and other northern provinces for some time. The phenomenon was so pronounced that the following longitudinal study compared civilian perceptions of informal militias and the ALP in Kunduz as a way to study the effects of institutionalisation: Koehler & Gosztonyi, 'The International Intervention', [see FN 155], 231–250; Gosztonyi et al, 'Taming the Unruly', [see FN 155], 218–224.

172 During a research visit in Jalalabad, Nangrahar at the end of July 2019, one of the authors interviewed a number of provincial-level security officials as well as representatives from five districts where there had been ongoing 'clear and hold' operations over the past year. Although there was substantial evidence of the operation of Uprising Forces in all five of these

districts, and although Uprising Forces were reported in another five, it was hard to find any evidence that the 19 ALP units supposedly active in Nangrahar province were indeed active. Interview with two Uprising Force leaders from the Shinwari tribe (Achin and Naysan districts), 20 July 2019, Jalalabad; interview with tribal elders from Kot district, 20 July 2019, Jalalabad; interview with NDS official, 20 July 2019, Jalalabad; interview with tribal elders from Bati Kot district, 21 July 2019, Jalalabad; interview with provincial ANP representative, 21 July 2019, Jalalabad; interview with local researcher, 21 July 2019, Jalalabad; interview with ANA general overseeing the ANA Territorial Force, 22 July 2019, Jalalabad; interview with ALP Special Operations Advisory Group officer, 25 July 2019, Kabul.

173 In its annual Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict reports, UNAMA categorises Uprising Forces as a 'Pro-Government armed group', which it defines as "an organized armed non-State actor engaged in conflict and distinct from Government Forces, rebels and criminal groups" that does not lie within the formal military structures of the state or under its direct control, but may "receive direct/indirect support of the host Government or other States." UNAMA has also pointed out that Uprising Forces "have no legal basis under the laws of Afghanistan" – although it is possible there has been an unpublished presidential decree authorising them Clark,'Update on the ALP', [see FN 12]; Gaston, 'The Leahy Law', [see FN 14]; Erica Gaston, 'Legal Pluralism and Militia Regulation: International, Domestic, and Community Accountability Frameworks for Sub-State Forces in Afghanistan', Afghan Legal Studies Journal, 2018; SIGAR, 'Afghan Local Police: A Critical Rural Security Initiative Lacks Adequate Logistics Support, Oversight, and Direction' (SIGAR 16-3-AR), 2015, https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/audits/SIGAR-16-3-AR.pdf; SIGAR, 'Child Sexual Assault in Afghanistan: Implementation of the Leahy Laws and Reports of Assault by Afghan Security Forces', SIGAR 17-47-IP, 2018, https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/inspections/SIGAR 17-47-IP.pdf.

174 One provincial NDS director said that the CIA contributed some support to NDS funding for Uprising Forces in his province, but only to a minority of them (less than 10 per cent), despite frequent requests for more funding. Interview with NDS director (province and name withheld due to confidentiality), 20 July 2019. The NDS is precluded from SIGAR scrutiny because of this funding. Discussion with SIGAR official, 7 February 2015, Kabul.

175 The literature review discusses these critiques in three sections: one on the effects of community dynamics, one on human rights and accountability, and one on state-building and rule-of-law effects. Gaston & Clark, 'Backgrounder', [see FN 10]. Other notable sources include: any UNAMA human rights reporting on the ALP, which is generally available at https://unama.unmissions.org/protection-of-civilians-reports; Derksen, 'Non-State Security Providers', [see FN 16]; Goodhand & Hakimi, 'Counterinsurgency', [see FN 16]; International Crisis Group, 'Future of the ALP', [see FN 94]; Reid, 'Just Don't Call', [see FN 16]; SIGAR, 'Afghan Local Police', [see FN 132]; SIGAR, 'Child Sexual Assault', [see FN 132]. Although not a civilian source per se, two relatively balanced, full-scale appraisals which are helpful (the latter is non-public) are Moyar, 'Village Stability Operations', [see FN 16]; Mark Moyar et al, 'The Afghan Local Police Community: Self-Defense in Transition', Center for Special Operations Studies and Research, Joint Special Operations University, 2013.

176 The assessment found that the ALP were effective in one-third of the sites, ineffective or counter-productive in another third, and somewhere in between in the final third. Moyar et al, 'The ALP Community', [see FN 175], 4.

177 The military literature has generally been more positive on the record of the ALP. A sample of such literature includes: Seth G Jones and Arturo Muñoz, 'Afghanistan's Local War: Building Local Defense Forces', RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, California, 2010; Daniel Green, 'A Tale of Two Districts: Beating the Taliban at Their Own Game', Military Review 94, no 1, Jan/Feb 2014, 26–31; Linda Robinson, 'One Hundred Victories: Special Ops & the Future of American Warfare', Public Affairs, New York, 2013; Gen John R Allen et al, 'The Situation in Afghanistan', hearing before the Committee on Armed Services, United States Senate,2012, www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-112shrg76272/pdf/CHRG-112shrg76272.pdf; US DoD, 'Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan',2019, https://dod.defense.gov/News/News-Releases/News-Release-View/Article/1904051/dod-releases-report-on-enhancing-security-and-stability-in-afghanistan/; Michael Stevens, 'Community Defence In Afghanistan: A Model For Future

Stabilisation?', *RUSI Journal* 156, no 3, 2011, 42–47. As part of the research for this report, GPPi and AAN also reviewed this military literature. However, many so-called success stories in the military literature did not stand the test of time, or proved to be anecdotal misreadings of the local situation. For further discussion and sources illustrating these points, see Gaston & Clark, 'Backgrounder', [see FN 10].

178 An additional distinction that separates military and civilian analyses, which also came across in the interviews and discussions, was the difference in how outcomes and definitions of 'success' were weighed. For further discussion and sources, see Reid, 'Just Don't Call', [see FN 16] and the accompanying text.

179 See, for example, Moyar et al, 'The ALP Community', [see FN 175]; SIGAR, 'Afghan Local Police', [see FN 132]; SIGAR, 'Reconstructing the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces: Lesson from the U.S. experience in Afghanistan',2017, www.sigar.mil/investigations/hotline/report-fraud.aspx; SIGAR, 'Stabilization', [see FN 4]; SIGAR, 'Child sexual assault in Afghanistan', [see FN 132].

180 UNAMA, 'Protection of Civilians 2012', [see FN 128], 9.

181 UNAMA, 'Protection of Civilians 2013', [see FN 3], 50.

182 UNAMA, 'Protection of Civilians 2014', [see FN 106], 80.

183 A contributing factor to the ALP increasingly being caught on the frontlines was the expansion of Taleban influence and control over territory. By November 2016, USFOR-A data (as reported by SIGAR) estimated that the amount of territory substantially contested or under the control of insurgents had risen to 43 per cent, a figure which held roughly constant to the time of writing. Other metrics suggested even more contested areas – in January 2018, a BBC analysis found that insurgent groups controlled or were openly active in some 70 per cent of Afghan territory. In April 2019, SIGAR announced that the US military mission in Afghanistan had stopped tracking the degree of government control of districts. SIGAR, 'Quarterly Report to the United States Congress April 2019', , 2019, ii, https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/quarterlyreports/2019-04-30qr.pdf. A chart in the January 2019 quarterly report (the last quarterly report to contain this data) summarised the prior four years of USFOR-A tracking of government control, noting that in November 2015, 7 per cent of districts were under the control or influence of the Taleban and another 21 per cent were contested; by November 2016, this had risen to 10 and 33 per cent, respectively (43% total); and by October 2018, to 12 and 34 per cent, respectively (46% total). During the October 2018 period of data collection, this amounted to 50 districts under insurgent control or influence and 138 districts contested (neither insurgent nor government controlled). All of this is summarised in the last quarterly report that included such statistics: SIGAR, 'Quarterly Report to the United States Congress January 2019', 2019, 69–70, https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/quarterlyreports/2019-01-30qr.pdf. See also Shoabi Sharifi & Louise Adamou, 'Taliban threaten 70% of Afghanistan, BBC finds', BBC, 31 January 2018, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-42863116. On ALP caught behind these lines of contestation, see also FN 124.

184 Interview with former British military officer, 6 April 2017, Kabul.

185 Interview with senior US military officer, 7 December 2017, Kabul. See also AAN reporting from Helmand which noted that the ALP, irregular militias and some ANP fought harder against the Taleban than the ANA in 2015, despite heavy casualties and the absence of adequate army and air support. Rahmatullah Amiri, 'Helmand (2): The Chain of Chiefdoms Unravels', Afghanistan Analysts Network, 11 March 2016, https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/helmand-2-the-chain-of-chiefdoms-unravels/.

186 Emailed comment, 20 November 2019.

187 Interview with General Ali Shah Ahmadzai, Director of ALP unit, Ministry of Interior, 4 April 2017, Kabul; interview with another senior official (withheld due to confidentiality), 5 December 2017, Kabul.

188 ANA-TF companies are estimated to cost 45 per cent less to run than regular ones. For details, see SIGAR, 'Quarterly Report to the United States Congress July 2018', 2018, 99, https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/quarterlyreports/2018-07-30qr.pdf.

189 An October 2017 NATO question-and-answer sheet on the ANA-TF proposal noted that creating ANA-TF as a hold force would free up the ANA for more offensive operations, it was hoped, would also free up Afghan special forces, described by one of the international planners as "overused, constantly fire-fighting." NATO Office of the Senior Civilian Representative, "Q&A on Afghan Territorial Army," handout given to an author in October 2017.

190 In fact, there was almost no divergence in views. For example, Kunduz was listed as among the worst cases by every single person who was asked this question and Kunar among the best.

191 One local researcher who had experience documenting community experiences in both the north and the east noted that, in addition to the fact that some provinces or regions had a reputation for having better ALP than others, there were also ALP that were above or below standard for that province, making the question of whether or not an ALP is good a relative question on two levels. Taking the example of the ALP in Goshta district in Nangrahar province as an example, he said, "Goshta is a bad case compared with [the ALP you find in] Kunar. But Goshta will look like a best case if you compare it to [ALP in] Takhar and Kunduz." Interview with local researcher, 21 July 2019, Jalalabad. For other examples and descriptions of forces in Kandahar reflecting this mixed appraisal, see International Crisis Group, 'Future of the ALP', [see FN 94]. The material on Paktia was not ultimately included in the ICG report, but supplied by the author.

192 Miakhel Shahmahmoud, *Many Shuras Do Not a Government Make*, 2010.

193 Interview with Miakhel Shahmahmoud, 14 October 2017, Kabul. He also gave examples of the improved security, noting: "You drive around at night, after dark and all the shops are open and the people are out."

194 Interview with General Ali Shah Ahmadzai, Director of ALP unit, Ministry of Interior, 4 April 2017, Kabul.

195 A discussion of the differing regional experiences in the 1980s and 1990s and some of the different factional competition that emerged in these areas, is documented in Barfield, *Afghanistan*, [see FN 22], 252–54; Rubin, *Fragmentation*, [see FN 18], 258–64, 274–78.

196 Interview with former senior Afghan official, 23 July 2019, Kabul.

197 International Crisis Group, 'Peacebuilding in Afghanistan', Kabul/Brussels, 2003, 13.

198 Ibid.On these 'rule by the gun' dynamics more generally, see Human Rights Watch, 'Rule of the Gun: Human Rights Abuses and Political Repression in the Run-up to Afghanistan's Presidential Election', New York, 2004, https://www.hrw.org/report/2004/09/28/rule-gun/human-rights-abuses-and-political-repression-run-afghanistans; Laurel Miller & Robert Perito, 'Establishing the Rule of Law in Afghanistan', United Institute of Peace,2004, https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/sr117.pdf.

199 Conrad Schetter, Rainer Glassner & Masood Karakhail, 'Beyond Warlordism: The Local Security Architecture in Afghanistan', *Internationale Politik und Gesellschaft* 2, no 2, 2007, 136–152, 144, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/238777437_Beyond_Warlordism_The_Local_Security_Architecture_in_Afghanistan.

200 Interview with former senior Afghan official, 23 July 2019, Kabul.

201 Kate Clark, '2001 Ten Years on (3): The Fall of Loya Paktia and Why the US Preferred Warlords', Afghanistan Analysts Network, 25 November 2011, https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/2001-ten-years-on-3-the-fall-of-loya-paktia-and-why-the-us-preferred-warlords. See also infra note 218. On Loya Paktia traditions of self-defence and arbakai see Tom Gregg, 'Caught in the Crossfire: The Pashtun Tribes of Southeast Afghanistan', Lowy Institute for International Policy, 2009, https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/108942/LPB_Gregg_crossfire.pdf; Susanne Schmeidl & Masood Karokhail, 'The Role of Non-State Actors in "Community-Based Policing" – An Exploration of the Arbakai (Tribal Police) in South-Eastern Afghanistan', Contemporary Security Policy 30, no 2, 2009, 318–342; Tariq, 'Tribal Security System', [see FN 21].

202 International Crisis Group, 'Peacebuilding in Afghanistan', [see FN 197], 13–14.

203 Gregg, 'Caught in the Crossfire',[see FN 201], 4.

204 See Rubin's description of pre-war social structures among Pashtuns and other ethnic groups in *Fragmentation*, [see FN 18], 28.

205 Thomas Ruttig, 'How Tribal Are the Taleban? Afghanistan's largest insurgent movement between its tribal roots and islamist ideology', 2010, 2, https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2012/10/20100624TR-HowTribalAretheTaleban-FINAL.pdf.

206 For more on how displacement, socio-economic changes and direct targeting and co-option of elders (by both sides) during the ongoing conflict has significantly eroded the remit of traditional tribal leaders and structures over the last two decades, both leading up to and following the post-2001 period, see, for example, Coburn, 'Informal Justice and the International Community in Afghanistan', [see FN 61], 19; International Crisis Group, 'Peacebuilding in Afghanistan', [see FN 197], 13–14; The Liaison Office, 'Building Dispute Resolution Institutions in Eastern Afghanistan: Lessons from The Liaison Office Justice Shuras in Paktia and Nangarhar', 2011. On examples of some of the socioeconomic and demographic changes before 2001 that also affected tribal erosion, see Malkasian, War Comes to Garmser, [see FN 36], 38–41; Nojumi, Rise of the Taliban, [see FN 22], 19; Roy, Islam and Resistance, [see FN 18], 150–51, 160–66.

207 Erica Gaston & Jonathan Horowitz, 'The Cost of Kill/Capture: Impact of the Night Raid Surge on Afghan Civilians', New York, 2011, 10–15, https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/uploads/464a41ee-f987-49e7-9b60-bdffd05fd33c/Night-Raids-Report-FINAL-092011.pdf; UNAMA, 'Afghanistan Mid-Year Report 2010: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, 2010', 6–9, https://unama.unmissions.org/report-afghanistan-mid-year-report-2010-protection-civilians-armed-conflict; UNAMA, 'Afghanistan Mid-Year Report 2014: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, 2014', 17–21, https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/1082835/1226_1404997194_unama-mid-year.pdf.

208 Ruttig, 'How Tribal Are the Taleban?', [see FN 205], 8.

209 Goodhand & Hakimi, 'Counterinsurgency', [see FN 16], 11.

210 Committee on Armed Services, 'The Situation in Afghanistan, 112th Congress, March 22, 2012', U.S. Congress, 2012.

211 Similar trends, both in relatively higher casualty levels for ALP units given their size and anecdotal accounts of greater Taleban brutality toward them have also been documented in other reporting. See, for example, International Crisis Group, 'Future of the ALP', [see FN 94], 9.

212 Email from an international security expert, 20 March 2018, Kabul.

213 For more details of these statistical findings, see Osman & Clark, 'Enemy Number One', [see FN 14].

214 Jon Boone, 'Kandahar wedding bomb kills 40', The Guardian, 10 June 2010, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/jun/10/kandahar-wedding-bomb-afghanistan.

215 Habib, 'Killing Mullahs and Wedding Guests', [see FN 15].

216 This was the case in all five cases studied, except Arghandab, where the ALP remained relatively stronger and the Taleban were themselves weakened.

217 Barmal district in Paktika (see FN 287 on the different names use for this district) was the site of a particularly notorious 'campaign force', the Afghan Security Guards, which subsequently largely morphed into the ALP; for accusations against it, including by the UN, see Julius Cavendish, 'Afghanistan's Dirty War: Why the Most Feared Man in Bermal District Is a U.S. Ally', Time, 4 October 2011, http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2096079,00.html; Human Rights Watch, 'Today We Shall All Die: Afghanistan's Strongmen and the Legacy of Impunity', Human Rights Watch, New York, 2015, 31–39, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/afghanistan0315_4up.pdf.

218 The tribes of Loya Paktia historically enjoyed a special administrative status, formalised under Nader Shah, which exempted them from taxes and military conscription, gave them minimal state intervention and the right to bear arms, in return for their agreeing to defend the state when necessary, as Gregg has commented: "It is due to this unique history that Loya Paktia avoided co-option by the state until much later than other Pashtun regions." Gregg, 'Caught in the Crossfire', [see FN 201], 4. Would-be local strongmen in Loya Paktia have also had fewer factional links to power brokers at the centre. The region also kept out of some of the centrally

driven factional in-fighting and corruption because of the region's relative marginalisation in the post-2001 division of power. Clark, '2001 Ten Years on (3)', [see FN 201].

219 Katheleen Reedy, 'Systems of Patronage: A Path to Corruption or a Source of Accountability', Instituto Español De Estudios Estratégicos, 2012, http://www.ieee.es/en/Galerias/fichero/docs_opinion/2012/DIEEEO28-2012_Afganistan_KatheleenReedy_ING.pdf.

220 Bill Roggio & Alexandra Gutowski, 'Taliban control of Afghan districts remains unchanged despite increased US military pressure', FDD's Long War Journal, May 2018.

221 These statistics come from an international security expert with access to a database of security incidents. For more detail, see Muzhary & Clark, 'How to set up a "good ALP"', [see FN 13].

222 On *arbakai* traditions in this area, see Gregg, 'Caught in the Crossfire',[see FN 201]; Schmeidl & Karokhail, 'The Role of Non-State Actors', [see FN 201]; Tariq, 'Tribal Security System', [see FN 21].

223 The author of ICG's 2015 report 'Future of the ALP' said he observed relatively better examples of ALP in Paktia than in other provinces, although this particular finding was not included in the final report. Unpublished material provided by the author. The provinces of Paktia and Kunar also came up more frequently in interviews with Afghan ministers, Afghan local and community officials, journalists and international military when asked where they thought there were examples of ALP working well.

224 Interview with General Ali Shah Ahmadzai, Director of ALP unit, Ministry of Interior, 4 April 2017, Kabul.

225 All the original sources can be found in Clark, 'A Maelstrom of Militias', [see FN 148].

226 For a general description of this trade, including noting Takhar's place in it, see UNODC, 'Afghan Opiate Trafficking Along the Northern Route', 2018, 68, https://www.unodc.org/documents/publications/NR_Report_21.06.18_low.pdf; UNODC Studies and Threat Analysis Section, 'Opiate Flows through Northern Afghanistan and Central Asia', 2012, 36–38, https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Studies/Northern_Afg_Central_Asia_Opiate_flows_2012_draft_jan26_2012.pdf.

227 Antonio Giustozzi & Christoph Reuter, 'The Insurgents of the Afghan North', Afghanistan Analysts Network 2011, 45, http://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2012/10/AAN-2011-Northern-Insurgents.pdf. After the fall of the Taleban's Emirate, members of the 'commander class' frequently seized attractive posts in the police, the NDS, the Afghan Military Forces (the precursor to the Afghan National Army), and provincial and district governorships. For further examples, see Clark, 'A Maelstrom of Militias', [see FN 148].

228 Giustozzi & Reuter, 'Insurgents of the Afghan North', [see FN 227], 45.

229 Giustozzi & Reuter, Insurgents of the Afghan North, [see FN 227], 47.

230 UNODC noted that local commanders and power brokers, with clear lines of affiliation to former jihadi factions, have maintained control of the drug trade in northern Afghanistan – which is concentrated on Kunduz, Takhar and Badakhshan – since its inception. UNODC, *Opiate Flows*, [see FN 226], 35–36. These commanders have done so, UNODC argued, either by reaching an "accommodation" with local governance structures or by directly taking them over – for example, by filling positions in border posts or law enforcement. UNODC, (p36).

231 International Crisis Group, 'Peacebuilding in Afghanistan', [see FN 197], 13–14.ICG's report quotes one civilian as saying, "Elders who could previously solve a conflict now cannot because the person has the commander behind him." ICG then notes that this factional poweris strongest in the north, where "all but the most minor disputes were found to be linked to factional politics." (p14). See also footnotes 196–200 and the accompanying paragraphs.

232 Giustozzi & Reuter, 'Insurgents of the Afghan North', [see FN 227], 45–46.

233 They also say that Pashtuns number about 10 per cent of the Takhar population. Giustozzi & Reuter, 'Insurgents of the Afghan North', [see FN 227], 45. For broader discussions of Taleban recruitment and community outreach strategies, along both ethnic and other lines, see, generally, Frud Bezhan, 'Ethnic Minorities Are Fueling the Taliban's Expansion in Afghanistan', *Foreign Policy*, 15 June 2016, https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/06/15/ethnic-minorities-are-

    fueling-the-talibans-expansion-in-afghanistan/; Gilles Dorronsoro, 'The Taliban's Winning Strategy in Afghanistan',Carnegie Endowment of Peace, 2009, https://carnegieendowment.org/files/taliban_winning_strategy.pdf; Giustozzi, *Koran* [see FN 20].

234 Giustozzi and Reuter also note that the Taleban have brought in a limited number of outside fighters, mostly from other provinces, and some foreign fighters. Giustozzi & Reuter, 'Insurgents of the Afghan North', [see FN 227], 45–46.

235 Giustozzi & Reuter, 'Insurgents of the Afghan North', [see FN 227].

236 Giustozzi & Reuter, 'Insurgents of the Afghan North', [see FN 227], 47.

237 Studies and Threat Analysis Section,'Opiate Flows',[see FN 226], 39.

238 ALP expansion to the north did not begin until at least 2011, and even then it was slow. A March 2012 unclassified map of ALP locations lists only two "not validated ALP" units in Takhar – in Darqad and in Khwajah Ghar districts. Yet local accounts consistently referred to the armed groups as ALP, including during AAN interviews in January 2011. A February 2011 Associated Press article also describes Darqad as having an ALP unit, which was likely a reflection of what AP reporters were told by locals. Vogt, 'Afghans see warlord footprints', [see FN 113]. In 2012, UNAMA was also still noting that pro-government armed groups in Takhar were calling themselves ALP even though they were not. UNAMA, 'Afghanistan Mid-Year Report 2012: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict', 2012, 47, http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/AF/UNAMAMidYearReport2012.pdf; 'UNAMA, Protection of Civilians 2012', [see FN 128], 52.

239 See footnotes 167–172 and the accompanying text.On the transition from informal militias to ALP in the north generally, see also Gosztonyi et al, 'Taming the Unruly', [see FN 155], 46–52; Koehler & Gosztonyi, 'The International Intervention', [see FN 155], 231–250.

240 Interviews with ALP and ANP district commanders and a district governor, 4 January 2011, via telephone.

241 This supposition is supported by the authors' interviews with human rights and security experts (see the list of interviewees on page 7) and by broader trends in the region – for example, UNAMA's 2012 annual report raised particular concerns about armed groups funded by the CIPP programme, which funded the conversion of pro-government militias in ISAF's Regional Command-North wholesale into ALP without vetting or training. UNAMA, 'Afghanistan Mid-Year Report 2012: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict', 2012, 52, http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/AF/UNAMAMidYearReport2012.pdf.

242 See, for example, Goodhand & Hakimi, 'Counterinsurgency', [see FN 16], 29, 35.

243 UNAMA, 'Protection of Civilians 2012',[see FN 128], 51–52.

244 UNAMA, 'Protection of Civilians 2012', [see FN 128].

245 Interview with security expert on Takhar, 18 April 2017, Kabul.

246 Giustozzi & Reuter, 'Insurgents of the Afghan North', [see FN 227], 46–47; Koehler & Gosztonyi, 'The International Intervention', [see FN 155], 231–250.

247 Takhar ANP spokesman Khalil Aser said ALP and 'jihadi' militias had fought alongside the ANSF against the Taleban in Eshkamesh, Baharak and the Mawara-ye Kokcha districts in the recent past and still took part in most clearance operations. Interview with Khalil Aser, 15 August 2019, via telephone.

248 UNAMA, 'Protection of Civilians 2015', [see FN 128], 67.

249 UNAMA, 'Mid-Year Report 2016', [see FN 94], 92.

250 UNAMA, 'Mid-Year Report 2016', [see FN 94], 88.

251 Interview with security expert, 6 April 2017, Kabul.

252 Giustozzi & Reuter, 'Insurgents of the Afghan North', [see FN 227], 45–47.

253 Interview with international monitor, 11 September 2017, Kabul.

254 Interview with international security expert, 6 April 2017, Kabul.

255 The five were: Harakat, Hezb-e Islami, Mahaz-e Milli, Ettehad-e Islami and Jamiat-e Islami. For more information, see Fazal Muzhary, 'One Land, Two Rules (7): Delivering public services in

insurgency-affected Andar district in Ghazni province', Afghanistan Analysts Network, 13 June 2019, https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/one-land-two-rules-7-delivering-public-services-in-insurgency-affected-andar-district-in-ghazni-province/.

256 The madrassa has turned out many significant Sunni Muslim clerics, including Mawlawi Muhammad Nabi Muhammadi, leader of the mujahedin faction Harakat-e Enqelab-e, many of whose members would go on to form or join the Taleban. The madrassa is still known for its links with the Taleban and was closed down by the government as recently as May 2019 for that reason. For more, see Muzhary, 'One Land, Two Rules (7)' , [see FN 255].

257 Habib, 'AAN Reportage', [see FN 15].

258 See, for example, Frud Behzhan, 'Afghan Villagers Hit Back against Taliban', RadioFreeEurope, 23 August 2012, https://www.rferl.org/a/afghan-villagers-hit-back-against-taliban/24685937.html; Robert Burns, 'U.S. sees potential for wider anti-Taliban uprising in Afghanistan', Associated Press, 18 October 2012; Frederick Kagan & Kimberly Kagan, 'The "Andar Uprising" and Progress in Afghanistan', *The Wall Street Journal*, 4 October 2012.

259 Habib, 'AAN Reportage', [see FN 15]. For more details about the lobbying and rivalry of commanders, politicians and notables and how this created splits in local forces along sub-tribal lines and between mujahedin factions, see Habib's full documentation on Andar.

260 Habib, 'AAN Reportage', [see FN 15].

261 Interview with former international forces advisor, 13 February 2018, (location withheld due to confidentiality).

262 This was not just about supporting Andar, Allen said, which had "the most conspicuous [uprising] right now," but "there's another really substantial one that's growing in Kamdesh in southern Nuristan. There's one growing in Wardak. There's one growing in Ghor. We've heard of one in Faryab." Gordon Lubold & Michael R Gordon, 'U.S. Deployment Triggered by Intelligence Warning of Iranian Attack Plans', *The Wall Street Journal*, 6 May 2019, https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-deployment-triggered-by-intelligence-warning-of-iranian-attack-plans-11557180106.

263 Habib, 'Guest Blog', [see FN 15]. The existence of two different local force models provoked a question, at least for the authors, about whether one model or the other had better results, particularly on the question of the treatment of civilians. This question was not fully resolved by the available data. Locals rarely differentiate between the two, but refer to both as *arbakai,* making it hard to discern whether they rated one as better than the other. Matthew Dearing has argued that the ALP appeared more disciplined and controlled than the Uprising Forces. Matthew P Dearing, 'A double-edged sword', [see FN 112], 576–608. Examining the ALP and other militias in north-eastern Afghanistan, but not in Andar, Koehler and Gosztonyi found that the formalisation of militias into ALP units resulted in groups that were less feared by locals, which they took as a sign that greater institutionalisation and formal accountability could improve control and reduce abusive behaviour.

264 By October 2012, there were two main factions among the Uprising Groups in Andar: a smaller one linked to Hezb-e Islami, who were the original instigators of the uprising, and a larger one loyal to Asadullah Khaled, who is from Ghazni, was originally with Ettihad-e Islami, had been governor of Ghazni and was Minister of Tribal and Border Affairs in 2012 when the uprising broke out, before being appointed director of NDS in September of that year. Khaled had managed to insert local, mujahedin-era commanders, including former governor Faizanullah Faizan (who had been with Hezb-e Islami, but had become a Khaled loyalist) into the group. Other politicians joined the lobbying when the ALP was set up, including Governor Musa Khan Akbarzada (Ettehad, pro-Khaled) and two jihadi-era rivals, both former MPs and commanders, Khial Muhammad Hussaini (Harakat-e Enqelab-e Islami – not with Khaled) and Abdul Jabar Shelgari (Hezb-e Islami).

265 Interview with international advisor, 20 February 2018, via Skype.

266 UNAMA, 'Protection of Civilians 2012', [see FN 128], 48–49.

267 Habib, 'Killing Mullahs', [see FN 15].

268 Muzhary, 'Finding Business', [see FN 15].

269 UNAMA, 'Protection of Civilians 2014', [see FN 106], 88.

270 Matthieu Aikins, 'Exclusive: A US-backed militia runs amok in Afghanistan', *Al Jazeera*, 23 July 2014, http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2014/7/23/exclusive-a-killinginandar.html; Joseph Goldstein, 'Afghan Militia Leaders, Empowered by U.S. to Fight Taliban, Inspire Fear in Villages', *The New York Times*, 18 March 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/18/world/asia/afghan-militia-leaders-empowered-by-us-to-fight-taliban-inspire-fear-in-villages.html.

271 Muzhary, 'One Land, Two Rules (7)' [see FN 255].

272 After the Soviet withdrawal in 1987, writes The Afghanistan Justice Project, "the Afghan government increasingly relied for its defense on regional militias, paying for their loyalty with Soviet-provided cash and weapons." Militias robbed travellers, extorted money from people, looted property, grabbed land and fought each other, including conducting street battles in Kabul. Afghanistan Justice Project, 'Casting Shadows', [see FN 30], 48.

273 Interview with international advisor, 10 June 2019, via telephone.

274 This was both due to practical restraints – there were far fewer US forces in the field in 2018 and 2019 than when the ALP was mobilised, such that a US military lead was infeasible – and due to a recognition that Afghans had to be in the lead for the ANA-TF to be sustainable. As one international advisor commented, "It's not 2010 anymore," noting there was no hands-on US training, recruitment or any ground mobilisation. "It truly is an Afghan programme. We can't make the levers move. Only the Afghans can." Interview with international advisor, 10 June 2019, via telephone. The bulk of ANA-TF funding is American; in 2019, it was projected to spend $4.32 billion on the Afghanistan Security Forces Fund (ASFF), which funds the sustainment, operations, training and infrastructure of the ANSF, including the army, the police and the local police. See SIGAR, 'Quarterly Report to the United States Congress October 2019', 2019, 50, https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/quarterlyreports/2019-10-30qr.pdf.

275 The description of the deliberation over sites comes from a former Afghan government official. Interview with former government official, 29 November 2018 (location withheld due to confidentiality). By December 2018, a long shortlist of a dozen sites had been approved as appropriate for the pilot, whittled down from a longlist of 40, and needed to be whittled down still further.

276 Email from RS advisor, 2 August 2019.

277 Interview with international advisor, 10 June 2019, via telephone.

278 The establishment of a National Steering Committee led by MoD, with MoI NDS, IDLG, National Security Council, Ministry of Information and Culture and RS representatives in early 2019 was seen by everyone involved as a useful means of regularising decisions.

279 This information is generated from a government tracking information sheet that was collated on a biweekly basis for inter-ministerial planning and deliberation over the force, and provided to AAN. This data is accurate as of 17 December 2019. The estimate that 10,000 ANA-TF soldiers would be mobilised by the end of phase 2 is from an interview with a government official, 17 December 2019, via WhatsApp.

280 As outlined by an RS officer in an interview, 17 December 2019. The initial presidential decree authorising the ANA-TF focussed almost entirely on the state's role in setting up companies, while the only role specified for "elders" was guaranteeing ex-ANSF recruits (art. 5). The second decree, which set up the National Steering Committee, tasked it with "mobilis[ing] people in the form of people's councils to recruit" to the ANA-TF (art 4). One government official said the establishment of 'people's councils', with a wider brief than just the ANA-TF, was indeed planned, but had still to be implemented. The translated text of the first decree can be read in the annex in Clark, 'The Afghan Territorial Force', [see FN 12]. The text of the second decree will be in a forthcoming AAN publication on the ANA-TF.

281 CDCs are elected, village-level *shuras* initially established under the National Solidary Programme. Although their duties do not include security, members should know about important developments in their district. Interviews, primarily via telephone, took place in April 2019.

282 Interview with Shakar Dara CDC member, 11 April 2019, via telephone.

283 Interview with Shakar Dara CDC member,13 April 2019.

284 Interviews with a government official, 17 December 2019, and an international military officer, 19 December 2019, both via WhatsApp. Quote from the government official 5 September 2019, Kabul. Interviews with a government official, 17 December 2019, and an international military officer, 19 December 2019, both via WhatsApp. Political lobbying was also seen during phase 1; an Afghan government official noted that politicians in Takhar, who were connected with tribes in the border areas of Nangrahar, had lobbied to have companiesin their districts. Interview with former Afghan government official, 29 November 2018 (location withheld due to confidentiality).

285 Interview with ANA commander, 22 July 2019, Jalalabad, Nangrahar; interview with tribal elders from Kot district, 20 July 2019, Jalalabad.

286 Interview with two Uprising Forces leaders from the Shinwari tribe (Achin and Naysan districts), 10 July 2019, Jalalabad; interview with tribal elders from Kot district, 20 July 2019, Jalalabad; interview with NDS official, 20 July 2019 (location withheld due to confidentiality); interview with tribal elders from Bati Kot district, 21 July 2019, Jalalabad.

287 What is called the Barmal company is actually based in neighbouring Gomal district, in the solidly pro-government area of Shkin (which local people want to establish as an independent district; in the meantime, they consider themselves part of Barmal, to which they are better linked). Interviews with four elders – a mix of district and village level, two on 27 June 2019 via telephone, and two at an ANA-TF graduation in Sharana, 6 April 2019, with follow-up interviews via telephone.

288 Two interviews with civil society activists via telephone, 27 July 2019; interview with a recruit met at the ANA-TF graduation in Sharana, 6 April 2019, with a follow-up interview via telephone, 9 April 2019.

289 Interviews with recruits met at the ANA-TF graduation in Sharana, 6 April 2019, with follow-up interviews via telephone, both on 14 April 2019.

290 Interview with government official, 17 April 2019, Kabul.

291 Figure provided by RS advisor in an email, 2 August 2019.

292 Interview with government official, 29 April 2018, Kabul.

293 Interview, 14 March 2020, Kabul.

294 Interviews with a former government official, 14 March 2020, Kabul; a government official, 13 March 2020, Kabul; an international advisor, 19 December 2020; and a written comment from a former government official, 8 March 2020, who also provided the quote.

295 Interview with RS advisor, 22 April 2018, Kabul.

296 Email to the authors from a former government official, 4 April 2020.

297 This mujahedin group has stayed in control of the district through every era from 1978 onwards, enjoying effective immunity because of their excellent relations with Kabul during the mujahedin, Taleban and Karzai eras. In 2009, one of the authors reported on the case of a local woman, Sara, who managed to take three men to court who had publicly gang-raped her after she had accused their commander of killing her son. This was despite the district governor, district court judge, one of the province's MPs (now dead) and one of President Karzai's advisers being close factional allies or relatives of the rapists. Karzai later pardoned two of the rapists (the third had died). Less than a year after the pardons, Sara's husband was murdered after he refused to stop pursuing the case. "'When the president released the rapists,' Sara's brother-in-law, 'they thought if they could get away with rape and kidnapping, they could get away with murder. No one would say anything.'" See Kate Clark, 'Afghan President Pardons Men Convicted of Bayonet Gang Rape', *The Independent*, 24 August 2008, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/afghan-president-pardons-men-convicted-of-bayonet-gang-rape-907663.html. The same group of commanders was also accused of kidnapping school teachers in spring 2002 (as reported to an author in Bamyan), because they were teaching the government's non-madrassa curriculum, and of imprisoning and torturing local people trying to reclaim land that they said leaders of this group had stolen from them. Author

interviews with alleged survivors, 22 May 2006, Kabul. Both incidents were also reported by BBC World Service Radio, although no URL is available.

298 'War in the Treasury of the People: Afghanistan: Lapis Lazuli and the Battle for Mineral Wealth', Global Witne*ss*, 2015, 6, https://www.globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/conflict-minerals/war-treasury-people-afghanistan-lapis-lazuli-and-battle-mineral-wealth.

299 Interview with government official, 12 April 2019, Kabul.

300 See the sources in FN 279, and the accompanying text on phases of mobilisation. The July 2019 figures are taken from a government tracking information sheet that was collated on a biweekly basis during the summer of 2019 for inter-ministerial planning and deliberation over the force, and provided to GPPi/AAN.

301 Interview with Afghan government official, 17 September 2019, Kabul.

302 Email to authors from former government official, 4 April 2020.

303 Interview with several Afghan officials and advisors to the ANA-TF program (names withheld due to confidentiality), July 23 and 24, 2019, Kabul; interview with Mike Hutchinson, Resolute Support, 26 July 2019, Kabul. Information is also drawn from an analysis of a summary data sheet detailing company locations, level of company completeness and recruitment stages, which was provided to the authors.

304 Details in Clark, 'The Afghan Territorial Force', [see FN 12].

305 Interview with government official, 17 December 2019, via WhatsApp, and 14 April 2020, Kabul; interview with international military officer, 14 December 2019, via WhatsApp. See also Fahim Abed, 'At Least 23 Soldiers Killed in Insider Attack in Afghanistan', *The New York Times*, 14 December 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/14/world/asia/afghanistan-soldiers-taliban.html.

306 Interview with RS advisor, 14 January 2019, via Skype.

307 Interview with RS advisor, 5 September 2019, Kabul.

308 Interview with government official, 17 December 2019, via WhatsApp.

309 Interviews conducted in May 2019 with officials from a variety of US government departments.

310 SIGAR, 'Quarterly Report to the United States Congress January 2020',2020, 83, https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/quarterlyreports/2020-01-30qr.pdf.

311 Interview with former Afghan government official, 29 November 2018 (location withheld due to confidentiality). Of note, the same official was almost as reluctant about the idea of ALP members joining the ANA-TF once the ALP programme ends, which did not appear to be happening on a widespread basis as of the time of writing.

312 Goodhand & Hakimi, 'Counterinsurgency', [see FN 16], 16; Deedee Derksen, 'Hezb-e Islami, Peace, and Integration into the Afghan Security Forces', United Institute of Peace, 2018, https://www.usip.org/publications/2018/07/hezb-e-islami-peace-and-integration-afghan-security-forces.

313 For a discussion of past reintegration processes, see Clark, 'Graft and Remilitarisation', [see FN 40]; Derksen, 'Politics of Disarmament', [see FN 39]; Derksen, 'Hezb-e Islami',[see FN 312]. Using the ALP for reintegrating reconciled insurgents was pushed, for example, by Massum Stanakzai, President Ghani's advisor on reconciliation, according to Goodhand & Hakimi, 'Counterinsurgency', [see FN 16], 16.

314 There were similar findings across the communities that mobilised behind the Uprising Forces in Nangrahar. In Bati Kot, elders described the tipping point as ISKP's attempt to kidnap a local elder who had protested against ISKP abuses and proposed forming a resistance force; elsewhere, interviewees described an increasing pattern of insurgents targeting and kidnapping not just ANSF personnel, but also their family members as the triggering event in the spring of 2018. Focus group discussion with Bati Kot elders, 21 July 2019, Jalalabad; interview with international security analyst, 23 July 2019, Kabul.

315 An ISAF officer briefing NGOs on the ALP by ISAF (10 January 2012, Kabul), when asked by one of the authors about eventual demobilisation strategies, said, "Yes, it's part of this debate, if it's required, there will need to be DDR. There is a risk of unemployed, armed men, so DDR is under

review. But it may not be necessary." Congressional staff engaged in monitoring the ALP also noted that the issue of demobilisation or transition has been raised almost annually since the ALP began. Interview with congressional oversight staff, 24 September 2019, Washington DC.

316 As of the time of writing, US funding and support would halt with the end of the US fiscal year 2020, which would mean the program support ends in September. The Afghan government could decide to fund the ALP on its own but according to interviews, this was neither determined nor likely. Interview with Khosna Jalil, Director of Security Policy, Ministry of Interior, 25 July 2019; interview with ALP Special Operations Advisory Group officer, 25 July 2019; interview with ALP Special Operations Advisory Group officer, 24 February 2020, via telephone.

317 The January 2020 report by SIGAR noted 19,000 current ALP on the roster, a figure also confirmed in interviews. SIGAR, 'Quarterly Report to the United States Congress January 2020', 2020, 73, https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/quarterlyreports/2020-01-30qr.pdf. However, this lower number in large part reflects US pay accountability reforms, with only those that could meet more rigid electronic certification standards formally on the roster. The number of ALP registered with the MoI ALP Directorate was higher according to US and Afghan officials, but information on the exact discrepancy in numbers, and whether and how these additional forces was not available. Interview with Khosna Jalil, Director of Security Policy, Ministry of Interior, 25 July 2019; interview with ALP Special Operations Advisory Group officer, 25 July 2019; interview with ALP Special Operations Advisory Group officer, 24 February 2020, via telephone. More on pay accountability reforms is discussed in Clark, 'Update on the ALP', [see FN 12].

318 Boone, 'US pours millions', [see FN 51]. The direct citation reflects The Guardian's summary of Ruttig's comments. Also predicting many of the other issues cited in this report, Ruttig additionally told The Guardian: "It is not enough to talk to a few tribal elders and decide that you trust them […] No matter how well-trained and culturally aware the special forces are they will never be able to get to know enough about a local area to trust the people they are dealing with."

319 Interview with former Afghan government official, 29 November 2018 (location withheld due to confidentiality).

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