

# CSG PAPERS

## Non-State Security Providers and Political Formation in Afghanistan

Deedee Derksen

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**GERDA HENKEL STIFTUNG**



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## ABOUT THE NON-STATE SECURITY PROVIDERS PROJECT

This is the first of four papers produced as part of the CSG's project on Non-State Security Providers and Political Formation in Conflict-Affected States. The project was made possible by generous financial support from the Gerda Henkel Foundation.

The project considers new aspects of the relationship between security and development by examining how the presence of non-state security providers affects political development in conflict-affected societies. The established “security-development nexus” maintains that security and development are mutually reinforcing, and conversely that insecurity and underdevelopment are mutually reinforcing. While these links are of obvious importance, more recent work suggests two other relationships of equal significance: between insecurity and development insofar as violent conflict may fuel political formation; and between underdevelopment and security insofar as supposedly “underdeveloped” and conflict-affected areas may feature unique and unconventional security structures. The project has explored these largely uncharted relationships by examining processes of political formation in societies that host a diverse array of non-state security providers and assessing the effects of the latter on processes of state formation, deliberate state-building interventions and the emergence of unconventional governance structures. Drawing on three case studies—Afghanistan, Somalia and South Sudan—the project's main research questions are: how does the presence of diverse non-state security providers affect the process of state formation and state building, and how should this shape donor state building approaches? The overarching goal of the project is to stimulate a discourse and make initial policy recommendations on how donors can better engage non-state security structures in the context of state building and security sector reform programs.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Deedee Derksen has conducted research into Afghan militias since 2006. A former correspondent for the Dutch newspaper *de Volkskrant*, she has since 2011 pursued a PhD on the politics of disarmament and rearmament of militias at the War Studies Department of King's College London.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper examines how diverse non-state security providers - warlords, tribal leaders and local strongmen - affect the process of state formation and statebuilding in Afghanistan. Its analysis of the nature and scope of international engagement of informal security actors in northeast and southwest Afghanistan suggests that external donors have not primarily promoted liberal peace, but rather a hybrid political order.

The support of international actors has allowed non-state security actors to operate without the consent of communities, a situation in stark contrast, for instance, to Afghan tribal leadership in the past, whose authority and survival was predicated on the support of community constituencies. This practice of international state builders has thus impeded the development of a social contract and prevented non-state actors from winning the legitimacy that could potentially make their governance a viable alternative to the centralized state. Considering the adverse effects that international donor support for non-state security providers has had in Afghanistan, the paper argues that a hands-off, “do no harm” approach from international actors with regard to non-state security providers would increase stability more than its current form of engagement.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper examines how the presence of diverse non-state security providers affects the process of state formation in Afghanistan, and if non-state security providers can contribute to the state-building efforts of foreign donors.

In Europe, state formation entailed a gradual process of eliminating or co-opting rivals to state authority to create a centralized monopoly of violence (Tilly, 1985; 1992). Since 2001, the security sector reform (SSR) agenda as part of state-building efforts by the international community in Afghanistan has thus aimed to create a monopoly of violence for the state by disarming militias and building up a new police force and a new army. However, the current security sector landscape shows that many other non-state security providers, including strongmen and warlords, continue to operate alongside the official security forces. The Afghan state has historically been challenged by a strong society and deep-rooted suspicion of central state authority. After 2005, the state came under attack from a growing insurgency, which, in places, can build on strong local support from communities who feel they have been marginalized and preyed upon by the post-2001 government, and therefore don't accept its authority.<sup>1</sup>

Arguing that the state-building efforts of the international community in Afghanistan and elsewhere have failed, a new direction in the security sector reform literature claims that engaging non-state security providers can contribute to medium- to long-term state building by stabilizing and securing the political environment. This would mean a shift away from the conventional focus on working to achieve the state's monopoly by centralizing the means of violence. Instead, the support of non-state security providers would be sought. This approach is controversial (Ahram, 2011).

A different direction in security sector reform literature argues that the international community's state-building agenda has been compromised in Afghanistan by empowering domestic elites (warlords, strongmen) during the transitional governance period until the first elections, who used this opportunity to consolidate their holds on power in a zero-sum political calculation relying on predation and patronage. The solution, it is argued, is not to discard the conventional state-building agenda, but to improve it, by understanding the political economy of conflicts and the potential policy levers for altering, rather than perpetuating, these dynamics (Barma, 2012).

This paper explores these arguments in the light of the profiles of some of the strong non-state security actors in Afghanistan today. It challenges the assumption underlying these arguments that the international community's primary project in Afghanistan was a state-building mission. After all, its intervention started not with a state-building project but with a military campaign, aimed at seeking justice for the 9/11 attacks and at making sure that Afghanistan would not become a safe haven for terrorists again. Even though the

United States originally favoured a light footprint, with security provided by local militias, shortly after the defeat of the Taliban regime, a state-building project began to take shape. Astri Suhrke (2011) has argued that the international intervention therefore rested on two pillars: a military campaign and a state-building agenda, and that there was considerable tension between these two projects. Which of these two projects was prioritized in the security sector? What are the implications for the process of state formation and the future of international involvement in this process?

The role of non-state security actors in the process of state formation over the past 14 years will be examined in two parts: first, non-state security actors will be profiled, and second, their impact on state formation and the role of foreign donors in this process will be assessed. Before that, it is useful to look at historic developments in the relationship between the state and non-state actors in Afghanistan. In contrast to current Western states, the Afghan state has always been weak, and could be better described as “the most powerful actor within a system of tribal and religious leaders” (Malkasian, 2013: 7) or a “broker” (Goodhand and Hakimi, 2014) than as a monopolist. It historically existed next to solidarity groups<sup>2</sup> with whom it competed for control over dispute resolution, tax collection and the recruitment of armed groups, and this is arguably still the case today.

Historically, Afghan kings negotiated with armed Pashtun tribes to mobilize men to wage war against internal and external enemies, but these groups could also turn against the rulers if their policies didn’t suit them (Edwards, 2002: 55-56; Rubin, 2002: 55). Islam and tribalism acted as “twin engines” in mobilization (Edwards, 2002, 56). A call for jihad by mullahs and ulema could temporarily forge “broad coalitions for raid or conquest.” The khan, who exercised influence, “related to his status as a landowner or as a tribal leader” (Dorrnsoro, 2000: 119) and who would assume command over the troops, had the advantage that he had armed forces ready at hand, because the “tribal military unit was a preexisting social group” (Rubin, 2002: 11).

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the externally funded jihad against the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan government in the 1970s and 1980s undermined the traditional power of khans and boosted the influence of commanders, who received funding from jihadi parties supported by Pakistan with US and Saudi money. Like the khans, they mobilized their solidarity groups and dispersed patronage to their followers (in some cases, they were the same person – the khan becoming an externally funded commander), but “while the power of the khans was entirely informal, the commander could impose its will by force and was not obliged to rely on appeal to the consensus or on the use of indirect pressure” (Dorrnsoro, 2000: 125). The widespread violence in rural Afghanistan featuring these commanders led to strong support in the south for the Taliban movement, which enabled it to eventually capture Kabul in 1996.

After 2001, many former jihadi commanders returned to Afghanistan, and were accommodated by the Karzai government and its international allies with a view to short-term stabilization.

The state, meanwhile, was able to create a standing army and break with traditional patterns of mobilization, in which khans selected soldiers rather than the state. However, the reliance on foreign funding for state-building since King Abdur Rahman Khan in the late nineteenth century has made the state accountable to external donors rather than to its own population, which was a major challenge in its struggles to establish a social contract with its population and gain legitimacy. In the early 1990s, the Soviet-trained and -funded army collapsed, and it was only after the international intervention in 2001 that the army and police force in Afghanistan were again fully rebuilt.

This paper, which considers the period of the governments of former President Hamid Karzai (December 2001-September 2014), focuses on several strongmen in Uruzgan, Kunduz and Baghlan and their armed networks. The Pashtun-dominated Uruzgan, in southern Afghanistan, is part of greater Kandahar, the heartland of the Taliban insurgency. In this area, the first anti-Taliban irregular militias were funded by the United States after 2001. The ethnically diverse Kunduz and Baghlan only saw rearmament after the insurgency gathered pace there after 2007, and their informal security sector development was, therefore, very different from that in Uruzgan. This paper is based on some of the findings from ongoing research on these provinces – hundreds of interviews with Western and Afghan officials, tribal elders, religious leaders and commanders, including from the insurgency. Most were conducted by the author between 2011 and 2014; in some cases, local researchers were involved.<sup>3</sup> The paper also draws on research conducted during the years that the author operated in Afghanistan as a journalist for the Dutch newspaper *de Volkskrant* (2006-2009).

## PART 1: PROFILING NON-STATE SECURITY ACTORS

### URUZGAN<sup>4</sup>: MATIULLAH

#### **Matiullah: A Non-state Security Provider?**

General Matiullah, or Matiullah Khan as he was commonly called, was, until his assassination in Kabul in March 2015, Uruzgan's main official security provider. However, his appointment in 2011 as provincial police chief merely formalized his extensive informal powers in the security sector, which had gradually grown since 2001. Also, in spite of being the provincial police commander, he retained a militia of around 800 men outside the Ministry of Interior (MoI) structure until 2014.<sup>5</sup> He continued to exert considerable informal influence over the civilian administration, and most appointments in the local government had to be approved by him. He was, therefore, arguably the main formal and informal power broker in Uruzgan.

Matiullah's main activity since the collapse of the Taliban regime up until he was killed consisted of fighting insurgents, who grew in number and launched increasingly violent attacks in Uruzgan after 2004. His militia was part of the Afghan Military Force (AMF), which was paid by the Ministry of Defense (MoD) from 2002 to 2004, and after its disbandment under the first disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) program,<sup>6</sup> he became the chief of the Highway Police, with protecting the main road from Kandahar to Tirin Kot as his principal activity. In 2006, the Highway Police was abolished because of concerns about corruption and links to drugs smuggling, but Matiullah continued his activities and expanded his irregular militia (called Kandak Amniant-e Uruzgan, or KAU), which he paid with income from foreign forces from protecting convoys carrying military equipment, food and fuel from Kandahar for the troops operating in Uruzgan. One unit of the former Highway Police – which grew from 50 people to 130 between 2001 and 2013, the year the foreign forces left Uruzgan – assisted the American and Australian Special Operations Forces (SOFs) in counterinsurgency operations.

Before Matiullah was appointed as provincial police chief in 2011, he and his commanders became engaged in resolving conflicts and disputes through establishing a provincial shura or council and local shuras. Although the provincial shura does not exist anymore, some of the local shuras do. As a provincial police chief, he also became officially in charge of maintaining public order.

These activities – resolving conflicts and disputes, maintaining public order within the community and defending the community from external threats – arguably made him a security provider in Uruzgan, with partly official, partly unofficial roles. However, this section argues that at the same time, he and his men were one of the drivers of insecurity

in the province, through the establishment of a politically exclusive and predatory formal and informal governance structure – making his rule inherently unstable. The gap between Matiullah and his men on the one side and the communities they claimed to serve on the other side was the result of Matiullah's reliance on external sources for support.

### **Functionalism: Hunting the Taliban and Supporting the Karzai Family**

The rise of Matiullah as a security provider in Uruzgan was not in response to a need of the local communities, apart, perhaps, from some Popalzai communities that wished to expand their influence in the post-2001 political order (although he was not a Popalzai representative). Rather, Matiullah – who started out as a militia commander under his uncle Jan Mohammad and gradually expanded his power base – served in the first place outside actors, most importantly the foreign troops deployed in Uruzgan and the Karzai family.

#### *Supporting the Karzai Family*

For the Karzai family, Jan Mohammad, Matiullah and their supporters were part of its southern network, which provided a much-needed bulwark against former Northern Alliance commanders in the north and west of Afghanistan, who had come to dominate parts of the central government after 2001, especially the security ministries. In the south, Matiullah's family increased the profile of the Popalzai, the same tribe as the Karzais (although they did not represent the whole tribe and were opposed by many fellow tribesmen, some of whom became part of the insurgency). Historically, the Popalzai had competed with the Barakzai and Achekzai for the throne.<sup>7</sup> This rivalry played out again after 2001, when former jihadi commanders from these tribes returned to Afghanistan after living in exile during the Taliban regime. For example, in Kandahar, the Karzais worked to undermine former jihadi commander Gul Agha Shirzai (Barakzai), who had become governor after the collapse of the Taliban regime in 2001. In Uruzgan, the Popalzai (an estimated 10.5 percent of the local population) were far outnumbered by the Barakzai (9 percent) and Achekzai (35 percent) together.<sup>8</sup> Jan Mohammad, Matiullah and the Karzais had a common interest in outmanoeuvring the potentially stronger former jihadi commanders from the Barakzai and Achekzai tribes and establishing a minority rule in Uruzgan that supported the president (Green, 2012: 23).<sup>9</sup>

#### *Hunting the Taliban*

For the foreign troops engaged in counterterrorism operations in the context of the War on Terror in the first half of the 2000s and in counterinsurgency operations from the second half of the decade, Matiullah and his uncle Jan Mohammad were useful as ruthless but effective Taliban hunters. The American SOFs started operating in Uruzgan in November

2001 and established a Forward Operating Base (FOB) in Dehrawud district in 2002. In 2004, an American-led Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) was established in Tirin Kot to assist Afghan officials and improve living conditions in Uruzgan.<sup>10</sup> As US troops had been working closely with Karzai, who had tried to launch a tribal uprising against the Taliban in the province after the international intervention in the fall of 2001, they became close with his allies in the province. It was a collection of former jihadi commanders from different tribes to which Karzai had appointed Jan Mohammad as leader. The United States at that time was hunting for remnants of the Taliban and al-Qaeda, and Jan Mohammad and Matiullah were seen as men who could get the job done. In the second half of the decade, the foreign forces operating in Uruzgan faced a growing insurgency. Again, Jan Mohammad, and by now especially Matiullah, were seen as the answer.

### **Political Economy: Sources of Matiullah's Power**

#### *Links to the Karzai Family*

Arguably, the main source of Matiullah's power in Uruzgan had been his family's links with former President Karzai and his half-brother Ahmad Wali Karzai, who in 2005 became the head of the Kandahari provincial council and was one of the main informal power brokers in the region until his assassination on July 12, 2011. Initially, it was Matiullah's uncle Jan Mohammad's close relations with Karzai, who made him governor in 2002,<sup>11</sup> that rubbed off on him, and which was the basis for increasing his own power in the province.

Matiullah started as the main militia commander of Jan Mohammad – who described himself as a “governor in a flak jacket” and an effective Taliban hunter – in a larger governance structure that included formal actors – like district governors and district police chiefs – and informal actors – like the Afghan Security Forces (ASF) or Afghan Security Guards (ASG) (the names were used interchangeably);<sup>12</sup> militias guarding American bases in the province, providing intelligence and assisting them in combat. Supported by President Karzai Jan Mohammad was able to appoint his people (mostly former jihadi commanders, including a large number of Popalzai) in positions in the centre, and relied on proxies from other tribes in the periphery. Matiullah, who initially relied on a smaller circle of supporters, namely Popalzai from his home village, but did develop ties with some of Jan Mohammad's allies, gradually became more powerful with the support of President Karzai's half-brother Ahmed Wali Karzai.<sup>13</sup> Matiullah's rise to power, which caused tensions between him and his uncle, was completed in 2011 after the latter was assassinated and the former became the provincial police commander (Derksen, 2013; 2015).

Although President Karzai was Jan Mohammad's primary backer and Matiullah was closer to Ahmed Wali Karzai, the president supported him twice in his bid to become

the provincial police commander. The first time was in 2006, when the Highway Police was abolished – Karzai supported Matiullah to become provincial police commander, presumably also to compensate for his own loss of influence locally as a result of the removal of Jan Mohammad. However, this initiative was thwarted by a veto from the Dutch government, which sent troops to Uruzgan in that year in the context of International Security Assistance Force's (ISAF's) expansion (see below). After the deaths of Ahmad Wali Karzai and Jan Mohammad in July 2011, Matiullah and Karzai became automatically more dependent on each other regarding Uruzgan. President Karzai appointed Matiullah as provincial police chief in August 2011. By this time, the Dutch troops, who had opposed Matiullah's appointment in 2006, had left Uruzgan (Derksen, 2013; Schmeidl, 2011; Epstein and Kelly, 2011).

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 and who had been fighting on his side since the early days in 2001. Many now occupy top positions in the ANP and ALP, a militia program that was started in 2010.<sup>14</sup> Former Jan Mohammad allies in the ASGs are employed in a second tier, at the district level. Mainly in the second tier, Matiullah also included a number of Achekzai and Barakzai commanders. Very few commander positions are occupied by members of the traditionally weaker Durrani Panjpai branch and the Ghilzai tribes (according to TLO, accounting for around 45 to 50 percent of the local population) (Derksen 2013; 2015).<sup>15</sup>

#### *Links to the Foreign Forces*

Links between Matiullah's family and the US SOFs date back to the start of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) on October 7, 2001. The CIA and US SOFs helped Karzai to launch his tribal uprising against the Taliban in Uruzgan (which had few takers until he could show he had US support behind him). Karzai reportedly convinced Matiullah, who was a conscripted Taliban soldier at the time, to join his group, which mostly consisted of former jihadi commanders from different tribes. When Jan Mohammad was released from the Taliban prison in Kandahar in 2001, he assumed leadership over this group.<sup>16</sup>

After the collapse of the Taliban regime, Jan Mohammad assisted the US SOFs in their hunt for remnants of the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Uruzgan. In these early years, the province reportedly saw many human rights violations committed by commanders tied to Jan Mohammad, including Matiullah.<sup>17</sup> Jan Mohammad and his commanders targeted their rivals,<sup>18</sup> denouncing them as Taliban to the foreign forces (even though many had not supported the Taliban regime). These actions antagonized a significant segment of the population. Part of this segment now constitutes the core of the Taliban movement in Uruzgan, which already had a major footprint in the province and could easily revive its networks.<sup>19</sup>

From the establishment of the American-led PRT in 2004 onwards, there seems to have been a gradual cooling in the relationship with Jan Mohammad and a rapprochement with his nephew Matiullah, who was seen as a ruthless Taliban hunter but less divisive than his vengeful uncle. Matiullah distanced himself from his uncle's violent rule, in which he himself had been a key player in the first years after 2001. He posed as an effective commander not openly involved in human rights abuses – although according to numerous well-informed sources away from the public eye, some of his men were still involved in abuses (killings, disappearances, torture).<sup>20</sup> Leaked American Embassy cables and other sources show that the US PRT became more aware of how Matiullah operated, but that short-term stability was prioritized over dealing with the underlying causes of some of the political and security problems in Uruzgan. In 2006, the deputy chief of mission of the American Embassy in Kabul, Richard Norland, wrote:

Like Jan Mohammed, Matiullah is a semi-literate former militia commander and among the leaders of the Pashtun- Populzai tribe here (Uruzgan's strongest). His impulse is to deploy his men to support his tribe's interests and/or kill Taliban rather than having any strategic approach to highway security. (...) Credible accounts indicate that Matiullah operates protection rackets, skims from the Afghan Highway Police (AHP)'s payroll, and is involved in the illegal narcotics trade. Matiullah is particularly adept as a Taliban fighter and has generally cooperated well with the PRT, regularly sending his men for Military Police Advisory Training (MPAT) and deploying them for missions in collaboration with coalition forces. For this reason we may need to support his retention as AHP Chief for the short term, in the interest of stability, but he will need to be replaced once the political situation in Uruzgan has become more stable.<sup>21</sup>

The closeness of the American SOF and Australian SOF operating in Uruzgan to Matiullah remained solid throughout the past decade, even though civilian officials from both countries had their doubts about him.<sup>22</sup> At first Matiullah, with his men, operated alongside them as AMF commander, and after its disbandment under the first post-2001 DDR program he created a special unit of the Highway Police/KAU (which grew from 50 to 130 men) to work with the foreign troops. Eventually, they moved to Camp Holland in Tirin Kot, where Australian SOF monitored the Provincial Response Company, as they were called by that time. However, as far as could be ascertained, this unit had no official status. Matiullah also seems to have taken over his uncle's influence on the ASG in Tirin Kot and Dehrawud. As mentioned above, Matiullah's Highway Police/KAU also provided security for convoys transporting food, fuel and military equipment from Kandahar to Tirin Kot – a business that made him a wealthy man (see below) (Derksen, 2013; 2015).

The PRT changed hands in the summer of 2006 when the Dutch took over the responsibility for the ISAF's involvement in Uruzgan. One condition of the Dutch

government before the deployment of troops was the removal of Jan Mohammad as governor. Although it stopped short of asking for Matiullah – who at the time had a less prominent profile than his uncle – to be removed as well, they did not want to work with him and vetoed his appointment as provincial police commander, the job he wanted. However, because of the US support for Matiullah, the Dutch, while having succeeded in preventing him from becoming the provincial police commander could not neutralize him. In fact, away from the public eye they (indirectly) also paid him to transport their goods from Kandahar to Tirin Kot. But it was only after the Dutch left Uruzgan in 2010 – when the PRT changed hands back to the Americans – that the way was free for Matiullah to become the provincial police commander.

#### *Implications for Security Provision*

The financial, political and military support from the foreign forces and the Karzai government has shaped Matiullah's profile as a commander fighting insurgents rather than maintaining public order or resolving conflicts and disputes – which are therefore less developed elements of his rule.<sup>23</sup> Locally, Matiullah was credited with having been able to provide security to communities in the central parts of Uruzgan against the insurgents, especially in recent years. However, while the existence of a relatively well-organized Taliban movement backed by Pakistani elements seems beyond doubt, its local support is made up of various population segments, some of which have been antagonized by Jan Mohammad and Matiullah's harsh treatment or by their exclusion from the local administration. Although Matiullah seemed in a strong position before he was killed, the Taliban, partially motivated by the exclusive and predatory rule of the current local government, was the main challenge to his rule – making it inherently unstable.<sup>24</sup>

#### *Business*

Land is a traditional status symbol among Pashtuns, “as it provides income from agricultural production and support from clientele working the land” (Schmeidl 2012: 32). Leaders who inherited their status traditionally came from major land-owning families. In contrast, “achieved leaders” like Jan Mohammad and Matiullah, who achieved leadership by their commander status, buy land or grab it from other people or the government. Research by Susanne Schmeidl found that both men “have purchased and/or grabbed land and built impressive houses” (ibid.).

The opium business and foreign funds for the reconstruction and the protection of ISAF and OEF bases and convoys were the other major sources of income in Uruzgan since 2001. Matiullah's security contracts on the Kandahar-Tirin Kot highway and other roads in Uruzgan have been mentioned above. He has also been said to profit from international funds through construction companies in the names of relatives, although he denies this. In addition, he was able to tap into reconstruction funds by providing transportation

and security to reconstruction projects. By the end of the decade, Matiullah was thought to earn about 50 percent of the available funds for reconstruction in Uruzgan through providing transportation and security. His income from providing security to foreign military convoys was estimated at some \$340,000 each month.<sup>25</sup>

Opium has been the main pillar of the illegal economy since the international intervention.<sup>26</sup> By 2006, the drug market in Uruzgan was reportedly controlled by about six mid-level traffickers, who were connected to key traffickers further up the drugs hierarchy, who in turn operated thanks to high-level political support in Kabul, which ensured key appointments in the interest of the trade. The main appointment was that of provincial police chief, who then appointed district chiefs of police, creating a web of protection for drugs traffickers. Informed observers alleged that Jan Mohammad and Matiullah were both involved in trafficking, but both men denied these allegations in interviews.<sup>27</sup>

The ALP general directorate in Kabul had the ALP in Uruzgan under investigation in 2014 for *chop khati* or ghost soldiers – taking money for fighters who don't exist; a widespread problem in Afghanistan. From 2011 to 2014, 612 ALP ran away and 74 died. “The Uruzgan police tell us that they have hired new people but we are investigating that”, said an ALP inspector from Kabul visiting in Tirin Kot in May 2014. According to him “the problem of *chop khati* exists in Tirin Kot and sochdistricts of Uruzgan.” The inspector was not sure if measures would be taken if the allegations turned out to be true. “Matiullah Khan acts quite independent because of his links to the president.”<sup>28</sup>

### **Communitarianism: Matiullah's Relations within Uruzgan**

#### *Legitimate Rule?*

According to Susanne Schmeidl (2012), today's leadership in Afghanistan in general, and in Uruzgan in particular, falls into three categories: inherited (membership of a landed elite family); achieved (through the jihad, but also through acquired wealth and education) and appointed (either selected by the population as their representative vis-à-vis the district authorities, and/or holding a government post). Inherited leadership and appointed leadership correspond to ideal types of authority as proposed by Max Weber, respectively to traditional authority and legal-rational authority. In Afghanistan, however, “the appointed status is still strongly dependent on the other two status groups, with actors accessing government positions by leveraging their inherited or achieved status and associated networks.”

In the case of Matiullah, he obtained his appointment as provincial police commander by leveraging his position as the province's most important informal security provider. Therefore, the formal appointment merely officialized his substantial informal power in

the local security sector. Although at the end of his life Matiullah had a formal position, his rule was not impartial and formalistic according to rational rules, as described by Weber.<sup>29</sup> Rather he adopted a patrimonial rule, which favoured those closest to him. Also, Matiullah's influence in the province extended well beyond the security sector, although he denied this in interviews.<sup>30</sup> He reportedly had much influence over government appointments, from district chiefs to the level of governor. He was probably also the richest man in this poor province, with income from legal and, sources claim, illegal business.<sup>31</sup> In short, Matiullah had become Uruzgan's main power broker, exerting influence well beyond his official position.

On a superficial level, Matiullah's style of governance resembled that of a traditional khan, and it seemed that this is the image he liked to project with the addition of "Khan" to his name. He maintained a clientele of people who were loyal to him, and whom he rewarded with jobs and other benefits. But outside this circle he was also known for his generosity; he gave money to widows, he helped young people with scholarships to India, and he financed health clinics, mosques, and bridges and even a local branch of a Kandahari university. He had a large guesthouse with a swimming pool and an extensive flower garden in Tirin Kot, where guests sometimes stayed for months on end. Furthermore, he was an important intermediary between the communities in Uruzgan and external actors, such as the central state and international actors (although he was certainly not the only intermediary in the province). As shown above, he also exploited these relations with outside actors to enrich himself. But it seemed that prestige, not material wealth was his prime goal, while his ambitions didn't seem to reach further than Uruzgan.<sup>32</sup>

There were, however, major differences between Matiullah and the traditional khans. In the first place, Matiullah was not from a landed elite, but had a modest background. During the Taliban regime, when he was in his twenties and early thirties, he worked as a shopkeeper and was even conscripted as a soldier in the Taliban army. Toward the end of his life he was rumoured to possess much land, but he acquired rather than inherited it (Schmeidl, 2012: 32).<sup>33</sup> A second major difference is that rather than being a completely informal actor who competed with the state in matters like the recruitment of armed men, dispute resolution and taxation, he was the state in his position as a security provider, while at the same time he also competed with the state, including in matters of recruitment, dispute resolution and taxation. A third difference was that Matiullah didn't have to rely on "persuasion, debate and gifts" to persuade communities, but could impose his will by force (Dorrnsoro, 2000: 119).

Matiullah shared with the former jihadi commanders the category of achieved rather than inherited leadership. Some of the main parallels were the modest background, the mobilization of kinsmen and the use, or threat, of force to make communities comply. During the jihad against the Soviets, when Matiullah was a teenager and not under arms,

external funding was usually distributed through the jihadi party leadership. In the case of commanders working with foreign forces operating in the provinces after 2001, the relationship with foreign donors was much more direct. This meant that Matiullah had to cater to their needs, while ensuring that on a superficial level his style of governance was acceptable to them. In this Matiullah – who, at least on the surface, improved his profile as a security provider after 2006 – was much more successful than his uncle Jan Mohammad, a former jihadi commander who kept doing things the “old way” and saw foreign support for him stop.<sup>34</sup>

Unlike legal, traditional and charismatic rule, the achieved leadership category has not been described by Weber as an ideal type of legitimate rule (Spencer, 1970: 123, 124). While many in Uruzgan said they abhorred the predatory and politically exclusive rule of Matiullah at the same time, in the end he did seem to enjoy limited acceptance among quite a few communities outside his circle of co-opted local power brokers as a result of his efforts to counter the insurgency in Uruzgan. The ANP and ALP were credited with having brought relative security (less violence from the Taliban) in and around the provincial capital (Tirin Kot, Dehrawud, Chora) in recent years. Interviewees generally thought this was a major accomplishment, especially in light of the withdrawal of the foreign troops, which led to many in the province worrying about a deteriorating security. Even though most interviewees didn’t like Matiullah and thought he should be replaced as soon as possible when the situation allowed for it, they said they supported him in recent years. “We need a dictator now,” was how one tribal elder put it.<sup>35</sup>

There are two important qualifications to Matiullah’s role as local security provider. First, many interviewees thought that it was safer after Matiullah became the provincial police chief than before because he “somehow created insecurity before.”<sup>36</sup> They said they supported him because they claimed that if he was fired he would seek to destabilize the province. It was impossible to verify these claims. However, the dynamic of actors outside the government apparatus who feel entitled to a position causing insecurity to prove their point is very familiar.<sup>37</sup> Second, some interviewees said that Matiullah and his men thrive on insecurity – because it generates financial and political support from the central government and, previously, from the foreign forces and because it limits the government’s oversight over illegal activities – and would not seek to establish a genuinely secure environment.<sup>38</sup>

#### *More Support through More Consultation and Dispute Resolution?*

Matiullah tried to gain more widespread popular support after his uncle Jan Mohammad left Uruzgan in 2006. These efforts seem to have reached a peak around 2010, the year before he became the provincial police commander; therefore, most interviewees say they were intended to get the people’s approval for the appointment. As mentioned above, Matiullah engaged in charity work, for example, by giving money to the poor and donating

funds for educational purposes and for the improvement of health services. His main effort, however, seems to have gone into expanding his consultation of communities and playing a more prominent role in dispute resolution.

To accomplish this, Matiullah established a provincial-level shura, an official platform for consultation with other informal and formal power brokers and for the peaceful resolution of disputes. It is not completely clear how many people it included, probably between 50 and 70 (although Matiullah said 170). What does seem clear though is that the shura, or Reform Shura as it was called, included a number of opponents of Matiullah.<sup>39</sup> One former shura member from the Ghilzai Tokhi tribe remembers:

There were 10 elders in the shura from my tribe. Different issues were being discussed and resolved, like debts, legal issues, security and projects. But most of the issues that were discussed were legal issues. For example, if someone owed money to someone else, how could he pay it off? Or if someone had grabbed land or stolen someone else's property, what should be done? However, no one was implementing the decision of the shura if it was in our (tribe's) favour, only if it was in favor of the Popalzai.<sup>40</sup>

According to a former local government official, the shura “wasn't very organized,” and after 1.5 years stopped convening.<sup>41</sup>

When Matiullah became provincial police commander in 2011, he claimed he established local shuras, for local commanders to discuss urgent issues with the communities. In some places local shuras seemed to be up and running in 2014, including in one area near the provincial capital, which until a few years ago was one of the province's main insurgency hotspots. Local power brokers joined the Taliban movement after being harassed by Jan Mohammad and Matiullah's men in the early years of the Karzai government. Tribal elders in the area said that locals who used to support them instead started supporting the local government a few years ago. Two of the reasons for this change they mentioned are the effectiveness of Matiullah's police in keeping the Taliban out, and the local shura, which improved communication between the local police commanders and the tribal elders.

The weekly shura, which is held in one of the local police bases, appeared to include discussions on disputes between locals, including criminal issues, and on disputes between locals and the police commanders, usually over arrests of insurgents and treatment of detainees. In the first case, if the commander does not have an interest in the issue he expected the tribal elders to come up with a solution. If he did have an interest, possibly because he had been bribed, the room for maneuver was smaller for the tribal elders, although they could try to negotiate the best possible deal for the loser. In the second case, when the issue concerned the police and arrests of “insurgents,” the main local police commander – who was seated higher than the other commanders, the elders and villagers during the shura – also ultimately decided what happened. The best tribal

elders could hope for, it seemed, was some form of compensation for victims or the family of victims. However, when the locals believed the police commander in question had made a mistake, sooner or later, the commander usually found an improvised explosive device (IED) on his way.<sup>42</sup>

It is not clear how widespread these informal shuras are in Uruzgan. It is important to note that this particular shura was apparently established at the request of the elders, and that together with the police commander they decided on the procedures. A tribal elder from another area, which has also seen a heavy presence of insurgents in the recent past, said: “The local police are providing security against the Taliban. They also do dispute resolution at local level. Of course in dispute resolution they can’t stay impartial. They take sides because they are corrupt and whoever pays them money will take their side.”<sup>43</sup>

In Dehrawud, one of the main towns in Uruzgan to the west of Tirinkot, no regular shura with local commanders is held at all, according to locals. “Consultation takes place for example if an IED goes off somewhere in a village,” said one tribal elder. “You will see that everybody is summoned and interrogated. But in a normal situation, if we want to talk or discuss something with any police commander, ANP or ALP, it takes us days to find them.”<sup>44</sup> The former police chief in Dehrawud, who is known as Mohammad, had another approach, according to this elder: “Commander Mohammad had told people that if they had complaints about people, they could come to Mohammad without hesitation and file a complaint about his men. He had good relations with people. But since the current commander has come to Dehrawud, I have not seen his office yet.”<sup>45</sup>

The different examples seem to indicate that there are no fixed rules and procedures, and that communication with the communities – only in cases of incidents, an open door policy or a regular shura – is dependent on the individual commander. Not only is it different from area to area, but also from commander to commander in one place. The problems in communication between ANP/ALP commanders and communities are probably at least partly the result of the lack of consultation of the villagers on the hiring and firing of the ANP/ALP commanders.<sup>46</sup>

### Conclusion

Matiullah had achieved an almost monopoly of the government’s use of violence in the central parts of Uruzgan (apart from ANA deployments and ANP and ALP in peripheral areas), not only through his formal position as provincial police chief, but also through his informal influence on the local administration. His police force seemed well organized, even the unit providing highway security, which was only incorporated into the official security apparatus in 2014. As far as fighting the Taliban goes, there seemed to be stable patterns of security provision and the recognition of Matiullah and his men as the

legitimate authority. However, other parts of their security provision were less developed, notably maintaining public order and dispute resolution, although these were the main requirements of communities in the early years after the collapse of the Taliban regime.

The fight against the Taliban started out as an agenda of the foreign forces operating in Uruzgan after 2001, which Matiullah and his uncle were more than willing to accommodate. Partly as a result of their heavy-handed military approach and exclusive governance – enabled by the political support from the Karzai family – parts of the population joined the reorganizing Taliban movement after 2004. Although later on Matiullah took measures toward a more inclusive style of governance, most importantly the setting up of a provincial-level shura, they have not proved to be either genuine or sustainable. He seems to have co-opted some members of the majority Achekzai, who serve in a second tier in the province's security apparatus, and has recruited young men from all tribes in the lower ranks. However, large parts of the local population remained excluded from representation in the local political order. Their political exclusion is arguably one of the most important factors fuelling local support for the insurgency, which was the main challenge to Matiullah's rule in Uruzgan.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, the support for Matiullah of those who have not joined the insurgency seemed quite limited and based on his status as security provider. This status was, in later years when the foreign forces had left Uruzgan, mostly dependent on financial support from patrons in the central government.

In sum, Matiullah's rule in Uruzgan, although showing some crude signs of state formation, was inherently unstable. Support for him from international troops and the Karzai faction in Kabul enabled him to establish minority rule and made him accountable to his backers rather than to local communities, which meant he enjoyed only limited legitimacy.

#### **KUNDUZ AND BAGHLAN:<sup>48</sup> MIR ALAM, AMIR GUL, MULLAH ALAM**

##### **Mir Alam, Amir Gul and Mullah Alam: Non-state Security Providers?**

Recent years have seen a proliferation of militias in northeastern Afghanistan. This section looks at three local strongmen – with informal and sometimes formal political, military and economic power in “their areas”: Mir Alam in Kunduz<sup>49</sup> and Amir Gul and Mullah Alam in Pasthun-dominated areas in neighbouring Baghlan.<sup>50</sup> The three strongmen have seen their position strengthened in recent years as their militias, or *arbaki*,<sup>51</sup> played crucial roles in large-scale military efforts led by the Afghan government and American and German forces operating in the provinces to push back the Taliban's growing influence in Kunduz and Baghlan after 2009.<sup>52</sup> However, Mir Alam and Amir Gul – both connected to the Shura-ye-Nazar faction of Jamiat-Islami, a former jihadi party that rose to prominence

during its fight against the Soviets in the 1980s and is currently registered as a political party – have not been active in maintaining public order within the communities in which they operate, nor in resolving disputes. In fact, they have both had a highly polarizing influence and are arguably one of the main causes of insecurity in areas under their influence.

Mullah Alam, on the other hand, although he is suspected of having committed human rights abuses during the jihad against the Soviets, is now locally credited with maintaining public order in his area, at least during the day. The Pashtun power broker, who is reportedly connected to former President Karzai's camp in Kabul, is also involved in dispute resolution through a shura that, in addition to him, includes elders and his commanders. In contrast to Mir Alam and Amir Gul, most of Mullah Alam's commanders have, in recent years, been integrated into the government through the ALP program – even though he himself does not hold an official position.

### **Functionalism: Issues Driving Their Emergence and Functioning**

Two main issues have driven the emergence of Mir Alam, Amir Gul and Mullah Alam as non-state security providers: political manoeuvrings from factions in Kabul and the insurgency.

#### *Political Manoeuvrings from Kabul*

After the defeat of the Taliban regime in 2001, the Shura-ye Nazar faction of the Jamiat party had gained much influence over the three security ministries (initially occupying the top positions). This meant that in Kunduz and Baghlan, both within Jamiat's sphere of influence in Afghanistan, the security apparatuses became dominated by Tajiks affiliated with Shura-ye Nazar factional leaders in Kabul. Although Jamiat managed to retain its dominance throughout the period under consideration, many of its commanders who became unemployed after the first post-2001 DDR program,<sup>53</sup> including Mir Alam in Kunduz and Amir Gul in Baghlan, were looking for a way to regain their influence. With political support from Marshal Fahim<sup>54</sup> and other Jamiati patrons in Kabul, some were able to remobilize after 2008. In the meantime, President Karzai's camp sought to counter Jamiat's dominance and expand its own power in the region, where it initially (in 2001) had very little influence. Much like Jamiat, it tried to strengthen its own ethnic group, and supported Pashtun power brokers, especially those with a Hizb-i-Islami background like Mullah Alam, through local government appointments and through supporting Pashtun militias (Derksen 2015; Giustozzi and Reuter, 2010: 8).<sup>55</sup>

*Insurgency*

The marginalization of Pashtuns in Kunduz (where they were the largest ethnic group) and Baghlan (where they were the second-largest ethnic group) and discontent among the broader population with corruption in the government and militias fighting each other fuelled local support for an insurgency that was externally initiated (Derksen 2015).<sup>56</sup> From 2008 onwards the insurgency gained strength, as the Taliban “started investing human and other resources into the Greater North on a much larger scale in 2008” (Giustozzi and Reuter, 2010: 7). In 2009, the insurgency, which also included non-Pashtuns, took off, with the number of incidents peaking at 300 in the third quarter. Antonio Giustozzi and Christoph Reuter sourced an ANA intelligence officer who estimated the number of insurgents in the northeast at 1,150 in 95 groups. Kunduz emerged as the “epicentre of insurgent activity in the Greater North,” and by early 2009, the Taliban controlled one of its districts, Chahardara (ibid.: 8, 35). That same year also saw much-increased Taliban activity in Baghlan, with the insurgents trying a military takeover of Baghlan-e-Jadid and infiltrating the provincial capital, Pul-i-Khumri (Goodhand and Hakimi, 2014: 27).<sup>57</sup>

The ISAF in both provinces seemed initially reluctant to get involved militarily. However, after the situation got worse and the insurgents threatened an important ISAF resupply route linking Kabul with Tajikistan, German forces operating in the northeast started to take a tougher stance against the insurgency in Kunduz, where they led the PRT, from April 2009 onwards. From spring 2010, they also deployed a 126-person Quick Reaction Force to Baghlan, as the Hungarians who were heading the PRT were reluctant to engage in combat operations (Goodhand and Hakimi, 2014: 28).<sup>58</sup> Moreover, in the summer of 2010, several thousand US troops, including US SOFs, were deployed to the north. The American SOFs started kill-or-capture missions together with their German counterparts. By October 2010, “around two-thirds of the 2009 Taleban leaders of Kunduz were captured or killed or had fled” (Munch 2013: 39). The Taliban in Baghlan also came under heavy pressure and lost four shadow governors in a short time (Derksen et al., 2013).

Without sufficient police and army in Kunduz and Baghlan to help the foreign forces in counterinsurgency operations, local government officials and foreign forces started to look to militias for extra muscle to defeat the Taliban. Kunduz saw Afghan initiatives to remobilize militias from 2008. In the summer of 2009, when a request was denied from the provincial governor, engineer Mohammad Omar, to include Kunduz in the Afghan Public Protection Program (or AP3), a pilot militia program that was running in Wardak province,<sup>59</sup> he began arming local jihadi commanders, “many of whom had fought the Taliban in 2001, to contain the insurgency and improve security” (Goodhand and Hakimi, 2014: 33). When Abdul Rahman Sayedkheili, a former jihadi commander linked to the Shura-ye Nazar faction of Jamiat, was appointed as provincial police commander in September 2010, he began handing out cash to militia or *arbaki* commanders, many of

them connected to his own party, to fight the Taliban, and to insurgents willing to switch sides (ibid.: 33). After the assassination of Sayedkheili,<sup>60</sup> the militias recruited by him in the Kunduz districts Qal-e-Zal, Chahardara and Alibad continued to be supported with US military Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP)<sup>61</sup> funds under the Critical Infrastructure Protection (CIP),<sup>62</sup> another militia program. Some of the *arbaki* were also absorbed into the ALP program, which was initiated in Kunduz in November 2010.<sup>63</sup>

Whereas in Kunduz the ALP seems to have generally favoured those already in power, including Jamiat, in Baghlan the militia program acquired a different character. There, marginalized Pashtun power brokers were included in the ALP, which started in February 2011. As they were seen to have been supporting the Taliban in Baghlan, Afghan government officials – especially those connected to the Karzai camp – and the US military supported them as a means of getting Pashtuns back on the government side (Derksen, 2011: 18; 2015).

### Political Economy: Resources

#### *Links to Political Patrons in Kabul*

After the collapse of the Taliban regime, Mir Alam, Amir Gul and Mullah Alam<sup>64</sup> became part of the Tajik-dominated security apparatuses in Kunduz and Baghlan, with the establishment in 2002 of the AMF, the predecessor of the ANP, which was not much more than a collection of militias on the payroll of the MoD, headed by Marshal Fahim from Shura-ye-Nazar. The 6<sup>th</sup> Corps headed by General Daoud Daoud, an important Shura-ye-Nazar figure, controlled the northeast. Mir Alam commanded the 54<sup>th</sup> division in Kunduz, and Amir Gul and Mullah Alam both worked as sub-commanders to Tajik commander Mustafa Mohseni, from a locally influential family tied to Shura-ye-Nazar, heading the 20<sup>th</sup> Division. After the first DDR program, the three men became unemployed (Derksen, 2015).

Mir Alam and Amir Gul eventually managed to get appointed as provincial police commander of Baghlan (Mir Alam, in 2006) and as district chief of Baghlan-i-Jadid (Amir Gul, in 2007). Mir Alam was fired again in 2007 as part of the police reform, and did not obtain a new government job. However, his position and that of Amir Gul was much strengthened when Marshal Fahim, who had left government in 2004, politically supported the remobilization of militias in the northeast from 2008 onwards – presumably as part of his bid to re-enter the government, which he did as vice-president in 2009.<sup>65</sup> Because of his support and that of other Jamiati power brokers in Kabul, Amir Gul, Mir Alam and their commanders were able to remobilize and operate with impunity.<sup>66</sup>

The remobilization of former Shura-ye-Nazar militias in the northeast under Fahim's political guidance after 2008 prompted officials around President Karzai to support

Pashtun strongmen and their militias, including former Hizb-i-Islami commander Mullah Alam in Baghlan. According to some sources, Alam and his men had joined the Taliban after he became unemployed as a result of the DDR program, but he denies this. By the end of 2010, Minister of Interior Atmar reportedly gave permission and support to arm 120 of his fighters to fight on the government side. The Baghlan police commander at the time, General Abdul Rahman Rahmani, who was trying to counter the Jamiat influence in the local security apparatus, supported this initiative, according to some sources.<sup>67</sup>

*Support in the Context of Counterinsurgency Efforts by Foreign Forces and the ANSF*

Mullah Alam seems to have profited most from direct foreign assistance, through the ALP program.<sup>68</sup> When the US SOFs initiated the ALP program in Baghlan in February 2011, Alam became one of their main local partners. As mentioned above, Alam did not obtain an ALP position himself but decided on appointments in Dand-e-Ghori in June and July 2011 through his shura (see below). He reportedly also exerted some influence over ALP appointments in Baghlan-i-Jadid and Dahane-Ghori. The ALP program was one of the factors in turning the tide against the insurgents in Baghlan (and Kunduz) in 2011.<sup>69</sup>

In contrast to Mullah Alam, Amir Gul does not seem to have been supported either by the foreign forces or by the local security apparatus, but was directly supported by Fahim, as described above.<sup>70</sup> He seems to have tried getting “his” commanders into the ALP, but was only partially successful, as other Pashtun power brokers seem to have intervened and advised against this with the American SOFs operating in the area. He did play a role in countering the insurgency in Baghlan in 2009 and 2010. In November 2009, hundreds of Taliban fighters stormed the district centre of Baghlan-e-Jadid and the home of Amir Gul, then the district governor, “in a conventional-style military attack” (Goodhand and Hakimi, 2014: 27). Amir Gul mobilized around 400 former Hezb-i-Islami commanders and pushed the Taliban back in “pitched battles lasting for days” (ibid.).

Although the German PRT in Kunduz had been wary of Mir Alam in the first half of the decade, after a suicide attack on a patrol in the Kunduz bazaar in May 2007 killed three soldiers, they started relying on him for intelligence. His position as the main informal power broker in Kunduz was boosted by key appointments in the national and local security sector after Fahim became vice-president in 2009: Bismullah Khan became minister of interior, General Daoud Daoud returned to the region as commander of the 303<sup>rd</sup> Pamir Regional Northern Zone of the ANP and Sayedkheili became the provincial police commander. Mir Alam remobilized his men as part of a local initiative headed by his brother-in-law National Directorate of Security (NDS) chief General Mohammad Daoud to rearm militias in 2009. General Daoud relied “almost exclusively” on Mir Alam, although in a later stage other militia commanders were also included (Goodhand and Hakimi, 2014: 33; Munch, 2013; Koebel, 2010).<sup>71</sup> Since that time, his closest commanders have continued to operate as *arbaki* rather than being included in the ALP, although some of the ALP

and ANP commanders are also connected to him. It is not clear if he tried to get more commanders into the ALP but failed, or if he wanted “to keep his hands free,” as one elder from Kunduz City and others said.<sup>72</sup>

#### *Income from Illegal Taxation, Business and Government Resources*

Formal and informal positions in the provincial security apparatus provide several ways of earning income from illegal business, including through taxation and extortion of villagers. Many interviewees linked commanders connected to Mir Alam, Amir Gul<sup>73</sup> and Mullah Alam to this type of money-making activities. Although there is anecdotal evidence connecting particular incidents to individual commanders, it is not clear if and how they are directed by the strongmen.

Another source of income for informal and formal actors in the security apparatuses is from the smuggling of drugs and other illegal goods like weapons. Kunduz and Baghlan are strategic areas, connecting the poppy-growing province of Badakhshan to Kabul. They also lie en route to Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Both Mir Alam and Amir Gul have been suspected of involvement in drugs trafficking. Mir Alam was fired as the police chief of Baghlan after a drugs raid on his compound (although it is not clear if these events were connected) but doesn't appear to have ever been arrested for involvement in drugs trafficking. Amir Gul was arrested in 2006; however, he was released after tribal elders put pressure on President Karzai (Koebl, 2010; Munch, 2013).<sup>74</sup>

#### **Communitarianism: Legitimacy?**

Illegal armed groups, or *arbakai*, are today generally seen in Kunduz and Baghlan as a source of insecurity rather than security, especially in the areas of influence of Mir Alam and Amir Gul. Problematically, due to the years of war, migration, pashtunization and the ethnic diversity in Kunduz, there are “no universally accepted communal forms of organization and institutions that are capable of checking and balancing the power of individuals,” according to Conrad Schetter, Rainer Glassner and Masood Karokheil (2007: 144). “This has resulted in mini-fiefdoms as well as localized ‘rules of law.’” Much the same can be said for neighbouring Baghlan, also an ethnically diverse province.

Because of the insecurity and disruption of government services attributed to illegal armed groups, Mir Alam and Amir Gul enjoy little legitimacy among the broader population. Most public support for the two strongmen runs along ethnic, factional and, in Amir Gul's case, tribal lines. Few people dare to criticize them, even anonymously. Locals who do support them do so mainly out of fear, according to most interviewees who were willing to talk about them.

Mir Alam gets most support from Tajik communities “and parts of the Aimaq and Uzbek communities” because of past factional links in the northeast of Kunduz City and in Khanabad district (TLO, 2011: 38). Research organization ATR Consulting concluded after conducting research in Kunduz in 2013 that Mir Alam’s influence on the provincial and district government structures is such that he often overrides the decisions of high-ranking officials of Kunduz. Afghan government officials estimated in 2014 that in Khanabad, a Pashtun-majority district that has no ALP, there were around 2,300 members of illegal armed groups, about half of whom are connected to Mir Alam. Most seem to share a connection to the Shura-ye-Nazar faction of Jamiat. They come from all ethnic groups but mostly Tajiks and Uzbeks and operate in groups from five to 15 men. In 2011 and 2012, the Afghan government announced their disarmament but the weapon collection was limited (Hewad, 2012; Rivera, 2011). Interviewees said commanders connected to Mir Alam could operate with impunity because of his support. “When they are arrested they are very quickly released again,” said one Afghan intelligence source. “If the governor or the police don’t help them they turn to Mir Alam, who, even since Fahim died, still has support in the MoI and in the MoD.” A former government official added: “They get money, weapons and ammunition from Mir Alam. He still has a lot of weapons in storage.”<sup>75</sup>

In Khanabad, the informal security sector is fragmented and uncontrolled and militias have become a source of violence, fuelled by ethnic and social tensions. Commanders connected to Mir Alam have carved out mini-fiefs and are fighting other militia commanders and Taliban for the “right” to tax and extort the local population. “When people want to sell their land, they have to pay a bribe to the local militia group,” said one local elder, an assertion that is supported by other interviewees. “Even when people marry their daughters off they have to pay some dowry money to the militia commander.” The militia commanders also “tax” reconstruction projects.<sup>76</sup>

Elders complain that they can’t impose their authority, and that they can’t communicate with the commanders. The elders are involved in dispute resolution, through shuras established as part of the National Solidarity Programme. “Members of the shuras have relatives in the illegal armed groups, so they maintain the security for the shuras,” said a local government official. However, research organization ATR found during research conducted in 2013 that elders’ efforts to mediate between commanders seldom work, as the commanders don’t respect the elders. The Taliban are even perceived as more supportive to the population’s needs than the militias, and therefore attract ever increasing support. According to one government official, families try to spread their sons among the Taliban, the government and illegal armed groups in order to prevent getting harassed by any of these groups (Derksen 2015; Goodhand and Hakimi, 2014: 38).<sup>77</sup>

Amir Gul does not have the same provincial-level influence as Mir Alam, and since he was fired as district governor of Baghlan-e Jadid at the end of 2012, his influence seems

to have decreased somewhat. This led to a slight improvement in security in Baghlan-e-Jadid, which is described as an extremely volatile district as a result of the combination of the insurgency and illegal armed groups, according to research organization ATR in 2013. However, Amir Gul remains the most powerful informal actor in “his” district, with several ALP commanders and illegal armed groups engaged in illegal taxation, extortion, kidnappings and killings, reportedly connected to him. He is also connected to commanders in neighbouring Nahrin, including Taliban commanders. He seems to be supported by families of his own tribe, who moved with him from Pul-i-Khumri to Baghlan-i-Jadid during the jihad against the Soviets, but also seem to enjoy support from several elders from other tribes in Baghlan-e-Jadid. Prominent provincial council members connected to Shura-ye Nazar support him and he seems to still have a following among some former Hizb-i-Islami commanders and their followers in Baghlan-e-Jadid. In general though, villagers seem scared of Amir Gul, and some of those who dare to talk about him say harassment by his commanders leads people to support the insurgency (Derksen, 2015).

The ALP, in which Mullah Alam is involved, and which has had more oversight from the Afghan government and the foreign forces than other militia initiatives, is also often seen in a bad light by the local population. ALP commanders (some, at least) protect local villages against Taliban attacks or prevent abuses by Jamiat-dominated government security forces. But they also commit human rights abuses, like the harassment, kidnapping and killing of civilians. “The predominantly Pashtun ALP in Baghlan, for example, has a record of harming and abusing the Pashtun communities it is purportedly protecting” (Goodhand and Hakimi, 2014: 31). The most notorious example is Nur-ul-Haq, a former Hezb-i-Islami commander turned ALP commander in Shahabuddin, whose men harassed local villagers.<sup>78</sup> In Mullah Alam’s area of Dande-Ghori, village elders say that ALP commanders connected to Mullah Alam keep the Taliban out and generally provide security during the day but that at night “it is difficult to know who is Taliban and who is ALP.” Another elder said that some of the ALP commanders were involved in harassing the local population and kidnapping for ransom, but didn’t think Mullah Alam was personally responsible. Locals were generally more positive about Mullah Alam, who is thought to take action against criminals through his shura (see below), than they were about Amir Gul and Mir Alam in “their” areas.<sup>79</sup>

Mullah Alam also has support in the provincial council, from Pashtun and non-Pashtun power brokers who are against the dominance of Shura-ye Nazar. By contrast, the Shura-ye Nazar power brokers are very much opposed to him and accuse him of being in cahoots with the Taliban. In 2004, Mullah Alam established a shura, which, according to him, is registered with the Ministry of Justice, and which is engaged in local dispute resolution. The shura, which he claimed has around 5,000 members (who don’t all attend at the same time), is held irregularly (according to need) in his compound. He reportedly dominates proceedings and decisions.<sup>80</sup>

### Conclusion

Former jihadi commanders Mir Alam, Amir Gul and Mullah Alam were able to remobilize their militias after 2008 in part because political leaders in Kabul tried to expand their powerbases before the 2009 presidential elections, and because of the counterinsurgency operations against the growing insurgency, which gathered pace after 2009. However, the political polarization and fragmented security landscape in Kunduz and Baghlan, due to the years of war and ethnic diversity, meant there were few checks on the power of militia commanders. With support from local strongmen, they carved out mini-fiefdoms and employed the “rule of the gun” in “their” areas. Although the situation differs from area to area, in places like Khanabad in Kunduz the increased competition over territory and the right to levy illegal taxes means that commanders have little time, capacity and willingness to focus on basic public goods, like security and justice. They have become a source of insecurity, rather than security.

In the Pashtun areas of Baghlan, the situation differs; some strongmen who are thought to support predatory commanders, like Amir Gul, have little support from the local population, and are generally perceived to contribute to instability in already volatile districts. The informal influence of others, like Mullah Alam, seems to be more accepted by the previously marginalized Pashtun population in their areas, in spite of a past of human rights abuses. The inclusion of Mullah Alam’s commanders and other Pashtun power brokers in the ALP program has partially offset the Tajik domination of the security system in Baghlan, one of the factors driving local support for the insurgency. However, as Hakimi and Goodhand (2014: 31) argue: “One paradoxical outcome of the U.S. military’s role in the formation and support to the ALP in Baghlan has been the reinforcement of two separate but interconnected governing orders, one for Tajiks, and one for Pashtuns.”

## PART 2: PROSPECTS FOR STATE BUILDING AND STATE FORMATION

This part looks at two sets of questions. First, what are the implications of security provision by non-state security actors like the ones profiled above for state formation in Afghanistan? Can these non-state actors be incorporated into the process of state consolidation? Do they negotiate hybrid relationships and share governance functions with the state or do they represent alternative governance structures with pronounced autonomy from state structures? Do they complement or contradict donor-supported state-building projects? These questions are answered by considering the relationship between these actors and the state.

Second, can programs of state building, like the international attempt to build a modern liberal state in Afghanistan since 2001, proceed where no actor enjoys a monopoly of force and where there is no overarching social contract? This question has been debated in recent years as state-building efforts, including the one in Afghanistan, are seen to be failing. A new direction in security sector reform literature argues that engaging non-state security providers can contribute to medium- to long term state building by stabilizing and securing the political environment. Would this work in Afghanistan?

### Implications of Non-state Security Provision for State Formation

#### *Hybrid Governance System*

The case studies above confirm that the accommodation policy of the Karzai government and its international allies for the sake of short-term stabilization has created a hybrid governance system in Afghanistan, with weak formal institutions and significant informal power. The reliance on warlords and strongmen “to advance a number of high priority agendas, from security and reconstruction to counternarcotics and counterinsurgency” enabled them to expand their influence in the periphery. The resulting hybrid governance model is nothing new in the Afghan context, as Karzai’s approach should be seen as part of a “longer tradition in Afghan state building and governance through accommodation of powerful competitors” (Mukhopadhyay, 2009: 2).

However, the hybrid governance system in Afghanistan should not be seen in terms of the state developing co-governance arrangements with non-state actors, as this implies a clear division between the two. In Afghanistan, the expansion of the government bureaucracy funded by foreign donors in combination with the accommodation approach led to the inclusion of warlords and strongmen in the state apparatus on paper, while in reality their patronage networks (or solidarity groups) remained intact. The new government officials then used their positions to favour those within their patronage networks, and in some cases also brought them temporarily or permanently into the government apparatus.

For example, Marshal Fahim was one of the political-military leaders who was brought into the government, and then used his position to reward those in his network, by incorporating them into the AMF. However, the careers of Mir Alam and Amir Gul, both clients of Fahim, show that their inclusion was not permanent. Rather, they switched back and forth from being in government and operating as non-state actors. The same was true for Marshal Fahim himself, who was removed as minister of defense in 2004 and only returned into government in 2009 as vice-president. In some ways, being in or out of office did not change much in the way these actors operated. Their solidarity groups remained their main support networks, which had to be accommodated in various ways – some legal, some illegal.

The Karzais, although they were not former warlords or strongmen like Fahim, General Dostum and Ismael Khan, adopted some of the same patronage politics. They were able to build an extensive network of armed clients in the south, many of whom were former jihadi commanders who they were able to bring into the government apparatus because of their own strong position in it. Matiullah and his uncle Jan Mohammad were part of their network, as described above. To counter Jamiat's influence in the north, the Karzai camp supported Pashtun power brokers, including Mullah Alam in Baghlan.

### *Relative Strength*

Real power in Afghanistan is thus vested in competing and forever shifting solidarity networks, parts of which are in the government, and parts of which function as non-state actors. State institutions in many places hold less power compared to these solidarity networks, as the case studies show. Human rights abuses committed by many of these actors and their commanders have gone unpunished, even though, in some cases, victims included government personnel.

However, paradoxically these types of non-state actors are only as strong as state actors (notably their political patrons in Kabul) and foreign donors, their main sources of support, allow them to be. They are in power only as long as they receive external funds or political back-up from Kabul. They are delegitimized by their association with state actors and foreign donors (and vice versa), especially if these patrons allow them to operate with impunity, as was the case with commanders described above. In sum, the non-state actors profiled in this paper only have a narrow base of local support, so their strength is relatively limited.<sup>81</sup> If political patrons in Kabul and foreign donors had consistently supported the prosecution of commanders who violated human rights or committed other crimes, and ensured the representation of all the main communities in the local non-state security set-ups, then perhaps the militias would have enjoyed broader support. That this was not the case reflected the United States' prioritization of counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations against the Taliban over state building in Afghanistan.

### *Legitimacy?*

Much has been written about the Afghan government's lack of legitimacy. This problem is further highlighted by the strong insurgency, fuelled by support from local communities partly as a result of marginalization and harassment by government officials. The lack of Afghan government legitimacy is one of the reasons for the international community exploring support for non-state security providers in the latter stages of the intervention. However, although non-state security providers may have closer links to local communities than the state, to conclude that they have more legitimacy as a result would be wrong. The non-state security providers profiled above have at best very limited legitimacy. This is the result of their external, rather than internal, sources of support, as the case studies show. The next part of this section further explores this point in relation to the international engagement in Afghanistan.

### **International State Building**

#### *State Building or Military Campaign?*

Searches for viable alternative governance structures than the Western state model promoted by the state-building efforts of the international community in places like Afghanistan stem from the perception among observers that these efforts have failed. There have been major advances in all areas of governance compared with the Taliban regime, including in the building up of a sizeable army and police force. However, the corruption, predation and maladministration that have also characterized the post-2001 government has clearly disenfranchised many inside Afghanistan, and has fuelled support for an insurgency that has been successful in challenging the state's influence outside the cities. Furthermore, the proliferation of militias and strongmen type non-state security actors underline the weakness of the current state to assert its power over its territory and control the means of violence.

It is clear that by embarking on a state building mission in Afghanistan, the international community set itself a huge task in 2001, considering that the state's political, economic and military infrastructure had mostly collapsed in recent decades of war. Moreover, the Afghan state had always been weak and had always relied on deals with power brokers in the periphery. Therefore, it seems that the aim to create a state based on the model of statehood as currently seen in the West was overambitious. These inherent limitations may make a state-building project in Afghanistan impossible.

However, the point here is that in the country's periphery, this agenda has been overshadowed by the international community's military campaign (Derksen, 2015). The case studies above show how short-term military considerations rather than long-term

state-building imperatives have driven the security sector reform agenda in the provinces. Therefore, the argument that alternative governance structures should be considered because the state-building effort has failed in Afghanistan is moot. The stories above show that international actors in Afghanistan have not primarily promoted liberal peace, but a hybrid political order, in which non-state security actors are supported alongside official security forces. This was the result of the international community pursuing two often-contradictory projects in Afghanistan simultaneously: state building and a military campaign, with most financial and political investment going into the latter.

#### *Encourage Militia Formation?*

Analysts have taken different angles in their critique of the state-building model promoting liberal peace in fragile states, including in Afghanistan. It is worthwhile to examine them with the case studies above in mind. One group of critics argues that the international community (seeking to establish modern states based on a Western model of statehood) has operated on a false assumption about historical processes of state building. State formation in Europe was a “violent process of subjugation and domination” (Ahram, 2011: 117). Therefore, rather than seeking to rebuild state capacity, as it has attempted in Afghanistan and other countries, Ahram (2011), for example, argues the international community should consider replacing dysfunctional states by devolving power directly to other systems of local protection, and encourage the formation of local militias and paramilitary forces. Attempts to devolve violence to non-state actors have come only belatedly in Afghanistan, after all policy options were exhausted, according to Ahram. The implication is that Afghanistan would be less of a mess today if this strategy had been followed from the beginning. This paper argues instead that much of the insecurity in Afghanistan today is actually the result of exactly the strategy Ahram proposes.

First, devolving violence to non-state actors has been ongoing in Afghanistan since the defeat of the Taliban regime in 2001 and this policy has been an important factor in the increase of violence in the region from 2005 onwards. The widespread US support in the south for militias operating with impunity like Matiullah’s, and the Afghan Security Guards in Uruzgan, has arguably been one of the main drivers of local support for the insurgency, which, in turn, is one of the main sources of instability in Afghanistan today. Ironically, Matiullah’s militia, part of which were supported under the ALP program, were locally credited with providing security against Taliban attacks. However, interviewees outside his inner circle argue that the underlying problem of political exclusion, which could be perpetuated by Matiullah’s control over the means of violence in Afghanistan, was not solved before his death.<sup>82</sup> He did not have a clear successor with a similar level of control, so his death could potentially open the way to a more inclusive local order. However, in the short term it may spark greater instability.

Second, even support for militias in the latter stages of the international intervention in Afghanistan, for example, in Kunduz and Baghlan, was initiated before other policy options were explored and have led in places to an increase in instability. In the summer of 2009, the German military suggested sending 2,500 additional police to Kunduz instead of arming local militias, “which they thought risked undermining the formal security structures and reversing the modest progress made through the DDR and DIAG programs” (Goodhand and Hakimi, 2014: 33). However, local government officials in Kunduz started supporting jihadi commanders to mobilize *arbakai*, which were later partly incorporated in foreign-funded militia programs. The case studies show how local militias in Kunduz and Baghlan are now, in some places, seen as contributing to insecurity. In other places, their behaviour has been more positive. However, the question is what will happen with these mobilized men once foreign funding dries up. ALP Chief Ali Shah Ahmadzai believes, like many others, these men will engage in banditry if they are no longer paid.<sup>83</sup>

Third, there does not seem to be broad local political support for foreign involvement with militias. Even though Afghan political leaders have themselves been involved in supporting illegal militias, there have also been factions in the Karzai administration that have tried to counter the proliferation of foreign-backed militias in Afghanistan. Most importantly, former President Karzai himself has, in many instances, opposed international support to militias, and initiatives to establish militia programs – even though he may have acted from personal interests rather than with a view to centralize the means of violence to build a strong state. Moreover, a westernized faction in the Karzai government tried in 2005 to move toward disbanding internationally supported militias under the DIAG, but failed partly because of a lack of support by the international community (Derksen, 2015).

Another critique on state building, as forwarded by Peter Albrecht and Helene Maria Kyed and others, is that it is too state centric. Considering that non-state actors “are the primary providers of justice and security in the Global South where they deal with an estimated 80 to 90% of disputes,” foreign donors should rethink their state-centric agenda. Albrecht and Kyed argue that the state/non-state dichotomy that informs the state building framework “rarely reflects reality,” and that the point of departure should rather be how services are provided and by whom (Albrecht et al., 2011: 3; Albrecht and Kyed, 2010: 2). In Afghanistan in the latter years of the intervention, there was a growing perception among Western policymakers that the state was part of the problem (Goodhand and Hakimi, 2014: 10). The international community then became more involved in supporting traditional justice mechanisms and local shuras dealing with governance issues – with mixed results (Shahm Mahmood and Coburn, 2010; Fearon, 2011; Coburn, 2011; Nielse, 2011).

The US-supported official militia programs that were initiated from 2006 onwards,<sup>84</sup> including the ALP in 2010, drew on Afghan traditions of community policing like the

*arbakai* (Goodhand and Hakimi, 2014: 90).<sup>85</sup> There were, however, several problems with the assumptions that communities could influence the mobilization and demobilization of militias, and that these would improve local security. First, the assumption that communities can influence militias is an out-dated idea based on the pre-1978 stability in Afghanistan. “(T)raditional forms of governance and traditional leaders have been severely weakened during the conflict—suppressed successively by the communist and subsequent regimes and captured, supplanted, or replaced by war-related arrangements characterized by armed violence and the threat of it,” according to William Byrd (2012). “Massive urbanization also has eroded traditional rural governance mechanisms for a large part of the increasingly urbanized population” (*ibid.*: 11).<sup>86</sup>

Second, even in cases where communities still influence the mobilization of militias, outside support will 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.

The case studies show that also since 2001, commanders are accountable to their external donors (foreign forces and political patrons in Kabul) rather than to local communities. While local communities in the south were interested in security providers maintaining public order and in support with resolving local disputes over land and water in the first years after 2001, militia commanders followed the agenda of their foreign donors and focused on hunting Taliban. In the northeast, local communities view political support by patrons in Kabul to commanders as the reason they can operate with impunity and get away with illegal taxation, extortion and the kidnapping of villagers.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, the question is if non-state security providers fairly represent their respective communities.<sup>87</sup> As the case studies show in Uruzgan and Kunduz, foreign support to local commanders has enabled minority groups to dominate the local political order and exclude large parts of the population. In Baghlan, the ALP became dominated by Pashtun power brokers, which seems fair as the militia program was initiated in Pashtun-dominated areas. However, this led to the establishment of two competing security systems in the province.

In a society like Afghanistan, where informal structures are often more important than services provided by the state, there seems little doubt that it is important for foreign donors to be aware of non-state security providers. However, the question is if the international community should interfere in local security set-ups or even create new systems, or if it can cause harm by doing so. The current situation in Afghanistan seems

to suggest that international interference in non-state security provision has done more harm than good. “‘What works’ sometimes works because of (a) lack of international engagement,” according to Albrecht and Kyed (2010). “International actors may therefore use their leverage with governments to create a space for local providers, rather than engage directly with them.” The case studies seem to suggest that a hands-off approach of the international community regarding non-state security providers would contribute more towards stabilization than its current engagement.

#### *Improve State-building Agenda?*

The last critique on state building in Afghanistan that will be explored here is that the international community has compromised the state building process by co-opting domestic elites “who use the legitimacy and power resources granted by transitional governance, and the subsequent aid economy, to turn the state into an arena of rent-seeking and distribution that is then employed in the struggle for political power” (Barma, 2012: 274). Rather than turning away from the goal of instituting effective and legitimate government as the basis for sustainable peace, and instead “stand by as patronage and predation contribute to insecurity” as some of the state building critics propose, Barma proposes to improve state-building policies (ibid). First, the international community should avoid picking winners and thereby locking in a particular domestic power configuration. Second, it should embark on a gradual and more expansive course of peace building that defers elections and focuses on institutionalization in order to prevent state capture by anointed elites. Third, it should focus on party building. Fourth, it should emphasize alternative mechanisms for building the state-society compact, particularly from the ground up.

While these suggestions may make sense for other fragile states emerging from conflict, the question is if they were realistic in the Afghan context after 2001. This is not to suggest that Afghanistan was not ready for liberal peace. On the contrary, anecdotal evidence from years of research suggests that the majority of Afghans were very supportive of a genuinely democratic system and an end to warlordism.

However, the US-dominated international engagement has not been primarily focused on bringing liberal peace to Afghanistan. The United States’ initial interest was in taking revenge for the 9/11 attacks and in preventing the country from becoming a safe haven for terrorists again. This had implications for the state-building agenda that was added soon after the intervention. For example, a policy of not picking winners as Barma proposes could, in theory, have contributed to establishing liberal peace in Afghanistan. But this was not realistic in 2001 as the whole purpose of the intervention was to attack the Taliban regime – which inevitably generated winners.

Although the United States' interests, especially making sure the country will not again become a safe haven for terrorists, would arguably be best served by a stable and democratic Afghanistan, a more short-term approach has been taken, and the opportunity to bring more fundamental changes was lost – if that opportunity ever existed. Moving forward, it seems unlikely that the international community is politically and financially invested in engaging itself at the same level in Afghanistan as it has over the past decade. Therefore, chances of a more sustainable state-building project along the lines Barma proposes seem remote.

### *Redefining Local Security*

Considering the arguments above, what should be the engagement of the international community regarding non-state security providers in Afghanistan in the future? Security in Afghanistan has been defined from an international perspective since 2001. The intervention started with the broader issue of security from terrorist attacks in the United States. Once in Afghanistan, Taliban attacks on foreign troops occupied a central place in their perspective of the security situation, with an absence of attacks counting as “security.” In order to increase the security of military bases, ISAF transportation routes and patrols in provinces, foreign troops supported local militias. However, these militias often caused insecurity for local communities, as the case studies also show.

A more stable Afghanistan seems to require a shift in the policies of foreign donors away from a focus on the security of international actors operating in the country to a focus on the security of local communities. Such a policy shift – for which there may be more room as foreign forces are drawing down and the international involvement in the country changes – would lead to a different discussion on who are the real security providers in Afghanistan. A new agenda regarding non-state security actors should start by mapping who is who among the local commanders – an exercise that can draw on a wealth of data collected over the past 14 years, including in the context of existing or former programs involving non-state actors. One way in which the international community can contribute toward security for communities is by supporting the Afghan government in prosecuting commanders who violate human rights. Regarding non-state actors who enjoy broad local support, the most constructive international role would be to make sure international troops are not in the way, though the drawdown has already changed much in this respect. Foreign donors should stop actively supporting militia commanders, including those in the ALP (even though some of them may genuinely provide security), and instead focus their attention on the ANA and the ANP. But rather than simply dropping support for militia commanders, they should assist them in their reintegration into the ANP or in civilian society if that is their preferred option.

However, continued support for the ANSF is also not a long-term solution to the security problem in Afghanistan, as foreign donors are not willing and able to foot the bill

indefinitely. Moreover, as the example of Matiullah in Uruzgan shows, the police and army are not neutral state institutions. A more fundamental change in the environment in which non-state security providers operate can only be brought about by a change in the political order, toward more inclusion, a process that foreign donors can support. Such a political process is bound to be complicated and full of unappealing compromises. Foreign donors should make an effort to support a genuinely inclusive process, one that brings all main political factions to the table, including the Taliban, and one that also incorporates the voice of civil society in the broadest sense of the word – including non-state security and justice providers.

## CONCLUSION

Whereas in the history of Afghanistan non-state actors traditionally mobilized their solidarity groups by seeking approval from their communities, interference from foreign powers in several stages of the past 35 years of war has changed that dynamic profoundly. Nowadays, the most powerful non-state security actors operating in Afghanistan are accountable to foreign donors or political patrons in Kabul rather than to their communities. Therefore, not only is the state weak and suffering from a lack of legitimacy, the same is true for many of the militia commanders who have been employed by foreign militaries on the assumption that non-state security providers enjoy community support. Moreover, their long-time dominance has eroded the influence on non-state security provision from traditional leaders – the khans.

The accommodation policy adopted by the Karzai government and its international allies meant a perpetuation of a hybrid governance system, whose main characteristics (weak formal institutions and significant informal power) preceded 2001 but were strengthened by an influx of foreign funds after the fall of the Taliban, much of which was used by warlords and strongmen to reward their clients rather than to build institutions. In the short term, there seems little alternative to this governance system. However, foreign donors play a significant role in the issue of the legitimacy of the government and of non-state actors – which plays a central role in the conflict in Afghanistan. While both state and non-state actors are, to a great extent, dependent on foreign resources (next to the drugs business) and if a full blown civil war is to be avoided, these should not decrease radically any time soon donors should rethink how they can offer support in a way that really benefits the security in Afghanistan.

## NOTES

1. See Derksen (2015).
2. Non-state security providers in Afghanistan usually mobilize men in the context of solidarity groups, or *qaum*, a key concept in Afghan society but difficult to define as “it designates a group as a whole as compared to anyone outside it” (Azoy, 2012: 30). Solidarity groups can be based on familial, ethnic, tribal and sub-tribal relations, but “other important affiliations include those based on the mujahedeen political parties or tanzims (which can represent a shared political or religious outlook, shared battlefield experiences or simply being part of a share network with the access and the resources that provides), area of origin, shared economic interests, ties through marriage, and the bonds between former brother in arms, classmates and colleagues (the *andiwali* or comrade networks)” (Van Bijlert, 2013: 99). The nuclear family is usually at the core of a leader’s solidarity group, with cousins and uncles in a second ring – although loyalty there is already more problematic. In general, however, social relations are temporary and flexible and a “(m)an is less a passive recipient of social fate than an active entrepreneur” (Azoy, 2012: 31).
3. Some of the findings have been previously published by the Afghanistan Analysts Network, Foreign Policy online, Peace Research Institute Oslo and by United States Institute of Peace, which, like the Centre for Security Governance, also provided some of the funding for research (“The Politics of Disarmament and Rearmament in Afghanistan,” Peaceworks series no. 110, United States Institute of Peace, May 2015, available at <http://www.usip.org/publications/2015/05/20/the-politics-of-disarmament-and-reamament-in-afghanistan>; “All the President’s Strongmen,” Foreign Policy Online, December 8 2014, available at <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/12/08/all-the-presidents-strongmen/>; “Reintegrating Armed Groups in Afghanistan,” Peace Brief, United States Institute of Peace, March 7, 2014, available at [www.usip.org/publications/reintegrating-armed-groups-in-afghanistan](http://www.usip.org/publications/reintegrating-armed-groups-in-afghanistan); “Transition in Uruzgan: Power at the Centre,” Afghanistan Analysts Network, June 12, 2013, available at [www.afghanistan-analysts.org/transition-in-uruzgan-2-power-at-the-centre](http://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/transition-in-uruzgan-2-power-at-the-centre); “Impact or Illusion? Reintegration under the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program,” Peace Brief, United States Institute of Peace, September 29, 2011, available at [www.usip.org/publications/impact-or-illusion-reintegration-under-the-afghanistan-peace-and-reintegration-program](http://www.usip.org/publications/impact-or-illusion-reintegration-under-the-afghanistan-peace-and-reintegration-program); “Peace from the Bottom-Up? The Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program,” Peace Research Institute Oslo, September 29, 2011, available at [www.prio.org/Publications/Publication/?x=7308](http://www.prio.org/Publications/Publication/?x=7308). This paper also draws on the author’s work as a journalist for the Dutch newspaper *de Volkskrant* in Afghanistan from 2006 to 2009, on which she published a Dutch book *Thee met de Taliban, Oorlogsverslaggeving voor Beginners*, De Geus, 2010. Uruzgan is located at the southern foothills of the Hindu Kush; the north of the province has mountains up to almost 2,778 m, while the south is relatively flat. It is one of the most thinly populated, remote, conservative and religious-minded provinces in Afghanistan. It has traditionally had low levels of education, a limited government presence and high levels of violence, even by Afghan standards. Agriculture and animal husbandry are key economic activities, next to poppy growing. However, the acreage of arable land has decreased since the 1990s due to increased water scarcity. Many young men have sought employment outside the province, or even outside the country, and remittances are another important source of income in this poor province. While Uruzgan was entirely Hazara until the mid-eighteenth century, now they are only 10 percent of the population; the other 90 percent of the approximately 375,000 inhabitants is Pashtun – which means the province is situated today in the so-called Pashtun tribal belt of Afghanistan, roughly covering the southern and eastern part of the country. The main elements of Pashtun identity are “the shared code of honor (*pashtunwali*); the belief in a common ancestor: Qais Abdur Rashid; and the religion of Islam” (Government of the Netherlands, 2006: 7). Tribal elders and religious leaders referring to Pashtunwali and Islam traditionally play a prominent role in what in the West are considered classic state functions like the recruitment of armed men, dispute resolution and taxation. Political and military mobilization traditionally happens in the context of the solidarity network, or *qaum*. In Pashtun society, *qaum* usually refers to kinship relations. Tribal and sub-tribal affiliations are the most important focus of loyalty, conflict and obligations of patronage in the south, but they overlap with relationships based on shared experiences on the battlefield; on coming from the same village; or on being part of the same religious or economic network. Politically and tribally, Uruzgan is part of Greater Kandahar,

consisting also of Helmand, Zabul and Kandahar provinces – with Kandahar City as the “gravitational center for the whole zone” (Unpublished survey for the Dutch government, 2006, page 14) The main tribal fault lines in greater Kandahar run along tribal divisions: between the Durranni and Ghilzai confederations; between the Zeerak and Panjpai branches within the Durrani and between the Popolzai and Barakzai tribes within the Zeerak (Afghan rulers from 1747 to 1978 were mainly drawn from the Popolzai and Barakzai tribes, and supported kinsmen from the south). However, Dorronsoro (2000: 109) argues that “broad sources of solidarity,” like tribal confederations, “do not constitute a framework for mobilization.” Rather, in the south, mobilization appears to occur more at the sub-tribal level. (Fishstein, 2012; Dorronsoro, 2000; unpublished survey for the Dutch government, 2006; Van Bijlert, 2013).

4. In 2014, Matiullah claimed that the Mol – presumably with the 2014 presidential elections in mind – paid for all his men, including 950 of the 1583 Afghan National Police (ANP) that he still used as highway police. In addition to the ANP, he oversaw the Afghan Local Police (ALP), which numbered 2250 men according to Matiullah and 2000 according to a representative of the ALP headquarters. Interviews with Matiullah in Tirin Kot in May 2013 and May 2014; interview with representative of ALP headquarters in Kabul, Tirin Kot, in May 2014.
5. The first post-2001 DDR program was led by the United Nations on behalf of the Afghan government under the Afghanistan New Beginnings Program (ANBP) that was created for this purpose in 2003. The first DDR program, which ran to 2005, aimed at disarming, demobilizing and reintegrating members of the AMF, a collection of militia that had helped the United States defeat the Taliban regime in 2001, and was paid by the Afghan MoD with foreign funds. It was followed by the Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups program in 2005 (ongoing) that was more Afghan owned than DDR and targeted all illegal armed groups in Afghanistan. Together the programs claimed to have disarmed and demobilized tens of thousands of armed men, although data are generally unreliable in Afghanistan. They may have resulted in temporary improvements in security in certain areas, but the proliferation of armed groups in Afghanistan today shows that overall they failed to contribute to stability (Derksen, 2015).
6. Although the Achekzai and Barakzai are separate tribes they often act together and are thought to once have been one tribe.
7. As estimated by TLO in Kabul.
8. Interviews with Afghan and Western officials and elders and former jihadi commanders from Uruzgan between 2006 and 2014. See also Derksen (2015).
9. In 2004, FOBs were established in Khas Uruzgan district and in Char Chineh district.
10. President Karzai removed another Popalzai power broker to make place for Jan Mohammad as governor. He reportedly also gave him special dispensation to appoint district governors, which Jan Mohammad did, in the process removing rivals who had already been chosen by their communities and replacing them with his allies. After President Karzai had to remove Jan Mohammad from Uruzgan in 2006, he kept backing him and made him “tribal adviser” in Kabul. From that position Jan Mohammad worked to destabilize Uruzgan and keep his influence on local appointments, apparently unhindered by Karzai. (Derksen, 2010; 2015; Gopal, 2014).
11. These were irregular militia working mainly with US SOFs to guard bases and assist them in fighting the Taliban. They worked very closely together, and the ASG/ASF usually provided local intelligence on “Taliban,” who, in many cases, were simply personal rivals of the particular commander.
12. The president’s half-brother was officially the head of the provincial council in Kandahar until his death in July 2011, but in reality had extensive informal powers in the southern region. There were many claims that Ahmed Wali Karzai and Matiullah had set up a private security company for the provision of protection for trucks travelling in Kandahar and Uruzgan, and that they were involved in drugs smuggling through this transportation network, but both denied these allegations in interviews (interviews with Matiullah in Tirin Kot in March 2008 and with Ahmad Wali Karzai in Kandahar in June 2008; see also Derksen, 2010).
13. The Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) writes in its Quarterly Report of January 30, 2015 (page 98) on the ALP: “The Afghan Local Police (ALP) is under MOI authority and functions under the supervision of the district Afghan Uniformed Police (AUP). ALP members (known as Guardians) are selected by

village elders or local power brokers to protect their communities against Taliban attack, guard facilities, and conduct local counterinsurgency missions. As of December 1, 2014, the ALP comprised 27,837 personnel, all but 800 of whom were fully trained, according to the NATO Special Operations Component Command-Afghanistan (NSOCC-A).”

14. Overall, Matiullah seems to have had most control over appointments in central districts like Tirin Kot, Dehrawud and Chenartu – where positions were filled by members of his inner circle. The further from the centre, the more he had to rely on proxies, or, in some cases, had to contend with the influence of other power brokers.
15. Interviews with members of Karzai’s group in Tirin Kot and Kabul, 2006–2014. See also Gopal (2014).
16. Interviews with Western and Afghan officials, and tribal elders, 2006–2014. See also Gopal (2014).
17. They targeted rival power brokers from all tribes, but reportedly especially members of the traditionally weaker Ghilzai and Panjpai tribes they associated with the Taliban regime, even though many had not supported it.
18. For more on how Jan Mohammad and Matiullah’s actions contributed to the insurgency in Uruzgan see Derksen (2015). In interviews in Tirin Kot and Kabul between 2006 and 2009, the late Jan Mohammad always emphasized that he had not been “too hard on any specific tribe.”
19. Interviews with elders and local officials and former officials from Uruzgan in Tirin Kot and Kabul 2013 and 2014.
20. US Embassy Cable, “PRT/Tarin Kowt – Security Programs Getting Traction in Uruzgan Province,” April 12, 2006, available at: [www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06KABUL1669\\_a.html](http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06KABUL1669_a.html).
21. Interviews with American and Australian officials between 2006 and 2013, Tirin Kot. See also Epstein and Kelly (2011).
22. This prioritization is seen, for example, in US Embassy cables. In one, the continued support of Matiullah is advocated, even though his militia “is not effective at patrolling Uruzgan’s roads.” But “they are seasoned anti-Taliban fighters.” (US Embassy Cable, “PRT/Tarin Kowt: Governor Monib’s Tenuous Grasp on Uruzgan Province,” May 14, 2006, available at: [www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06KABUL2178\\_a.html](http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06KABUL2178_a.html)).
23. See also Derksen (2013).
24. Based on the report that Matiullah protected 200 trucks per month going from Kandahar to Camp Holland near Tirin Kot for \$1,700 per truck (Kelly, 2009; Schmeidl, 2012: 24, 33; interviews with tribal elders and Western and Afghan government officials between 2006 and 2014).
25. Uruzgan came sixth on the list of main poppy cultivating provinces in Afghanistan between 2007 and 2013 (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC] and Islamic Republic of Afghanistan – Ministry of Counter Narcotics, 2013).
26. US Embassy Cable, “PRT/Tarin Kowt – Security Programs Getting Traction in Uruzgan Province,” April 12, 2006, available at: [www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06KABUL1669\\_a.html](http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06KABUL1669_a.html); Government of the Netherlands, 2006; interviews with international and Afghan government officials, tribal elders, Ahmed Wali Karzai, Jan Mohammad and Matiullah between 2006 and 2014.
27. Interview with control manager, ALP general directorate, Tirin Kot, May 2014.
28. As described in Glassman and Murvar (eds.) (1984: 134).
29. Three interviews with Matiullah in Tirin Kot in May 2013 and May 2014.
30. Interviews with Western officials in Tirin Kot and The Hague, with Afghan officials and journalists in Kabul and Tirin Kot and with elders from Uruzgan, 2006–2014; Government of the Netherlands (2006); US Embassy Cable, “PRT/Tarin Kowt – Security Programs Getting Traction in Uruzgan Province,” April 12, 2006, available at: [www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06KABUL1669\\_a.html](http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06KABUL1669_a.html); “Credible accounts indicate that Matiullah operates protection rackets, skims from the AHP’s payroll, and is involved in the illegal narcotics trade.”
31. For a description of a traditional khan, see Dorronsoro (2000: 119, 125).
32. Interviews with tribal elders, Afghan and Western officials in Uruzgan and Kabul, 2006–2014.

33. See Derksen (2013).
34. Interview with tribal elder from Uruzgan in Kabul, October 2013. See also Derksen (2013).
35. Interview with tribal elder from Uruzgan in Tirin Kot, May 2014.
36. The next section explores the cases of Mir Alam in Kunduz and Amir Gul in Baghlan. See Martin (2014) and Derksen (2012) for examples of Helmand power brokers Abdul Rahman Jan, Sher Mohammad Akhunzada and Malem Mir Wali.
37. Interviews with international and Afghan government officials and tribal elders in Uruzgan between 2006 and 2014.
38. Interviews with officials and tribal elders from Uruzgan, 2010–2013.
39. Interview with tribal elder from the Tokhi tribe, Tirin Kot, May 2014.
40. Interview with former government official in Uruzgan, Kabul, June 2014.
41. Interviews with tribal elders from the area and Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) commanders operating there, Uruzgan and Kabul, 2013–2014.
42. Interview with tribal elder from a village near Tirin Kot, May 2014.
43. Tribal elder and government official from Dehrawud, Tirin Kot, May 2014.
44. A senior ANP official in Tirin Kot claimed in May 2014 that a shura was up and running in Dehrawud under the new commander.
45. The appointment of ANP and ALP officials was decided upon by a “military council,” according to Matiullah (consisting of Matiullah, the governor, the head of the NDS and the Afghan National Army [ANA] commander). He claimed to consider the role of the communities in appointing the ANP and ALP commanders (in the case of the ALP this is required by the official rules and regulations in place), but interviewees outside his circle all said that they were not consulted on appointments. They claimed that when there were problems between the communities and the commanders they complained to Matiullah but that he didn’t listen. However, Matiullah said: “We immediately take action if people come to us and complain.” Interviews with tribal elders and government officials from Uruzgan and Matiullah, 2011–2014.
46. See Derksen (2015).
47. Kunduz and Baghlan provinces are located in the northeast of Afghanistan in a fertile plain between the Amu Darya River to the north and the Hindu Kush in the south. They occupy a strategic position, connecting Kabul to the former Soviet republics of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. There is a large amount of transit trade, and both provinces are on trafficking routes for the country’s opium. Kunduz and Baghlan have traditionally seen more involvement from the state and a higher level of socio-economic development than the south. A basic infrastructure of health services exists in Kunduz and Baghlan, and the overall literacy rates are respectively 33 percent and 21 percent (compared to 5 percent for Uruzgan). This area has also profited from industrialization drives in the twentieth century. Between the 1850s and early 1970s, several immigration waves changed the demography of the northeast, which was originally populated mainly by Uzbeks, Tajiks, Arabs and, in smaller numbers, by Turkmen, Hazara and Aimaq. Currently, Pashtuns are the main ethnic group in Kunduz, and the second-largest group in Baghlan. The various immigration waves have triggered many of the area’s long-running conflicts over land, water and political representation (see Wormer, 2012: 7, 8; Devlin et al., 2009: 5, 6; Bhatia and Sedra, 2008: 250). In the 1980s and 1990s Kunduz and Baghlan became heavily contested. One of the important resistance parties in both provinces was Hizb-e-Islami led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar (who was born in the Kunduz district Imam Sahib), “with a strong base in Pashtun dominated areas.” When the Taliban captured most of the northeast in the second half of the 1990s, many Hizb-i-Islami commanders joined them. Hizb-i-Islami’s main rival was Rabbani-led Jamiat-i-Islami, “which was mainly made up of educated Tajiks, Uzbeks and Turkmens.” Within Jamiat, the Shura-ye-Nazar faction led by the late Panshjiri commander Ahmad Shah Massoud, became particularly strong (Devlin et al., 2009).
48. Former jihadi commander Mir Alam operates at the provincial level in Kunduz, but has most influence in the

- ethnically diverse districts of Kunduz City and Khanabad in the east of the province. The Tajik wields by far most power of the three strongmen. See Derksen (2015).
49. Former jihadi and former Taliban commanders Amir Gul and Mullah Alam, both Pashtuns, operate in the Pashtun dominated district Baghlan-i-Jadid (Amir Gul) and the equally Pashtun dominated Dande-Ghori area around Pul-i-Khumri (Mullah Alam). They are the most important informal actors in 'their' areas. See Derksen (2015).
  50. In the northeast, the word *arbaki* is another word for militias (also often called "irresponsible armed groups") and generally carries a similarly negative connotation among the interviewees for this paper. It has the most positive association in the southeast; "the traditional ideal of a small, village-based group that can be raised when required to defend the community" (Human Rights Watch, 2011: 13).
  51. In 2009, Mir Alam's *arbaki* were estimated to number around 500 commanders and fighters (American Embassy Kabul, "Unconventional Security Forces – What's Out There?" November 2009, available at: <https://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/11/09KABUL3661.html>). By the end of the decade, there were thought to be around 4,500 to 10,000 militias throughout the province (Goodhand and Hakimi, 2014: 32). In 2013 and 2014, local government officials thought that in the district of Khanabad (one of Mir Alam's main areas of influence) around 1,000 militia were connected to him (interview with Afghan government official, May 2014, Kunduz; interview with former Afghan government official, October 2013, Kunduz). Amir Gul claims that he commanded 300 men around 2001, who are still his *andiwal* (solidarity group). During a fight of his militias against the Taliban near Pul-i-Khumri in 2009, he had reportedly mobilized 400 men (telephone interview with Amir Gul, May 2014; Goodhand and Hakimi, 2014: 27). The number of ALP in Baghlan was 1,250 in 2014. Those in the Dande-e Ghori area of Pul-i-Khumri (around 300) are connected to Mullah Alam, and he selected them. Moreover, he is connected to some ALP commanders in Baghlan-e-Jadid and Dahane-Ghori (interview with ALP chief Ali Shah Ahmadzai, May 2014; interview Mullah Alam, Kabul, May 2014). All three men claim to not directly command any men. Commanders linked to them, who typically control 5–25 men and sometimes have sub-commanders, seem to indeed operate with a great level of independence. However, many of them have been tied to the strongmen since the jihad time, and can, therefore, be seen as part of their solidarity group, which they can mobilize if they need to. The three strongmen also act as local political patrons, who through political support from their patrons in Kabul make sure that local commanders can operate with impunity (Derksen 2015).
  52. The first post-2001 DDR program, which ran from 2003 to 2005, aimed at disarming, demobilizing and reintegrating members of the AMF, a collection of militia that had helped the United States defeat the Taliban regime in 2001, and was paid by the Afghan MoD with foreign funds. See Derksen (2015).
  53. Mohammad Qasim Fahim, also known as Marshal Fahim, from the Shura-ye Nazar faction of Jamiat, was vice president and defense minister of the Afghan Transitional Administration from 2002 to 2004, and became vice president again in 2009 until he died in March 2014.
  54. On appointments, see also Munch (2013).
  55. The insurgency included Taliban, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Hezb-e-Islami, al-Qaeda (Giustozzi and Reuter, 2010: 21, 22).
  56. Interviews with tribal elders and government officials from Baghlan, Baghlan and Kabul, 2011-2014; findings by research organization Assess, Transform, Reach (ATR) Consulting.
  57. US Embassy Cable, "Afghanistan: A Snapshot of the Northeast," May 2009, available at: <http://wikileaks.ch/cable/2009/05/09KABUL1239.html>.
  58. Goodhand and Hakimi (2014: 10) write: "One of the rationales...was to free the regular police force from protecting government installations and officials and return them to civilian policing and rule of law duties... In 2009, MOI and U.S. special operation forces piloted the AP3 in Wardak." The program did not go beyond the pilot phase though, and was overtaken by other militia programs.
  59. By a suicide bomber in a bazaar in Kunduz City on March 10, 2011 (Roggio, 2011).
  60. "The Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP) enables local [U.S.] commanders in Afghanistan and

Iraq to respond with a nonlethal weapon to urgent, small-scale, humanitarian relief, and reconstruction projects and services that immediately assist the indigenous population and that the local population or government can sustain," (see [http://armypubs.army.mil/doctrine/DR\\_pubs/dr\\_a/pdf/atp1\\_06x2.pdf](http://armypubs.army.mil/doctrine/DR_pubs/dr_a/pdf/atp1_06x2.pdf)).

61. The CIP was set up by ISAF's Regional Command North in 2010 in several provinces in the north, including Kunduz (where the total force was slightly over 500, according to Goodhand and Hakimi [2014]). Initially unpaid, officers were later paid US\$150 dollars and commanders US\$200. Goodhand and Hakimi (2014: 34) write: "CIP was another ad hoc response to deal with [security] problems that might have been anticipated." In contrast to the ALP, the CIP was not under control of the MoI, and by the end of 2011, President Karzai issued a decree to disband it (see <http://president.gov.af/en/news/5802>).
62. For more on the CIP, see Goodhand and Hakimi, 2014: 34.
63. All three fought in the jihad against the Soviets: the Tajik Mir Alam mostly as part of the Shura-ye-Nazar faction of Jamiat, and Pashtuns Amir Gul and Mullah Alam as Hizb-i-Islami commanders. The latter two switched to the Taliban when they invaded Baghlan in the second half of the 1990s, but joined the former Northern Alliance again when it helped the US-led coalition defeat the Taliban regime in 2001.
64. Interview with Marshal Fahim, Kabul, 2008.
65. In a notorious incident in September 2012, two commanders reportedly connected to Mir Alam were alleged to have killed 12 citizens in Kanam, northeast of Kunduz City. However, neither Mir Alam nor the two commanders were held responsible, according to government officials, because of support from Fahim. Amir Gul was reportedly involved in a fight with the provincial police chief on November 24, 2012 that followed the killing of three Afghan SOFs in Baghlan-i-Jadid on October 25, in which a commander allegedly connected to him was involved. Even though there was a warrant out for his arrest he remained free. Government officials and tribal elders said this was because of support by Fahim. See Derksen (2015); Derksen et al. (2013).
66. Interviews with Afghan government officials and tribal elders in Baghlan and Kabul, 2011–2014. See also Derksen (2015).
67. Which started in Baghlan in February 2011 and in 2014 numbered 1250 fighters in Baghlan, in Baghlan-e-Jadid, Pul-e-Khumri, Burka, Nahrin and Dahane-Ghori.
68. Interviews with Afghan government officials, tribal elders and Mullah Alam, 2012–2014; findings by research organization ATR in June 2013; Goodhand and Hakimi (2014: 29, 30). Even though there was an official local shura to vet the ALP recruits it "played no meaningful role," according to Goodhand and Hakimi.
69. Although at some point, probably around the time of the campaign for the 2009 presidential elections, he became an Afghan National Civil Order Police commander for six months (Derksen, 2015).
70. Interviews with international and Afghan government officials and tribal elders from Kunduz, 2012–2014.
71. Interviews with Afghan government officials, elders and commanders from Kunduz, 2012–2014.
72. While he was district chief of Baghlan-i-Jadid (2007–2012), Amir Gul set up a "mafia-like system" of corruption, where departments' mandates were changed to allow the collection of bribes, according to findings of research organization ATR in 2013. Gul is reportedly also one of the owners of the bazaars in the district.
73. US Embassy Cable, "Kunduz politics of corruption in Baghlan police force," December 20, 2005, available at: <https://wikileaks.org/cable/2005/12/05KABUL5181.html>; US Embassy Cable, "Bringing down a warlord and keeping him there," July 27, 2006, available at: <https://wikileaks.org/cable/2006/07/06KABUL3317.html>; US Embassy Cable, "Baghlan warlord Amir Gul released," December 21, 2006, available at: <https://wikileaks.org/cable/2006/12/06KABUL5920.html>.
74. Interviews with Afghan intelligence source and former local government official, Kunduz, October 2013 and May 2014. Most interviewees, including Afghan government officials and former officials and elders, said that commanders connected to Mir Alam can operate with impunity. Mir Alam handed over 900 weapons to the Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG) program in 2007. The German-led PRT suspected him of keeping

weapons behind, but was unsuccessful in trying to uncover them, as they worked together with the provincial NDS-chief, a brother-in-law of Mir Alam. See Derksen (2015) and Munch (2013).

75. Interviews with local government officials, tribal elders and commanders, Kunduz and Kabul, 2012–2014; findings from ATR research organization from research done in first half of 2013.
76. Interviews with government officials, tribal elders and ALP commanders in Khanabad, October 2013–September 2014; findings by research organization ATR. General Niamatullah.
77. He has since been fired from the ALP (interview with government official in Baghlan, April 2013).
78. Interviews with local elders from Dand-e-Ghori, Baghlan, 2011–2014.
79. Interviews with Mullah Alam, members from the provincial council and tribal elders, 2011–2014. Goodhand and Hakimi (2014: 31) argue that Pashtun power brokers like Mullah Alam and provincial council member Alam Jan try to act as brokers and mediators because they calculate that armed conflict with power brokers from the Andarab district in Baghlan who support the Shura-ye Nazar faction of Jamiat would strengthen other Pashtun strongmen and undermine their position in the local power set up.
80. See also Derksen (2015: 45).
81. Interviews in Uruzgan and Kabul with several elders from Chora, Dehrawud, Shahadi Hassas and Tirin Kot districts in 2013 and 2014. See also Derksen (2015).
82. Interview with Major-General Ali Shah Ahmadzai in Kabul, November 6, 2013.
83. American troops supported militias already from 2001, as the case studies show.
84. See also Tariq (2008).
85. Indeed, many tribal elders who were interviewed said they had little influence over commanders.
86. See on the same question regarding international community engagement with local councils (Miakhel and Coburn, 2010).
87. Justice and security – when the state isn't the main provider, DIIS Policy Brief based on the conference "Access to Justice and Security: Non-state Actors and the Local Dynamics of Ordering" in 2010 in Copenhagen, page 1.

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