COUNTERINSURGENCY, LOCAL MILITIAS, AND STATEBUILDING IN AFGHANISTAN

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ABOUT THE REPORT

Much international effort and funding have focused on building and bureaucratizing the means of violence in Afghanistan. At the same time, parallel government and NATO experiments have armed local defense forces, including local militias, under the Afghan Local Police (ALP) program to fight the insurgency and provide security at the local level. This report—which is based on a year's research in Kabul and the provinces of Wardak, Baghlan, and Kunduz—seeks to understand the role and impact of the ALP on security and political dynamics in the context of ongoing counterinsurgency and stabilization operations and the projected drawdown of international troops in 2014 .

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[The greatest threat to stability in Afghanistan is less the existence of a few hundred militias per district in the form of the ALP and more the danger that after 2014 an oversized and unevenly trained armed force will decompose and fragment into myriad competing militia groups.]

Summary

- International intervention in Afghanistan at the end of 2001 marked less the beginning of a war-to-peace transition and more a new phase of an ongoing conflict.

- The fundamental contradiction has been attempting to build peace while fighting a war.

- Post-2001 Afghanistan exemplifies the deleterious effects of exogenous, militarized statebuilding, which has undermined peacebuilding and statebuilding at many levels.

- The paradox of counterinsurgency doctrine in Afghanistan is that its success depends on a high-capacity regime to put it into practice but that exogenous statebuilding prevents the emergence of such a regime in the first place.

- The growth of the insurgency, the failures of top-down statebuilding, and the influence of counterinsurgency doctrine all help explain the proliferation of militias since the mid-2000s.

- Militias are formed to engage in protective violence but often mete out predatory and abusive violence.

- No necessary or straightforward connection exists between militia formation and state breakdown or collapse.

- Preceded by several other militia programs, the Afghan Local Police (ALP) emerged as a U.S.-funded effort.

- ALP militias are less a threat to national-level stability and more a danger that after 2014 an oversized and unevenly trained national armed force will fragment into numerous competing militias.

- Outsourcing community protection and defense to the ALP—rather than extending state power and legitimacy—may have had the opposite effect.

- The ALP will not go away, has already left a long-term legacy that Afghans will have to deal with, and is symptomatic of a wider deficiency of the post-2001 intervention.

- The long-term future of the ALP program remains uncertain. If it continues, however, it should not be expanded. Stronger state oversight and support are needed, and plans should be developed to facilitate the absorption of the ALP into the Afghan National Police (ANP).

Introduction

In the context of the Afghan security transition of 2014, when the bulk of foreign military forces are due to withdraw, policy debates have focused on the role and capabilities of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF).[1] Much effort has been devoted to building up and bureaucratizing the means of violence in Afghanistan with a view to establishing a legitimate monopoly over the means of coercion. Yet this has been paralleled by a series of government and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) experiments in arming local defense forces, including local militias under the ALP, to fight the insurgency and provide security at the local level. Frequently, notions of Afghan ownership, local solutions, and cost-effectiveness are invoked to justify such programs. This strategy is not without controversy, however. It has prompted concerns about the efficacy and impact of such interventions on the Afghan state's capacity to rein in armed groups, impose a monopoly over the means of violence, improve security, balance civil-military relations, enforce the rule of law, create political stability, and end the internal conflict. These debates on the role of irregular forces tend to be driven by agency interests and based on limited or disputed evidence.

This report attempts to provide an empirically based and independent analysis of the ALP program.[2] It aims to show how the program and its previous iterations evolved and its impacts at the local and national levels. The research addresses the roles and impacts of the ALP program on security and political dynamics in the context of ongoing counterinsurgency and stabilization operations and the transition of security responsibilities from Western forces to Afghan security forces.[3]

Background

International intervention in Afghanistan has been driven and shaped by different (and competing) logics, justifications, and modalities.[4] Although it is often claimed that all good things come together, in practice, major contradictions and trade-offs are involved in pursuing multiple objectives simultaneously.[5] The most fundamental contradiction is attempting to build peace while fighting a war (Suhrke 2011). This contradiction manifests itself in the sphere of policing in the form of tension between a U.S. focus on paramilitary policing to pursue the war and a European focus on civil policing to consolidate the peace.[6]

In addition to a complex range of often contradictory interests, the international response has shifted over time. Intervention began as a relatively minimalist endeavor involving a limited presence of U.S. ground forces fighting al-Qaeda and the Taliban through local proxies.[7] This changed over time to a more expansive, top-down form of statebuilding—encompassing all the transformative ambitions and recognized deficiencies of what is generally called liberal peacebuilding—radical institution building, good governance, reconstruction, security sector reform, rule of law, and so forth.[8] This was followed by a third phase, returning in some respects to a modified version of the first phase, in response to the intensification of the insurgency and the evident failures of statebuilding. The terminology, if not always the practices, changed to incorporate what are known as more bottom-up, Afghan-led, culturally appropriate, quick-impact stabilization measures. This approach was influenced by wider trends in military doctrine, shifts in personnel—particularly the arrival of General Stanley McChrystal as the commander of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)—and imperatives from the field. This was paralleled by a massive surge in international troops and financial resources aimed at turning the situation around. Thomas Barfield (2012) nicely captures the shift in how the international community defined and responded to the 'Afghan problem': In

2002, the absence of a strong centralized state was viewed as the driver of insecurity and terrorism, yet by 2011, a corrupt, illegitimate central state was considered the core of the problem. A fourth and most recent phase has been transition, the drawdown of foreign troops by 2014 and the handover of ownership to the Afghan government, including responsibility for fighting the Taliban and providing security for the population. This latest phase has involved a further and hasty redefinition of the problem and the criteria for success—leading to a search for pragmatic solutions—and the ALP can perhaps be understood as one manifestation of this shift toward expediency. This phase has also been marked by the surfacing of long-standing tensions between the Afghan government and international actors, particularly the United States. President Hamid Karzai has openly distanced himself from the U.S. war agenda and emphasized Afghan sovereignty and independence.

Shifting Security and Policing Environment

International intervention at the end of 2001 marked the mutation of thirty years of conflict into a new phase rather than the beginning of a transition from war to peace. The preceding war years had seen the growing decentralization of the means of violence, associated with the emergence of a new class of military entrepreneurs and a political economy shaped by military patrimonialism. The collapse of the Najibullah regime was followed by a demodernization of the army, in which, over time, fragments of the regular army in the north gradually assumed the character of militias, similar to other military forces in the rest of the country (Giustozzi 2009a).[9] The Taliban regime to some extent centralized the means of violence, including through an effective disarmament campaign, a process that was reversed by internationally promoted regime change, leading to the further fragmentation of the political-military landscape.

International military intervention, the exclusive elite pact forged in Bonn in 2001,[10] the failures of statebuilding, and the absence of meaningful reconciliation efforts galvanized the insurgency, which over time intensified and spread geographically. Although patchy attempts at disarmament were attempted in the north and less so in the south, as the insurgency intensified, the U.S. military embarked on arming Pashtun rivals of the Taliban in the south. If war is, as Ariel Ahram suggests, "an effective auditor of institutional performance" (2011, 16), the growing insurgency exposed deficiencies in the capacity and legitimacy of the Afghan state.

Western efforts to regulate what was in effect a security market have been contradictory and often ill considered. On the one hand, interventions were directed toward bureaucratizing coercion by building up a monopoly on the means of violence through security sector reform, which was defined as the five related pillars of the Afghan National Army (ANA) and ANP; judicial reform; disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR); and counternarcotics. On the other hand, foreign forces continued to support and fund local power brokers, creating militias and deploying private security companies, who operated either above or below the law.[11] Unsurprisingly, given the continued high levels of insecurity and the absence of real socioeconomic opportunities to encourage the reintegration of fighters, DDR programs were a failure. Warlord democratization by absorbing jihadi factions into key ministries succeeded in relation to some of the senior figures within the northern alliance. However, many provincial strongmen resisted the extension of centralized state power into the periphery, while mid- to low-level fighters had few options beyond military-patrimonial networks or engagement in the drug economy. The underlying structural conditions that explain the continued persistence of illegal militias, far from being transformed,

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have intensified over time. Programs that attempted to centralize the means of coercion and establish effective policing were a threat to the interests of many, both within and outside the state (Giustozzi and Isaqzadeh 2013).

Efforts to invest in policing reflect and have contributed to this security environment. Initially, investment in policing was limited and muddled (Giustozzi and Isaqzadeh 2013; Wilder 2007), though in 2006, the Afghanistan Compact[12] stated that by the end of 2010 there would be a fully constituted, professional, functional, and ethnically balanced ANP and Afghan Border Police (ABP) with a combined force of up to 62,000 that had the ability to meet the security needs of the country and be increasingly fiscally sustainable. The ANP's growth targets expanded, paralleling the increase in size of the ANSF more generally, and the ANP numbered some 148,500 personnel in February 2013 (Planty and Perito 2013, 1).[13] Between 2001 and 2011, the international community spent more than $15 billion on Afghanistan's police. The focus for the United States, however, was primarily on the paramilitary dimensions of policing rather than on building an institution to enforce the rule of law.[14] As the United States became more involved in funding and organizing policing, the strategic goal was increasingly to fight off organized challenges to state power.[15] This emphasis on training and using the police in offensive counterinsurgency roles reflected the institutional preferences of the U.S. Department of Defense, which has had primary responsibility for police assistance in Afghanistan since 2005 (Rosenau 2008, 10; Perito 2009, 5). Between 2005 and February 2013, the United States, the largest donor in this sector, spent some $14 billion to train and equip the ANP (Planty and Perito 2013). Efforts directed at restructuring and training the police achieved mixed success, and even by 2011, the uniformed police "was still more like a fragmented coterie of militias than either a paramilitary police or a civilian police force" (Giustozzi and Isaqzadeh 2011,18).

This combination of protracted conflict and invasive international intervention has led to a militarized and volatile security landscape inseparable from the wider regional conflict system, given that both Afghanistan and Pakistan use asymmetrical warfare to pursue statebuilding goals.

The decentralization of violence and remobilization has arguably accelerated in the run-up to the transition deadline. When General David Petraeus took over for McChrystal in 2010, the rules of engagement shifted from counterinsurgency back to counterterrorism. This shift was reflected in an increased reliance on night raids, aerial bombardment, and drones. Some argue that Afghanistan has increasingly become a dirty war whose brutality has increased insecurity, which in turn has been used to justify the arming of communities by U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOFs), the Afghan state, or regional strongmen (Boone 2011). A negative spiral is in evidence as concerns about a chaotic post-2014 scenario contribute to a spontaneous rearmament by communities and militias.

Emergence of the ALP

Historically, state formation has involved the creation of a military specializing in the monopoly of large-scale violence (Giustozzi 2011; Tilly 1992; Olson 2000). Policing, which tends to occur in the shadow of this process, involves the management of small-scale violence (Giustozzi and Isaqzadeh 2013, 3). The increased provision of state policing has often gone hand in hand with the gradual disarmament of the population and the expropriation of policing capacities from the communities. This is associated with what Michael Mann characterizes as a shift from states that rule through despotic or raw coercive power to those that govern

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through infrastructural power associated with policing and technologies of governance, such as census making and mapping, that make society more legible and therefore more manageable (1984). However, the creation of a military and police force is costly in financial and political terms. Historically, states and imperial powers have frequently acted as brokers rather than monopolists, seeking to extend their control through franchising the means of coercion. This pattern was typical of feudal Europe and the norm for pre-twentieth-century states in much of Asia (Scott 2009). Imperial powers such as the British developed a policy of indirect rule, which involved creating irregular armies to police and administer the empire, particularly in frontier zones.[16] Such armies and constabularies were less costly in manpower, resources, and political risks. One example is the Sandeman system, developed on the northwest frontier in the nineteenth century and recreated in the form of the watch and ward system in the early twentieth century and echoed in U.S. counterinsurgency strategies in the Philippines and Vietnam. Policing by tradition is therefore not new. The Sandeman system of frontier management introduced and institutionalized the *jirga* system, irrevocably changing Baluch society in the name of its preservation (Marsden and Hopkins 2011, 73).[17] Contemporary counterinsurgency (COIN) and development policy literature on Afghanistan similarly reinvent and reify local traditions, including older forms of community policing, such as *arbaki*.[18]

Historically, a symbiotic relationship between bandits, warlords, and states has been common (Gallant 1999). The assumption that building a Weberian monopoly over the means of violence is a necessary condition for state formation is not always born out by historical experience. As Ariel Ahram notes, violence devolution can be seen as a mode of military development rather than as a defective mode of state formation (2011, 130). In Burma, for example, the state has deployed militias effectively to regain control over and pacify its unruly borderlands (McCoy 1999; Woods 2011). Similarly, the Sri Lankan state created Tamil militias to fight the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and police the Tamil population in the north and east.

This body of literature suggests that militias are not necessarily a manifestation of state breakdown or agents of *statecide*, to borrow Antonio Giustozzi's term (2009b). They may contribute to disintegrative or integrative dynamics, depending on context. Critics of the ALP point to the Najibullah period as a warning about the danger of militias, given that government-created militias ultimately contributed to the downfall of the regime once Moscow ended the external subsidies that held the system together. However, the relative importance of militias was much greater during Najibullah's time, leading to a symbiotic relationship between government and irregular forces.[19] Furthermore, Western donors are unlikely to suddenly curtail subsidies to the Afghan state as the Soviets were forced to do, which made the militias defect and sealed the downfall of the Najibullah regime.

States and empires have frequently deployed surrogate forces to extend their control and counter violent resistance to their rule. How these forces are deployed and the forms they take vary from place to place. The term *militia* is frequently used as a catchall that lumps together dissimilar phenomena. For this study, the distinction between home guards and militias is important. The former are recruited from a particular locale and are responsible for policing that locale. Their role is primarily defensive and policing. This most closely resembles the arbaki model, which was meant to maintain law and order and defend the borders and boundaries of the tribe or community. In the context of counterinsurgency operations, home guards are meant to secure control over the population and minimize insurgent abilities to establish a support network among civilians (Hughes and Tripodi 2009, 11).[20] On the other hand, militias

are larger and more powerful than home guard units and combine policing with an offensive military role and frequently operate over a wider geographical area.[21] The boundaries between the two structures may frequently be blurred, particularly given that organizations have a tendency to mutate over time.

Antecedents

International actors have funded and supported efforts to disarm factions and centralize the means of coercion. DDR was launched in April 2003 in the form of the UN-created and Japanese-funded Afghan New Beginnings Program (ANBP), which targeted what was known as the Afghan Military Forces. This program was followed by the Disarmament of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG) program.[22] Both, however, were largely failures in terms of achieving stated aims (Bhatia and Sedra 2008; Giustozzi 2008; Sedra 2006). As noted earlier, opportunities for rank-and-file combatants were limited; only a few went into the newly constituted ANA, and many joined local militias or semiprivate police forces (Suhrke 2011, 142).

In parallel with these programs, other international actors were supporting rearmament and contributing to the further decentralization of violence. This support occurred from the time of the invasion, when the CIA channeled funds to Northern Alliance warlords to pursue the war on terror. This model—promoted by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld—of deploying special forces and arming local proxies, initially appeared to be successful in achieving regime change. It was followed in subsequent years by a succession of experiments in local policing or community militias, including the Afghan National Auxiliary Police (ANAP), Afghan Public Protection Program (APPP or AP3), Community Defense Initiative (CDI), Local Defense Initiative (LDI), arbaki, Critical Infrastructure Program (CIP), counterterrorism pursuit teams, the Kandahar Strike Force, and the Khost Protection Force. Some of these programs were locally initiated—sometimes spontaneously by provincial governors, regional strongmen, and local communities as the growth of the insurgency increased the demand for paramilitary policing, particularly in the north—and others were pushed from the center or the provinces by foreign forces. The management of the various militia groups was located in different parts of the Afghan government (although they often had closer relationships with foreign forces than with the government), including the Independent Directorate for the Protection of Public Properties and Highways by Tribal Support, Ministry of Interior (MOI), President's Office, and National Directorate of Security (NDS). The rationale for their formation was linked to a range of tactical and strategic objectives, including fighting the Taliban, winning election campaigns, strengthening local power bases, pursuing local vendettas, strengthening the central government, or promoting Taliban reintegration.

The experiments reflected wider developments in COIN doctrine, which as a body of knowledge and set of practices appeared to mesh with the statebuilding and stabilization agenda. The dissemination of this practical knowledge was associated with a number of what David Miller and Tom Mills (2010) call warrior intellectuals and associated policy institutes and academic institutions, which at the end of the Cold War were influential in helping carve out a new role for Western militaries in relation to expeditionary forces, statebuilding operations, and counterinsurgency campaigns.[23] COIN doctrines involved reframing warfighting, from being conceived as purely a military task to primarily a battle for governance. Counterinsurgency is understood to be "an umbrella term that describes the full range of measures that governments take to defeat insurgencies. These can be political, administrative, military, economic, psychological or informational, and are almost always used in combination" (Kilcullen

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2011, 42). Soft power is deployed alongside hard power to win local hearts and minds and to engage in more nuanced ways with the local terrain. This requires deep knowledge of civilian populations. COIN represented a shift from the Weinberger-Powell doctrine of using overwhelming force to achieve a decisive victory, but U.S. COIN doctrine does not hide the fact that, as Kilcullen concedes, "There is always a lot of killing, one way or another" (cited in Gregory 2008, 19). Nor ultimately does it provide a convincing answer to what happens when the priorities of the military occupation are not aligned with those of the host political system. For example, the arming of Sunni militias in Iraq or the military's involvement with traditional justice institutions in Afghanistan are in tension with the putative establishment of a monopoly of force or the state's universal legal jurisdiction (Ledwidge 2009). Afghanistan, like Iraq, became a testing ground for this supposedly new but actually very old doctrine. It was picked up and embraced enthusiastically by military planners, special forces, and politicians desperately seeking solutions to what they saw as the lack of progress in Afghanistan and seeking to justify and legitimize what had become an increasingly difficult enterprise to package and sell to Western electorates.

Yet there was a growing perception among Western policymakers that the state was part of the problem, especially the formal policing structure.[24] Furthermore, as the insurgency expanded and changed tactics to target major population centers, the regular police were increasingly deployed to either protect urban centers or to fight in operations alongside or in support of the ANA and foreign forces. Consequently, the police were taking heavy casualties, an estimated twice as many as the ANA. Attrition rates for the ANP have remained at an annual rate of 25 percent overall with rates up to 70 to 80 percent in some units (Planty and Perito 2013, 5). One of the rationales for militia programs such as the AP3 and Afghan Public Protection Force (APPF) was to free the regular police force from protecting government installations and officials and return them to civilian policing and rule of law duties.

COIN experts also drew on—or reinvented—Afghan traditions of community policing to justify the promotion of such programs.[25] Since 2006, the United States has supported several efforts to establish militias. The first was the ANAP, when in February 2006 the Afghan Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Finance approached the Americans with the idea of creating a new force involving an additional two hundred to four hundred police per district (Jones 2012). Under this plan, provincial governors could recruit 11,271 men from 124 high-risk districts in twenty-one provinces. The program aimed to train villagers for ten days and equip them with guns. By July 2007, some 8,300 ANAP members received training. They were then sent to secure checkpoints and conducted operations with coalition forces in Helmand, Zabul, Kandahar, Farah, Uruzgan, and Ghazni, reaching a strength of nine thousand men. It was ostensibly managed by the MOI in close collaboration with the U.S. Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan (CSTC-A). However, the force was widely criticized for reversing the effects of DIAG. Many of its participants were thought to be Taliban agents, and nearly all were members of forces loyal to provincial power brokers (Perito 2009, 9). The force was disbanded in May 2008.

In 2009, MOI and U.S. special operation forces piloted the AP3 in Wardak. It was funded and implemented by SOFs until mid-2010, when U.S. regular forces took over. The plan initially provided for between one hundred and two hundred guardians to be recruited in four insecure districts, but no more than a total of twelve hundred in the entire province. The AP3 was in theory part of an integrated, sequenced program to improve security that included four elements: deployment of U.S. troops that were part of the surge, training of locally based ANP officers un-

der the Focused District Development program and their interim replacement by the ANCOP constabulary, the recruitment of an AP3 cadre, and provision of development assistance from the Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP). Districts that cooperated were eligible for an additional $500,000 in CERP funds as an incentive to participate (Perito 2009, 10).

Haneef Atmar, the minister of interior at the time, saw the AP3 as a pragmatic solution to the problem of local insecurity. However, he also explicitly linked it to the wider project of centralization and institutionalization and therefore emphasized the need for central control and regulation of surrogate forces. Local *shura* were to select local recruits, who were to be vetted by government institutions, trained by SOFs, paid directly by the MOI, and required to report to the district police chief, bypassing their commanders. Atmar's preference was for small groups linked to local shuras and not for either commanders pursuing personal agendas or large militias that could pose a military risk to the government. Paying local recruits directly through the bank and not through their commanders was one way of engendering loyalty to the state rather than to militia commanders. Further, Atmar envisaged the gradual replacement of private security companies (PSCs) with the APPF.[26] The AP3 and APPF were envisaged as two sides of the same coin.[27] The AP3 were to serve guard duties as a defensive force at the provincial and district level to free regular police from those tasks. The model envisaged a government-controlled stopgap measure tied to the growth of the ANSF, whereby militia units would be demobilized or integrated into regular forces as the ANP and ANA developed. This was a pragmatic way of building state power by extending control over armed groups and the means of violence. Atmar saw AP3 as a means of registering existing weapons belonging to local villagers willing to join the force and in so doing promoting the goals of DDR and DIAG.[28] However, the gap between the theory and the practice was wide, largely because the theory was based on an outmoded set of assumptions about the capacity of tribal leaders to command the loyalties of local villagers. In practice, it was the militia commanders who held the real power in post-2001 Afghanistan.

Emergence

In 2009, General Stanley McChrystal, commander of the ISAF and U.S. Forces Afghanistan, conducted a thorough interagency assessment of the situation. It concluded that the insurgents had increased their control of territory in most parts of rural Afghanistan, in particular the Pashtun areas in the south, west, and east. As the AP3 was getting under way in March 2009 in Jalrez district in Wardak province, U.S. and Afghan officials began discussing options to establish rural militias under the CDI, later branded the LDI. U.S. planning was led by Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command—Afghanistan (CFSOCC-A) under the leadership of Brigadier General Edward Reeder. The program's goal was to "identify local communities that seek outside help against insurgents" and to "assist the local population to provide their own security with defensive 'neighborhood watch' type programs."[29] Reeder's staff claimed to have analyzed the history of militias in Afghanistan. It was, they claimed, a "model built consciously on Afghanistan's previous stable periods" (cited in Jones 2012, 30).

The CFSOCC-A plan involved deploying U.S. and Afghan special operations teams to live and operate in villages that had decided to resist insurgents. They would focus on three tasks: improving informal governance through village shuras, establishing or co-opting village defense forces, and improving development. The militia had to number fewer than three hundred, be defensive, fall under the oversight of village jirgas, and be closely monitored by the Afghan government and NATO. The deployment of U.S. and Afghan SOFs to villages

facilitated oversight. At this stage of the program, no formal role was envisaged for the MOI or any other Afghan central state institution, which meant that the SOFs would work with local shuras they either found or established for that purpose. It was thus presented as a truly local initiative, far removed from the corrupting influence of Kabul.

Four criteria were set down to determine where CDI-LDI units would be established:

1. The locals had already resisted insurgents.
2. The area was strategically important for the Taliban and other insurgent groups.
3. The area was strategically important for the Afghan government and NATO.
4. An assessment team found that it was feasible, based on local support, terrain, and population density.

In July and August 2009, CFSOCC-A briefed McChrystal and won his approval for the concept. In August, CFSOCC-A briefed the ministers of interior and defense, Haneef Atmar and Rahim Wardak. Both ministers reportedly supported the formation of local militias (Jones 2012, 31). It was also in August that CFSOCC-A deployed a special operations team to Nili in Daykundi province to train forces with the help of the ANP. By December, the United States had teams training a total of one hundred militia members in four other districts.[30]

However, the CDI-LDI initiative proved controversial with Afghan officials and the U.S. political leadership in Kabul. The LDI was never a full-scale program but more a series of experiments tried in Arghandab (Kandahar), Nili (Daykundi), Achin (Nangahar), Gereshk (Helmand) and parts of Paktia.[31] The program, which Haneef Atmar later called illegal, involved turf battles between the Independent Directorate of Local Government (IDLG), the MOI, and the Independent Directorate for the Protection of Public Properties and Highways by Tribal Support led by Wolesi jirga member Aref Noorzai, a relative of Hamid Karzai.[32]

Nevertheless, in mid-November, U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan Karl Eikenberry reported that CFSOCC-A was conducting survey work and tribal engagement and outreach to local shuras on CDI-LDI. Although ISAF had sought ministerial approval for the scheme, by the end of October, Karzai had not given the Afghan government's formal approval. The ambassador insisted on a firm approval by the president and the cabinet before implementation, even though by August, CFSOCC-A had already deployed special operations teams to four provinces. The U.S. political leadership in Kabul feared that local militias set up by SOFs outside the framework of Afghan institutions would come at the expense of formal institutions and distract from efforts to build the Afghan army and police by potentially undercutting popular and international support for funding formal security forces, especially in the absence of plans to eventually reintegrate them into the ANSF or disarm and disband them. They could also reverse the rather modest progress made under DDR and DIAG programs in disarming mujahideen militias (U.S. Embassy Kabul 2009c).

In April 2010, Brigadier General Scott Miller took control of CFSOCC-A and, though the Afghan government had not yet granted a formal approval, began a significant expansion of the program with the support of McChrystal. He coined the term 'Village Stability Operations' to capture the governance and development aspects of the program. When Petraeus took command of the ISAF that July, he pushed for and succeeded in extracting a formal agreement from Karzai. Keen on expanding the ISAF's local militia initiatives to fight the insurgency, Petraeus must have realized that an expansion of the program could not have gone ahead without the approval of the Afghan government. He needed legal cover and political legitimacy for the operation. Following intense wrangling between Karzai and

Petraeus, the program was officially authorized in August 2010 under the MOI, calling the militia members Afghan Local Police.[33] As a result, most of the existing militias were eventually incorporated into the ALP. For example, the MOI directive of June 2011 affirms that the aim of the ALP program was to incorporate all previous village and district defense programs (MOI 2011). The U.S. Department of Defense stated that the ALP program incorporated previous village-level defensive programs, such as the CDI-LDI (DOD 2012a, 2). In many places, the ALP label became a seal of approval to legitimize existing local militias that SOFs often set up outside any agreed framework. It was an attempt to "legitimize what was really a militia program by calling it 'police' and making it part of the MOI."[34] By December 2010, the ALP had three thousand men in fifteen districts. By December 2011, it had ten thousand in fifty-seven districts.

The idea of the APPF, as noted earlier, developed in parallel with the ALP. It was discussed in July 2010—about the same time that negotiations over the ALP heated up—but was actually created in early 2011 to replace the hundreds of private security companies that had protected institutions and infrastructure throughout the country. President Karzai issued a decree in August 2010, ordering the disbanding of all PSCs by December 2010. However, following pressure from the ISAF and development contractors and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that depended on PSCs for their security, a one-year extension to March 2013 was negotiated (DOD 2011b; Aikins 2012). These firms had operated without government oversight, and the majority of them were owned by Afghan power brokers allied with Karzai. The APPF is supervised by the MOI and operates under the presidential decree that disbanded private security providers. The APPF's fourteen thousand Afghan personnel are a static guard force that protects public buildings, development projects, and vital infrastructure (Planty and Perito 2013, 4–5).[35]

The ALP, as described by the Department of Defense, is a village-focused local defense initiative that complements the ISAF's counterinsurgency efforts by targeting rural areas affected by the insurgency to enable conditions for improved security, governance, and development (DOD 2010; 2012a). The ALP is a complementary component to the VSO program (DOD 2011b). It focuses on rural areas that have limited ANSF and ISAF presence, where Afghan communities were already resisting the Taliban and providing for their own security (DOD 2011a). However, before the ALP was formally launched, the U.S. military's priority of containing the insurgency at the local level empowered militia commanders who received direct U.S. military patronage, such as former PSC commander Azizullah in Urgun, whose forces were eventually transitioned into the ALP (Reid 2011). The Afghan government perceived such armed units as a threat to its authority and aimed to bring U.S.-supported local militias under central government control. The ALP and the APPF were thus seen as instruments to further the goal of centralizing the means of coercion.

The ALP, in its final manifestation, was a compromise solution. On the one hand, it allowed the U.S. military to legalize and legitimize its existing network of ad hoc local militias and expand it in support of its counterinsurgency strategy. On the other hand, the Afghan government, at least in principle, managed to put an end to such ad hoc initiatives as the CDI-LDI and extended its control over the means of coercion by reining in U.S. military patronage. Two important questions to ask in relation to the CDI-LDI and ALP are why the U.S. military chose to adopt the CDI-LDI model following the AP3 and why the Afghan government, in particular President Karzai—who initially raised objections—agreed to U.S. plans to expand its local militia program and make the ALP a national force, albeit with a local mandate.

In many places, the ALP label became a seal of approval to legitimize existing local militias that SOFs often set up outside any agreed framework.

The answer to these questions can be partly found in the SOFs' experience with AP3 in Wardak in 2009. U.S. military officers in Wardak argued that setting up "local defense forces is done better when SOFs live and work with them and are under their direct control."[36] However, this model "lacked broader legitimacy and links to Afghan government institutions."[37] The ALP as a presidentially approved and MOI-run program had "strategic level buy-in and legitimacy, but at tactical level," as military officers noted, "it is a mess, and MOI is unable to service it properly."[38] As a result, the LDI program was launched to overcome the limited success of the AP3. The general conclusion among the SOF community in Wardak was that the bureaucratic nature and the centralized control by the MOI had complicated AP3 implementation. The LDI was launched to remove the central government's control and free the hands of SOFs to experiment with more locally driven initiatives to raise village-based militias. With the rollout of the LDI, the view that local militias independently operated by SOFs were more successful gained traction within U.S. military circles and paved the way for Petraeus to propose its expansion nationally. However, when he presented the idea to Karzai, he faced opposition. As Karzai's national security advisor admitted in early 2012, there were intense negotiations and numerous disagreements between Karzai and Petraeus on this issue.[39] To some extent, this was also a fight over control of patronage and the people it empowered.

As noted earlier, the Afghan government had objected to what it perceived as unilateral efforts by U.S. SOFs to create local militias outside the control of the central government. Furthermore, the government's objections may have been linked to Karzai's preference for and prioritization of rebuilding the ANSF. In fact, in 2005, Karzai proposed increasing the size of the national police to improve security in the border areas with Pakistan, indicating a preference to train and equip more ANA and ANP to meet the security needs of the population and to fight the insurgents. When his request was turned down by U.S. and NATO officials, he then proposed creating what he called community or local police, modeled on the arbaki concept.[40] His plan was to arm local villagers in those areas so they could provide their own security and protect their homes. They would receive funds and military equipment in exchange for agreeing to operate under the control of the MOI.

It appears that Petraeus was not in favor of international forces or of the ANSF conducting COIN operations in insecure areas. According to Afghan officials involved in the negotiations, Petraeus's proposal was influenced by his experience with the Sons of Iraq program in Iraq. It involved setting up small anti-Taliban local armed groups paid by the U.S. military to work directly under SOFs command without links to central government institutions.[41] Karzai argued that such a plan would lead to *militia-sazi* (proliferation of militias), the destruction of the state, and a new form of warlordism.[42] To prevent this outcome, Karzai argued for Afghan government control and proposed an alternative in the form of the ALP, which allowed the creation of thousands of local police under the command of the MOI. This option enabled the Afghan government, at least in principle, to exercise some control over SOF-supported militias while legitimizing the U.S. expansion of its existing militia program.

The future of the ALP by early 2013 was unclear. Some argued for its absorption into the regular police, others for its disbandment, and others still for its extension. The Afghan government did not articulate a clear policy on whether to keep, expand, or disband it. The U.S. military indicated that it had plans to expand the more cost-effective ALP and to shrink the more expensive army and police units. The ALP's strength in January 2013 stood at 19,600 in

more than one hundred districts, covering roughly 17 percent of the Afghan population, some five million people being protected by ALP units according to the Special Operations Command. These numbers were projected to increase to twenty-two thousand in July 2013 and thirty thousand by July 2015. In February 2013, plans were revealed for the Special Operations Command to extend a financial lifeline from the Pentagon to the ALP for at least five more years, providing $1.2 billion to train, arm, and pay forty-five thousand fighters. Although the expansion plans won the approval of U.S. commanders, and Afghan officials from the MOI also gave their support, Karzai and his cabinet did not officially approve the request, and the president remained critical of the program (Cloud and Bengali 2013; Hodge 2013).

Rationalities and Incentives

In practice, the way that the ALP program emerged and was implemented was the result of a complex bargaining process involving international actors, national political elites, and provincial level elites.

For international actors, the ALP was attractive because of cost efficiencies and risk transfers.[43] It helped overcome manpower shortages while reducing costs and political risks. Like colonial systems of policing, the metropolitan centers of power seek to reduce the costs of policing the periphery by devolving these responsibilities to the periphery itself. As William Rosenau notes, local police are in effect low-cost trigger pullers (2008).

Militias were revived or created because of a perceived tactical deficit—the inability of regular forces to respond effectively and efficiently to insurgent activities in remote insecure areas where government and ISAF forces had no or limited presence. As well as being more cost-effective, according to their special forces mentors, they do not desert, have low attrition rates, and tend to win their battles, though their casualty rates are three times higher than those of regular forces. Their lack of institutionalization ensures a more rapid response, they know the local terrain, and they can generate effective intelligence—all critical factors in counterinsurgency operations.

As noted earlier, European donors were more skeptical about what they perceived as the paramilitarization of the police force. Whereas the American military was mostly concerned with increasing the capabilities of the police force to suppress the insurgency, Europeans were mostly worried about the weakness of the rule of law. Afghan reformers, on the other hand, were intent on strengthening the institutions of the Afghan state (Giustozzi and Isaqzadeh 2011, 17).

Therefore, from the beginning, their role, status, and institutional home were ambiguous. Should they be a military or paramilitary force or a policing force? What should be their duties? Should they enforce the law or bring security? What was their legal status? Should they be subject to criminal or military law? Should they be housed in the Ministry of Interior or the Ministry of Defense? The Americans and Europeans had different answers to these questions, with the former wanting them to be more of a paramilitary force and the latter a civilian policing force. As one European official noted, "If they're police, they shouldn't be on the frontlines or manning checkpoints."[44]

For national elites, the calculations were quite different. It is important to distinguish between centralizers like Karzai, who have sought to build up their power base through brokerage and patronage, and centralizers like Atmar and former finance minister Ashraf Ghani, who are essentially donor-dependent reformers and have sought to build the institutions of the central state and to disempower the men of violence in the periphery—in the process making

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