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CARL FORSBERG

AFGHANISTAN REPORT 5

POLITICS AND POWER IN KANDAHAR



INSTITUTE FOR THE
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MILITARY ANALYSIS AND EDUCATION
FOR CIVILIAN LEADERS

Cover Photograph: (Left to Right) Ahmed Wali Karzai, Arif Khan Noorzai, and Afghan Defense Minister Abdul Rahim Wardak cut a ribbon that formally opens an Afghan National Army hospital in Kandahar.

Photo Credit: U.S. Navy Photo by LCDR Steven Parks

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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RECOMMENDATIONS

- A strong personality-driven political order is emerging in Afghanistan which undermines ISAF's goals. This report discusses the historical context of governance structures in Kandahar, the declining influence of tribes, Kandahar's current powerbrokers, and the rise of the Karzai family.
- Kandahar is strategic terrain for the Quetta Shura Taliban and the Karzai family, and a central focus of ISAF's 2010 counterinsurgency campaign.
- Ahmed Wali Karzai's influence over Kandahar is the central obstacle to any of ISAF's governance objectives, and a consistent policy for dealing with him must be a central element of any new strategy. Wali Karzai's behavior and waning popularity among local populations promote instability and provide space for the Taliban to exist.
- ISAF has inadvertently strengthened the forces that undermine legitimate government institutions. ISAF must shape the political landscape in Kandahar so that the local government becomes a credible partner.
- ISAF must develop a new coherent strategy that is unified in both Kandahar and Kabul and that recognizes the means by which informal power structures co-opt and undermine the development of robust institutions.
- A new ISAF strategy must include:
 - Unity of effort among coalition actors at the national and provincial levels.
 - Comprehensive intelligence on the interests and relationships of local powerbrokers, contracting networks, and on the connections between Kabul and Kandahar.
 - Reform of ISAF contracting, to ensure distribution of ISAF funding to a broad range of constituencies, and to ensure that contracts do not create strong military-commercials networks.
 - Disarmament and demobilization of private security forces and private militias.
 - Building ministerial capacity in Kandahar and Kabul to ensure strong and independent security forces.

KEY FINDINGS

- While most actors in Kandahar call themselves tribal leaders, few influential actors in Kandahar derive their influence from this position. Control over guns, money, and foreign support have become more important as sources of power.
- Influential actors in Kandahar nevertheless attempt to maintain influence over the tribal system and often organize their networks, militias, and cartels along tribal lines.
- The Karzai family is the key to politics in Kandahar. The Karzai family and the Quetta Shura Taliban have emerged as the most powerful forces.
 - Since 2001, Ahmed Wali Karzai has gradually built a powerful empire in Kandahar through the support of foreign backers and by bringing under his influence the province's key commercial, military, and contracting networks.
 - The Karzai family's leading members, Hamid, Mahmoud, Qayum, and Ahmed Wali, have built significant influence in different spheres, strengthening the family's power as a whole.
 - President Hamid Karzai reassigned Kandahar Governor Gul Agha Sherzai to Nangahar province in 2005, replacing him with Asadullah Khalid, a family ally. This gave Ahmed Wali Karzai informal control of the province.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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- Kandahar's political and economic life is dominated by several commercial and military networks.
 - Ahmed Wali Karzai is at the center of a number of these networks, and has considerable influence over business life in Kanahar City itself, with significant private security, real estate, and contracting interests.
 - His control of private security forces, as well as his influence over contracting firms like Watan Risk Management and Asia Security Group allows him to enforce his political will in the city and exert influence over all business transactions.
 - Ahmed Wali Karzai has formed alliances with other key strongmen in Kandahar, who control transit routes and run commercial/military networks. These strongmen include Arif Noorzai, Abdul Razak, and Matiullah Khan.
 - Family members and allies of Gul Agha Sherzai run a rival commercial network to Ahmed Wali Karzai's.
- Ahmed Wali Karzai has used his informal power and his connections to the Afghan state to give him shadow ownership of the government of Kandahar.
 - Through the Independent Directorate of Local Governance, the Karzai administration in Kabul controls the appointment of provincial governors and district officials, giving it considerable power over local government.
 - Given Ahmed Wali Karzai's influence in Kabul, local government officials understand that challenging Ahmed Wali Karzai's influence would jeopardize their political futures.
 - Local powerbrokers have intentionally kept the official police force weak. This allows them to manipulate the police force to their ends and forces ISAF to rely on their private security companies. Because many of these companies are controlled by or allied with Ahmed Wali Karzai, this ensures both revenue and influence.
- The local population sees the government as an exclusive oligarchy devoted to its own enrichment and closely tied to the international coalition.
 - Anti-government sentiments are exploited and aggravated by the Taliban. Many of the local powerbrokers who are excluded from Wali Karzai's network see the Taliban insurgency as the only viable means of political opposition.
 - The 2009 presidential and provincial council elections demonstrated that Ahmed Wali Karzai's popular base in Kandahar was narrowing.
- Despite limited popular support, Ahmed Wali Karzai's maintenance of power rests on three interdependent pillars. These are:
 - That the international coalition, despite growing frustrations, will continue to give him de facto support where it matters and will not take actions that challenge his fundamental interests.
 - That he will continue to receive critical state backing and continue to control the formal government of Kandahar. He assumes that Hamid Karzai will continue to support him and that the government ministries in Kabul will not challenge his influence due to his brother's political ascendancy.
 - That he will maintain the ability to exert power over locals through his use of force and his control over the provincial economy.

POLITICS AND POWER IN KANDAHAR

By Carl Forsberg

INTRODUCTION

The United States' political strategy in Afghanistan is adrift. The coalition finds its influence in Kabul dwindling and its partnership with the Karzai government deteriorating. The Karzai administration has been pursuing its own approach to stabilizing Afghanistan, and one that often has little connection to or is at cross-purposes with ISAF's strategy. A strong personality driven political order is emerging in Afghanistan, in which the state is a collection of personal alliances of regional powerbrokers and commercial networks held together by the Karzai administration, and in which institutions are divided among various factions.¹

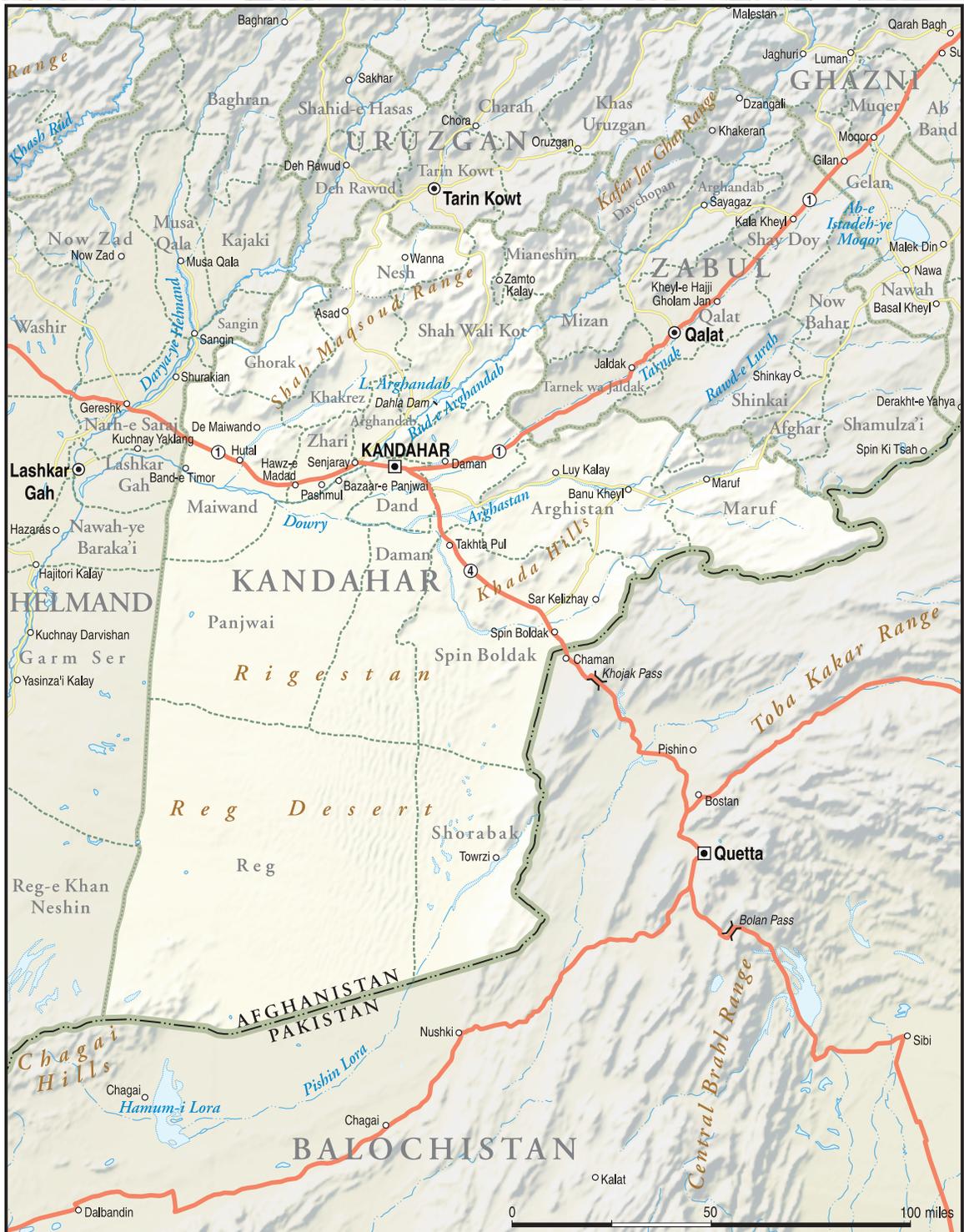
The case of Kandahar starkly dramatizes the failure of the international coalition to respond to political realities on the ground and to support ISAF's military operations with a coherent political strategy. ISAF has made securing Kandahar City a central component of its 2010 campaign in southern Afghanistan, and has recognized that altering the dynamics of local politics is every bit as important as are military operations. Kandahar's politics fuel the insurgency, alienate the population from the government, and deprive ISAF of reliable partners.

The politics of Kandahar clearly reveal that some of President Karzai's closest allies, including his half-brother Ahmed Wali Karzai, are more interested in manipulating the coalition for their own interests than in genuine partnership. ISAF's stated strategy of countering the Taliban in Kandahar with a population-centric counterinsurgency and strengthening Afghan governance institutions will become incoherent if the interests of local powerbrokers remain unchallenged. The coalition will not win the population over to the government unless it decouples the government of Kandahar from a small oligarchy that is perceived to rule by virtue of its guns and money.

ISAF needs a strategy in both Kabul and Kandahar that accounts for discrepancies

between the Karzai administration's strategy and its own and can set the conditions for genuine partnership. Ultimately, the targeted application of leverage may be the only means of moving the Karzai administration to take action against the personal interests of a small elite and to pursue a program that builds Afghanistan's long-term stability.

This paper documents the dynamics, personalities and relationships that drive political action in Kandahar and the role which Kabul plays in shaping dynamics in the province. The first section deals with the historical forces shaping Kandahar today and traces the diminishing influence of tribes in Kandahar. The second section investigates the Karzai family's history, interests, and internal dynamics and lays out the family's consolidation of power in Kandahar from 2001 to 2006. The third part traces the personality based networks, which ally political, business and military interests to hold effective power over Kandahar. The fourth section documents how Ahmed Wali Karzai uses his informal interests and connections to Kabul to subvert formal government institutions for his own ends, and analyzes the negative effect this dynamic has for Kandahar's security forces. It emphasizes that dynamics in Kabul are of pressing importance for Kandahar, and stresses that national, provincial, and district-level politics are intertwined. Section five analyzes how the



MAP 2 | KANDAHAR PROVINCE

politics of Kandahar have contributed to popular perceptions of Kandahar's government as an exclusive oligopoly, looking at the fraud that accompanied the 2009 elections, Ahmed Wali Karzai's manipulation of the tribal system, and to the significance of Kandahar's political system for reconciliation efforts. The paper concludes by considering why ISAF's efforts to reform governance in Kandahar have been ineffective, and proposes a more aggressive approach that brings to bear the whole range of ISAF's military, financial, and diplomatic resources.

Kandahar: Basic Population

Discerning basic demographics has been a major challenge in Kandahar, as demonstrated by the lack of reliable population figures for the province. Official population surveys for Kandahar province include a 2003-2004 study by the Afghan Information Management Service (AIMS), which estimated the population of Kandahar Province as 913,900, and put the population of Kandahar City at 323,900, with another 144,300 individuals living in the city's suburbs. These figures are based on the 1979 census, the last taken in Afghanistan.² The Afghan Central Statistics Organization uses similar numbers, estimating a modest rise in the province's population to 1,080,300 by 2009.³ There is general consensus amongst those in the field that these numbers are too low, especially for Kandahar City, whose population has swelled over the last five years, as many fled the insurgency in rural areas nearby.⁴ Kandahar City has become a haven not only for rural Kandaharis, but also for tens of thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs) from Uruzgan and Helmand.⁵ As of 2009, the most credible estimates suggest the city's population has more than doubled in the last five years to around 800,000, though some estimates suggest the city's population is as high as two million.⁶

The distribution of the population outside of Kandahar City is even harder to estimate. The general trend has been movement from rural areas to urban areas, and Canadian estimates now suggest that up to eighty-five percent of

Kandahar's population lives in Kandahar City and its suburbs. The city of Spin Boldak-Wesh on the border with Pakistan has also grown as fast, if not faster, than Kandahar City, and its population may number some 50,000, and several settlements along Highway One, including Senjaray and Howze Medad have also seen significant growth.⁷ The 2004 AIMS figures suggest that some 250,000 Afghans lived in the Arghandab River Valley in the Arghandab, Panjwai and Zhari districts and that approximately 100,000 lived in the northern districts of Shah Wali Kot, Khakrez, Ghorak, Mianeshin and Nesh.⁸ The population figures for these areas are likely lower in 2010, given the fighting that has occurred there.⁹ The 2004 population survey estimated that another 10,000 Afghans lived in the desert Shorabak and Reg districts, although there may be significant population fluctuations in these districts due to movement back and forth from Pakistan, and some 55,000 lived in the mountains of Maruf and Arghestan. These remote areas are generally considered under local control, and have limited connection to Kandahar's political system.¹⁰

TRIBE AND STATE IN KANDAHAR

The tribe is an underlying social factor in Kandahar, but its importance for Kandahar's politics and security can be overestimated. Kandahar's tribes are not unified political entities. Almost all political leaders in Kandahar claim to be tribal elders. Even Ahmed Wali Karzai insists to the western media that "I'm only a tribal elder."¹¹ But few influential actors in Kandahar derive their influence from their position as tribal leaders. Control over guns, money, and connections to the state have become far more important. If the tribe is not the central driver of politics in Kandahar, however, it is the terrain on which Kandahar's political battles are fought. Influential actors in Kandahar, though not brought to power through the tribes, nevertheless attempt to maintain influence over the tribal system, and often organize their cartels along tribal lines in the same way that mafia networks often draw on manpower from a set group

of families. Powerbrokers in Kandahar thus maintain illusions about the importance of the traditional tribal system and their place within it for their own ends.

Pashtun tribes generally consist of multiple subdivisions, including sub-tribes and clans. Broad tribal confederations like Durrani, Ghilzai, or Karlanri are helpful mostly for purposes of classification.¹² It is rare for an entire Afghan tribe to take collective action on a given issue. Sub-tribe and clan divisions are more relevant for Pashtun politics than are broad tribal groupings, as these are the levels on which important rivalries and blood feuds develop.¹³ Alongside subtribes and clans, the most relevant kinship groups in Afghanistan are called *qwams*.¹⁴ Though *qwams* sometimes overlap with clan affiliation, they can often transcend clan and be based on factors like class, profession, religious community, political affiliation, or village.¹⁵ Traditionally, Pashtun tribal leadership is decentralized and semi-meritocratic. Tribal authority is held by tribal elders, traditionally older men, but this authority is limited and based upon their reputation and demonstrated prudence.¹⁶ These elders traditionally play a role in organizing communal defense and maintaining social order by resolving disputes, but decision-making is generally collective and an individual tribal elder has limited command and control.¹⁷

Tribal organization in Kandahar today bears little similarity to traditional models. Two distinct periods in Kandahar's history – the Durrani monarchy and the mujahideen and Taliban era – have in different ways caused this transformation. Understanding power structures in these periods is essential to understanding political relationships in Kandahar today.

The Durrani Monarchy

The first of these historical periods was the Durrani monarchy, from 1747 to 1973, during which there evolved a super-tribal elite, which drew its strength more from state power than from having broad tribal authority, but which prudently managed Kandahar's traditional tribal leadership, generally maintaining social order

especially as the state became stronger in the twentieth century.¹⁸

The development of a super-tribal elite in Kandahar is linked to the unique history of the Durrani tribe, which has long held sway over southern Afghanistan. Durrani Pashtun tribes seized Kandahar from the Hotaki Ghilzai dynasty in the 1730s.¹⁹ The Durrani tribes settled in Kandahar, claiming the province's best land and subordinating the once powerful Ghilzai.²⁰ Ahmad Shah Durrani, a member of the Durrani Popalzai tribe, unified the Durrani confederation, and led a series of military campaigns, conquering a large portion of modern Afghanistan.²¹ In 1747, he was proclaimed the first Shah of Afghanistan, which was at its inception essentially an empire ruled by Durrani kings from Kandahar. For the next 200 years, until the 1970s, Afghanistan was ruled by Durrani kings.²²

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, connections with the monarchy led authority in Kandahar to become more hierarchical than elsewhere in Afghanistan. Within Kandahar's Durrani tribes grew an aristocracy which benefited from its ties to the state.²³ As the state gradually built its own institutions, Durrani aristocrats gained a certain power and prestige, as well as the ability to distribute patronage. The pattern of landholding in Kandahar also contributed to growing hierarchy, as a few Durrani families significantly increased their property ownership, becoming large scale landlords. Beneath the Kandahar aristocracy with its ties to the state was the traditional class of tribal headmen and *maliks* who were more closely integrated with Kandahar's population, playing key roles in areas such as conflict resolution. Unlike in eastern Afghanistan, however, these tribal and village leaders were dependent on, and subordinate to, the local aristocracy – a class which was less prominent in other Pashtun areas.²⁴

The Z̄irak Durrani Tribes Become a Super-Tribal Elite

The Durrani confederation is often split into two groupings by anthropologists, one of which is the Z̄irak Durrani and includes the Popalzai, Barakzai, Achakzai and Alokozai tribes.²⁵ The

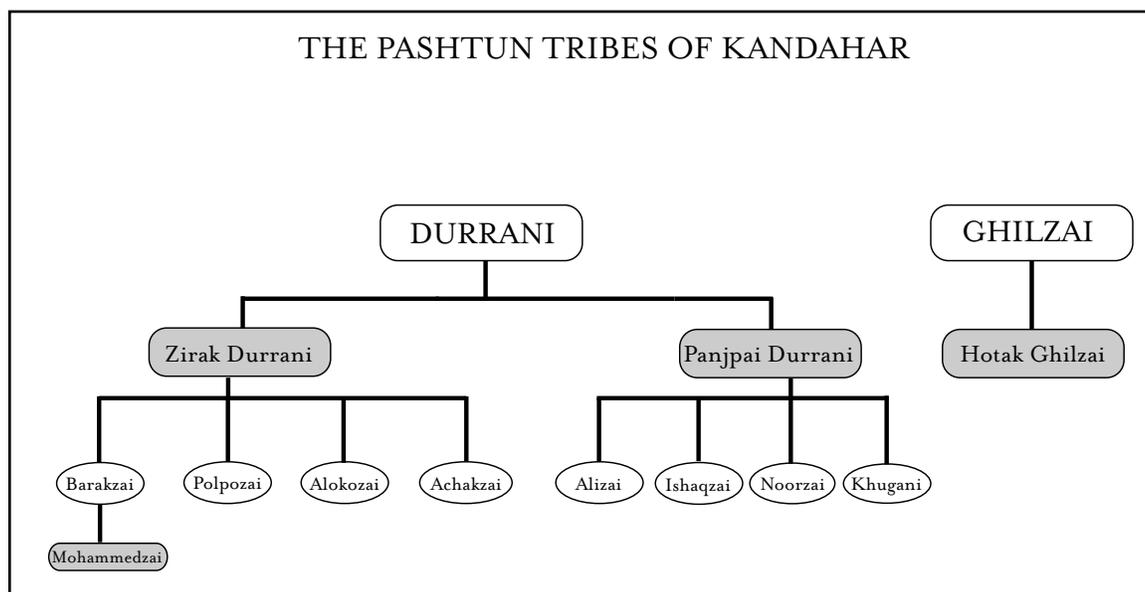


CHART 1 | THE PASHTUN TRIBES OF KANDAHAR

super-tribal elite in Afghanistan evolved from some of these Zirak Durrani tribes. The Afghan royal family came first from the Popalzai tribe and then, after 1842, from the Barakzai. As a result, these tribes formed particularly strong connections to the Afghan state and had more prominence and influence in Kandahar.²⁶ The Popalzai have produced a number of Afghanistan's leading politicians, including the Karzai family,²⁷ and in Kandahar the Popalzai are both leading politicians and often the largest landholders.²⁸ Within the Kandahar Popalzai, the leading clan has historically been the Sadozai, from which the Afghan Shahs were drawn from 1747 to 1842.²⁹

The Barakzai tribe, with its historic connections to the monarchy, is one of the most urban, wealthy, influential and progressive of Kandahar's tribes.³⁰ The Barakzai are particularly influential in Kandahar City, concentrated as they are in the suburbs and villages of the Dand and Daman districts surrounding Kandahar City.³¹ The Shahs of Afghanistan from the 1840s to the 1970s came from the Mohamadzai sub-tribe of the Barakzai, which led many Mohammadzai to relocate to Kabul. Today the Mohamadzai have a minor presence but a disproportionate influence in Kandahar. In addition to the Mohamadzai, the Nusrat and Noorahudin are the two most

prominent Barakzai clans in Kandahar, and compete for the place of the leading Barakzai clan.

The Alokozai tribe dominates the fertile Arghandab district bordering Kandahar City, and there are also Alokozai communities in the hills of Khakrez and Shah Wali Kot.³² The Alokozai have historically been less attached to Kabul than the Popalzai or Barakzai. Perhaps as a result, the tribe's leadership remained much stronger and attached to its people through the 1980s and 1990s, and until 2007 the Alokozai retained a reputation for their strong and unified militias.³³ The Achakzai tribe in Kandahar inhabits the plains of Spin Boldak, and also has enclaves in Panjwai.³⁴ In Spin Boldak, the Adozai clan of the Achakzai dominate. The Adozai's location along the main transit points between Afghanistan and Pakistan gives them control of trade routes between the two countries, and they have developed a reputation for vigorously defending their smuggling routes.³⁵ The leadership of the Adozai clan in Kandahar has tended to support the national government so long as it has a role in managing customs and cross-border transit,³⁶ although in areas such as Uruzgan other sub-tribes of the Achakzai have formed a major element of the Taliban insurgency.³⁷

The Panjpai Durrani, the Ghilzai, and the Baluch

The Panjpai Durrani, meanwhile, played a subordinate role in the Durrani confederation and are considered by some Zirak Durrani to have been incorporated into the Durrani from the Ghilzai tribes in the eighteenth century.³⁸ The Panjpai Durrani tribes the Noorzai, Alizai, and Ishaqzai – are largely based in the rural districts of Zhari, Panjwai, and Maiwand.³⁹ There are also Alizai and Ishaqzai tribal enclaves dispersed through the hills of Ghorak, Khakrez, and Shah Wali Kot. The Noorzai and Ishaqzai are generally less affluent than the Zirak Durrani, and are more likely to work as laborers or tenant farmers on large estates in the agricultural belt along the Arghandab River.⁴⁰ These groups are often identified as more sympathetic to the Taliban. A large number of senior Taliban commanders are indeed Noorzai, and their conservative social norms, distance from Kandahar City, and subtle antagonism with some Zirak Durrani groups do make this true in some cases.⁴¹ Yet there are also Noorzai clans that have a large stake in the new post-Taliban administration in Kandahar, and in Afghanistan's western provinces like Farah, Noorzai families like the powerful Farahi form the pro-government elite.⁴²

In Kandahar there are also sizeable minorities of the Ghilzai tribe, the historic rivals of the Durrani. The Ghilzai heartland is now in neighboring Zabul Province, but there are significant enclaves of Ghilzai in the remote valleys of Shah Wali Kot District.⁴³ Many Ghilzai families have migrated to the agrarian regions of Panjwai and Zhari, where they form a relatively less affluent class of small landholders or farmhands.⁴⁴ Mullah Omar, leader of the Quetta Shura Taliban, comes from one of the less affluent Hotak Ghilzai families in rural Zhari District, and the conservative social norms of the Taliban movement reflect the culture of this long marginalized social group.⁴⁵ The tribal hierarchies of these groups have eroded in areas like Panjwai and Zhari where the Durrani leadership had laid claim to much of the land.⁴⁶

A final demographic in Kandahar is a small

population of nomadic, non-Pashtu, Baluch and Barech tribesmen who migrate through the scarcely populated southern districts of Shorabak and Reg.⁴⁷ These tribes are closely tied to Baluchistan Province in Pakistan, and are particularly susceptible to Taliban influence.

But as pervasive as tribe is in Kandahar, the social divide between rural Kandahar and Kandahar City may be a more useful distinction than that between the Zirak Durrani tribal hierarchy and the Panjpai Durrani, or between the Durrani and Ghilzai groups.⁴⁸ This divide overlaps somewhat with tribal distinction, because the Zirak Durrani tribes benefited more from their affiliation with the Afghan monarchy. But there are many Popalzai and Barakzai alienated from their own tribal elites and holding extremely traditional worldviews, just as there are Noorzai and Ghilzai who are cosmopolitan and well integrated into the Afghan elite.⁴⁹ Tribal affiliation in Kandahar City tends to be weaker than in the countryside, and Kandahar City has also been home to groups of non-Pashtun Persian speaking Hazaras, Tajiks (the latter are called Farsiwani in Kandahar) and Uzbeks.⁵⁰ But if traditional tribal leadership is weak in Kandahar City, tribally based networks still remain an important political force in Kandahar, and since 2001 tribally-based cartels have gained considerable power over the city's two dominant sources of revenue: contracts from foreign organizations and the opium trade.⁵¹

Mujahideen and Taliban Eras: The Receding Authority of Kandahar's Tribes

The historic pattern of social relations in Kandahar was thrown into turmoil after the communist revolution of 1978. By this point, Kandahar's super-tribal aristocracy had grown more attached to the state than to their clans, and when the communist Khalq party seized control of the Afghan government from the old Durrani regime in 1978, the traditional Durrani aristocracy saw its influence evaporate almost overnight.⁵² Many of the old aristocrats, including some who would return to play a prominent role in post-2001 Kandahar politics, fled abroad and into exile; few returned to

Kandahar to lead their tribes or take up arms against the communist regimes.⁵³

The educated tribal aristocracy in Kandahar was thus supplanted in the 1980s by a new set of commanders who led the mujahideen, the broad-based Afghan guerilla movement which arose in response to the Soviet invasion in 1979.⁵⁴ These new commanders were tribally based, but drew their power less from traditional sources of moral authority than from their access to weapons and ability to organize and lead tribal militias. A minor tribal figure named Abdul Latif represented the new breed of commanders, assuming control of the Barakzai tribe with the support of a violent gang of young fighters known as the Payluch. Upon Latif's assassination in 1989, leadership fell to his son, Gul Agha Sherzai, currently the governor of Nangarhar province.⁵⁵

After the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, the communist regime of President Najibullah and the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) managed to hold Kandahar City for three additional years, even as the mujahideen commanders controlled the surrounding countryside. PDPA governor Nor-ul Haq Ulomi survived with considerable support from Kabul and by cutting deals with the mujahideen leadership. When the Najibullah government finally fell in 1992, the leading mujahideen commanders formed a loose confederation and divided provincial offices and carved out small fiefdoms. Kandahar City itself was divided between the leading mujahideen commanders, who turned to consolidating their recently acquired power over their own tribes. Most of the significant mujahideen commanders from the 1990s returned to Kandahar in 2001. The seven major mujahideen commanders from 1992-1994, almost all of whom were relevant for post 2001 politics were:

- Barakzai commander Gul Agha Sherzai, who also served as governor of Kandahar and controlled Dand District in 1992-1994.⁵⁶
- Alokozai commander Mullah Naqib, who controlled Arghandab District from the 1980s on, having reached an accommodation with

the Taliban and remained in Kandahar during their rule.⁵⁷

- Popalzai commander Amir Lalai, who controlled much of Shah Wali Kot District from 1992- 1994.⁵⁸
- Achekzai commander Hajji Ahmed, who controlled the highway to Spin Boldak and eastern districts of Kandahar City from 1992-1994.⁵⁹
- Noorzai commander Ustad Halim, who controlled parts of Panjwai District from 1992-1994.⁶⁰
- Mullah Sarkatib, who led the largely Ghilzai Hezb-e Islami party and fell out with the rest of Kandahar's mujahideen leadership in 1992. Sarkatib is one of the few living mujahideen commanders not to have returned to Kandahar, and is currently a businessman in Dubai.⁶¹
- Habibullah Jan, who led the Alizai tribe around Senjaray, to the west of Kandahar City from 1992-1994.⁶²

These commanders seized large amounts of government land and doled it out to their lieutenants, while their militias took to extortion against their fellow tribesmen and established hundreds of checkpoints along Kandahar's roads.⁶³ Tribal leadership became increasingly based on the use of force, and the mujahideen commanders were much rougher and uninhibited in their use of violence.⁶⁴

The post-Soviet mujahideen era was an aberration from the historic subordination of Kandahar's tribes to state-connected elites, produced by the weakness of the state at that time and the effect communist rule had on breaking the connection between tribe and state. For a few years Kandahar's tribes appeared to be growing in autonomy, though in reality that autonomy really belonged to a class of warlord mujahideen commanders, and traditional tribal leadership not integrated into the new militias grew increasingly irrelevant. The mujahideen commanders' use of

violence in many ways destroyed traditional forms of tribal leadership, based on soft power, standing and ability to provide for the tribe.⁶⁵

The rise of the Taliban in 1994 was enabled by overwhelming popular resentment of the mujahideen government. In the conservative agrarian Panjwai District west of Kandahar City, a young cleric named Mullah Omar raised a militia of *taliban*, or seminary students, to liberate two girls from a predatory mujahideen commander in the summer of 1994.⁶⁶ His action rallied other mullahs and seminary students, who formed the Taliban movement. Strong discipline and unity of purpose, a surge of recruits from Pakistani seminaries, and the support of the Pakistani Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI) directorate gave the Taliban a clear military advantage over the fractured local warlords. Faced with a Taliban-led uprising, the mujahideen commanders disbanded their militias and fled Kandahar without a fight in October 1994.⁶⁷ The Taliban gained power in Kandahar largely because mujahideen commanders had failed to gain the support of the population and to govern well, though Pakistani assistance played the decisive role in turning the Taliban's popular cause into a successful military force. The Taliban's rise to power was also in part a response to the failure of the traditional Pashtun leadership structure which had been eroded by the communist revolution and the rise of the mujahideen commanders. The central role of traditional tribal structures had always been the maintenance of social order and the provision of justice, and the Taliban mullahs, though traditionally less influential than tribal headmen in Pashtun culture, were able to fill this vacuum effectively. Unlike the mujahideen commanders, the clerics who formed the Taliban initially had a concrete connection to lives and concerns of Kandahar's villagers. The Taliban's rigorous application of strict *sharia* law filled a void in the provision of justice and the rule of law.⁶⁸

The rise of the Taliban re-established the control of Durrani Pashtuns from Kandahar over the Afghan government. And like the Durrani monarchy and the Karzai government after it, the Taliban in Kandahar used its control

over the state and outside support (in this case Pakistani and global jihadist) to rule over and co-opt much of the population. The Taliban's senior leadership was dominated by those with connections to Kandahar and was closely enmeshed in Kandahar's tribal system, but its leadership did to some degree transcend tribal loyalties.⁶⁹ The Taliban incorporated a broader base of Kandahar's tribes than did previous or successive governments. Six of ten men on the Taliban's Supreme Shura were Durrani Pashtuns, but these Durrani came from a broad range of subtribes and clans, not just from the Popalzai and Barakzai.⁷⁰ The Taliban also gave Ghilzais a role in the Afghan government, and Mullah Omar and several other top Taliban leaders were Ghilzai.⁷¹

But if initially the population of Kandahar and its tribal leadership were content with Taliban rule, the Taliban soon moved too far from the traditional political, social, and cultural order of Kandahar, and lost local support. The Taliban, like the communists before them, and in contrast to the Durrani monarchs, insisted on imposing a revolutionary social program onto the population. Their puritanical bans on public entertainment and recreation, influenced by a fundamentalist Wahabist reading of sharia, went too far, and even conservative Kandaharis resented having this extremely austere lifestyle forced upon them.⁷²

Perhaps even more problematic for the Taliban movement was its increasing reclusiveness and its leadership's tendency to associate more closely with Arab jihadists like Osama Bin Laden (who spent much of his time in Kandahar) than with Kandahar's traditional structures. In addition, conscription for the long and costly war against the Northern Alliance provoked resentment in Kandahar.⁷³ By 2001, the Taliban had alienated not only the tribal leadership it had supplanted, but also the population of Kandahar.⁷⁴

The fall of the Taliban in 2001 left a complete political vacuum. In the course of thirty years the old Durrani aristocracy, traditional tribal leadership, the mujahideen leadership, and the Taliban clerics with their foreign backers had all

been discredited, exiled, or suppressed, and none of these groups entered the post-Taliban period with a solid indigenous base of support. In this vacuum, political savvy and foreign backing would be decisive.

THE KARZAI FAMILY: HISTORY, INTERESTS, AND RISE TO POWER

The Karzai family is the key to politics in Kandahar. Of the actors contesting the vacuum left by the fall of the Taliban, the Karzai family has, along with the Quetta Shura Taliban, emerged as the most serious contender. In the course of eight years, President Hamid Karzai's brother, Ahmed Wali Karzai, has, with the support of family members, built a political and commercial empire in Kandahar. By the end of 2009, all significant institutions desiring influence within the framework of the post-2001 Afghan government were dependent upon his blessing.

The Karzai family's rise to power was facilitated by the U.S. but it also owes much to the Karzai family's mastery of political tactics and intrigue. In more recent years, the Karzai family has benefited from using the institutions of the Afghan state to its advantage, and in doing so, has formed important synergies linking politics in Kandahar and Kabul.

The Structure of the Karzai Family

There is, of course, a danger in referring to the Karzai family as a unified entity, as no family possesses a single will. In general, the four brothers who have led the family since 2001 – President Hamid Karzai, his older brothers Qayum and Mahmoud, and his younger half-brother Ahmed Wali – have presented a united front on significant political issues.⁷⁵ Each of the four plays a different role and directs a distinct sphere of the family's activity, but unity and some degree of coordination are maintained. Occasionally, hints of tensions, including between Hamid Karzai and Ahmed Wali Karzai, emerge. Frequently cited is an exchange between Hamid and Ahmed Wali in the presence of a delegation of

visiting elders. Hamid Karzai told his brother he was making a mess of Kandahar, to which Ahmed Wali replied, 'and you're making a mess of the entire country,' before storming out.⁷⁶ In 2006, Hamid Karzai summoned the U.S. Ambassador and CIA and MI6 station chiefs in Kabul to ask if they had hard evidence of Ahmed Wali Karzai's involvement in the drug trade.⁷⁷ But these officials did not produce conclusive evidence, and Hamid has ultimately defended his brother's role in Kandahar, displaying a solidarity unlikely to be broken.⁷⁸ Ahmed Wali Karzai and Mahmoud Karzai repeatedly argue that exposés written about them by Western journalists are really meant as attacks against Hamid Karzai.⁷⁹ The solidarity that the president and his inner circle have shown towards the president's brothers stems at least in part from a feeling that failing to support the president's brothers would undermine President Karzai himself and be a fatal concession to foreign interference.⁸⁰

Thus, this paper understands the Karzai family at its core to be built on the shared interests and objectives of Hamid, Qayum, Ahmed Wali, and Mahmoud. Dozens of other Karzai relatives have entered Afghan politics in the past several years, and although they are important in advancing the family's interests, these relatives are not necessarily working closely with the four leading Karzai brothers, nor do they have the same authority.

Even as the Karzai inner circle feels it has to protect the president's brothers from their detractors in order to protect the President, there is also an impetus within the family to protect Hamid himself.⁸¹ Hamid Karzai is ultimately the reason for his family's prominence, and in a way that his brothers never could, Hamid has created a powerful and unique image as a national figure.⁸² But within the Karzai family, according to reports, there has been a feeling that Hamid Karzai is not naturally inclined to deal with the rough-and-tumble power politics required to govern Afghanistan or secure the family's interests. Hamid Karzai's family is reported to see him as the sensitive middle brother who maintains an inclination towards idealism, reads poetry, and cries in public, and family members may feel

it is incumbent upon them to more aggressively protect family interests.⁸³

Karzai Family History

Internal family dynamics, the Karzai family worldview, and their connection to Kandahar are best illustrated by the family's history over the past decades.

Before 1978, the Popalzai Karzais were one of many Durrani families from Kandahar who benefited from the rule of the Mohamadzai Shahs.⁸⁴ Hamid Karzai's father, Abdul Ahad Karzai, was a significant figure in the administration of Zahir Shah (who ruled Afghanistan from 1933 to 1973) serving as Deputy Speaker of the Afghan Parliament in the 1960s.⁸⁵ Like many of the Durrani aristocrats connected to the monarchy, most of Abdul Ahad's sons left Afghanistan for the United States after the communist coups of 1978. Mahmoud Karzai had emigrated earlier to the U.S. in 1976,⁸⁶ and many of his brothers joined him, opening a series of successful Afghan restaurants under Mahmoud and Qayum's leadership.⁸⁷ Mahmoud, in particular, developed an appreciation for the political and economic institutions of his adopted country, and may be more intrinsically pro-U.S. than some of his brothers.⁸⁸

But Abdul Ahad and Hamid Karzai stayed involved in the anti-Soviet resistance from Pakistan,⁸⁹ where they helped organize and secure funding for Sibghatullah Mojaddedi's Afghan National Liberation Front, one of the more moderate mujahideen factions resisting the Soviet occupation.⁹⁰ They thus maintained links in the Durrani tribal structures of southern Afghanistan, though the family's influence waned somewhat as a new generation of mujahideen commanders rose in prominence.⁹¹ When Soviet forces withdrew from Afghanistan in 1988-1989, Abdul Ahad and Hamid Karzai took a leading role in the short-term interim government led by Mujadeddi, which replaced the communist government of Soviet-supported President Najibullah in 1992.⁹²

Between 1992 and 1994, father and son worked in the fledgling mujahideen government, with

Hamid Karzai serving first as an aide to interim President Mujadeddi and then as Deputy Foreign Minister for the mujahideen government under President Rabbani.⁹³ Karzai brought to the table his diplomatic skills and contacts: by the early 1990s, Hamid Karzai was already well-respected by a number of U.S. State Department officials, who saw Karzai as "an attractive, reasonable royalist, a wily talker and politician."⁹⁴ Karzai would maintain connections with U.S. officials working on Afghanistan over the next decade. By 1994, however, Hamid Karzai had fallen out with Rabbani's Tajik-dominated government, and was forced to flee to Pakistan.⁹⁵

When the Taliban began to consolidate power in 1994 and 1995, Karzai initially supported the movement.⁹⁶ He knew many members of the Taliban leadership as fellow Kandaharis. When the Taliban took Kabul in 1996, they offered Karzai the position of ambassador to the United Nations.⁹⁷ But Karzai had quickly soured on the Taliban, judging that the movement had been co-opted by the Pakistani ISI and was increasingly under the influence of radical Arab groups, eventually including al-Qaeda, and whether out of his own will or because the Taliban recinded their invitation, Hamid Karzai never joined the Taliban government.⁹⁸

Ahmed Wali Karzai, a younger son of Abdul Ahad by a different wife, had spent much of the mujahideen period in Chicago, where he managed a branch of the family restaurant.⁹⁹ But unlike Qayum and Mahmoud, he left the U.S. in the mid-1990s to join his exiled father and his half-brother Hamid in Quetta, Pakistan.¹⁰⁰ Ahmed Wali's decision to return to Quetta does much to explain his relationship with Hamid Karzai. Ahmed Wali had earlier demonstrated loyalty to the family by keeping the lines of communication open with his father when Abdul Ahad was briefly imprisoned by the communist Taraki government in the late 1970s.¹⁰¹ He demonstrated a similar loyalty in the 1990s by returning to Quetta, but beyond that he also financially supported his brother Hamid, just as Mahmoud, a decade earlier, had funded Hamid's studies in India.¹⁰² This may have left Hamid

indebted to both brothers.

Beginning in 1998, Karzai worked, mainly out of Quetta, to organize resistance to the Taliban among Pashtun leaders. While Karzai maintained relations with some elements of the Taliban leadership, his anti-Taliban efforts led to a falling out with the leading circle around Mullah Omar. In response to Hamid Karzai's work, the Taliban assassinated his father Abdul Ahad in Quetta in 1999.¹⁰³

Hamid Karzai's response to his father's assassination in 1999 was a key moment in the family's return to prominence in Kandahar. Karzai organized a massive funeral procession to return his father's remains to the family's native village of Karz, outside Kandahar City.¹⁰⁴ Pragmatic elements of the Taliban leadership in Kandahar opted not to intervene for fear of galvanizing opposition amongst Kandahar's tribal leaders.¹⁰⁵ The bold move demonstrated that Karzai, though a diplomat and intellectual, was capable of leadership, and won him recognition as heir to his father's mantle as the political leader of the Kandahar's Popalzai tribe.¹⁰⁶

In 2000 and 2001, Hamid Karzai began to work in cooperation with Ahmad Shah Massoud, the famed commander of the Northern Alliance, on plans to form a broad anti-Taliban alliance and incite a Pashtun uprising in southern Afghanistan.¹⁰⁷ Karzai, along with several uncles and his brother Ahmed Wali, became important figures around which anti-Taliban leaders in Quetta congregated, but Karzai and his allies remained too weak to actually challenge the Taliban.¹⁰⁸ By the summer of 2001, however, Hamid Karzai's activities in Quetta attracted enough attention that the Pakistani government, which supported Mullah Omar's regime, ordered Karzai to leave Pakistan by the end of September.¹⁰⁹ Though Ahmed Wali Karzai was the only brother who stayed with Hamid in Quetta after the assassination, Qayum Karzai became engaged in Afghan affairs from the United States, where he lobbied in for U.S. government support of anti-Taliban groups.¹¹⁰

The Fall of the Taliban and the Karzais' Place in the New Political Order

The new political order in Kandahar was born in the months after October 2001, when the United States launched military action against the Taliban regime. When the U.S. launched its operations, Hamid Karzai had long been planning an insurrection.¹¹¹ Expelled from Pakistan, Karzai made a bold move, traveling with several friends from Quetta to Kandahar and then to Uruzgan in hopes of fomenting a tribal uprising against the Taliban.¹¹² Having maintained connections with Hamid Karzai, and identifying him as a promising anti-Taliban leader, the CIA and U.S. Special Forces supported him as a proxy through which to oust the Taliban from Kandahar.¹¹³ Hamid Karzai's efforts in Uruzgan initially had limited success, but when a U.S. Special Forces team joined his fighters in the mountains outside of Tarin Kowt, Durrani tribal leaders sensed the direction of events and flocked to join Karzai as he moved on Kandahar City from the north.¹¹⁴

The other U.S. proxy in Kandahar was a former mujahideen commander named Gul Agha Sherzai, who had briefly served as Kandahar governor before he was ousted by the Taliban in 1994 and who remobilized a network of former mujahideen commanders.¹¹⁵ Kandahar City fell to Sherzai, Karzai, and their allies on December 8, 2001. Sherzai and Karzai were able to rally local commanders almost exclusively because of the U.S. support they received: Sherzai in particular benefited from cars stuffed with U.S. dollars given him by the CIA.¹¹⁶ Yet, they were assisted in overthrowing the Taliban regime by a third figure, who had no U.S. backing – the influential Alokozai commander Mullah Naqib, who had tacitly supported the Taliban's rise to power in 1994, and who sided with Karzai and acted as the key conduit for the Taliban's surrender.¹¹⁷

The United States' choice of proxies determined the shape of the new order even before Kandahar City fell, although numerous other actors, including former mujahideen commanders and returning Durrani émigrés also rushed in seeking

opportunities in the new Afghanistan. Hamid Karzai was selected by a group of international and Afghan representatives meeting in Bonn, Germany to serve as Afghanistan's interim President while he was still fighting in Kandahar in December 2001.¹¹⁸ He had benefited from his wide network of contacts, his links to the Royalist faction that had disproportionate influence and the favorable impression he had made on several U.S. officials in Pakistan. When Hamid Karzai left for Kabul later in December, he left his brothers Ahmed Wali and Qayum in Kandahar, and these two inherited Hamid's relationship with the U.S. Government.¹¹⁹ Though Hamid Karzai initially suggested Mullah Naqib serve as Kandahar governor, the U.S. backed Sherzai, leading to his appointment to the office.¹²⁰

As unlikely as the Karzais' rise may have seemed to Afghans in 2001, given their complete lack of hard power assets such as militias and wealth, the family has compensated for an initial lack of local power through political savvy and an astute ability to leverage influence over the Afghan state and the international community. The family's history since the 1980s and its education in both Afghan politics and American institutional processes emerged

as vital assets.¹²¹ The Karzais grew up aware of the machinations of the royal court.¹²² Hamid Karzai had experienced the rough-and-tumble of mujahideen politics in Pakistan during the 1980s and in the Kabul government from 1992 to 1994, and had gained diplomatic experience in the 1990s as well.¹²³ Mahmoud and Qayum had developed a strong understanding of Western business practices and U.S. Afghan policy, putting them in a position to influence Western policy, aid and investment.¹²⁴ Wali Karzai proved adept at mastering local political dynamics and leveraging President Karzai's control of the executive to slowly build a power base in Kandahar. Thus, in December 2001, when Mahmoud and Qayum joined Hamid and Ahmed Wali in

Afghanistan, the family was well positioned to make an informal division of spheres, such that each brother had his own arena in which to act. Hamid took the role of the great statesman, Mahmoud built a business empire, Ahmed Wali built an empire in Kandahar, and Qayum quietly manipulated things behind the scenes as the family's *éminence grise*.¹²⁵

The Karzai Family's Motivations and Interests in Kandahar

Key to understanding the actions of the Karzai family is an understanding of the terms in which it conceives of its interests. Ahmed Wali Karzai's actions in Kandahar generally appear an ambitious pursuit of self-interest narrowly conceived. But for the Karzai family there does seem to be a more complicated conception

of interests, shaped both by perception of threats to the family and to political order in Afghanistan, by which the family's pursuit of its own goals is an element of a broader grand strategy for the Afghan state.

Starting in late 2002, a pattern of behavior from Ahmed Wali Karzai demonstrated a coherent strategy for Kandahar, in which ordering the province's politics and advancing family interests were identified as mutually

supporting goals. There is evidence that the strategy was coordinated with Qayum Karzai, and through him with elements of the Karzai inner-circle.¹²⁶ Ahmed Wali Karzai's approach to Kandahar is well summarized by his words to a reporter in 2009: "This is a country ruled by kings. The king's brothers, cousins, sons are all powerful. This is Afghanistan. It will change but it will not change overnight."¹²⁷ Ahmed Wali Karzai understood that the competing power interests in southern Afghanistan required that local commanders be managed, co-opted, and restrained by the state. This accorded with the historical patterns by which central governments exercised authority over Afghanistan. No groups could be allowed to be too strong, or too

"This is a country ruled by kings. The king's brothers, cousins, sons are all powerful. This is Afghanistan. It will change but it will not change overnight." – Ahmed Wali Karzai

independent of the government. Ahmed Wali Karzai assumed for himself the role of manager in Kandahar.

The Karzai family blurs the state and the personalities who lead it, as suggested by Ahmed Wali Karzai's evocation of the Afghan monarchy. For Ahmed Wali, extending the influence of Hamid Karzai and his inner circle over Kandahar equated with expanding state influence. This mindset views the state as a set of personalities, rather than as institutions, and Ahmed Wali has indeed shown a general nonchalance towards building bureaucratized state institutions independent of personality. The Karzai family has thus confused personal and family interests, justifying consolidation of power as a means of managing Afghanistan's complex internal conflicts. Obviously, the enormous power and wealth which men like Ahmed Wali Karzai acquire from following this model of state-building does much to explain why it is adopted.

It is significant that the Karzai family has felt the greatest need to aggressively build their own empire in those moments when it has felt most threatened, including in those moments when it came to mistrust the international community's willingness to offer unconditional support. The instability of Kandahar Province in the years after the fall of the Taliban may explain why the Karzai family initially believed it necessary to consolidate its own power so aggressively, but, as the evidence in this paper suggest, in recent years their motives, at least in Kandahar, have shifted to the maintenance of power and financial gain.

Despite the U.S. presence, Kandahar's strongmen continued to dominate, and Kandahar moved towards disorder in 2002, as the absence of governance left a vacuum.¹²⁸ Governor Sherzai presided over the new Kandahar government, but did little to impose stability, and often only heightened the latent feeling that Kandahar was devolving into a free-for-all. His power derived chiefly from the support of U.S. Special Forces and the CIA.¹²⁹ Both groups relied on Sherzai for operations in hunting al-Qaeda and the Taliban, but took no interest in the governance

of Kandahar.¹³⁰ Sherzai's power was heightened by his unabashed use of the post of governor to further his power. He kept millions of dollars of customs revenue for his own use, monopolized the mining and construction businesses in Kandahar, and installed allies, particularly Barakzai tribesmen, in provincial offices, furthering his power through patronage.¹³¹

In addition to Gul Agha Sherzai, a host of former mujahideen commanders exiled by the Taliban returned to Kandahar, reconstituted their old militias, and claimed influence over their tribes.¹³² In addition to Sherzai, notable former mujahideen commanders were Amir Lalai (who exerted control over much of the Popalzai), Habibullah Jan (who led the Alizai), and Ustad Halim and Arif Noorzai (who exercised influence among the Noorzai).¹³³ Sherzai closely allied himself with the Adozai branch of the Achakzai tribe, and supported the rise to power of Abdul Razak, who, though initially a proxy of Sherzai, would soon build his own powerful network in the border district of Spin Boldak.¹³⁴

The strongest nexus of mujahideen commanders, initially rivaling Gul Agha and his Barakzai and Achekzai allies, centered on the Alokozai tribe.¹³⁵ The tribe was led by a number of widely respected mujahideen commanders, including tribal chieftain Mullah Naqib, Kandahar's first post-2001 police chief Akrem Khakrizwal, and Khan Mohammad, the commander of the 2nd Corps of the Afghan Military Forces (AMF), the predecessor of today's Afghan National Army.¹³⁶ This network of Alokozai commanders initially had considerable influence over the Kandahar police force and was well represented in the 2nd Corps.¹³⁷

These mujahideen commanders and their militias were initially incorporated into the Kandahar Police force and the 2nd Corps.¹³⁸ Other commanders were incorporated into the provincial administration.¹³⁹ But despite perfunctory attempts to integrate these commanders into the government, this collection of strongmen and militia commanders only escalated local tensions.¹⁴⁰ The old mujahideen

commanders reestablished their infamous checkpoints and their militias took to violent extortion of Kandahar's population.¹⁴¹ Sherzai's Barakzai allies almost came to blows with the Alokozai tribe over control of the police, and when President Karzai attempted to replace some of Sherzai's commanders they refused to give up their posts until U.S. forces intervened on President Karzai's behalf.¹⁴² At one point conflict loomed between governor Sherzai and Ismail Khan, the warlord who dominated Herat Province in western Afghanistan, as Sherzai made a bid to establish Pashtun nationalist credentials and establish himself as the warlord of the south by rallying Herat's Pashtun tribes against the Tajik Ismail Khan.¹⁴³ The deprivations of the returned mujahideen commanders also led some groups to ask for Taliban protection, creating a permissive environment for a low-grade Taliban insurgency starting in early 2003.¹⁴⁴

The rough-and-tumble of the new Kandahar was driven home to the Karzai family in September 2002, when President Karzai traveled to Kandahar City for the wedding of Ahmed Wali Karzai to a sister of Afghan politician Arif Noorzai.¹⁴⁵ During the president's visit to Kandahar, a gunman in Governor Sherzai's security detail opened fire, presumably on the president, while he was riding in a car with Sherzai. Karzai escaped uninjured, although Governor Sherzai was wounded in the attack.¹⁴⁶ An attack on the president in his hometown was a strong psychological blow and demonstrated that the presence of U.S. and international troops had done little to bring order or security to Kandahar.

Even before, but especially after, the 2002 assassination attempt, Ahmed Wali Karzai began not simply to be involved in the political process in Kandahar, but to dominate it.¹⁴⁷

Building the Karzai Empire in Kandahar

Ahmed Wali Karzai's eventual dominance in Kandahar was based on his acute understanding of the evolving political order. The first key reality Ahmed Wali Karzai grasped was that international support – financial, political, and military – is kingmaker in Afghanistan. But at the same time,

despite its potential influence, the international community either did not understand the political ramifications of its actions, or did not have the will to use its resources to stabilize local politics. In addition, international forces and development funding were deeply dependent on local actors for logistical and intelligence support. As a result, international support could be effectively manipulated.

Ahmed Wali Karzai also recognized that, despite the initial U.S. willingness to back actors because of their militias and anti-Taliban credentials, electoral success would eventually be important to gaining legitimacy and support from the international community. And because the NATO coalition desired to support and work through the formal Afghan government, influence over government institutions and appointments became equally important.

Eventually, Ahmed Wali adopted and mastered two other principles, first pioneered, but clumsily so, by Gul Agha Sherzai. The first of these principles was the importance of using political interests to further business interests and vice-versa. The second principle was that despite official rhetoric, the international coalition could be manipulated to either give tacit permission or to actually fund private armed forces and militias. Ultimately, money and arms are the two factors which guaranteed influence in Kandahar, and Ahmed Wali Karzai developed significant assets in both areas.

With a farsighted view towards elections not taken by his rivals, Ahmed Wali Karzai's initial work in Kandahar was in civil politics, despite this initially being a peripheral form of influence in the years when former mujahideen commanders still wielded real power.¹⁴⁸ Ahmed Wali worked to set himself up as a key patron, provider, and protector for local powerbrokers. In this way he benefited from his position as the president's envoy for southern Afghanistan, an official post which President Karzai had given his brother in 2002. A key means by which Ahmed Wali Karzai secured his role as a chief patron for local politicians and tribal leaders was his connections to international aid groups and the international

security forces. Ahmed Wali became heavily involved in the distribution of aide to Kandahar from non-governmental organizations (NGOs).¹⁴⁹ He benefited from a solid grasp of NGO practices and organizations from his time working with them in Pakistan in the 1980s and 1990s.¹⁵⁰ Local leaders desiring NGO or state assistance found Ahmed Wali Karzai a chief mediator for securing desired resources.¹⁵¹ Ahmed Wali Karzai thus became, along with Gul Agha Sherzai, one of two figures who daily received dozens of petitioners, including powerful tribal leaders, from across southern Afghanistan seeking assistance.¹⁵²

In addition, Ahmed Wali Karzai secured leadership roles in the province's early deliberative bodies and founded his own system of district and tribal councils. He was head of the Kandahar Provincial Military Council in 2002,¹⁵³ chaired meetings of the Kandahar municipal council in 2003,¹⁵⁴ and also led the Kandahar delegation to the Loya Jirga in late 2003.¹⁵⁵ The various councils Ahmed Wali set up with the help of his brother Qayum were designed to build up a personal political constituency and undermine the influence of both the mujahideen commanders and of Governor Sherzai.¹⁵⁶ Organizations set up by Ahmed Wali Karzai to co-opt tribal notables included district councils and a *Eslahi Shura*, or provincial reform council.¹⁵⁷ Ironically, given Ahmed Wali Karzai's subsequent behavior, these organizations capitalized on the discontent that weaker tribal leaders felt toward Gul Agha Sherzai and allowed Ahmed Wali to pose as the champion of those excluded from Sherzai's administration.¹⁵⁸ The multiple shuras founded during this period were an important base for the political machine Ahmed Wali Karzai used in the 2005 elections, and many members of these councils were elected to Kandahar's Provincial Council.¹⁵⁹

Ahmed Wali Karzai was one of two figures (Gul Agha Sherzai being the other) known to have established a long-term relationship with the CIA and U.S. Special Forces between 2002 and 2005.¹⁶⁰ This gave him the ability to shield himself and his allies from possible coalition intervention, and allowed him to convince rivals he had the coalition's support.

2005 and After: Ahmed Wali Karzai's Work Comes to Fruition

Ahmed Wali Karzai became the leading bowerbroker in Kandahar in 2005. Gul Agha Sherzai was reassigned by President Karzai for a second time, and moved to serve as governor of Nangahar province in June 2005.¹⁶¹ The move demonstrated both President Karzai and his circle's growing ability to control political appointments, and the Karzai family's ability or desire to direct politics in Kandahar without Sherzai. Sherzai was replaced by Asadullah Khalid, the former governor of Ghazni Province.¹⁶² Asadullah Khalid had connections with the CIA and U.S. Special Forces and with the influential Ghazni Mujahideen commander Sayyaf, but beyond that and the militia he brought with him from Ghazni, he had no power base in Kandahar.¹⁶³ Khalid seems to have understood that his future influence in Afghanistan relied upon the Karzai family's support, and proved a solid ally of Ahmed Wali Karzai, often acting on Ahmed Wali's behalf to coordinate security between Afghan Government forces, informal powerbrokers, and ISAF in Kandahar.¹⁶⁴

Another key development for the Karzai family's influence in Kandahar in 2005 was the September elections for the Wolesi Jirga, the lower house of the Afghan Parliament, and for the Kandahar Provincial Council.¹⁶⁵ These elections demonstrated the effectiveness of the Karzai network at negotiating electoral politics, and the relative weakness of other actors.

Voting has generally followed tribal and ethnic lines in Kandahar, with much of the population inclined to vote for fellow tribesmen. Political factions often compete specifically for the votes of certain tribal demographics, but the most influential networks were able to support candidates from a range of tribes. In Kandahar, the Karzais and their allies had a strong electoral performance in the Parliamentary elections: Qayum Karzai was elected with the highest total vote, and brother-in-law Arif Noorzai came in third.¹⁶⁶ In addition, the Karzai family supported the parliamentary campaign of the Popalzai former mujahideen commander Amir Lalai.¹⁶⁷

Gul Agha Sherzai's mostly Barakzai network proved less adept at electoral politics, electing only one representative to the Wolesi Jirga, the American-educated Khalid Pashtun.¹⁶⁸ The other Barakzai candidate elected was former Parcham leader (Parcham was one of two Soviet backed communist parties) and Soviet ally General Noor-ul-haq Ulomi.¹⁶⁹ Given his communist-era connections, Ulomi's ties were more national than provincial, and he would become a leading figure in the parliamentary opposition to Karzai. He led the National Unity Party in Parliament and was involved in the formation of the National Front in 2009.¹⁷⁰

Other Kandahari candidates of note elected to the Wolesi Jirga were Alizai strongman Habibullah Jan and two Achakzai politicians, tribal elder Ahmad Shah Khan Achakzai and Obaidullah Achakzai.¹⁷¹ No members of the Alokozai tribe were elected to the Wolesi Jirga, indicating the inability of Alokozai tribal leadership to adjust to new forms of politics which demanded electoral organization and mass patronage.¹⁷²

Equally important for the Karzai family was the 2005 provincial council election.¹⁷³ Fifteen members were elected to the council,¹⁷⁴ with Ahmed Wali Karzai garnering the largest number of votes in the election.¹⁷⁵ Many of those elected to the new provincial council had been part of Ahmed Wali Karzai's earlier provincial reform council, and had loyalties to Ahmed Wali, though initially Ahmed Wali's men formed a minority on the council.¹⁷⁶ Still, Ahmed Wali was elected provincial council chairman by the new body.¹⁷⁷ This provided him with a formal, democratically-elected position which legitimized his influence in the province, protected him from calls for his removal, and gave him official reason for carrying on relations with the international community in Kandahar.¹⁷⁸

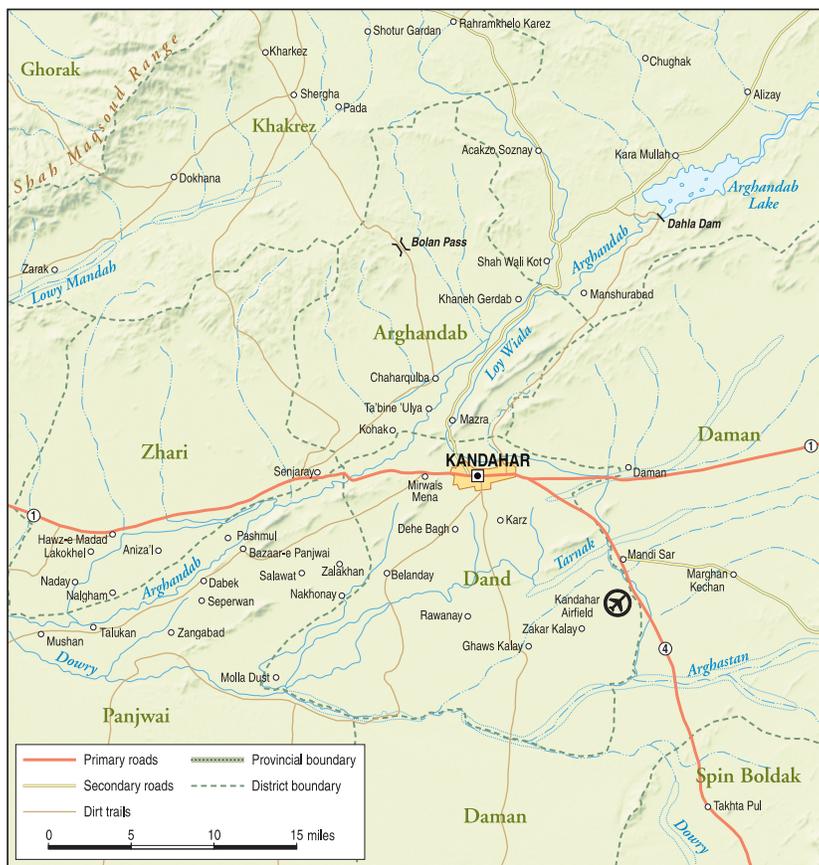
By the end of 2005 Ahmed Wali Karzai's careful preparations for power had paid off. Kandahar had a new governor, strongly under his influence, and he had emerged with a strong hand from provincial elections. Ahmed Wali's connections with the international coalition continued to be

strong in 2005-2006, despite several reports in the Western press alleging involvement in narcotics, and were bolstered by his elected position as provincial council chairman. The U.S. transferred formal responsibility for the province to ISAF, led in Kandahar by the Canadians from 2005 to 2006, but ISAF also worked closely with Ahmed Wali Karzai, and Ahmed Wali's SOF and CIA partners also continued to be active in Kandahar.¹⁷⁹

Decline of Mujahideen Leadership

Ahmed Wali Karzai's ascendancy was accompanied by a phasing out of the influence of the older generation of mujahideen commanders. Most of the major mujahideen commanders who ran Kandahar between 1992 and 1994 returned to Kandahar after the fall of the Taliban. These commanders had been given considerable autonomy and influence under Gul Agha Sherzai's government in 2002-2004, and were informally incorporated into Kandahar's security forces. Several forces accounted for the decline of the mujahideen commanders. In some cases, they were intentionally weakened by leading figures in Kandahar. They also found themselves eclipsed by a class of younger businessmen/commanders with far greater financial resources, secured from contracts, and by actors like Ahmed Wali Karzai with closer ties to the Afghan state. Finally, the Taliban had a decisive role in limiting their influence, as mujahideen have been vigorously targeted. The Taliban may have focused on these commanders in order to isolate the Karzai government from some of Kandahar's tribal militia networks, but, as their old nemesis from the 1990s, the mujahideen commanders may simply have figured more prominently in the consciousness of senior Taliban leaders. In either case, numerous commanders have been killed, and many of those still living have stepped away from public life. By 2008 the old mujahideen leadership had become a marginal player in Kandahar.

Gul Agha Sherzai's return to eminence in Kandahar is profiled above. The other major mujahideen commanders have maintained



MAP 3 | CENTRAL KANDAHAR PROVINCE

their own personal, and sometimes erratic, relationships with key figures in the Kandahar government. Based outside of Kandahar City, these mujahideen commanders have been given some autonomy within small fiefdoms provided they do not interfere with the commercial interests of the larger networks based in Kandahar City. Ustad Abdul Halim, for example, still maintains a militia to the west of Kandahar City. He cooperated on an ad hoc basis with Governor Khalid, but did not have a standing role in provincial security.¹⁸⁰ Amir Lalai, who returned to Kandahar from exile in Iran in 2001 and reconstituted his militia, has had a subtly antagonistic relationship with the Karzai family, who see him as a rival to their influence within the Popalzai tribe.¹⁸¹ Lalai supported Yunous Qanoni, Hamid Karzai's challenger, in the 2004 Presidential election, but the next year won a seat in the Wolesi Jirga with the Karzais' support, only to campaign against Hamid Karzai again in the 2009 election.¹⁸² The current extent of

Lalai's power is unclear: during the early 1990s he commanded a sizable militia and appropriated large amounts of land in the Loy Wiala area of Kandahar City.¹⁸³ Much of this influence may have been lost, but Lalai has reasserted his control over parts of Shah Wali Kot district near the Dahla Dam, a small pocket in the midst of Taliban-controlled territory.¹⁸⁴ Another former mujahideen commander, the Alizai strongman Habibullah Jan, exerted personal control over the strategically critical Senjaray area until killed, presumably by the Taliban, in 2008.¹⁸⁵ Habibullah Jan had a turbulent relationship with Ahmed Wali Karzai, having accused Ahmed Wali of connections to the drug trade during a period of antagonism before the two were reconciled again in 2007.¹⁸⁶

The mujahideen leadership's influence has been in decline since the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) program carried out under the auspices of the UN

from 2003 to 2005. The DDR program sought to demobilize Afghanistan's militias, which would in theory be replaced by the new Afghan National Army (ANA).¹⁸⁷ The DDR process ultimately eroded the influence and independence of the various tribally-based commanders and took them off the payrolls of the Afghan government, but the old commanders did retain significant militias. By taking these commanders off government payrolls and decoupling them from the government in Kandahar, the process effectively allowed Sherzai and Karzai to push rivals out of the Kandahar government. This was especially true for the Alokozai tribe.¹⁸⁸

The tribally-based former mujahideen leadership of the Alokozai tribe, which retained considerable military strength and authority in Arghandab district under the leadership of Mullah Naqib, had been an independent power structure since the fall of the Taliban and was perceived by both Gul Agha Sherzai and Ahmed Wali Karzai as more of a threat and rival than a partner. Ahmed Wali Karzai's role in the disintegration of the Alokozai tribal leadership and the Taliban takeover of Arghandab district in 2008 and 2009 is particularly telling of how the progressive alienation of key provincial constituencies contributes to the insurgency, and of the fragility and vulnerability of those leadership networks caught between Ahmed Wali Karzai and the Taliban.

The Alokozai tribe's senior leadership had gradually lost its stake in the Kandahar provincial administration as Karzai and Sherzai consolidated power after 2001. Its initial influence over the Kandahar police steadily eroded in favor of Karzai allies after 2004, when General Khan Mohammad Alokozai was removed as police commander in favor of Karzai allies.¹⁸⁹ But the Alokozai remained strong and presented a holdout against both Ahmed Wali Karzai's consolidation of power and the Taliban's attempt to take Arghandab District through 2007.

When Mullah Naqib died of a heart attack on October 11, 2007, Ahmed Wali Karzai saw an opportunity to weaken the autonomy of the tribe's

leadership and bring it more firmly under his influence.¹⁹⁰ Tribal leadership would naturally have fallen to one of several senior Alokozai leaders, including Khan Mohammad, the former Kandahar Chief of Police and Naqib's deputy. But within weeks of Naqib's death, President Hamid Karzai traveled to Arghandab, where he publically crowned Naqib's son, the twenty-six-year-old Kalimullah Naqibi, as Alokozai tribal head (an incident suggesting considerable coordination between the President and Ahmed Wali Karzai).¹⁹¹ Naqibi's appointment provoked protests from key Alokozai figures including Mohammad Khan and Izzatullah Wasefi, son of former Alokozai leader Senator Azizullah Wasifi. Naqibi was not only young, but had no political or military experience and in interviews displayed a persistent self-doubt.¹⁹² He failed to win the popular support enjoyed by his father, and lacked standing among the Kandahar government, where he was treated by Governor Khalid "like a rag doll."¹⁹³

The death of Mullah Naqib and the Karzais' interference in tribal politics caused the Alokozai leadership to disintegrate rapidly. The Alokozai tribe under Mullah Naqib had played a vital role in Kandahar's security in 2007 and earlier, forming a bulwark against Taliban infiltration of Kandahar City from the north through Arghandab district. Within weeks of Mullah Naqib's death in October, 2007, and again in June, 2008, the Taliban launched full scale assaults on Arghandab district with several hundred fighters, briefly capturing the northern bank of the Arghandab River.¹⁹⁴ The two attacks destroyed public confidence in the ability of the Alokozai tribe's anti-Taliban leadership to defend Arghandab. In addition to their incursion, the Taliban conducted an assassination campaign against the tribe's leadership, killing several major commanders in the spring and summer of 2008, and conducting frequent attacks on the Afghan Police in Arghandab.¹⁹⁵ Taliban intimidation had severe psychological implications, and by mid 2008 several of Arghandab's main families conceded to the Taliban. The fall of Arghandab district proved a critical gain for the Taliban, who were able to use the district to step up their

infiltration and terror campaign in Kandahar City.¹⁹⁶

The fall of Arghandab is a clear example of the ways in which Ahmed Wali Karzai's pursuit of his own political interests has negatively affected security in Kandahar. Not only did Ahmed Wali Karzai contribute to the deterioration of security in Arghandab by installing Karimullah Naqibi as Alokozai chieftain, but he continued to demonstrate apathy towards the district, seeing it mostly as a field in which to increase his own influence at the expense of the Alokozai tribal leadership. The fall of Arghandab had broad implications for the security of Kandahar, as the Taliban were able to use the district to infiltrate Kandahar City, and were it not for ISAF's presence may have been able to undermine Ahmed Wali Karzai's control of Kandahar City.¹⁹⁷ Kandahar's new governor in the fall of 2008, General Ramatullah Raufi, entered office with a comprehensive plan for securing Kandahar, including a new focus on securing Arghandab district, but soon found himself a lame duck as his authority was ultimately undermined by Ahmed Wali. The problem caused by Taliban presence in Arghandab was ultimately only addressed by ISAF troops and the ANA, who at last deployed in strength to Arghandab in August 2009.¹⁹⁸

FAMILIES, CARTELS, AND MILITIAS: THE INFORMAL POWER STRUCTURE AND POLITICAL ECONOMY OF KANDAHAR

In the place of tribal or mujahideen leadership there has emerged a powerful new order built around a small number of personal networks, which for the most part are interconnected with their own hierarchy of dependency. These networks gain their strength from a combination of arms, business interests, control over government institutions, ability to control patronage, and influence over ISAF.

There is a frequent perception that political life in Kandahar is disordered and unstructured. In reality, Kandahar's new political order has

developed a firm, hierarchical structure, though built around personalities and families which often operate through violence and coercion and which is resented by much of the population. Its political order is of a type not always recognizable to the West, and certainly not in line with Western hopes for institutionalized governance responsive to the population.

Most networks in Kandahar ultimately are dependent on Ahmed Wali Karzai, though there are also networks built around Gul Agha Sherzai and his allies which are an exception to this rule. Networks which are allied with or have established accommodations with Karzai are run by three other critical actors in Kandahar: Arif Noorzai, Abdul Razak, and, Matiullah Khan.

Ahmed Wali Karzai's immense influence over politics in Kandahar is not due to his official position as provincial council chairman (though this position has been a key guarantor of ISAF support), but to his ability to secure patronage and to his control of multiple armed actors. An underlying dynamic driving Kandahar politics, which has become more important after 2006, has been the consolidation by the Karzai and Sherzai families of patronage networks whereby they gain the loyalty of militia commanders in exchange for distributing lucrative contracts from international actors.¹⁹⁹ The Sherzai and Karzai families have secured a duopoly on the distribution of major contracts from the international community. Obtaining private security contracts became extremely desirable for militia commanders in Kandahar, who could secure enormous compensation and in some cases legitimize their militias.²⁰⁰ The politics of contract patronage has undermined security in Kandahar by generating armed militias operating outside formal Afghan structures which are committed to protecting their own profits and the political interests of their commander.

Ahmed Wali Karzai began building his contracting empire slightly later than his rival Gul Agha Sherzai, but ultimately built a more powerful network. Ahmed Wali's entry into the contracting business benefited from ties to the CIA and U.S.



PHOTO 1 | KANDAHAR CITY

Special Forces as well as to international NGOs. The CIA quickly came to rely on Ahmed Wali as a conduit for renting property, in addition to relying on an Ahmed Wali affiliated unit – the Kandahar strike force – as a key proxy force.²⁰¹ By 2004 Ahmed Wali secured some additional contracts with U.S. firms like US Protection and Investigation (USPI), and would soon secure more.²⁰²

The economics of the contracting business are such that actors Ahmed Wali Karzai, close family members like Hashmat Karzai or Ahmad and Rashid Popal, and their allies, have tremendous ability to build patron-client relationships with militia commanders. Starting in the early 1990s, and increasingly after 2001, Kandahar's militias have been managed for economic profit.²⁰³ As the authority and reputation of tribal leaders decreased, militia commanders increasingly attracted fighters by promising high wages. In the early 1990s and the first several years after 2001, these militias funded themselves by establishing checkpoints and extorting their tribes.²⁰⁴ The DDR process made it more complicated for militia or “police” (the two were often one and the same)

commanders to extort the population.²⁰⁵ They now needed permission from prominent figures in the Kandahar administration – chiefly Ahmed Wali Karzai and for a while Governor Asadullah Khalid – to do so. Obtaining ISAF contracts was a more effective way for commanders to make their militias profitable. Commanders were able to take a large cut of the profits, and Afghans could receive far higher wages by working for these commanders than they could by serving in the ANA or Afghan National Police (ANP).²⁰⁶ Because ISAF contracts in Kandahar have been channeled through two networks, those of Ahmed Wali Karzai and of the Sherzais, commanders who desire to secure major contracts must curry favor with these two players – essentially rendering these militias dependent on Kandahar's leading actors. Militias loyal to Ahmed Wali Karzai are a major presence in Kandahar City, where they are often posted at checkpoints and patrol the city.²⁰⁷

Ahmed Wali Karzai's influence in Kandahar City penetrates beyond major contracts into much of the city's commercial life.²⁰⁸ Operating on a smaller scale than the major Kandahar contracting interests are a host of other minor contractors. Establishing and profiting from these small businesses has largely absorbed the energy of Kandahar's ambitious business and political entrepreneurs.²⁰⁹ These small contractors are not necessarily all linked directly to Ahmed Wali Karzai. But like most businesses in Kandahar, they are careful to stay in Ahmed Wali Karzai's favor due to his influence over the Afghan government, ISAF, Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), and Kandahar's major business interests.²¹⁰ Ahmed Wali Karzai's connections and influence allows him to collect a cut of most of the business transactions occurring in Kandahar City.²¹¹ These transactions might be compared to informal taxation, though evidence suggests that much of Ahmed Wali Karzai's revenue in Kandahar is laundered and transferred abroad, and certainly not applied to the public interest.²¹²

Since 2006, the Karzai family has established its own major private security firms and private militias, which give them even greater influence

over the commanders who have become their dependents.²¹³ Several of these firms have major interests across Afghanistan, not just in Kandahar. The largest Karzai family-controlled firm in southern Afghanistan is the Asia Security Group (ASG), run by Hashmat Karzai, the cousin of President Karzai.²¹⁴ ASG once claimed to have over 10,000 security personnel available, and operates an office in Kandahar, among other cities.²¹⁵ The scale of the operation suggests that the militias of key regional actors may fall under the aegis of ASG and provide it with its manpower.²¹⁶ The ASG, in turn, is part of Asia Group International, which includes construction and logistics contracting firms.²¹⁷ In addition to ASG, the extended Karzai family also runs Watan Risk Management.²¹⁸ Headed by another pair of cousins of the Karzai family, Ahmad and Rashid Popal, Watan is a major provider of security for international convoys moving along the Kabul to Kandahar road.²¹⁹ It, like ASG, is part of a

larger business conglomerate, the Watan Group, which is also invested in telecommunications and logistics.²²⁰ The financial resources of these groups, as well as their access to lucrative ISAF contracts, puts them in a position to incorporate subsidiary militia groups across Afghanistan, and particularly in the south, where these firms can further Ahmed Wali Karzai's political interests. Karzai-affiliated contracting firms have benefited from the influence of the Karzai network over the Ministry of Interior in Kabul. The Afghan Ministry of the Interior introduced a licensing procedure for private security companies in the spring of 2008, denying licenses to a number of previously active Afghan firms, but, despite some controversy, authorizing Karzai-affiliated firms like ASG and Watan.²²¹

In addition to the militias that answer to Ahmed Wali Karzai through the Karzai contracting firms, Ahmed Wali Karzai's growing business interests

THE HASHMAT KARZAI INCIDENT

Recent murder allegations against Hashmat Karzai, head of the powerful Asia Security Group, raise interesting questions about the relationship between the Karzai brothers and the host of extended family members who have in the last several years capitalized on their relatives' rise to power.

A December 2009 New York Times article revealed accusations that Hashmat killed eighteen-year-old relative Waheed Karzai in October 2009 in order to settle a longstanding family blood-feud.²²² Members of the Karzai family were alleged to have covered up the allegations and encouraged family members not to bring it to the police, allegations supported by the two month lag between the incident and its first report in the press.²²³

After the murder allegations were publicized in the New York Times, Mahmoud Karzai publicly disowned Hashmat Karzai, stating that "Hashmat Karzai is not a good man in my opinion...I do not associate with Hashmat Karzai and he is not our family."²²⁴

It is unlikely that the family followed through on Mahmoud's statement, and there has been little news on Hashmat since December.²²⁵ But if the Karzai brothers do in fact distance themselves from Hashmat, it would suggest that they've come to consider many of their extended family members more of a liability than an asset.

This group of extended family includes Hashmat's brother Hekmat, who runs a Kabul think tank often consulted by ISAF, politician Jamil Karzai, NDS (National Directorate of Security) deputy Jamar Karzai, businessman Hashim Karzai, and private security firm directors Abdul and Rashid Popal.²²⁶ Many of these cousins tend to be brasher and more open in their pursuit of self-interest, and have garnered negative publicity in the Afghan and western press.²²⁷

While Mahmoud and Ahmed Wali Karzai have had their own fair share of negative publicity, they show some savvy in deflecting accusations,²²⁸ and may fear that family members like Hashmat need to be reigned in.

and influence have allowed him to form a number of militias directly under his command. As of late 2009, these include some 150 personal bodyguards under the command of Fazl Mahmad, the force securing the Ayno Mena development, commanded by Haim Zarz, and the provincial council security force, commanded by Hajji Seyid Jan.²²⁹ These units have been known to maintain a visible presence and enforce Ahmed Wali Karzai's will within Kandahar City.²³⁰

In addition to holding sway over Kandahar's business life, Ahmed Wali Karzai has developed powerful business interests of his own. Ahmed Wali Karzai has strong interests in the transportation and real estate sectors in Kandahar.²³¹ The real-estate sector in Kandahar is particularly notorious for benefiting from abuses of state power. In the 1990s large amounts of state land were seized by mujahideen commanders, who proceeded to sell it to their commanders and militiamen. Similar patterns of questionable land transactions emerged after 2001, when former mujahideen commanders appropriated land in areas like Zhari and Panjwai, and the Sherzai and Khalid governments were known to grant large tracts of government land around Kandahar City to their political allies.²³² Ahmed Wali Karzai has become a dominant player in these land transactions.²³³ Some of his real estate interests appear to be conducted through the Kandahar Provincial Council, which has actively intervened in land issues. Despite the lack of a constitutional prerogative to do so, the council has at times asserted its ownership over land or water rights.²³⁴ There is evidence as well that Ahmed Wali Karzai has attempted to seize land potentially used by ISAF troops for basing or for reconstruction or road building projects, in order to rent it to the coalition at a considerable profit.²³⁵ A frequently cited real-estate venture in Kandahar is the Ayno Mena housing project, developed with the participation of Ahmed Wali Karzai and his older brother Mahmoud.²³⁶ Ayno Mena is probably one of the more legitimate and transparent real estate interests of Ahmed Wali Karzai, but its history still gives some indication of the nature of his broader land interests. Ayno Mena is a 10,000 acre gated community to the

east of Kandahar City which caters to Kandahar's new money.²³⁷ The land for the development was sold to a consortium of five buyers, including Mahmud Karzai, in 2005 at a minimal price by Governor Gul Agha Sherzai, allegedly with the involvement of Ahmed Wali Karzai.²³⁸ The project has subsequently made a considerable return for its investors, with some houses in the development selling for over \$90,000.²³⁹ The ANA, which is itself one of Afghanistan's largest landholders, has subsequently claimed ownership of the land, alleging that it was it was illegally sold to its investors by Governor Sherzai.²⁴⁰

The Ayno Mena development in Kandahar raises a question about the connection between Ahmed Wali Karzai's business interests and those of his brother Mahmoud. The two brothers conduct business according to different models, with Mahmoud's displaying a relative degree of transparency, operating through declared corporate interests, rather than informal networks. As such, it is much easier to define Mahmoud's holdings. (This, in turn, has made Mahmoud more vulnerable to media scrutiny, and may have subjected him to greater investigation from journalists than other Afghan businessmen, who operate under far more problematic business models.)²⁴¹ Along with business partner Sher Khan Farnood, Mahmoud runs the Afghan Chamber of Commerce, a powerful organization which has secured and directed considerable foreign aid and investment,²⁴² and has a major interest in the Kabul Bank, one of Afghanistan's largest, and of which Farnood is chairman.²⁴³ Other business interests of Mahmoud Karzai include the Afghan Investment Company of which Mahmoud is chief executive officer, and which runs Afghanistan's largest cement factory along with subsidiary coal mining operations.²⁴⁴ Mahmoud also signed an exclusive sales agreement with Toyota Corporation.²⁴⁵ These interests, and influence over organizations like the Chamber of Commerce and the Kabul Bank in particular, have made Mahmoud an important figure within the legitimate business networks operating in Kabul.²⁴⁶ The Kabul Bank, in which Mahmoud has a stake, suggests the utility of commercial interests for political gain, and the extent to which Kabul's

business elites forge alliances based on dual commercial and political considerations. Kabul Bank's Chief Executive Khalilullah Fruzi was senior financial advisor to Hamid Karzai's 2009 re-election campaign,²⁴⁷ and the Kabul bank was one of the nodes around which President Karzai secured an alliance with Northern Tajik leader Mohammad Fahim. Haseen Fahim, the brother of Northern Alliance Leader and First Vice-President Mohammad Fahim, is another major shareholder in Kabul Bank, and the political connections between Mahmoud Karzai and Haseen Fahim helped to cement Hamid Karzai and Mohammad Fahim's political alliance in the lead-up to the 2009 presidential election.²⁴⁸ It is less clear, however, how the corporate interests of Mahmoud and his associates interact with the the powerful informal business networks dominant in Afghanistan's provinces. Beyond Ayno Mena, there is not significant evidence that Mahmoud works closely with Ahmed Wali Karzai and his business network in southern Afghanistan.

Ahmed Wali Karzai's power network, consisting of security forces and business interests, alongside their influence over state institutions, is a key prop of their control over the official government in Kandahar and over the political and commercial life of the province. Before examining the means by which this influence is exerted, however, it is important to note the other major powerbrokers and their networks, one of whom stands as an independent rival to Karzai, and the other three of whom are dependent upon Ahmed Wali Karzai and accommodate his interests.

The Sherzai Network in Kandahar

Gul Agha Sherzai and his allies lost control over Kandahar's government in 2005, when Sherzai was moved to serve as Governor of Nangahar. Since then Sherzai's network has reached an uneasy accommodation with Ahmed Wali Karzai. While Sherzai has little political influence in the province, his network maintains considerable business interests and ties to ISAF contracting. Sherzai's network in Kandahar maintains its independence from the Karzais largely because

of these residual ties and connections to ISAF from before 2005, when Sherzai had a virtual monopoly over ISAF contracts.²⁴⁹ In Gul Agha Sherzai's absence, his brothers Bacha and Razziq Sherzai have maintained close connections to ISAF, in addition to leading the family's mining, construction, and energy interests, sectors in which the Sherzais are reported to dominate in Kandahar.²⁵⁰ Sherzai also maintained alliances with several key Barakzai business families and with the militia commanders who had served under his command in 2001. A number of these Sherzai allies and lieutenants have maintained connections with ISAF forged before 2005. Khalid Pashtun, who was educated at the University of Southern California, served as Sherzai's spokesman before 2005 and is now a Member of Parliament (MP), managing a major construction company with contracts from the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT).²⁵¹ Colonel Tor Jan, one of Gul Agha's commanders, received a number of contracts after 2005 to provide security for the Canadian provincial reconstruction team in Kandahar, as had another of Sherzai's allies, NDS (National Directorate of Security) officer General Gul Alai.²⁵²

The provision of militia units to serve as private security for ISAF is only one aspect, though, of the Sherzai family's business empire in Kandahar. That business empire was founded on Gul Agha Sherzai's use of political power before 2005 to secure a major interest in construction and several other subsidiary interests. Political power was integral to Sherzai's initial financing: until the fall of 2003, Sherzai kept most of Kandahar's customs revenues for himself and his allies, rather than sending it to Kabul. Some sources suggest that Sherzai's personal revenue from Kandahar's customs was as high as eight million dollars a month.²⁵³ Of particular value to the Sherzai family's construction business is its gravel mining operations, which were built on Sherzai's personal appropriation of gravel quarries in 2002. The Sherzais were able to sell their gravel to foreign development agencies for as high as \$100 a load, when the production cost of the gravel may only be one-tenth of that, leaving the Sherzais with a

hefty profit.²⁵⁴ Logistical support to ISAF – going far beyond provision of hired guns – is central to Sherzai’s profit making. ISAF at one point rented Kandahar Air Field from the Sherzai family, ensuring another revenue stream for the family.²⁵⁵

Sherzai’s business interests – or at least those of his allies – compete with the Karzai business empire for the same pool of ISAF contracts. While business competition within the confines of law is healthy, competition for contracts in Kandahar has taken on distinctly problematic forms. Reports suggest that rival contractors sabotage each other’s projects: in February 2008, for example, contractors were reported to have blown up each other’s bridges to undermine their competition.²⁵⁶ The vast scale of the resources inattentively distributed by ISAF certainly provides a clear motive for this behavior.

The monetary incentives provided by the widespread use of local militias for protective services have given many armed Kandaharis a greater incentive to protect the sources of their funding, rather than to protect the population or defeat the Taliban. This incentivization structure may explain widespread reports that many contractors across Afghanistan pay off the Taliban rather than fight them.²⁵⁷

The extent to which the unrestrained pursuit of financial interests by Kandahar’s private militias undermines security and the refusal of figures like Ahmed Wali Karzai to rein in their networks is best highlighted by the killing of Police Chief Matiullah Qateh in June 2009. Forty members of a Karzai-affiliated unit, the Kandahar Strike Force, entered the office of the Kandahar City prosecutor and demanded the release of an associate being held for car theft and forgery.²⁵⁸ The Kandahar Strike Force was based with U.S. Special Forces to the west of Kandahar City and employed by the CIA as a local proxy force.²⁵⁹ The Kandahar City prosecutor refused to hand over the suspect, leading to an exchange of gunfire during which Kandahar Province Police Chief Matiullah Qateh was killed.²⁶⁰ The Kandahar Strike Force’s brazenness in forcefully demanding the release of a criminal associate demonstrates

the extent to which private armed groups are willing to challenge the authority of the state, and their expectation that its officials would accede to their demands. Given the absence of forceful ISAF regulation, the self-aggrandizement of private security forces has seriously undermined the rule of law and security. Incidentally, while President Karzai was quick to condemn international forces for their connection to the Qateh killing, he did not admit to his own brother’s connections to the Kandahar Strike Force.²⁶¹

Sherzai and Karzai in 2009–2010

While their family networks have competed for power in Kandahar, President Hamid Karzai and Gul Agha Sherzai, both key national leaders, have maintained an ambiguous relationship. Sherzai’s transfer to Nangarhar had mixed results for the Barakzai leader. His influence in Kandahar decreased, and in his absence much of his own Barakzai tribe faction has freed itself of his influence.²⁶² But in Nangarhar, meanwhile, Sherzai won considerable popularity through a massive construction campaign and rebuilt his reputation with the international community by ending opium cultivation in the province.²⁶³ Sherzai remained for practical purposes an ally of Karzai, but by 2009, had become the type of leader Karzai did not want to create: a politician with a base in Kandahar as well as considerable popularity and influence in the east. Sherzai’s influence became clear when he considered a possible presidential run in the spring of 2009.²⁶⁴ This would have been a disaster for Karzai, splitting the vote in Kandahar and throughout Pashtun areas of Afghanistan. Over the course of the summer, Hamid Karzai and Ahmed Wali Karzai met with Sherzai independently, and persuaded him to withdraw his candidacy, arguing that a Sherzai candidacy could reduce the influence of both men.²⁶⁵ During the summer and fall of 2009 there was speculation that in exchange for Sherzai dropping his candidacy, Karzai promised him a greater role in the South.²⁶⁶ Gul Agha Sherzai’s continued influence in Afghanistan is still very much up in the air. When Karzai eventually formed his new

WHO'S WHO - KEY FIGURES IN KANDAHAR POLITICS

KARZAI FAMILY

Hamid Karzai - President of Afghanistan.

Ahmed Wali Karzai - Younger half brother of Hamid Karzai. President of the Kandahar Provincial Council and key powerbroker in Kandahar.

Qayum Karzai - Older brother and close advisor of Hamid Karzai. Resigned from Parliament in 2008, and now heavily involved in reconciliation efforts.

Hashmat Karzai - Cousin of the Karzai brothers. Runs the private security company Asia Security Group.

SHERZAI FAMILY & ALLIES

Gul Agha Sherzai - Governor of Kandahar from 2001-2003 and again from 2004-2005. Governor of Nangarhar from 2005-present.

Abdul Raziq & Bacha Sherzai - Brothers of Gul Agha Sherzai. Major business interests include logistical support for Kandahar Airfield.

Khalid Pashtun - Former Sherzai spokesman, Member of Parliament, and head of major construction company.

Yusef Pashtun - Governor of Kandahar, 2003-2004, Minister of Urban Development and Housing, 2004-2009.

Gul Alai - Sherzai lieutenant and major contractor in Kandahar.

GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

Toryala Wesa - Governor of Kandahar from 2008-present. Spent several decades in Canada and is a childhood friend of Hamid Karzai.

Ramatullah Raufi - Governor of Kandahar from August 2008-December 2008. Removed after challenging Ahmed Wali Karzai's influence.

Asadullah Khalid - Governor of Kandahar from 2005-2008, former governor of Ghazni. Removed with Canadian urging.

Gulam Haider Hamidi - Kandahar Mayor. Has lived in the US and is a close friend of the Karzai family.

***Matiullah Qateh Achakzai** - Former Kandahar Police Chief, 2008-2009. Killed by Kandahar Strike-Force in June 2009.

* (Deceased)

NOORZAI FAMILY

Arif Noorzai - Afghan politician, Member of Parliament, and head of a prominent Kandahar family. He is a close confidant of President Karzai and plays a key role in tribal engagement and reconciliation issues.

Mirwais Noorzai - Deputy Commander of the 205th Corps of the ANP. Interim Kandahar Chief of Police, July - September 2009, and close to the Karzai family.

ALKOZAI TRIBE

***Mullah Naqib** - Famous mujahideen commander & leader of the Alkozai tribe in Arghandab until his death of natural causes in October 2007.

Karimullah Naqibi - Son of Mullah Naqib. Officially named head of Alkozai tribe by President Karzai in 2007, but exercises limited authority.

***Akrem Khakrezwal** - Kandahar Chief of Police from 2002-2003. Served with distinction as Kabul Chief of Police before being killed by the Taliban in 2005.

Agha Lalai Dastergeri - Kandahar Provincial Council member, close ally of Ahmed Wali Karzai and former head of the Peace Through Strength (PTS) program in Kandahar.

KEY SECURITY & MILITIA COMMANDERS

Abdul Razak - Commander of the Afghan National Border Police in Kandahar, from the Achakzai tribe.

Matiullah Khan - Popalzai Commander of the Kandak-e Amniat-e Uruzgan and heavily relied on by ISAF to provide security for the Kandahar Tarin Kowt Road. From the Popalzai tribe.

Jan Mohammed - Former governor of Uruzgan. Removed by President Karzai in 2005 with Dutch urging. Uncle of Matiullah Khan, from Popalzai tribe.

Sher Mohamad Akhundzada - Governor of Helmand, 2002-2005. Removed by President Karzai in 2005 with British urging.

***Habibullah Jan** - Former Alizai strongman & Member of Parliament who controlled the town of Senjaray. Assassinated in 2008, presumably by the Taliban.

Ustad Halim - Noorzai commander based west of Kandahar City.

Ruhullah - Enigmatic Popalzai commander who has built a monopoly over security provision on the Kabul to Kandahar Road.

government in early 2010, Yusuf Pashtun, an ally of Sherzai's, was not renominated to serve as Minister for Urban Development, leaving Gul Agha without a man in the cabinet, and the President has not demonstrated any intention to give Sherzai increased influence in Kandahar.²⁶⁷

But while it does not appear that Hamid Karzai wants Sherzai back in Kandahar, Gul Agha Sherzai has actively campaigned for a return to power in the south in early 2010. Most notably, he made a public visit to Kandahar in February, 2010 to meet with Ahmed Wali Karzai, for the duration of which Governor Wesa was away in Kabul.²⁶⁸ Sherzai appears to be lobbying ISAF for its support for a return to Kandahar as well. He has argued that Kandahar needs a much stronger governor, and in his typically straightforward manner, has proposed himself to fill the position.²⁶⁹ Naming Sherzai as Kandahar Governor is an unlikely move for the Karzais, chiefly because it would create a rival power figure and significantly weaken Ahmed Wali Karzai's stature. Despite talk of a pre-election deal between Sherzai and Karzai, Sherzai ultimately has little beyond his ISAF connections that he can use as leverage against the President. Through the turbulent elections in 2009, Hamid Karzai succeeded in keeping Sherzai dependent upon his influence, demonstrating a broader trend at the national level of Pashtun politicians throwing their lot with the Karzai camp rather than seeking to challenge its influence. Ultimately, while Sherzai no doubt resents President Karzai for keeping him in Nangarhar, he appears impotent to alter the situation, and as an instrument of central power in Nangarhar and a benign force in Kandahar, he continues to acquiesce to the interests of the Karzai family.²⁷⁰

The Other Powerbrokers: Abdul Razak, Arif Noorzai, and Matiullah Khan

In addition to the Karzai and Sherzai families, there are a handful of key figures in Kandahar who, along with their own families and networks, wield considerable influence in Kandahar, but who are also dependent on the Karzai network. One of these figures, Arif Noorzai, maintains

influence in both Kandahar and Kabul, and is a close ally of both the president and of Ahmed Wali Karzai. Two others, Jan Mohammad and Abdul Razak run their own powerful militias and provide security for key areas in Kandahar Province away from Kandahar City.

Arif Noorzai Family: Using State Power for Influence in Kandahar

A key actor in Kandahar and Kabul who has often remained off the radar of ISAF and the international community is Arif Noorzai. Arif Noorzai's father, Haji Musa Jan Noorzai, came from a prominent Noorzai family in Maiwand district of Kandahar, and was one of southern Afghanistan's first drug barons, entering narcotics trafficking in the 1960s and amassing a large fortune.²⁷¹ The family's narcotics interests have almost certainly been revived after 2001, and its recent business investments, including a fifteen million dollar investment in Kandahar's only luxury hotel, hint at its considerable financial assets.²⁷²

Arif Noorzai left Kabul University in the early 1980s and earned his credentials fighting against the Soviets as a member of the Ittehad-e Islami (IEI), mostly in Western Afghanistan, rather than Kandahar.²⁷³ During the Taliban era he was one of very few southern Pashtuns to join Ahmad Shah Massoud and the Northern Alliance.²⁷⁴ His background as a Kandahari, a member of the Ittehad-e Islami party, and an associate of the Northern Alliance, as well as his ties to Noorzai families in Western Afghanistan, give him broad political connections. Arif Noorzai cemented a critical alliance with the Karzai family in 2002, when his sister married Ahmed Wali Karzai. Since then, the Noorzai family has been a trusted ally of the Karzais, and Noorzai family members have been placed in key positions.

Arif Noorzai has spent the post-Taliban period in appointments in Kabul. The ability of his family to increase their influence in Kandahar serves as further evidence of the role connections in Kabul have had in building influence in Kandahar.

The family's considerable commercial interests

depend on using connections to Kabul to control transit routes across the Afghan South. Arif Noorzai served in the powerful cabinet post of Tribal and Frontier Affairs Minister under Karzai from 2002 to the end of 2005.²⁷⁵ He was elected to parliament from Kandahar in 2005 and several months later was named the first deputy speaker of parliament, a post he held until 2009, when he was made head of the Independent Directorate for Protection of Public Spaces and Highways by Tribal Support. This position gives Noorzai critical control over the Community Defense Initiative, a U.S.-backed effort to develop tribal militias. President Karzai appointed Noorzai to the position despite the protests of the ISAF, which wanted to take the community defense initiative out of Noorzai's hands and give it to the ANA and ANP.²⁷⁶ In all these posts, Arif Noorzai has remained personally close to Hamid Karzai, who relies on him for advice and for support on key political issues. Arif Noorzai has frequently been dispatched by Karzai for sensitive missions, demonstrating Karzai's level of trust. Noorzai has been involved in attempts at reconciliation with the Taliban since as early as 2004, and has worked with Qayum Karzai on Saudi-mediated reconciliation efforts.²⁷⁷

For the Noorzai family, business and political interests are linked. A key element of the family's commercial interests in the Afghan South is access to the transit routes that stretch across the family's zone of influence, from Farah to Kandahar. This requires some control over official armed forces operating along these routes. Arif Noorzai's tenure as Tribal and Frontier Affairs Minister and his current position as head of the Independent Directorate for Protection of Public Spaces and Highways by Tribal Support both offer influence over border and highway protection units in the south. The Noorzais also gained significant control over the Afghan Highway Police in the region, until the Afghan Highway Police were officially disbanded in 2006 for their corruption and involvement in the narcotics trade.²⁷⁸ Noorzai's influence over transit routes continued at the national level, however. General Younus Noorzai, an uncle of Arif's, was Afghanistan's first director of customs in the Karzai government,²⁷⁹

appointed head of traffic and highway security in 2005, and now serves as a senior officer in the Afghan National Border Police.²⁸⁰ The Noorzai family's influence over transit routes in southern Afghanistan was only supplemented by the marriage of a second of Arif's sisters to former Helmand governor and strongman Sher Mohammad Akhundzada, who is himself widely acknowledged to have strong ties with the narcotics trade.²⁸¹

The Noorzai family is ultimately dependent on the Karzais, and their influence comes from their close alliance with them. The family's influence over their own Noorzai tribe in Kandahar is limited, given the Taliban's inroads there, though connections with elite Noorzai families across southern Afghanistan, including in areas like Farah, likely facilitate the family's commercial interests.²⁸²

In Kandahar, the Noorzai family's usefulness to the Karzais is well demonstrated by the role of Arif's brother Mirwais Noorzai in the Kandahar police. Mirwais was appointed Kandahar police chief in the summer of 2009, following the murder of Matiullah Qateh. His appointment worked to the advantage of the Karzai family by elevating a close family ally to head the Kandahar police during the August 2009 elections. After the elections, Mirwais Noorzai was named the deputy commander of the 205th Police Corps – the ANP headquarters which commands ANP units in southern Afghanistan. With influence over the ANP across the south, he is in a position to support the Karzais' influence over the ANP and protect family commercial interests.

Not all of Arif Noorzai's relatives toe the family line. One of Arif's cousins, Kandahar provincial council member Mohammad Ehsan, is a cosmopolitan figure educated in Germany and well-liked by ISAF. Ehsan has demonstrated little enthusiasm for the Karzai family's role in Kandahar, publically criticizing the Karzai camp for fraud in Kandahar during the 2009 election.²⁸³ Even tenuous are relations between Arif Noorzai and his uncle Abdul Qader Noorzai, who is head of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission.²⁸⁴

Matiullah Khan and Abdul Razak

Matiullah Khan and Abdul Razak have influence of a different sort than Arif Noorzai. Both men represent a new type of militia commander: too young to have fought in the jihad, they exercise considerable influence over small fiefdoms through a combination of military prowess, business interests, and ISAF's dependency on them to provide security in areas ISAF cannot secure.

Matiullah Khan has established himself as the leading Popalzai leader in Uruzgan. He is the nephew of former Uruzgan Governor and Karzai's childhood friend and close ally Jan Mohammad.²⁸⁵ Matiullah Khan and Jan Mohammad are based in Uruzgan province, where they are key proxies for the Karzais, but their influence also expands to Kandahar, where Matiullah acts as the only government ally able to exert influence over Shah Wali Kot and Nesh districts in northern Kandahar province.²⁸⁶ Matiullah Khan's influence extends largely from his control of a several-thousand man militia, the Kandak-e Amniante Uruzgan (KAU). In addition to exerting considerable influence over areas of Uruzgan province, the KAU is employed by ISAF to protect convoys traveling from Kandahar to Uruzgan through Shah Wali Kot to supply the Dutch contingent stationed in Uruzgan. The Kandahar-Uruzgan road in Shah Wali Kot passes through Taliban strongholds, making it vulnerable to Taliban attacks.²⁸⁷ ISAF pays Matiullah and the KAU at least \$1,700 per truck to ensure that logistics convoys safely reach Tarin Kot.²⁸⁸ Matiullah's force is strong enough that its convoys are rarely challenged by the Taliban, and Kandaharis consider it the only safe way to travel to Tarin Kot.²⁸⁹

Abdul Razak, meanwhile, has carved out a fiefdom in Spin Boldak district of Kandahar, and has played a vital role in securing this strategically-critical district against Taliban infiltration. Abdul Razak rose to lead the Adozai clan of the Achakzai tribe in 2003. Though only in his mid-twenties when he was named tribal chief, Razak had demonstrated considerable faculty for military command and benefited from the support of

Gul Agha Sherzai.²⁹⁰ Elders in Razak's Adozai tribe may have assumed that, given Razak's young age, he could be easily controlled: in this they proved to have been mistaken, as Razak soon came to dominate the clan. Razak used the Adozai's militias to increase his importance to Kandahar's ruling elite. The Adozai had been a key element of Gul Agha Sherzai's march on Kandahar in 2001, and during Gul Agha Sherzai's governorship, Sherzai came to rely heavily on Razak and his militias to provide him with military muscle.²⁹¹

Razak's influence in Spin Boldak derives not only from his military strength, but from his ability to use his power to exert considerable influence over Spin Boldak's transit economy. A driving interest of the Adozai militias and commanders for decades has been influence over the lucrative transit business between Afghanistan and Pakistan.²⁹² Abdul Razak's Afghan National Border Police units play a major role in facilitating and collecting money from the movement of goods back and forth from Pakistan. Razak's militias are also demonstrably involved in the transit of narcotics from Kandahar to Pakistan.²⁹³ In November 2009, the commander of Razaq's Quick Reaction Battalion, an elite unit heavily relied on by Razak, was arrested for possession of forty tons of hashish.²⁹⁴ The scale of narcotics trafficking in Spin Boldak was made evident in the summer of 2008, when U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) agents seized 237 tonnes of opium in Operation Albatross, a sting operation in Spin Boldak. Sixteen people, including four Iranians and seven Pakistanis were arrested in the operation.²⁹⁵ Given the control which Abdul Razak's militias exercise over Spin Boldak District and the size of the discovered cache, it is logical to conclude that these narcotics transits were happening with at least the tacit permission of some elements of Abdul Razak's establishment. Indeed, evidence suggests that the drug runners who transit through Spin Boldak are careful to cultivate close relations with Abdul Razak.²⁹⁶

Despite their considerable business and smuggling interests, however, the militias of Abdul Razak

have maintained an aggressively anti-Taliban posture.²⁹⁷ Abdul Razak himself harbors personal enmity against the Taliban, who killed both his father and uncle.²⁹⁸ The Taliban have waged a constant and vigorous intimidation campaign from safe havens in Pakistan targeting Afghan officials in Spin Boldak. But Abdul Razak's militias, which have been integrated into the Afghan National Border Police, have maintained a high level of security in Spin Boldak.²⁹⁹

As Ahmed Wali Karzai eclipsed Gul Agha Sherzai as the primary powerbroker in Kandahar, he began to build his own relationship with Razak.³⁰⁰

Ahmed Wali Karzai's close ally, governor Asadullah Khalid, developed a close relationship with Razak as they worked together to coordinate security issues in Kandahar.³⁰¹ Another

connection between Razak and Ahmed Wali Karzai may be

the influential regional figure Asadullah Waffa, a leading businessman in Kandahar and former governor of Helmand Province, who is close to both Ahmed Wali and Razak.³⁰²

Waffa's son Samiullah controls car dealerships, real estate, and construction interests in Spin Boldak.³⁰³ Shared commercial

ties may be the most important link between the two, but Ahmed Wali Karzai also benefits from Razak's ability to secure Spin Boldak. Razak in turn benefits from the relative prestige and autonomy given him by Ahmed Wali Karzai.³⁰⁴

In early 2009, Ahmed Wali Karzai traveled to Spin Boldak to hold a ceremony promoting Razak from Colonel to General, though Ahmed Wali Karzai has no formal role in any of Kandahar's military or police chains of command.³⁰⁵ Abdul Razak clearly believes his fortunes now rise and fall with the Karzai family, as demonstrated by the August 2009 presidential election, in which Razak's border police were accused of rampant ballot-stuffing to secure President Karzai tens of thousands of votes from Spin Boldak.³⁰⁶

ISAF has been forced to rely heavily on Abdul Razak and Matiullah Khan to provide security

for Spin Boldak and Uruzgan and northern Kandahar, respectively, given the importance of both areas to ISAF logistic routes and ISAF's hitherto limited resources. While this may be necessary, ISAF must be aware that these commanders have at times antagonized rivals in the pursuit of power and contributed to the insurgency.

Abdul Razak's Adozai militias, for example, have antagonized the rival Sultanzai clan of the Noorzai tribe, which has historically been at odds with the Adozai, perhaps driving some Sultanzai to the Taliban.³⁰⁷ An attempt by Governor Khalid to use Abdul Razak's militias to suppress the Taliban in Panjwai in 2006 was even more disastrous: the excesses of Razak's militia provoked hundreds of local farmers to take up arms and join the

Taliban.³⁰⁸ The involvement of Razak's militias in narcotics trafficking also poses problems for ISAF, though whether their trafficking benefits the Taliban depends largely on their degree of cooperation with Taliban affiliated cartels and whether the Taliban receive a cut of the profits from traffickers working with Razak's men,

both of which are unknown.

Matiullah Khan and his uncle, former Uruzgan Governor Jan Mohammad Khan, meanwhile, have worked systematically to undermine their tribal rivals in Uruzgan.³⁰⁹ While Dutch forces in Uruzgan have helped check these abuses of power, Matiullah and Jan Mohammad have driven several key leaders and tribes to the Taliban, and other commanders in Uruzgan have threatened to defect to the Taliban if Dutch forces leave the province and Matiullah is unrestrained.³¹⁰

ISAF would be well advised to consider innovative forms of mentoring for these militias (which is already being done with Abdul Razak's units in the Afghan National Border Police), but mentoring designed not so much to increase their fighting capacity as to prevent abuses of power

Abdul Razak clearly believes his fortunes now rise and fall with the Karzai family.

and instill discipline. ISAF Special Forces units might be well positioned to provide oversight of the militia units with whom they work. ISAF must also work with both commanders to induce them to check their problematic ambitions for rapid consolidation of power and facilitate their transition into commanders willing to pursue moderate and inclusive policies towards the local population and respect the institutions of the Afghan government.

Commander Ruhullah

While Razak and Matiullah control the transit routes into Kandahar from the south and north, respectively, and the Noorzai family exerts influence over routes to the west, the key transit route along the ring road to Kandahar's east is controlled by an enigmatic Popalzai commander known simply as Ruhullah.³¹¹ For several years Ruhullah controlled the stretch of road from Qalat in Zabul to Kandahar City, subcontracting from Watan to provide security for trucking contracts to Kandahar worth hundreds of millions of dollars.³¹² After the assassination of another commander, Abdul Khaliq, who controlled the road from Maidan Shah to Qalat, Ruhullah expanded his influence and is now reported to have an unchallenged hold over the provision of security on the ring road from Kabul to Kandahar.³¹³ Ruhullah may be a key element of Ahmed Wali Karzai's attempts to build a powerful confederation of military-commercial networks in southern Afghanistan, and ISAF should increase its visibility on commander Ruhullah's network and on his connections with the Karzais.

FORMAL STATE INSTITUTIONS IN KANDAHAR AS TOOLS OF THE INFORMAL POWER STRUCTURE

Politics in Afghanistan is frequently described as decentralized, driven by the weakness of the central government to exert its authority. But the formal governance structures authorized by the constitution and laws of Afghanistan actually give the central government considerable formal control over the government of the provinces.³¹⁴ What is problematic about Afghanistan's formal

institutions, particularly in Kandahar, is that in a society where politics has always been personal rather than institutional, Afghanistan's institutions, with their considerable formal power, are generally under the shadow influence of personality-based networks. This, combined with the considerable constitutional powers given the national executive, leads formal institutions to be manipulated as effective tools by which networks like Ahmed Wali Karzai's can strengthen their regional influence.³¹⁵ In Kandahar specifically, Ahmed Wali Karzai has been able to use his considerable family influence over the central government in Kabul in tandem with his local influence as an effective means of exerting control over provincial and district level government institutions, such that most of these institutions can act only with his permission. Any discussion of central state influence in Kandahar is complicated by the reality that, far from a neutral institution which would exert an impartial order over Kandahar, the state has become a set of institutions to be captured and manipulated by various factions.

Understanding the nature of the Karzai family and its inner circle's influence over the Afghan government in Kabul is a starting point for understanding the ways Ahmed Wali Karzai uses these institutions to extend his writ over district and provincial level politics. There are both parallels and synergies between the Karzai family's process of power consolidation in Kandahar and at the national level. In both cases, the Karzais have helped shape a personality-driven political order. In Kabul, as in Kandahar, state-building and family interests have become confused, such that they are equated with one another, in ways that sometimes parallel the monarchical political order of the old regime, in which the strength of the state relied on the strength of the Shah, his family and its personal allies. As state building began in earnest after 2004, there has emerged a marked divergence between the Karzai family's idea of personality-driven state-building and ISAF and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan's (UNAMA) more institutionalized vision.

Rise to Power and Evolution of Family Interests at the National Level: 2002–2009

At the beginning of his interim presidency in 2001, Hamid Karzai had minimal influence over the central government, and, especially outside of the Afghan South, no influence over the periphery.³¹⁶ The central government in 2002 was dominated by Tajiks and Uzbeks who had fought with the Northern Alliance, and its institutions were largely under the influence of figures like Marshall Fahim and Yunous Qanuni.³¹⁷ These Tajik and Uzbek groups initially dominated Afghanistan's security forces, nominally acknowledging Hamid Karzai's presidency simply because they saw him as a weak figurehead able to appease Afghanistan's Pashtuns but not to counter their influence.³¹⁸ But this group lost its stranglehold over the government from 2003 to 2005.³¹⁹ During this period U.S. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad and Hamid Karzai developed a close working relationship, which emboldened President Karzai to act knowing he had the full support of the United States government, and caused the so-called "warlords" to yield ground to Karzai.³²⁰ In their place Karzai appointed a number of reformist Pashtun ministers – figures like Ashraf Ghani and Ali Jalili – who were championed by the U.S. and other Western states.³²¹ The appointment of these reformist ministers gradually eroded the Northern Alliance's dominance over the security sector and opened up the possibility for other groups to step in.³²²

The Karzai family's influence received another major boost with the Loya Jirga, which formulated and approved the new Afghan Constitution from 2003 to 2004. The Loya Jirga was perhaps the first clear example of the Karzai family's ability to master political tactics on the national stage.³²³ Hamid and Qayum Karzai in particular, with the close support of U.S. ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, played a major role in shaping a coherent constitutional system, balancing the diverse and conflicting interests of Afghanistan's major actors.³²⁴ Under the first presidential election held under the new constitution, Hamid Karzai was officially elected to his first five-year

term as Afghanistan's president in October 2004 with fifty-five percent of the vote total. The Afghan Constitution of 2004 was designed to give considerable powers to the executive branch.³²⁵ The president was commander-in-chief of Afghanistan's armed forces, and was assigned, among others, the power to "determine the fundamental policies of the state with the approval of the National assembly," to appoint and remove ministers with the approval of the Wolesi Jirga, and to appoint and remove judges and officers of the military, police and NDS.³²⁶ These presidential powers, though they could not be exercised in a vacuum, were the material Hamid Karzai worked with to manage and co-opt regional powerbrokers and warlords by offering influence and incentives through the Afghan government.

While the Afghan National Assembly with its two houses – the Meshrano Jirga (one third of which is appointed by the president) and the Wolesi Jirga – has formal powers over the budget and legislation, in reality the National Assembly has done little to check the power of the president.³²⁷ Since it was elected in 2005, the National Assembly has remained a relatively weak body with too many internal divisions and incoherencies to successfully challenge the executive.³²⁸ Most delegates have no party affiliation and consider themselves independents, which leaves the body highly fractured.³²⁹ In addition, the executive branch has had some success in controlling the parliament, and has benefited from strong Ministers for Parliamentary Affairs like Farooq Wardak. A weak legislature increased the importance of the presidency and has enabled the Karzai family to use Hamid Karzai's position to extend its influence over important state organs after 2005.

Increased control over state institutions has in turn given Hamid Karzai a valuable tool with which to form political alliances and induce both regional strongmen and even talented technocrats to serve within his government and support his own political interests. Afghanistan's various line ministries are one of the key tools used for this end. Granting cabinet posts to figures like Ismail Khan, Gul Agha Sherzai, and General Dostum

gives these individuals a stake in the Karzai government. Each of these figures has some room to carve out a sphere of influence within parts of their ministries, and in turn use them to strengthen their own patronage network, but understanding all the while that holding the posts depends on ultimately supporting the president on key issues and in national elections.³³⁰ More recently, another class of educated, talented, ambitious, and savvy political actors, including men like Minister of the Interior Hanif Atmar, Karzai Chief of Staff Omar Daudzai, and Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG) head Jelani Popal who have clearly sensed the Karzai family's growing momentum in Afghan politics, have joined the emerging and increasingly powerful Karzai political empire in Kabul, giving it increased strength and vitality.³³¹

President Karzai's inner circle has secured influence within the security services, which has played an important role in the ability of Karzai allies to manipulate them for their own ends.³³² Hanif Atmar, head of the Ministry of the Interior, Defense Minister Abdul Rahim Wardak, and NDS head Amrullah Saleh are all figures who are judged competent and effective leaders and who do not have deep historic ties to the Karzai family. But these men also understand the Karzai family's ascendancy, and desire to work within this system. As such, they do not challenge the Karzai's inner circle's use of appointments, especially in areas like southern Afghanistan, nor do they challenge the tendency of some political actors, including the Karzai inner circle, to build spheres of influence within their ministries.³³³

President Karzai has constitutional control over cabinet-level and senior sub-national appointments, and, as was the intention of the Afghan Constitution, has used these powers effectively to extend his patrimonial vision of state influence.³³⁴ Especially at the sub-national level, many Afghan governors or *woleswals* came to realize that the future of their own political careers depended on pleasing the Karzai administration, and generally acquiesced to the administration's policy objectives.³³⁵ It is critical to note that through control of appointments, along with

political and business alliances, the Karzai administration has achieved considerable – more than commonly acknowledged – penetration into provincial and district level politics, which was enabled by the considerable constitutional powers of the central government.³³⁶

The power that Karzai exerted through his control over senior appointments has increased as his inner circle gradually solidified its ability to manipulate state appointments for their political advantage. Achieving this objective required frustrating international pressure to make appointments dependent on merit rather than political expediency. As was often the case, Karzai's mastery of political tactics allowed him to easily outmaneuver Western pressure to reform the qualifications for political appointments, and even to manipulate it to his advantage. One particularly important means by which the Karzai family exerted influence was the IDLG, which has responsibility for the appointment of provincial governors and district governors (*woleswals*). Prior to 2007, these appointments had been made first by the Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission and then by the Ministry of the Interior.³³⁷ The international community had long been pushing for a more impartial, less easily manipulated system which would contribute to merit-based appointments. On the surface, the IDLG promised to do this. But creating an independent commission ultimately increased the President's direct influence over senior sub-national appointments, as the commission was directly tied to the President and ministerial mediators were cut out. In addition, the IDLG had a political mandate from the start: it was given a political outreach function to increase the Karzai administration's influence and penetration into the provinces. The IDLG's head, Jelani Popal, was originally tied to Ashraf Ghani and the Afghan Mellat party, not to Karzai. But as was the case with many politically savvy Afghan politicians in Kabul, Popal viewed the Karzai family as the rising political force in Afghanistan, and opted to ally with it.³³⁸ As such, his leadership over the organization is closely tied with President Karzai's political objectives, making an effective means

of strengthening the Karzai family's control over regional and district politics, especially in the Afghan south. The IDLG became a powerful tool of patronage, by which the Karzai family was able to reward their allies and ensure the loyalty of critical appointees.³³⁹

2006 to the Present: Building State Autonomy from the West

The Karzai family escalated their efforts to build personal influence over the institutions of the Afghan state after 2006 in response to increased insecurity and concerns about the political vulnerabilities attendant with reliance on the international community for support. In Kandahar, the Karzai family began to feel an impending crisis and the fragility of the new order in 2002; in Kabul, where the international presence was larger and security was better, that feeling was not reached until 2006.

In May 2006, riots broke out in Kabul after a U.S. military vehicle careened down a slope crashing into civilian vehicles below. The rioters chanted anti-U.S. and anti-Karzai slogans, destroyed multiple buildings, and exchanged gunfire with the Kabul police.³⁴⁰ The May 2006 riots had a deep effect on Hamid Karzai, who was convinced that the riots were facilitated by the Northern Alliance and part of a plot to unseat him. Further, the riots drove home to the president that he lacked a powerful constituency to support and defend him if the situation in Afghanistan deteriorated.³⁴¹ Until 2006 the president's power had been based on the support of the international community, but the anti-foreign sentiment behind the riots sounded a warning note about the dangers of relying on foreign support.³⁴² Thus, after 2006, the Karzai family began to increasingly use executive power to build a powerful and loyal network across the country which could free it from its dependence on the international community.

The danger of over-reliance on foreign backing was further highlighted in the summer of 2006 when ISAF pressured Karzai to remove several of his key allies in the south. British and Dutch

forces had agreed to take responsibility for Helmand and Uruzgan provinces, respectively, as ISAF assumed responsibility for southern Afghanistan. As a precondition for their deployments the British demanded that Karzai fire Sher Mohammad Akhundzada, the governor of Helmand, and the Dutch demanded the removal of Jan Mohammad, then governor of Uruzgan. Karzai assented to the British and Dutch demands, but deeply begrudged both decisions.³⁴³ The insurgency grew rapidly in Helmand in the immediate aftermath of Akhundzada's removal, a development Karzai blamed on the marginalization of Akhundzada's powerful security network.³⁴⁴ Jan Mohammad, meanwhile, was a close childhood friend of Karzai's and a fellow Popalzai.³⁴⁵ For Karzai, the removal of Akhundzada and Jan Mohammad demonstrated ISAF's poor judgment and an insistence on dealing with the insurgency with limited deference to Karzai's views and strategic vision.³⁴⁶ As ISAF continue to wage an ineffective counter-insurgency campaign in Southern Afghanistan in 2007 and 2008, Karzai began to fear that the presence of ISAF forces in the South was only contributing to the insurgency. The president became especially critical of NATO forces for civilian casualties, and in public comments blamed much of the insurgency on NATO.

Karzai's simultaneous realization of his own dependency and his loss of faith in his NATO partners' ability to effectively handle the insurgency led to a growing rift between President Karzai and the international coalition in Afghanistan by the beginning of 2007. As Karzai and his inner circle worked to form an autonomous power base within the state, Karzai's relationship with the West changed from one of cooperation to one of acute distrust, in which the objective was to work around the West and prevent it from interfering in his interests.³⁴⁷ The honeymoon between President Karzai and the West had already ended after the 2005 departure from Kabul of U.S. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, who had formed an important bond of trust with the Afghan president.³⁴⁸

President Karzai's paranoia about Western attempts to undermine him only grew from 2007 to 2009, coming to a head during Afghanistan's second presidential election in 2009.³⁴⁹ A series of stormy meetings with high-ranking U.S. officials convinced Karzai that the new U.S. administration harbored a latent antagonism towards him.³⁵⁰ As the election cycle drew on, President Karzai began to fear that the United States embassy in Afghanistan was supporting competing presidential candidates, including Abdullah Abdullah and Ashraf Ghani.³⁵¹ The fallout developing over the course of the summer turned into a serious rift after the first round of voting as the Karzai camp learned that the UNAMA Deputy Head had floated a proposal to orchestrate Karzai's resignation, and as Karzai clashed with the US Embassy and the Holbrooke team on the issues of a recount, and a run-off election.³⁵²

The Karzai family and inner circle's desire, partially borne of fear and partially of ambition, to overcome dependency on the international community has corresponded with their aggressive use of the institutions of the executive branch to further the family's personal power. Convinced that the international community was set against him, Karzai formed widely-criticized alliances with a number of key northern powerbrokers, including Marshall Fahim, Abdul Rashid Dostum, and Karim Khalili in exchange for their support, and allies of Karzai subsequently used state power for large scale voting fraud and manipulation in the August 2009 election.³⁵³ Though some Western commentators speculated that the 2009 election had weakened Karzai, in reality it confirmed to Karzai and to the Afghan political community that Karzai had built a strong enough network to survive the 2009 elections without international support. Karzai's victory strengthened his hand within Afghanistan, confirming to Afghan politicians that Karzai had emerged as the leading force in Afghan politics.³⁵⁴

Karzai Control over Formal Political Structures in Kandahar

Political dynamics in Kandahar became more complicated after 2005, as the Afghan state took

a leading role as a source of Ahmed Wali Karzai's influence in Kandahar. Ahmed Wali Karzai embarked on a second and more robust phase of consolidation of power in Kandahar after 2005. This phase increasingly depended on the Karzai family's influence over state institutions. As was the case across Afghanistan, provincial developments were more and more linked to national developments. Influence within national institutions guaranteed Ahmed Wali Karzai significant control over official government institutions. Control over these institutions served as a valuable tool with which Ahmed Wali Karzai can protect and further his own power in the province.

The Theoretical Structure of Provincial Politics

The top-down structure of the Afghan Constitution gives Afghanistan's regional power-players considerable incentives for shadow ownership over provincial governments. Afghan provincial officials have considerable power to direct and mediate the distribution of state resources. They themselves are ultimately highly dependent on the central authorities who appoint them, and these central authorities in turn are frequently allied with regional powerbrokers.³⁵⁵

The provincial governor is constitutionally the chief administrative official in each of Afghanistan's provinces, and is responsible for extending the authority of the President and central government into the provinces. Responsibility for the appointment of provincial governors was held by the Ministry of the Interior until 2007, when the IDLG was established to give the Karzai government closer oversight over appointments.³⁵⁶ Afghan governors share control over line ministries and police forces in the provinces with government ministries in Kabul. They have little formal control over most appointments, which are the responsibility of Kabul, but they have some official control of the operations of the line ministries and some official responsibility for police operations.³⁵⁷ The actual powers and responsibilities of provincial governors vary widely depending on the governor's abilities, power base in his

province, and connections to the government in Kabul. Some governors like Atta Mohammad in Balkh dominate politics in their provinces: others, like Governor Wesa in Kandahar, have little influence and are completely dependent on local powerbrokers.³⁵⁸ The potential power of a provincial governor means that local powerbrokers have an interest in either securing the office for themselves (which requires good relations with the Karzai administration) or having a weak and pliant figure installed.

The governor works alongside a series of line ministries, including the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Public Health, Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Interior, which are responsible for the provision of government services.³⁵⁹ The line ministries at the provincial level report both to their ministries in Kabul and to the provincial governor. The ministries in Kabul are responsible for the appointment of senior and mid level ministry officials in the provinces and for budgeting, while the provincial governor oversees the day-to-day operations of the provincial ministries and has final power of approval over ministerial expenditures.³⁶⁰

Alongside the governor is the provincial council (*woleyati shura*), an elected body which serves four year terms. The Afghan Constitution states that the provincial council “takes part in securing the developmental targets of the state and improving its affairs in a way stated in the law, and gives advice on important issues falling within the domain of the Province.”³⁶¹ In most Afghan provinces, ambiguous formal responsibilities and limited funding leave the provincial council with little power and influence.³⁶² In Kandahar, by contrast, the provincial council has considerable influence due to Ahmed Wali Karzai’s position as council president.³⁶³ Some provincial governors have also created an additional provincial development council to coordinate between different bodies and implement provincial development plans, but there is no provincial development council in Kandahar.³⁶⁴ The Afghan Constitution mandates the creation of elected district and municipal councils to increase community oversight over governance at the local

level.³⁶⁵ The creation of these bodies, however, has been postponed indefinitely.³⁶⁶

Afghan district governors, called *woleswals*, are, like provincial governors, appointed by the president through the IDLG.³⁶⁷ *Woleswals* represent the national government and coordinate the activity of government ministries in their district. Despite ambiguously defined formal powers, district chiefs can have considerable influence because they serve as the chief intermediary between government departments and the people of their districts.³⁶⁸ *Woleswals* are commonly known to use their influence for graft and financial gain, and many are reported to be relatively uninterested in the other aspects of their job.³⁶⁹ And while *woleswals* have no defined security role, they are often heavily involved in security issues and some more charismatic *woleswals* have de-facto influence over the local police.³⁷⁰

Kandahar’s Governors

Kandahar has seen three very different governors since 2005, but in each case, the influence of Kandahar’s governor has depended on his relationship with Ahmed Wali Karzai, and two of Kandahar’s last three governors effectively served as tools of his agenda. But despite limited independence, the governorship in Kandahar is important because it was the chief point of engagement for ISAF’s governance efforts in Kandahar from 2006 to 2009.³⁷¹ The story of Kandahar’s three most recent governors demonstrates Ahmed Wali Karzai’s ability to manipulate formal power structures and indicates why ISAF’s governance strategy has failed to engage the underlying political dynamics shaping Kandahar.

Asadullah Khalid served as Kandahar’s governor from 2005 to 2008, replacing Gul Agha Sherzai in the fall of 2005.³⁷² Khalid came to Kandahar from Ghazni Province with an already established relationship with the U.S. Special Forces. He initially worked closely with the American and Canadian armies in Kandahar, serving along with Ahmed Wali Karzai as a coordination point between local Afghan actors and ISAF.³⁷³ Governor Khalid, however, was first and foremost

in Kandahar as an ally of the Karzai family, to whom he understood he owed his political future, and Khalid often served as Ahmed Wali's point man on security issues.³⁷⁴

In the spring of 2007, Khalid's relationship with ISAF began to sour, as allegations were made that Khalid was involved in the torture of prisoners handed over by Canadian forces to the NDS.³⁷⁵ Charges of abuses of power and the use of Kandahar's security forces for personal profit also damaged ISAF support for Khalid.³⁷⁶ For his part, Khalid publically expressed frustrations with an alleged lack of Canadian deference, poor coordination on security, and the refusal of ISAF to support his police units when they came under heavy Taliban attack while conducting opium eradication campaigns.³⁷⁷

A deteriorating relationship led the Canadian government to pressure President Hamid Karzai to replace Governor Khalid in 2008.³⁷⁸ The Karzais appear to have never been particularly attached to Khalid, feeling he was useful but disposable. There are reports that as early as 2006 the Karzai administration offered to remove Khalid, but that ISAF commanders relied on Khalid too heavily for military operations to want his removal.³⁷⁹ Khalid also had limited popularity in Kandahar, and Khalid's roots in Ghazni and his poor personal reputation led many Kandaharis to view him as an outsider.³⁸⁰ Canadian efforts to replace Governor Khalid demonstrated, however, the complexities of pressuring the Karzai government on appointments. In April 2008, Canadian Foreign Minister Maxime Bernier publicly called for Governor Khalid's replacement.³⁸¹ President Karzai, who was reportedly on the verge of replacing Khalid, stepped back from the move temporarily in order to protest heavy-handed tactics which he felt violated Afghan sovereignty.³⁸²

In August 2008, President Karzai replaced Khalid with General Ramatullah Raufi, who had commanded the 205th Corps in Kandahar from December 2005 to June 2007.³⁸³ Raufi was respected by ISAF officials who had worked with him earlier in Kandahar, and came into

his post with ambitious plans for a more holistic approach for dealing with the insurgency.³⁸⁴ His proposals included a regional security conference in August 2008 and a more aggressive approach to security in Arghandab District.³⁸⁵ Raufi's most ambitious plan, however, was to revive the Kandahar inter-tribal shura which Qayum Karzai had co-opted earlier in 2008, and to use it as the basis for addressing security issues and rallying tribal support against the Taliban.³⁸⁶ In the eyes of Ahmed Wali Karzai Raufi's plans were a challenge to his influence and interests.³⁸⁷ There were rumors, too, that Raufi had attempted to intervene in Ahmed Wali's real estate interests.³⁸⁸ Ahmed Wali Karzai responded to Governor Raufi's attempts to exercise some independence by forcefully exerting his own authority. In November 2008, he demanded that all provincial legislation have not only the signature of the governor, as constitutionally required, but also his signature as chairman of the provincial council, a demand which had no basis in Afghan law.³⁸⁹ Shortly after refusing this demand, Governor Raufi was removed from his post.³⁹⁰ Without the support of Ahmed Wali, General Raufi had accomplished little during his time as governor.³⁹¹ Raufi's short tenure in Kandahar confirmed that centrally-appointed Afghan government officials who challenged the Karzai family's interests in Kandahar put their careers in jeopardy and found themselves unable to make meaningful reforms.

Governor Raufi's replacement was Dr. Toryala Wesa, a member of the Mohamadzai clan of the Barakzai, from which the Afghan royal family was drawn.³⁹² The appointment of Wesa was an inspired move from Ahmed Wali Karzai's standpoint. An educated technocrat who had long lived in Canada, Canada and the United States had little ground on which to object to Wesa's appointment, and Wesa brought to the table a thorough knowledge of the process of securing international grants and assistance.³⁹³ But Wesa was also a childhood friend of President Karzai's and having spent decades abroad had absolutely no standing in Kandahar politics.³⁹⁴ Thus, while Wesa was uncontroversial among ISAF officials, he was also dependent on Ahmed Wali Karzai, and has not made reforms which challenge the



PHOTO 2 | GOVERNOR TORYALA WESA

Karzai's interests. Wesa has developed strong ties to ISAF and become an important conduit for development assistance.³⁹⁵ But while respected by ISAF officials, Wesa lacks the security credentials of his predecessors as well as local influence. In general, working through governors and other provincial officials who lack local influence will have limited benefits for governance and security in Kandahar.

The real force behind the governor's office may be Haji Mohammad Anas, who serves as Chief of Staff to the Governor.³⁹⁶ Mohammad Anas is known as a particularly savvy politician and largely responsible for holding Kandahar's government together.³⁹⁷ He is close to Ahmed Wali Karzai, but given his history, a close relationship with Kandahar's leading powerbrokers is hardly a surprise; Anas reportedly worked for the Governor of Kandahar under both the communist and Taliban regimes before joining the Karzai government.³⁹⁸

The Kandahar City mayor, Ghulam Haider Hamidi, is in essentially the same positions of Governor Wesa. Hamidi may have more local clout than the governor, but like Wesa, he is a Mohamadzai with a Western education, highly regarded by ISAF, a long time family friend of the Karzais, and dependent on Ahmed Wali Karzai.³⁹⁹

District Governors (Woleswals)

The influence of the Karzai family over the IDLG means that local district chiefs serve at the pleasure of the Karzai family, and there are few signs that district officials in Kandahar



PHOTO 3 | GENERAL MIRWAIS NOORZAI

ever challenge Wali Karzai's authority. District chiefs in Kandahar tend to serve short terms, and are commonly removed from their posts or transferred from district to district by the Karzai-influenced IDLG.

There is a definite financial aspect to the post of *woleswal*.⁴⁰⁰ In Kandahar, where Ahmed Wali Karzai plays a closer role in vetting district leaders, provincial powerbrokers still seem to give *woleswals* considerable autonomy to pursue their own financial interests. As key intermediaries between government departments and the population, *woleswals* are often involved in the distribution of state funds or of aid from international forces, and are thus well positioned to direct aid to their political allies or families. This offers opportunities to make a considerable income through payments from the population to the *woleswal* in exchange for government assistance.⁴⁰¹ There are also indications that some *woleswals* in Kandahar have been heavily invested in the growth of opium. In the summer of 2007 it was reported that district level officials in Kandahar commonly leased government land to opium growers: one district government reportedly collected over a million dollars from these leases.⁴⁰²

Haji Zaifullah, who was the Maiwand *woleswal* until August 2008, offers an example of the tendency for *woleswals* to use their office primarily as a means of personal gain. Like many Kandahar *woleswals*, Zaifullah spent only part of his time in the Maiwand district, much of which was under Taliban influence, and had a permanent residence in Kandahar City.⁴⁰³ He controlled the district

police forces, but rarely confronted the Taliban in Maiwand, maintaining an informal cease-fire, and the police were given free reign not only for corruption, but also for violent extortion and theft.⁴⁰⁴ Haji Zaifullah was heavily invested in the opium trade in Maiwand, and used provincial anti-narcotics teams to target the opium fields of his competitors.⁴⁰⁵ Large scale ISAF deployments with population-centric tactics often checked the worst excesses of these leaders: Zaifullah quickly fell out with ISAF after British and American units deployed to Maiwand in the summer of 2008, especially as he attempted unskillfully to co-opt local ISAF units for his own political ends. He had attempted to use ISAF troops to target rival opium growers, delayed the construction of an ISAF base, and requested ISAF material for his personal use and that of his allies.⁴⁰⁶

Zaifullah was a close ally of Governor Asadullah Khalid, who supported Zaifullah when he came under criticism from ISAF in the spring of 2008.⁴⁰⁷ But when Khalid was removed from his position as governor in 2008, Haji Zaifullah was replaced too. Zaifullah's successor, Mullah Nola Massoud, was unable to build much more public confidence than his predecessor, and the Maiwand police were still accused of corruption and abuses.⁴⁰⁸ The U.S. found the district leader hard to work with. U.S. LtC Daniel Hurlbut reported that it took nearly half a year to build a relationship.⁴⁰⁹ At the end of 2009 district leadership had changed again, with Haji Obidullah Bawari as the new district leader in Maiwand.⁴¹⁰

In the Zhari district, by contrast, leadership has been more stable. After district Chief Khariudin Achakzai was killed by a Taliban suicide bomber in 2007,⁴¹¹ the *woleswal* has been Niyaz Mohammed Sarhadi. Like Zaifullah, Sarhadi is not well loved by the population. He has demanded bribes for protection of the local poppy crop, forcing local farmers to pool their money to pay him off, and only aggravated the situation in certain years by attempting to double collect this payment.⁴¹² ISAF has been forced to work with Sarhadi, given its considerable investment in Zhari, but despite Sarhadi's exaggerated anti-Taliban rhetoric

(Sarhadi has frequently criticized ISAF for not pursuing the Taliban in Zhari vigorously enough), it is unclear if ISAF officers trust him.⁴¹³

Canadian troops in the Panjwai district, by contrast, have built strong relations with Haji Baran, a former mujahideen commander and a Noorzai who has been Panjwai *woleswal* since October 2007.⁴¹⁴ Canadian forces in Panjwai have consistently worked to boost Haji Baran's standing in his district, and seem to feel they have co-opted the district leader.⁴¹⁵ Baran in turn has had some success in revitalizing the Panjwai Bazar, which is located in a small Canadian-protected pocket of Panjwai, directly next to several ISAF bases.⁴¹⁶ Haji Baran's exact relationship with Ahmed Wali Karzai is unclear from the open source, but his ability to keep his job suggests he is not seen by Ahmed Wali as a threat. Haji Baran's longevity in office, contrasted with Zaifullah's removal in Maiwand, also suggests that power brokers in Kandahar and Kabul may take into account the ability of district leaders to build relationships with ISAF units in their districts, sometimes firing those who antagonize ISAF too deeply, and keeping those who can build strong ties.

A number of *woleswals* from Kandahar's northern districts have found themselves driven by the Taliban to seek refuge in Kandahar City, and are essentially in exile. After a year of being holed-up in a small compound with the Afghan National Police, Ghorak district leader Mohammed Azim was finally airlifted out in January 2009.⁴¹⁷ Haji Abdul Wahab, Khakrez district leader from 2008 to 2009, was similarly holed-up in the district center with virtually no influence over his district (his district police chief was arrested in 2008 for cooperation with the Taliban).⁴¹⁸ He was finally killed by a Taliban IED in August, 2009, only three months after his brother, the district security commander, was killed the same way.⁴¹⁹ Haji Hayatullah, the Nish district leader, relies on local militias – almost certainly connected to Matiullah Khan – for security, which leaves him highly dependent on these local actors.⁴²⁰

Security Forces

One of the most serious consequences of the structure of Kandahar politics from a counter-insurgency standpoint is the system's tendency to seriously undermine the strength and professionalism of Kandahar's police force. In recent years various political interests have intentionally weakened Kandahar's police leadership, limiting their command and control of the official police structure and allowing local powerbrokers to manipulate the police force for their own ends.

The first chief of police in Kandahar after the fall of the Taliban was Zabit Akrem, a respected Alokzai tribal leader who was close to Mullah Naqib. Akrem was in constant conflict with Governor Sherzai and with one of Sherzai's lieutenants, Nazar Jan, who had been named Akrem's deputy. Nazar Jan integrated his own militias into the police, and these units earned a notorious reputation with the population of Kandahar for crime and extortion. According to one report, Nazar Jan's police units were responsible for half the crimes committed in Kandahar.⁴²¹ Akrem unsuccessfully tried to fire Nazar Jan in 2002.⁴²² President Karzai finally removed Nazar in May 2003, but after vocal protests from Gul Agha Sherzai.⁴²³ Perhaps to compensate Sherzai for the removal of his commander from the police force, President Karzai transferred Zabit Akrem from Kandahar to serve as police chief in Mazar-e Sherif a few months later. Zabit Akrem distinguished himself as a highly competent commander in Kabul and Mazar-e Sherif, before being assassinated while visiting Kandahar in 2005.⁴²⁴ The Alokzai continued to have some influence in Kandahar's police establishment and in July 2004, General Khan Mohammad Alkozai was transferred from command of Kandahar's military corps to command its police force.⁴²⁵ But Khan Mohammad was replaced after only nine months, and the office of police chief saw a period of especially rapid turnover. A total of four provincial police chiefs were appointed between March 2005 and September 2006.⁴²⁶

Police leadership in Kandahar underwent significant changes when Asadullah Khalid assumed the governorship in the fall of 2005.⁴²⁷ Governor Khalid's attempts to increase his personal influence over the Kandahar police force, sold to the West as reform measures, resulted in significant turnover in police leadership. In his first half year in office he removed seven district chiefs and replaced the Kandahar chief of police twice.⁴²⁸ Khalid's attempts to exert influence over the force occurred simultaneously with more serious reform efforts by elements within the Ministry of the Interior (MoI) to increase MoI control and discipline, and establish a merit-based promotions system. These efforts were encouraged by the international community but not sufficiently supported, and faltered by the summer of 2007.

Kandahar saw two new reform-minded police chiefs in 2006 and 2007. Kandahar Police Chief Said Aziz Ahmad Wardak, installed in the summer of 2006, lasted in his post for less than four months before being replaced by Esmatullah Alizai.⁴²⁹ Alizai was a professional police officer appointed as part of a merit-based reform program and was respected by the Canadian PRT in Kandahar. Alizai made serious attempts to reform the police system, antagonizing Ahmed Wali Karzai in the process.⁴³⁰ He was removed as Kandahar police chief during the summer of 2007, less than a year after assuming command. The Kandahar Provincial Council accused Alizai of "acting without prior consultation with the Governor's Office and Provincial Council," though the provincial council has no legal authority over the police force.⁴³¹ The removal of provincial police chiefs like Alizai was facilitated by President Karzai's direct control over the appointments of police officers above the rank of general.⁴³² The failure of MoI police reform in southern Afghanistan was cemented by a nearly simultaneous event in the summer of 2007 in Garmsir district of neighboring Helmand province. The police chief appointed by the MoI to Garmsir as part of its reform effort program arrived at his new post only to be stripped and expelled from the district by the old police commander who was allied with local

powerbrokers.⁴³³ The incident signaled the end of serious MoI attempts to exert command and control in southern Afghanistan.

After mid-2007, Kandahar's police chiefs understood that their job security required not infringing upon Ahmed Wali Karzai's interests, and the MoI no longer pushed for more institutional control of the police in Kandahar. The Karzai family, for their part, did not, with notable exceptions, appoint direct proxies or close political allies into the highest provincial offices, understanding that doing so would create strong international resistance and ambassadorial protests. In the Kandahar police force, they were content with uncharismatic placeholders who accepted limited command and control over their own establishment.⁴³⁴

General Alizai's successor, Brigadier General Sayed Agha Saqib, was replaced a year later along with his deputy and Kandahar's criminal investigation director after the Taliban released over a thousand prisoners during the June 2008 Sarpoza prison break.⁴³⁵ A government investigation of the Sarpoza incident found that the three dismissed police commanders had been negligent in their duties.⁴³⁶ Saqib's replacements, Matiullah Qateh and his deputy, Abdullah Khan, were seen as a slight improvement by both their Canadian mentors and by many Kandaharis. An Achakzai, Qateh had connections to the old Alokozai-dominated police establishment which had been mostly forced from power,⁴³⁷ though he did not fundamentally take Kandahar's establishment to task. Qateh was killed in a June 2009 incident, when forty members of Ahmed Wali Karzai's CIA-trained Kandahar Strike Force arrived at Kandahar police headquarters demanding the release of a criminal accomplice with whom they worked.⁴³⁸ The death of Matiullah Qateh marked a broader turnover in police leadership. Also killed in the incident was Kandahar chief of

criminal investigations, one of the last holdouts from the old Alokozai police establishment which Ahmad Wali Karzai had worked to replace.⁴³⁹ Only several weeks prior to the Qateh killing, Qateh's deputy Abdullah Khan resigned from his post in the police force due to a dispute with Ahmed Wali Karzai.⁴⁴⁰

The death of Matiullah Qateh proved convenient for the Karzai family, as it allowed them to appoint Mirwais Noorzai as interim police chief during the 2009 Presidential elections. As the brother of Ahmed Wali Karzai's brother-in-law Arif Noorzai, Mirwais Noorzai was a loyal political ally. He was one of several close allies of the Karzai family appointed to provincial police commands before the 2009 presidential

elections, and was subsequently accused of turning a blind eye to the massive fraud which had occurred in Kandahar.⁴⁴¹ In the fall of 2009, Mirwais Noorzai was promoted to serve as deputy commander of the 205th Police Corps – responsible for southern Afghanistan – and replaced by Sardar Mohammad Zazai. Police commander Zazai is, like many previous chiefs of police, an ineffective placeholder unwilling to address the corruption from which they benefit.⁴⁴² At the end of 2009, real power within the

Kandahar police force was held by two of Ahmed Wali Karzai's allies: Mirwais Noorzai, from his current position as deputy regional commander, and by Fazel Ahmad Sherzad, the Kandahar City Chief of Police, who is also from the Noorzai tribe and whose brother Asadullah Sherzad serves as Helmand's provincial police chief.⁴⁴³

The Effects of the Political System on Kandahar's Police Leadership

Given the influence which former mujahideen commanders wielded, the police force in Kandahar was unruly and undisciplined before 2005, with their powerful rivalries played out in Kandahar City. The institutions of the police

After mid-2007, Kandahar's police chiefs understood that their job security required not interfering with Ahmed Wali Karzai's interests.

force were weak, but leaders like Zabib Akrem, Khan Mohammad, Gul Alai, and Gul Agha Sherzai were able to energize their men with charisma or largesse, keeping the ranks full and the police force eager to follow their commanders.

After 2005, however, strong but undisciplined leadership was intentionally replaced by relatively weak or weakened figures, often from outside of Kandahar. If the post-2005 police force was sometimes less dangerous and more subdued, it was not necessarily because its commanders were better officers or less prone to corruption, but because they lacked local influence and control of their own units.⁴⁴⁴

The lackluster performance of Kandahar's often short-lived police chiefs is a result of a system dominated by Kandahar's ruling actors, designed to limit the influence of the official police leadership. Not only have Kandahar's police chiefs discovered themselves easily replaceable if they step out of line, but their actual control over their own police forces is limited. Kandahar's police chiefs have consistently complained that they are unable to exert control over the myriad police units in Kandahar which report to local power figures and whose chain of command bypasses the official police structure.⁴⁴⁵ While Asadullah Khalid was still Kandahar's governor, a number of units reported directly to him. Governor Khalid had a personal police reserve unit, the 005 Standby Battalion, much of which he had brought to Kandahar with him from Ghazni.⁴⁴⁶ In June 2008, the Dand district's new police chief Fida Mohammed claimed that while only sixty police officers in the district reported to him, there were some additional six hundred men in Dand who reported directly to Governor Khalid.⁴⁴⁷ ANA mentors in 2008 and 2009 encountered "police" units based along key commercial routes of whose official status both the ANA and their mentors were unaware, but which were reported to be protected by Ahmed Wali Karzai.⁴⁴⁸ Other rogue units in Kandahar City did eventually face confrontations with ISAF; in an incident in July 2009, ISAF and ANA forces attacked an ANP checkpoint in the area of Mullah Alam Akhun in the eastern part of the city,

sparking a gun battle and leading to the deaths of three ANP.⁴⁴⁹

The apathy and weakened command and control of the official police structure serve local powerbrokers by allowing them to manipulate the police force to their own ends. As discussed above, many of Kandahar's elites benefit from private militias. Weakened police command and control allows some of these militias to be nominally integrated into the police, giving those militias legitimacy, even though the units remain under the control of their former commanders.⁴⁵⁰ In addition, police status is an important part of many militia's business model, as commanders use ANP funding to increase revenues. Official reports on police numbers in Kandahar generally report the number of salaries drawn: rarely will police units have even half the number of active duty officers claimed.⁴⁵¹ Not only do commanders affiliated with the police draw salaries for non-existent troops, but commanders tend to attach their men to as many police units as possible, to allow salaries to be drawn from multiple sources.⁴⁵² Many of the gunmen in Governor Khalid's 005 Standby Battalion, for example, were simultaneously employed by the regular ANP, the 005 Battalion, and by the private security firm USPI.⁴⁵³

Serving as placeholders, with little control over their own forces, much of the police command in Kandahar seems content to use their office simply to manage and benefit from a system geared towards graft and petty extortion.

It has been common practice since the fall of the Taliban for Kandahar's police units to generate additional revenue through extortion of the population. The most common and odious form of extortion has been checkpoints on Kandahar's highways and roads, a practice which had been common under mujahideen rule in the early 1990s, and which was one of the major grievances on which the Taliban rose to power.⁴⁵⁴ Checkpoints flourished initially after the fall of the Taliban, but, while not having disappeared, have become less frequent in recent years due to a higher density of ISAF troops and mentors.⁴⁵⁵

The police have also been known to forcefully confiscate property in Kandahar.⁴⁵⁶ These forms of extortion, which seriously antagonize the population, exist alongside perhaps more accepted and routine forms of graft like the expectation of payments in exchange for services provided, or fees for certain types of activities.⁴⁵⁷ This system is countenanced by senior police leadership in Kandahar.⁴⁵⁸ In turn for providing permission for extortion to local commanders, senior police leaders expect payments from field units. For a junior police commander, payments to one's superiors are generally an understood condition of service.⁴⁵⁹

ISAF and Police Reform

The Canadian military was an important actor in agitating for reform in Kandahar's police force since 2006. By 2007, it was evident to the Canadian force that in the absence of strong senior police leadership, only consistent ISAF mentoring of Afghan police units had a chance of ensuring a minimal level of professionalism and discipline.⁴⁶⁰ Canada stood up Police Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams (POMLTs), which embedded mentors who lived and worked full time with Afghan police units and took additional steps to bypass corrupt commanders and remove motivations for police extortion, which included paying salaries directly to Afghan police officers.⁴⁶¹ ISAF stood up the Focused District Development (FDD) program, which puts police units through an eight-week training course and then partnered them with Canadian mentors, in 2008. Units which completed FDD were designated Afghan Uniform Police (AUP), to distinguish them from the myriad militias integrated into the Afghan National Police (ANP).⁴⁶²

But as necessary as mentoring teams and the FDD program are, these effective bottom-up reform efforts cannot stand alone, not least because it will be difficult to mentor all of Kandahar's police units. The Kandahar police are still undermined by poor and ineffective leadership at mid- and senior-levels of command and by the large number of police units which are protected by local actors and on which ISAF has limited

visibility. ISAF's mentoring efforts in Kandahar will not achieve systemic effects unless met by a top down effort by Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan/NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan (CSTC-A/NTM-A) and other actors to achieve tangible progress in strengthening the MoI's command and control over armed groups in Kandahar and across Regional Command-South. These efforts must, at minimum, ensure the appointment of strong and independent senior police commanders, allowing the formal police chain of command to assert themselves against the regional cabals which insist on de facto control of local security forces.

National Directorate of Security

In contrast to the police force, the Karzai family has installed close allies into the NDS in southern Afghanistan, and the Kandahar NDS is a vibrant and strong organization loyal to Karzai family interests.

The NDS is a further example of the role which shadow ownership of national institutions plays in strengthening the Karzai family's hand in southern Afghanistan. The NDS in Kabul is directed by Amrullah Saleh, a Tajik and former deputy to Massoud. But Saleh has limited influence over his organization and is kept in power mostly because of American backing.⁴⁶³ His influence over the organization does not extend to Kandahar.⁴⁶⁴ Several close Karzai allies and even family members in NDS Headquarters in Kabul ensure Karzai influence in parts of the NDS bureaucracy. This shadow ownership enables regional branches of the NDS in areas like Kandahar to be dominated by strong Karzai allies.⁴⁶⁵ The Kandahar NDS Chief, appointed in October, 2009, is Colonel Mir Ali, a Baluch from Nimruz who had previously worked in the NDS in Farah and Herat provinces in western Afghanistan.⁴⁶⁶ There are few additional details in the open source on the leadership of the Kandahar NDS or on its leaders' political affiliations, but there is common recognition that the Kandahar NDS is strongly loyal to the Karzai family.⁴⁶⁷

The Kandahar NDS has the reputation of

being a highly efficient organization, employing vast networks of informants, and capable of conducting effective targeting, though there have also been concerns over the NDS's tendency to detain and interrogate suspects with limited evidence.⁴⁶⁸ Given the ineffectiveness of Kandahar's police force and ISAF's reluctance to operate in Kandahar City, the NDS is the key unit for providing security in the city itself.⁴⁶⁹ In the spring of 2009, as Taliban infiltration of Kandahar City grew, the NDS again took the lead in targeting insurgents in Kandahar City.

While there may be considerable information sharing with the CIA, which is known to work closely with the NDS at a national level, cooperation between the NDS and ISAF forces in Kandahar has been limited, and the NDS appears to carefully manage its intelligence sharing with ISAF. The NDS participates with ISAF, the ANA, and the ANP in the Kandahar Operational Coordination Center–Province (OCCP), but it has not worked with Canadian or other ISAF mentors.⁴⁷⁰ The NDS often insists on complete control over operations conducted by ANA and ANP troops, and limits sharing of operational intelligence. On raids with the ANA and their Canadian partners in Kandahar City, for example, the NDS has deployed the ANA to form cordons and conducted detentions itself while ANA officers and their ISAF partners are left unaware of the actual target of their mission.⁴⁷¹ Given the reported closeness of the NDS to the Karzai family, the NDS' insistence on maintaining complete control over its operations and information sharing may be done in order to protect its political interests and those of its allies in the South.

There is an argument that given Ahmed Wali Karzai's connections to organizations like the NDS, which is reported to be the most effective security force in Kandahar, and his connections to powerful militias in the province, working with him is essential for the effectiveness of security operations. But for the last five years ISAF has shown deference to and worked with Ahmed Wali Karzai and his allies on security in Kandahar, and during that period security has only deteriorated.

AHMED WALI KARZAI AND POPULAR ALIENATION FROM THE GOVERNMENT

Given the political dynamics described above, it should not be surprising that most Kandaharis see the government as a small, exclusive oligopoly devoted to its own enrichment, closely tied to the international coalition, which the family uses to maintain power and for financial gain. There is a growing feeling that the government's interests are opposed to those of the population that is exploited and aggravated by the Taliban.⁴⁷² "Rooting out corruption" is often described as the chief governance challenge in Kandahar. But describing the problem as one of "corruption" obscures the true governance issues. Afghans may tolerate certain levels of corruption: they will not tolerate a small clique that has exclusive access to the hundreds of millions of dollars in graft moving through Kandahar and that uses its political and military power, as well as coalition forces, to enforce control over Kandahar's unprecedentedly lucrative political economy.

Perhaps most telling of the growing distance between Kandahar's government and population are popular perceptions in Kandahar City of night raids, which are targeting missions conducted by coalition forces and the Kandahar NDS. There is a widespread belief that night raids are ordered by Ahmed Wali Karzai for political ends, targeting his political opponents rather than dangerous insurgent leaders.⁴⁷³ As long as the perception remains that a small elite is using the NDS and coalition forces to further their own power at the cost of significant constituencies, it will be difficult to reconcile much of the population with the government. The 2009 Presidential and Provincial Council elections in Kandahar and the relationships between Ahmed Wali Karzai and Kandahar's tribal leadership further reveal causes and symptoms of this growing divide.

The Significance of the 2009 Elections in Kandahar

The 2009 Presidential and Provincial Council elections demonstrated that despite his considerable power, Ahmed Wali Karzai's popular base in Kandahar was narrowing.⁴⁷⁴ The elections exhibited Ahmed Wali Karzai's

reliance on manipulation of state institutions and a small number of allies, rather than on a broad grassroots coalition to maintain power.⁴⁷⁵ Though the 2009 elections may have strengthened Hamid Karzai's hand in Kabul,⁴⁷⁶ they significantly weakened his brother's in Kandahar, even while demonstrating the Karzai political machine's ability to completely dominate Kandahar's electoral politics through the use of state power.⁴⁷⁷

Leading up to the election, the Karzai camp had clear concerns that many Kandaharis were apathetic at best towards the Karzai government.⁴⁷⁸ This, combined with a desire to ensure President Karzai could win a simple majority of the votes in the election's first round, so as to prevent a run-off, led Ahmed Wali Karzai's allies in Kandahar to take all possible measures to maximize Hamid Karzai's vote totals.⁴⁷⁹ Ahmed Wali Karzai undertook a whirlwind schedule of meetings to gain the support of local powerbrokers, at one event with tribal elders promising to kneel down and beg the forgiveness of anyone alienated by his government.⁴⁸⁰ He often played upon Pashtun fears of a Tajik like Abdullah in the presidency.⁴⁸¹ Even though President Karzai did not attend, an election rally in the Kandahar stadium organized by Ahmed Wali Karzai dwarfed those of his opponents. Government offices and schools closed for the day, and the majority of Kandahar's leaders were in attendance.⁴⁸² But the orchestrated show of public support belied a widespread lack of enthusiasm for the Karzais.

The Karzai machine was initially effective in ensuring that votes were tallied and reported for Hamid Karzai in Kandahar, but it soon became apparent that it performed poorly at mobilizing actual Afghans to vote, and that high vote totals were built on fraud. The Independent Electoral Commission's (IEC) initial announcement of

results in September declared that Hamid Karzai won 221,436 votes in Kandahar, 87.6% of the votes cast in the province.⁴⁸³ But subsequent audits revealed that the Karzais' success had been built on various forms of fraud and a massively inflated vote count. The final IEC vote, after the auditing process, left only 52,971 votes for Hamid Karzai.⁴⁸⁴ While this was 73.8% of those votes cast in the province, the number of Kandaharis who voted for Karzai still amounted to less than 5% of Kandahar's total population, a dismal showing for the President in his home province, and confirmation that most Kandaharis did not see the Karzai government as their own.⁴⁸⁵ Some Western officials suggested that even the

post-recount figures for Kandahar may have been too high, and that the number of people voting in Kandahar may have been as low as 25,000.⁴⁸⁶ That over two-thirds of the votes initially registered from Kandahar were thrown out by the IEC suggest the scale of the fraud in Kandahar, and concrete allegations of electoral fraud surfaced soon after the vote. At the end of August 2009, a group of local leaders and

Afghans may tolerate certain levels of corruption; they will not tolerate a small clique that has exclusive access to the hundreds of millions of dollars in graft moving through Kandahar.

MPs from Kandahar, Helmand, and Uruzgan issued a declaration alleging the stuffing of ballot boxes and the participation of the Kandahar police force in the fraud.⁴⁸⁷ The most publicized irregularities occurred in the southern district of Shorabak. Ahmed Wali had negotiated the support of the Barechi tribe in Shorabak, but a key Barechi chief at the last minute attempted to realign his tribe with the Abdullah camp.⁴⁸⁸ Delagha Bariz, the district chief and Barechi tribal leader alleged that he was detained, polling stations in his district shut down, and ballot boxes stuffed with Karzai votes by the police.⁴⁸⁹ Similar fraud was reported in Spin Boldak District, where ANBP units under the command of Karzai's ally General Abdul Razak, were accused of intimidation and of ballot-stuffing on a massive scale. In Arghistan

District, local residents reported that no one voted, but that the government officials arrived at the district center on the day of the election to fill out ballots.⁴⁹⁰ In Zhari and Panjwai, thousands of votes were reported from non-existent polling stations.⁴⁹¹

But the candidates against which the Karzais competed were, in Kandahar at least, even more dependent on outside funding and organization and had less grassroots support than the Karzai campaign. The Abdullah Abdullah campaign in Kandahar was also led by a small circle of political figures connected to the United National Front, an opposition movement dominated by non-Pashtuns with considerable resources.⁴⁹² The group was led by Kandahar Members of Parliament who sided with the opposition, and included Noor-ul-haq Ulomi, Hajji Obaidullah, and Shakiba Hashimi.⁴⁹³ The group was joined by Izzatullah Wasefi, former head of the Afghanistan Anti-Corruption Commission and a claimant to Alokozai tribal leadership. Wasefi had led the Karzai Presidential campaign in Kandahar in 2004, but in 2009 emerged as an Abdullah supporter and after the elections began working to organize an opposition movement in parliament.⁴⁹⁴ After the elections, Achakzai tribal elder and Member of Parliament Ahmad Achakzai joined the Abdullah camp in charging the Karzai government with massive fraud in Kandahar.⁴⁹⁵

Most of these parliamentarians, however, suffered from limited grassroots support in Kandahar, given their stronger ties to Kabul. And unlike Ahmed Wali Karzai, they did not have strong networks or control over government institutions to carry them to victory despite this. Abdullah Abdullah came to Kandahar for a rally in early August 2009, and was greeted by a modest crowd of some 1,500 supporters, many of whom had been drawn to the rally by Ulomi's political network.⁴⁹⁶ Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzi had more success in captivating the energy of young Kandaharis. Ghani's rally attracted a larger, younger, and more energetic crowd than Abdullah.⁴⁹⁷ But though he had appointed Kandahari businessman and head of the Kandahar Land Owners Association

Mohammed Ayub Rafiki as one of his running mates, Ghani lacked Abdullah's connections to Kandahari MPs and their political networks, and the young, educated generation which supported Ghani was largely alienated from any political influence in Kandahar City.⁴⁹⁸ The Ashraf Ghani campaign also complained of intimidation in Kandahar, especially after Ghani campaign posters were torn down across the city and one of Ghani's most prominent supporters in the city, Abdul Ahad Muhamadyar of the Benawa Cultural Organization (which also serves as Kandahar's only independent media outlet), was beaten by Kandahar government officials in Kandahar in May 2009.⁴⁹⁹

The 2010 parliamentary elections will be a test of whether those MPs who supported Abdullah Abdullah in the 2009 Presidential election can win elections in Kandahar without Ahmed Wali Karzai's support. Many of the province's current MPs may find their positions in danger: they have been enabled to oppose Ahmed Wali Karzai's system in Kandahar because they have formed strong ties to the political opposition in Kabul, especially to powerful northern Afghan networks. These connections give them some independence, but have their own risks, as many of these Kandaharis have become dependent on national networks, rather than building support amongst their local constituencies, over which Ahmed Wali Karzai has increasing sway. In addition, there is little reason to think that voter fraud, which favors parties allied to Ahmed Wali Karzai, will be less problematic in the 2010 elections, especially if Ahmed Wali Karzai maintains firm control over government institutions in Kandahar.⁵⁰⁰

2009 Provincial Council Elections

There has been no open source reporting on the 2009 Provincial Council election in Kandahar Province. However, an examination of the results announced by the Independent Electoral Commission suggests significant problems with the election.

Unlike other provinces, where the Provincial Council election results were released in September, 2009, Kandahar Provincial Council

results were not released until December 2009, after Abdullah Abdullah had dropped out of the run-off round of the presidential election.⁵⁰¹ The Karzai camp may have pushed to withhold the results until it was clear there would be no recount, to prevent backlash from the evidence of fraud they reveal. In the Presidential election, there were initially 252,780 votes reported cast in Kandahar. Final election results cut the total number of votes to 74,966, with only 71,783 of those considered valid, meaning that some 177,814 votes were tossed out and deemed fraudulent, in addition to those votes announced as invalid.⁵⁰² In the provincial council elections, by contrast, 272,217 votes were initially registered, and 5,473 votes declared invalid, leaving 266,744 valid votes.⁵⁰³

The huge discrepancy between the number of votes tossed out of the presidential election and the provincial council election in Kandahar suggests that the IEC lacked the political will or the resources to thoroughly investigate the Kandahar provincial council elections for fraud, unless hundreds of thousands of voters braved Taliban intimidation and attacks to go to the ballot box to vote only for a provincial council member, but not vote for a presidential candidate.

The evidence thus suggests that the scale of fraud in the provincial council elections was so massive as to render them largely invalid. Had ISAF pursued the matter in September 2009, it could have gained significant leverage over Ahmed Wali Karzai, who skillfully uses his status as an elected councilman to claim legitimacy and gain leverage over ISAF. Half a year after the event, however, there is little that can be done about the apparent illegitimacy of the provincial council vote.

Beyond securing a second term for Ahmed Wali Karzai, the election also returned a group of four incumbents who were allied with Ahmed Wali Karzai, and who saw significant gains in their vote totals since the 2005 provincial council elections. This group included Sayed Khakrezwal, Bismillah Afghanmal, and Ahmad Shah Khan.⁵⁰⁴ Other incumbents reelected included Mohammad Ehsan, who had sometimes taken a standoffish

attitude towards Ahmed Wali Karzai and whose vote total dropped, and the council's three female representatives, whose vote totals also dropped, as a possible sign of social pressures in the province increasingly working against female candidates.⁵⁰⁵ Five new council members were elected, many of whom came from a new class of those who had made small fortunes in the contracting business and had the funds to buy their seats.⁵⁰⁶

The 2009 Provincial Council election solidified perceptions that the Kandahar Provincial Council was not truly representative of the interests of the population in Kandahar. The Provincial Council does carry considerable influence in Kandahar, and has become a key means by which Ahmed Wali Karzai builds alliances and draws select local powerbrokers into his circle of influence.⁵⁰⁷ But the common consensus in Kandahar is that the Provincial Council is focused on pursuing and consolidating the personal and financial interests of its members, rather those of broad-based provincial constituencies.⁵⁰⁸ The massive fraud behind the 2009 re-election simply confirms this picture, and the 2009 elections appear to have been a final straw in the population's perceptions of the legitimacy of the government in Kandahar.⁵⁰⁹

Tribal Dynamics and Alienation from Kandahar Government

ISAF has considered tribal engagement and tribal shuras as a means of effecting political shaping prior to summer 2010 operations in Kandahar. It is argued that tribal engagement might be a means of checking Ahmed Wali Karzai's influence, enfranchising a large portion of the population and creating room in which robust popular resistance to the Taliban can emerge.⁵¹⁰ ISAF should be circumspect about the ability of tribal engagement to result in genuine popular buy-in to the government given the ease with which local powerbrokers and Ahmed Wali Karzai in particular manipulate tribal structures in the province for their own ends. Shuras will not in and of themselves result in greater popular buy-in to the government, and tribal engagement will only succeed if it is carried out with a sophisticated

attention to Kandahar's power dynamics.

Ahmed Wali Karzai has conducted vigorous tribal engagement in Kandahar since 2002, often using the rhetoric of greater inclusivity.⁵¹¹ His methods of dealing with Kandahar's tribes have shored up his position in the short term. But in the last several years they have also resulted in growing resentment and ultimately alienated potential allies of the government. The ease with which Ahmed Wali has manipulated tribal leaders is largely a result of the pronounced weakness of tribal leadership. Traditional tribal leaders have little influence at the provincial level, as political authority in Kandahar today is closely linked to militias and wealth. It is unlikely that they could become a strong force in Kandahar, and even with significant assistance from outside actors it is unclear how effectively they could rally popular resistance to the Taliban. But the tribes are one of the few forms of social organization remaining in the region and tribal leaders maintain influence at the village level, playing an important role as community leaders.

Kandahar's government and dominant political-commercial networks draw most of their manpower from a small number of sub-tribes and clans. The Popalzai subtribe is particularly well represented, but Karzai and his allies also draw supporters from the Mohammadzai clan of the Barakzai and select clans and families of the Achakzai, Alokozai, and Noorzai tribes.⁵¹² And while the Barakzai are no longer as predominant in the formal government as during Governor Sherzai's tenure, several Barakzai families manage extremely lucrative business interests, which tie a portion of the Barakzai into the Kandahar political economy.⁵¹³ Disproportionate tribal representation in the government is probably not in and of itself a problem, but becomes a point of contention given the current counter-insurgency and the amount of foreign money pouring into Kandahar. There is a popular perception amongst Panjpai Durrani and Ghilzais, for example, that they are singled out for abuse or targeting by the security services by virtue of their tribal affiliation.⁵¹⁴

But the fact that many of Kandahar's sub-tribes

and clans have no representation in the Kandahar government is by itself insufficient to convey the lack of connection between the population and the government. Even among those sub-tribes and clans, including the Popalzai and Barakzai, from which the provincial government and dominant commercial networks draw most heavily, large elements remain excluded with no buy-in to the government.⁵¹⁵

Ahmed Wali Karzai has, often in an invasive way, manipulated tribal structures in an attempt to keep tribal leadership subordinate and maintain the appearance of broad tribal support for the government. Ahmed Wali Karzai has adopted a policy of keeping this traditional tribal leadership dependent and weak to prevent them from challenging his influence, and has appropriated tribal leaders to his own ends when possible.⁵¹⁶ This approach is essentially a management strategy, employing a combination of carrots and sticks, divide-and-conquer tactics, and dependencies. These tactics rely on a robust political machine to guarantee the tacit loyalty of many of the province's powerbrokers and tribal leaders.⁵¹⁷ Often Wali Karzai props up weaker claimants for tribal leadership, providing the support needed to sideline rivals, in the process ensuring they remain politically dependent. One Alokozai elder explained that Ahmed Wali Karzai "finds people in a tribe to ally with and then helps them to become powerful by arresting honest tribal elders."⁵¹⁸

As Kandahar's tribal system has evolved away from traditional models, tribal leadership in Kandahar is increasingly based on a leader's ability to provide resources for his constituents. Ahmed Wali Karzai's chief means of exerting influence over Kandahar's tribes is his ability to control whether tribal leader have access to patronage resources. His links and influence over the state, over NGO's operating in Kandahar, and over ISAF means that access to these resources requires the favor of Ahmed Wali Karzai. Part of Ahmed Wali Karzai's political persona has become that of the *Arbab* – a sort of feudal lord in semi-tribalized Indo-Persian society – who holds court amongst the province's tribal leaders, hearing their petitions and granting

them resources, and increasing or decreasing their influence as it fits his political ends.

A critical element of Ahmed Wali Karzai's influence over traditional tribal elements is his ability to prevent the formation of any alternative tribal structures which might bypass or rival his authority. The most serious tribally based threats to his influence have been a series of Kandahar inter-tribal shuras. Late in 2007, a group of 120 tribal leaders attempted to respond to the growing crisis in Kandahar, to their declining independence, and to their alienation from the government by formulating plans for a tribal council including leaders from a half-dozen of Kandahar's tribes.⁵¹⁹ The group selected twenty-seven representatives to lead the effort, who in turn created a five man drafting committee to lay out the group's principles. The members of the drafting committee were mostly proxies, named to prevent their sponsors from coming under undue government pressure. A major force in attempts to form a council was the Achakzai tribal elder Mohammad Essa Khan, who had largely attempted to transcend the manipulation and power dynamics of Kandahar politics, which in turn had limited his influence under the new regime.⁵²⁰

The document produced by the drafting committee clearly stated the government of Kandahar had demonstrated its inadequacy to deal with the challenges it faced, and called on the people of Kandahar to address them.⁵²¹ It aspired to create a "Greater Kandahar Shura" to serve as an alternative provincial council. Its purposes were to serve, its leadership announced, "as a mirror for the government, to show how the people should be treated, how their problems solved, how a government should work."⁵²²

The extent to which Kandahar's traditional tribal leadership had lost its vitality as an independent force and been co-opted by the Karzai family was evident when Ahmed Wali Karzai neutralized the shura by co-opting its leadership. In the spring of 2008, his brother Qayum Karzai became the body's director, and Karzai loyalists secured control of the organization.⁵²³ For Ahmed Wali Karzai and the constitutionally-created provincial

council to seek to neutralize the shura was a natural course of action, as the group sought to challenge their influence. The exact process by which Qayum Karzai became the body's director was not evident to observers in Kandahar. But given the the Karzai family's tremendous influence over tribal leaders status, opportunities for advancement, and access to resources, it is clear that Ahmed Wali, Qayum, and their allies are able to leverage that influence to favor their political agendas, whether that is securing the votes of tribal elders or influencing the line tribal leaders take with ISAF.⁵²⁴

The Karzais and the Insurgency

Ahmed Wali Karzai, and the Karzai family more broadly, have maintained an ambiguous relationship with the Quetta Shura Taliban. Ahmed Wali Karzai seems to have a complex calculus towards insurgent leadership, in which political considerations sometimes outweigh tackling the insurgency. This calculus appears shaped by two factors. The first is growing concerns about the stability and sustainability of their position in Kandahar Province and in the south more broadly. The second is its conviction that Afghan stability depends upon the family's ability to manage the country's competing interests. Thus, rather than viewing the Taliban as an existential threat to their power, the Karzais entertain visions of co-opting Taliban leadership as a means of shoring up their influence. Some have argued that the Karzais use the prospect of Taliban reconciliation mostly for short term tactical ends, but there is strong evidence that Hamid Karzai and his inner circle in Kabul seriously believe they can turn major Taliban commanders, even if experience suggests their visions are overly ambitious and unrealistic.⁵²⁵

Hamid, Qayum, and Ahmed Wali Karzai have driven efforts to produce some form of reconciliation with the Quetta Shura Taliban. Reconciliation with elements of the QST has proceeded on two levels. The first is local. In Kandahar, local reconciliation has focused on individual Taliban commanders and fighters, and has been largely handled through the Peace Through Strength (PTS) Program, headed

until late 2009 by provincial council member Agha Lalai Dastergeri and by his deputy, former Taliban commander Khan Mohammad.⁵²⁶ The PTS Program has had modest success at drawing some commanders with a loose affiliation to the Taliban away from the movement. In October, 2008, Agha Lalai Dastergeri claimed that over the course of the program's existence it had convinced over 500 former Taliban fighters to reconcile with the government.⁵²⁷ It is unclear, though, what these reconciliations meant, as reconciled Taliban fighters often continue to cross back and forth from the insurgency.⁵²⁸ Despite questionable efficacy, these connections do open a line of communication between those backing the government in Kandahar and the insurgency: contacts like these are almost universal among prominent powerbrokers in Kandahar. Ahmed Wali himself appears to maintain communication with Taliban commanders, as evidenced by his attempts to broker a truce for the 2009 presidential election.⁵²⁹

Attempts to negotiate election day truces with the Taliban commanders in Kandahar in August, 2009 suggest the relative ineffectiveness of Ahmed Wali Karzai's efforts to win over local Taliban commanders. In the months before the election, Ahmed Wali Karzai conducted an aggressive campaign with NATO support to sign election day truces with local Taliban commanders, in hopes that many would ignore Mullah Omar's orders to disrupt the election.⁵³⁰ Ahmed Wali claimed that, worried about the election of a northern Tajik to the presidency, a number of senior Taliban commanders had signed secret deals.⁵³¹ But Karzai's truces with the Taliban at most caused a small reduction in election day violence: rocket attacks and incidents of Taliban intimidation were conducted throughout polling hours.⁵³²

The second aspect of reconciliation efforts related to Kandahar has been an attempt to bring senior Quetta Shura leadership to the negotiating table, rather than simply wining over dissident local commanders. The Karzais have insisted in maintaining close control of this process. In 2008, Qayum Karzai organized meetings with insurgent leadership in Saudi Arabia, mediated

by King Abdullah.⁵³³ There were also reports that the Karzai government had been conducting talks with Mullah Baradar, then the operational commander of the Quetta Shura Taliban, or his representatives. Baradar, who like the Karzais come from the Popalzai tribe, has been reported as the senior Taliban leader identified by the Karzais as mostly likely to reconcile. As of March, 2010, the Saudi mediated talks had made no progress, as senior Quetta Shura leadership refused to attend, demanding the complete withdrawal of foreign forces as a precondition for any discussions.⁵³⁴ Attempts to bring in Mullah Baradar may or may not have been a promising lead, but in any case were stalled after the Pakistan government arrested Baradar and refused to extradite him.⁵³⁵

Given the failure of reconciliation efforts with the Quetta Shura Taliban to bear fruit, some speculate that these negotiations have been "fundamentally about jockeying for power in Afghanistan and not about bringing stability to the country through conciliation and compromise."⁵³⁶ Internal jockeying for power certainly seemed a concern in the lead up to the 2009 presidential election. The Karzai family has been aware of the need to win electoral support from Pashtun groups in Afghanistan who do not desire sustained confrontation between the government and the Pashtun Taliban movement to continue, and the rhetoric of reconciliation may have been a move designed to appeal to these constituencies.⁵³⁷

The Karzais' vocal support for reconciliation and reintegration does indeed have a nationalist element to it, and is influenced by a desire to retain control over reconciliation and prevent other forces from stepping in. The Karzais have insisted that ISAF reconciliation efforts should work through the Karzai government, and continued emphasis by President Karzai on reconciliation may be an attempt to claim ground and ensure that the Karzai administration has the autonomy to drive the reconciliation process as it sees fit.⁵³⁸ Pakistan is another major concern for the Karzais, who harbor a deep suspicion of Pakistani designs on Afghan sovereignty. And there is likely a strong desire to pull Taliban leaders away from Pakistan.

Ultimately, serious questions surround the realism of the Karzai administration's vision for reconciliation in southern Afghanistan. There is a possibility that for both Ahmed Wali Karzai in Kandahar and for Hamid Karzai in Kabul, reconciliation has the element of an exercise in escapism, and in Ahmed Wali Karzai's case, may be a refusal to accept that a large portion of the population in Kandahar has substantial objections to his government.

Ahmed Wali Karzai and Population-Centric Counterinsurgency

Ahmed Wali Karzai's calculation of his own political interests also drives his position towards ISAF's counterinsurgency operations. From 2006-2008, he often emphasized the need for more development aid to be poured into Kandahar, which in general played into the interests of his network. But he has consistently opposed the implementation of a fully-resourced population centric counterinsurgency in Kandahar.⁵³⁹ Ahmed Wali Karzai has suggested that instead of a counterinsurgency strategy, NATO revert to the tactics used in 2001, and work through local proxies, conducting targeting missions. In a September 2009 interview Ahmed Wali Karzai argued that a NATO troop increase was not needed in Kandahar. He also called for the implementation of tribal militias in Kandahar, arguing that ISAF should employ "more Afghans, more people from this region... Whether you call them Arbakis [tribal volunteer militias] or local patriotic forces, they should be formed."⁵⁴⁰ NATO's use of local proxy forces to fight the Taliban has obviously had enormous benefits for Ahmed Wali Karzai. Because Ahmed Wali Karzai controls most local non-governmental security forces in Kandahar, he can justifiably assume that ISAF's local proxies would be his own units, as is indeed currently the case with the CIA's Kandahar proxy, the Kandahar Strike Force.⁵⁴¹ Governor Wesa stated in early April, 2010, that summer operations would be "based on intelligence" and not involve large scale sweeps – language that might be read as a rejection of clearing missions and may be an endorsement of Ahmed Wali Karzai's call for limiting operations to targeting missions.⁵⁴²

The greatest risk of a population-centric counterinsurgency strategy for actors like Ahmed Wali Karzai, though, is that it will increase ISAF's visibility on the political economy and subversion of formal power structures, and could lead ISAF to take measures which weaken his control over government institutions and his financial interests.

Preparations for Operation Omid ("Hope" in Pashtu), ISAF's population-centric counterinsurgency operation in Kandahar scheduled for the summer of 2010, brought these tensions to a head in late March and early April of 2010. Renewed focus on Kandahar led to a deeper understanding of the nature of Ahmed Wali Karzai's influence, which in turn contributed to a series of revelatory articles in the Western press, as Ahmed Wali Karzai was cast as an antagonist to significant governance improvements.⁵⁴³

The growing rift between Ahmed Wali Karzai and ISAF over the shape of ISAF's summer campaign in Kandahar took on national significance at the beginning of April, 2010, when President Karzai and close Karzai supporters in Kabul, including Interior Minister Atmar, waded into the debate in support of the President's brother. On April 5, 2010, Hamid Karzai spoke to a gathering of over 1,000 in Kandahar, promising that no operations would be undertaken without the consent of Afghan elders, an ambiguous statement, given the critical question of who decides which local leaders represent the people of Kandahar.⁵⁴⁴ President Karzai's commitment to protecting his brother and his significant family and political interests in the province may impact his judgement about counterinsurgency operations there, and his recent actions suggest the possibility of active Presidential intervention in operational planning.

CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS: ISAF AND KANDAHAR POLITICS

Kandahar's politics have been shaped by an intense power struggle to fill the vacuum left in 2001, in which guns and money are the only

guarantees of power. ISAF and the United States have been manipulated by actors, who otherwise had little influence, to build a significant powerbase and dominate official governance institutions. This has resulted in an unsustainable situation, heightened local antagonisms, and played into the Taliban's bid to regain power in the Afghan South.

Ahmed Wali Karzai and the Crisis of ISAF Strategy in Kandahar

Ahmed Wali Karzai has built a powerful empire by bringing under his influence the province's key commercial, military, and contracting networks. His militias and those of his allies, a small number of security organs like the NDS, financial resources, and his influence in his brother's administration allow him to dominate the province's government institutions and tribal leadership and to orchestrate elections. He has skillfully won the intentional or unintentional backing of coalition actors, whom he has used to build and strengthen his power.

Ahmed Wali Karzai's rapid consolidation of power is hardly surprising, given his starting point in a political vacuum. But the structure of politics in Kandahar only perpetuates the province's instability. Ahmed Wali Karzai has grown isolated from the vast majority of the population of Kandahar and from the many local powerbrokers who find themselves excluded from his commercial empire. The Taliban insurgency has become the only viable means of political opposition left to those Ahmed Wali Karzai has alienated, and winning popular support for the government requires fundamentally restructuring the nature of politics in Kandahar.

Ahmed Wali Karzai's maintenance of power despite limited popular support is built upon three specific and interdependent conditions. These are:

- That despite ISAF's growing frustration, the international coalition will continue to give him de facto support where it matters and will not take actions that challenge his fundamental interests.
- That he will continue to receive critical state backing and control the formal government of Kandahar. This assumes that Hamid Karzai will continue to support him and that Kabul ministries will not challenge his influence due to his brother's political ascendancy.
- That he will maintain the ability to exert power over local powerbrokers through his use of force and by his control over the provincial economy.

Ultimately, Ahmed Wali Karzai's strategic calculus has created a fundamental impasse with ISAF. Given his limited power base, he would be relegated to a secondary and insignificant role if his exclusive hold over government institutions in Kandahar is broken. Ahmed Wali Karzai controls the government in Kandahar because he controls all avenues of advancement within provincial politics, and if he relinquishes his hold, even some, the rest of his influence could disappear. He cannot make concessions with the population or local powerbrokers that might allow rival poles to form within the government of Kandahar.

It is important to note that Ahmed Wali Karzai's fundamental insecurities arise from his relationship with the population and other local powerbrokers, not with ISAF. But because ISAF cannot avoid working through the government of Kandahar, control over government institutions is also important as a means of holding ISAF in check. Essentially, for Ahmed Wali Karzai power in Kandahar is an all or nothing proposition.

ISAF must alter the fundamental dynamics of its relationship with local powerbrokers and take the initiative with a proactive and decisive strategy. If ISAF is committed to population-centric counterinsurgency and governance reform, ISAF must transform the dynamics of politics in Kandahar. ISAF policy towards Ahmed Wali Karzai is confined by boundaries: it abides by its own legal standards and a respect for Afghan sovereignty, which demands that reigning in Ahmed Wali Karzai cannot simply be done by fiat or force. But it also funds and protects the Karzai government, and this gives it significant leverage. The international coalition must use its leverage



PHOTO 4 | PRESIDENT HAMID KARZAI MEETS WITH TRIBAL LEADERS, ISAF COMMANDER GENERAL STANLEY MCCHRYSTAL AND AMBASSADOR MARK SEDWILL, THE SENIOR NATO CIVILIAN REPRESENTATIVE IN AFGHANISTAN ON 5 APRIL 2010.

and focus on making Ahmed Wali Karzai respond to pressure placed on his vulnerabilities. ISAF must undermine some of the preconditions for Ahmed Wali Karzai's influence enumerated above to force him into the concessions to government institutions, local leaders and the population that are needed to overcome the insurgency, but which he is currently committed to avoiding.

Inconsistencies in ISAF Strategy, 2006–2009

ISAF has lacked an effective political strategy and often worked at cross purposes with itself since it took responsibility for Kandahar in 2006. Its official policy is to strengthen official governance institutions, but it has simultaneously strengthened and enabled those forces which undermine and manipulate Kandahar's formal government. ISAF is right to make the formation of strong Afghan institutions its ultimate strategic objective. The strength of these institutions will determine the Afghan state's ability to ensure security and provide essential services like fair and impartial justice. But institutions are not formed in a vacuum, and in Kandahar strong governance institutions can only be built with close attention to the informal power system that determines their ultimate shape.

ISAF has supported the very powerbrokers who have undermined the Kandahar government because of dependencies and expedience. ISAF and OEF rely heavily on Ahmed Wali Karzai and others, including the Sherzai family, Abdul Razak, and Matiullah Khan, for intelligence, manpower, and logistics security. Through inattentive contracting, ISAF has poured millions of dollars into their hands and supported and sanctioned the creation of personal militias.

ISAF has dramatically increased the resources it devotes to governance issues in Kandahar since 2008. The Canadian government began increasing the number of civilian specialists on its Provincial Reconstruction Team in 2008, and added a senior civilian coordinator to serve as the Representative of Canada in Kandahar.⁵⁴⁶ The United States began to supplement Canadian efforts in 2009. But increased resources will, in and of themselves, do little if ISAF continues to work at cross purposes with itself and with other coalition actors in Kandahar.

A New Strategy

ISAF must develop a coherent and unified political strategy to address informal power

THE KARZAI'S CHALLENGE TO ISAF

Hamid and Ahmed Wali Karzai have often demonstrated erratic behavior, responding to pressure from ISAF with actions mutually detrimental to both their interests and those of the coalition. Hamid Karzai's vocal accusation of foreign responsibility for fraud in Afghanistan's presidential election and rhetoric about joining the Taliban in April 2010 are only the most recent examples of this behavior, and Ahmed Wali Karzai has made subtle threats to the coalition in Kandahar as well.²⁵

In Hamid Karzai's case, some suggest the president is breaking down under stress and isolation. There may be an element of this, and it is possible that Hamid Karzai's actions owe something to the manipulation and influence of his inner circle. But ISAF must not discount the political savvy of either Karzai. Their actions and statements may be part of a classic game theory "game of chicken," meant to dissuade ISAF from using leverage against Afghan actors by convincing the coalition that pressing too hard will have disastrous consequences.

There is an element of pushing boundaries in these actions. The Karzais are playing a dangerous game – Hamid Karzai's recent statements play into Taliban propaganda and legitimize the insurgency, for example – and the Karzais must not be emboldened in using these tactics. Successful diplomacy skillfully balances the building of trust and relationships with the effective application of leverage.

ISAF and coalition embassies must make it clear to the Karzai administration that they will not be intimidated from using leverage, including financial resources to challenge the interests of key Afghan powerbrokers when those interests undermine the development of enduring political stability in Afghanistan.

structures and set the conditions necessary for the emergence of a sustainable institutional order. This strategy must integrate the entirety of the coalition effort in both Kandahar and in Kabul.

A clear conception of the desired end state must drive political operations. The following strategic objectives are within the bounds of Kandahar's historical and cultural order, consistent with ISAF's current goals, and directly relevant to the defeat of the Taliban and to Kandahar's long-term stability:

- Strong, independent security institutions which are impartial and can gain the confidence of local communities and powerbrokers must be established. Legitimate government security forces must have monopoly over the use of violence and private militias must be disbanded.
- Military and political power should be decoupled from commerce: Actors in Kandahar's economy cannot maintain armed forces or use government security forces to further their commercial interests, and Kandahar's government must not be under the control of commercial networks.
- The broadest possible range of local

constituencies should have genuine buy-in to the Kandahar provincial government. Shuras must become actual deliberative processes, rather than events orchestrated by local powerbrokers.

- A functioning legal system must be established, and the dispute resolution requirements of the population must be met by a combination of government and traditional tribal mechanisms.

Dealing with Ahmed Wali Karzai

Ahmed Wali Karzai's influence over Kandahar is the central obstacle to any of ISAF's governance objectives, and a consistent policy for dealing with Ahmed Wali Karzai must be a central element of any new political strategy. The most immediate question ISAF faces vis-à-vis Ahmed Wali Karzai is whether to accept him as an enduring fixture in Kandahar politics, or to press for his removal, perhaps through a negotiated settlement. The situation in Kandahar may become more chaotic in the short term were Ahmed Wali Karzai to divest himself of power, depending on ISAF and the ANA's ability to provide order. In the mid-to-long term, his removal would facilitate ISAF's governance goals by allowing impartial Afghan government institutions with ISAF mentoring

to become the leading force in Kandahar. The state organizations and local powerbrokers, which Ahmed Wali Karzai uses to maintain minimal, inadequate security in Kandahar will not disappear in Ahmed Wali Karzai's absence. Rather, those men of talent now beholden to Ahmed Wali Karzai may become easier to partner with, and with ISAF mentoring can become the foundation of a strong and independent institutional order. Finally, removing Ahmed Wali Karzai would send a powerful signal to many of the government's opponents and those leaders sitting on the fence about ISAF or the Kabul government's genuine commitment to considering their interests and building a new order in Kandahar.

While negotiating Ahmed Wali Karzai's exile from Kandahar could pay high dividends, it faces the obstacle of Hamid Karzai and his administration's steadfast support for the President's younger brother. Past attempts to negotiate Ahmed Wali Karzai's exile from Kandahar have not employed targeted leverage, and accomplished nothing while costing political capital and loss of face. In 2007 U.S. Ambassador

Ronald Neumann suggested to no avail that the president give his brother an ambassadorial post abroad in response to renewed allegations of Ahmed Wali's involvement in the drug trade.⁵⁴⁷ This was repeated in November 2009, when Ambassador Eikenberry reportedly demanded that President Karzai remove Ahmed Wali Karzai from Kandahar, and again in the spring of 2010, only for the president to continue to refuse his brother's removal.⁵⁴⁸ In a press interview in December 2009, President Karzai noted that it would be an abuse of his powers and a violation of the constitution for him to remove Ahmed Wali Karzai from his position as elected head of the Kandahar provincial council.⁵⁴⁹ Hamid Karzai and his inner circle see attacks on Ahmed

Wali Karzai as attacks on the President. For this reason, and because Ahmed Wali Karzai's presence undoubtedly advances the administration's interests in the south, it is unlikely that given the restraints ISAF imposes upon itself, Hamid Karzai would pressure his brother to leave Kandahar.

Reasoning with President Karzai about the removal of his brother will not succeed, and simply assures the Karzai administration that U.S. advice can be ignored without consequence. Recent media reports suggest General McChrystal does not intend to remove Ahmed Wali Karzai from Kandahar, but is considering ways to contain his influence.⁵⁵⁰ ISAF should be conscious

that its troop commitment and funding of the Karzai government give it legitimate forms of leverage to use with the Karzai administration which can be used to put significant pressure on Hamid and Ahmed Wali Karzai.

If ISAF determines it cannot achieve the removal of Ahmed Wali Karzai from Kandahar, then it should undertake a concerted campaign to change the terms of its relationship with him and limit his power over Kandahar's government

and political economy. Achieving this will be difficult, and requires a more sophisticated and calculated strategy that would Ahmed Wali Karzai's outright removal. As this paper demonstrates, the Karzai family is immensely clever, masterful at political manipulation, and is hardly inclined to serve any but its own interests.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Whether or not Ahmed Wali Karzai stays in Kandahar, there are a number of critical steps ISAF must take to engage informal power networks and set the foundation for the development of impartial governance institutions. These are unity of effort, better intelligence,

The state organizations and local powerbrokers, which Ahmed Wali Karzai uses to maintain minimal, inadequate security in Kandahar will not disappear in Ahmed Wali Karzai's absence.

reform of ISAF contracting, disarmament of private security forces, and building ministerial capacity and command and control in Kandahar and Kabul.

Unity of Effort

The first step in addressing Ahmed Wali Karzai's behavior is to overcome the weaknesses and divisions in the international coalition which have enabled him to manipulate it to his advantage. ISAF has not been entirely ignorant of Ahmed Wali Karzai's machinations over the past years, and there have been occasional attempts by the Kandahar PRT to influence his behavior. But through 2009 the Kandahar PRT was never able to effectively coordinate a policy for dealing with the Karzai family with ISAF's military force, with Operation Enduring Freedom forces, or with the U.S. and other embassies in Kabul. These entities pursued their own policy towards Ahmed Wali Karzai, largely dictated by their reliance on him for short-term intelligence and contracting support. The PRT was often not aware of how much U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF) or the CIA supported Ahmed Wali Karzai. Ahmed Wali Karzai has benefited immensely from these divisions. Recognizing that ISAF, OEF, the Kandahar PRT, and the multiple embassies operating in Kabul all have their own short term interests and policies, Ahmed Wali has had little reason to respect the attempts of any one component to influence his behavior.

Unity of effort must also be achieved between the coalition at the provincial and national level. Because the Palace, the Ministry of the Interior and the IDLG have considerable influence over the strength of government institutions in Kandahar, governance efforts in the province must work hand in hand with political efforts in Kabul. Coordination and unity of effort must be maintained between the RC South Headquarters, the Kandahar PRT, the US and other NATO embassies, COMISAF, and CSTC-A, all of which must work in coordination to apply pressure to change the behavior of informal actors in Kandahar. Just as Ahmed Wali Karzai can call counterparts in the IDLG in Kabul and direct appointments, PRT officials in Kandahar should be able to regularly coordinate efforts with

counterparts in the embassies of NATO partners or with CSTC-A mentors in the Ministry of the Interior.

Better Intelligence

Better intelligence is a necessary element of changing the behavior of local powerbrokers. ISAF must not only know the key actors in Kandahar politics, but must track their actions and their relationships, gaining visibility on how their actions might undermine the Afghan government and understanding their key interests and the mechanisms by which they exert influence. ISAF has begun taking steps to address its lack of visibility on political, cultural, and economic issues. Major General Michael Flynn, ISAF's intelligence chief, ordered an increased focus on population-centric intelligence targets in his January 2010 paper "Fixing Intel: A Blueprint for Making Intelligence Relevant in Afghanistan."⁵⁵¹ Among other initiatives, MG Flynn is establishing Stability Operations Information Centers to be co-located with the regional commands and in RC South to work under the guidance of ISAF's senior civilian representative.⁵⁵²

"Fixing Intel" emphasizes grassroots level, local understanding of the population. As this report demonstrates, an understanding of local circumstances must be paired with a thorough understanding of the elite networks that are connected to regional powerbrokers and to Kabul. For example, while it is helpful to understand the grievances local tribal elders have with a district police chief, it will be hard to influence this police chief's behavior without understanding to whom he owes his appointment, what his relationship is with Ahmed Wali Karzai, the accommodations he has with business networks in Kandahar City, and of the politics of the Afghan MoI in Kabul. It will thus be critical that intelligence assessments of elite networks and actors and the interaction between Kandahar and Kabul be given high priority and that a personality driven intelligence is developed. This may require a widened range of tactics, and intelligence analysts must maintain networks of contacts within Kandahar's government and society.

Contracting

ISAF contracts and other forms of funding, including development aid, are the foundation of Kandahar's political economy. As such, ISAF has tremendous power to shape local dynamics through the calculated use of its funds. ISAF contracting and development aid must be made an integral aspect of ISAF's governance campaign and come under close political supervision. The assignment of contracts and award of aid money should be designed to benefit as many constituencies as possible and with enough equity to alleviate rivalries. Specific centers of gravity, including groups and powerbrokers sitting on the fence must be strategically targeted. ISAF contracts can also be used as a form of leverage to force business networks to alter particularly destructive behaviors.

Corruption will be an endemic part of the award of millions in contracts and Western aid money. Rooting it out is not realistic. Instead, the forms of corruption with the most serious political consequences must be tackled. Of chief importance is that the contracting system does not give a small number of networks the power to fund powerful security forces, control the government of Kandahar or otherwise subordinate their rivals.

Disarmament of Private Security Forces

A key element of Ahmed Wali Karzai's power in Kandahar is his use of private security forces and elements of the state security apparatus to enforce his political will. The use by Ahmed Wali Karzai and his allies of private paramilitary forces to subordinate rivals is deeply incompatible with ISAF's governance objectives. ISAF must undertake a comprehensive Disarmament, Demobilization, and Re-integration (DDR) campaign to deal with these private security forces. Disarmament measures must be conducted with attention to political circumstances and the ability of private militias to masquerade as more legitimate security forces.

Particularly careful thinking is required to address what would happen to the units making up private security forces and personal militias. Under present circumstances, integrating disarmed

fighters into the ANP is not a good option. The MoI has no command and control over ANP units in Kandahar, and many of Kandahar's private security forces are already on MoI rosters. Integrating these units into the ANP would simply allow the police to remain a sanctuary for the personal forces of local commanders, and seriously undermines the credibility of the police force. It is far better to have a small and disciplined police force than a large collection of autonomous units, as most of these units harm, rather than contribute to the counter-insurgency mission.

Reintegration of disarmed units is complicated by the political pressures which prevent MoI leadership from challenging Ahmed Wali Karzai's interests in Kandahar and cause them to accede to shadow ownership by local actors. A politically astute and heavily interventionist campaign is necessary to prevent capacity building from being derailed by this dynamic. CSTC-A must actively protect MoI officials from the pressure of the Karzai administration and guide and forcefully back them in taking concrete actions.

Building Ministerial Capacity, Command and Control

ISAF's capacity building and mentoring can be used as a means of enabling certain government actors in Kandahar and Kabul to assert their independence from Ahmed Wali Karzai and his allies if ISAF can gain visibility on the pressures faced by government officials. ISAF must show commitment to partnering with and supporting ministerial reforms to convince government officials to confront shadow ownership within their institutions. Government institutions which work for the good of the Afghan state, not personalities within it, must be seen as having the momentum over networks with narrowly conceived interests, in order to convince local powerbrokers to lend their support to these institutions, rather than attempt to co-opt them. Protecting institutions and government officials from undue influence of local powerbrokers requires a strong international lobbying effort in Kabul, working in close coordination with ISAF officers on the ground in Kandahar. It also requires that ISAF and other representatives of the international coalition maintain a working

presence within Afghan ministries.

Police mentoring, similarly, is the best means of decreasing co-optation of the police force. The police mentoring effort must ultimately pair mentoring of individual units with a more vigilant mentoring effort in the Ministry of the Interior, designed to give MoI officials command and control over their police units in Kandahar. ISAF's bottom up police mentoring must be met by a top down effort by Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan/ NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan (CSTC-A/NTM-A) and other actors to achieve tangible progress in strengthening the MoI's command and control.

Capacity building is also concerned with ISAF's ability to use of leverage in pushing for appointments and removals of government officials. With the exception of figures like Ahmed Wali Karzai who have achieved a monopoly on power, the removal of specific individuals alone has rarely had significant effects. More important is the question of who replaced government officials in question, and whether changes in personnel can be exploited for more systemic reforms. There have been multiple cases in which ISAF has expended significant political capital to remove a given official, Sher Mahmud Akhundzada in Helmand or Jan Mohammad in Uruzgan for example, but has achieved only cosmetic changes because the individuals who succeeded these men did not have sufficient influence or ISAF support to tackle key challenges to their authority.

For the next decade at least, any emerging institutional order in Afghanistan will have to contend with or work beside strong personal patronage networks. The current weakness of institutions and strength of personalities suggests that ISAF's work to strengthen institutions must be done in and sometimes through a political sphere dominated by individuals whose political power is derived from outside the government. ISAF must adapt to this mode of politics without losing a clear understanding of the strategic objectives and institutional order towards which it works.

The governance situation in Kandahar undermines any attempts to fight the insurgency, and making sufficient improvement will require a commitment to clear strategy, better intelligence, innovative thinking, and inspired diplomacy to enhance leverage. Improving Kandahar's governance is not optional if ISAF is indeed committed to a population-centric counterinsurgency strategy in Kandahar. ISAF must shape the political landscape in Kandahar so that the local government becomes a credible partner if it is to succeed in establishing long-term stability in southern Afghanistan. This strategy cannot succeed without a credible local partner and an attention to addressing the issues that enable the insurgency. Building a strong institutional order is a necessary foundation for stability in southern Afghanistan.

NOTES

Far too little attention has been given to discerning the forms of statebuilding and power consolidation which Afghan elites and the Karzai administration are pursuing. There are a handful of good sources published since 2009 focusing on elements of this dynamic. They include Antonio Giustozzi's *Empires of Mud* (2009), which provides an excellent analysis of the power consolidation strategies pursued by strongmen in northern and western Afghanistan, Dipali Mukhopadhyay's "Warlords as Bureaucrats," (September, 2009) and Martine van Bijlert's "Between Discipline and Discretion, Policies Surrounding Senior Subnational Appointments" (May, 2009). Haseeb Humayoon's "The Re-election of Hamid Karzai," (January, 2010) provides an excellent analysis of President Karzai and his inner circle's ability to masterfully hold sway over and subtly direct a broader process of personality and network based, de-institutionalized stabilization and state-building.

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¹³ Olivier Roy, 25-33; Barnett Rubin, 22-44.

¹⁴ Olivier Roy, 25-33; Barnett Rubin, 22-44.

¹⁵ Olivier Roy, 25-33; Barnett Rubin, 22-44.

¹⁶ Olivier Roy, 25-33; Barnett Rubin, 22-44.

¹⁷ Olivier Roy, 25-33; Barnett Rubin, 22-44.

¹⁸ Olivier Roy, 10-29, Barnett Rubin, 45-80.

¹⁹ Tanner, *Afghanistan: A Military History from Alexander the Great to the War Against the Taliban*, 114-117.

²⁰ Adamec, ed., *Kandahar and South-Central Afghanistan*, 509-529.

²¹ Tanner, *Afghanistan: A Military History from Alexander the Great to the War Against the Taliban*, 117-127.

²² Tanner, *Afghanistan: A Military History from Alexander the Great to the War Against the Taliban*, 117-127.

²³ Antonio Giustozzi and Noor Ullah, "The Inverted Cycle: Kabul and the Strongmen's Competition for Control over Kandahar, 2001-2006," *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 25, Iss. 2 (June 2007), pp. 167-184.

²⁴ Olivier Roy, 10-29, Barnett Rubin, 45-80.

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²⁶ Adamec, ed., *Kandahar and South-Central Afghanistan*, 509-577.

²⁷ Adamec, ed., *Kandahar and South-Central Afghanistan*; Naval Postgraduate School Program for Culture and Conflict Studies, "Province Overview," under "Kandahar Province," <http://www.nps.edu/Programs/ccs/Kandahar.html> (accessed 11 November 2009).

²⁸ Adamec, ed., *Kandahar and South-Central Afghanistan*; Alex Strick van Linschoten, "Far from the City," Frontline Club, posted October 8, 2008, <http://frontlineclub.com/blogs/alex/2008/10/far-from-the-city.html> (accessed November 11, 2009).

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³⁵ Chayes, *The Punishment of Virtue*; 33; Barnett R. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan: State Formation and Collapse of the International System*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2002), pp. 158-159.

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