

# The Rise of Afghanistan's Insurgency

Seth G. Jones

## State Failure and Jihad

In 2001 approximately 100 Central Intelligence Agency officers, 350 U.S. Special Forces soldiers, and 15,000 Afghans overthrew the Taliban regime in less than three months while suffering only a dozen U.S. fatalities. They were supported by as many as 100 U.S. combat sorties per day.<sup>1</sup> Some individuals involved in the operation argued that it revitalized the American way of war.<sup>2</sup> This initial success, however, transitioned into an insurgency, as the Taliban and other insurgent groups began a sustained effort to overthrow the Afghan government. The fighting, which began in 2002, had developed into a full-blown insurgency by 2006. During this period, the number of insurgent-initiated attacks rose by 400 percent, and the number of deaths from these attacks by more than 800 percent.<sup>3</sup> The increase in violence was particularly acute between 2005 and 2006, when the number of suicide attacks quintupled from 27 to 139; remotely detonated bombings more than doubled from 783 to 1,677; and armed attacks

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1. On the overthrow of the Taliban regime, see Gary C. Schroen, *First In: An Insider's Account of How the CIA Spearheaded the War on Terror in Afghanistan* (New York: Ballantine, 2005); Stephen D. Biddle, *Afghanistan and the Future of Warfare: Implications for Army and Defense Policy* (Carlisle, Pa.: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, November 2002); Gary Berntsen and Ralph Pezzullo, *Jawbreaker: The Attack on Bin Laden and Al-Qaida* (New York: Crown, 2005); Bob Woodward, *Bush at War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002); Stephen D. Biddle, "Allies, Airpower, and Modern Warfare: The Afghan Model in Afghanistan and Iraq," *International Security*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (Winter 2005/06), pp. 161-176; and Richard B. Andres, Craig Wills, and Thomas E. Griffith Jr., "Winning with Allies: The Strategic Value of the Afghan Model," *International Security*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (Winter 2005/06), pp. 124-160.

2. Henry A. Crumpton, "Intelligence and War: Afghanistan, 2001-2002," in Jennifer E. Sims and Burton Gerber, eds., *Transforming U.S. Intelligence* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2005), p. 177.

3. Following are the yearly figures on insurgent-initiated attacks in Afghanistan: 2002 (65); 2003 (148); 2004 (146); 2005 (207); and 2006 (353). Following are the fatalities during the same period: 2002 (79); 2003 (133); 2004 (230); 2005 (288); and 2006 (755). Data are from the RAND-MIPT Terrorism Incident database. A comparison of the RAND-MIPT data with U.S. and European government data shows that the RAND-MIPT data significantly understate the number of attacks and deaths because most improvised explosive device and armed attacks were never reported in the press. Nevertheless, the trend in these data is consistent with U.S. and European government data.

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nearly tripled from 1,558 to 4,542.<sup>4</sup> Insurgent-initiated attacks rose another 27 percent between 2006 and 2007.<sup>5</sup> The result was a lack of security for Afghans and foreigners.

Why did an insurgency develop in Afghanistan? Answers to this question have important theoretical and policy implications. First, existing theories of civil wars and insurgencies do not adequately explain the rise of Afghanistan's insurgency. Some scholars have argued that insurgencies usually begin because of grievances among ethnic groups. Others have claimed that they typically begin because of greed, especially the opportunity to organize and finance a rebellion through primary commodity exports. If these theories cannot explain the insurgency in Afghanistan, what can? Second, Afghanistan was supposed to be the initial front in the United States' war on terrorism. In an emotional address to a joint session of Congress a few days after the attacks of September 11, 2001, President George W. Bush pledged to launch a global war against terrorism beginning in Afghanistan: "The leadership of al Qaeda has great influence in Afghanistan and supports the Taliban regime in controlling most of that country. In Afghanistan, we see al Qaeda's vision for the world."<sup>6</sup> Afghanistan would be the first battleground. What happened?

This article argues that a precondition for the onset of Afghanistan's insurgency was structural: the collapse of governance after the overthrow of the Taliban regime. Weak governance is a common precondition of insurgencies. The Afghan government was unable to provide basic services to the population; its security forces were too weak to establish law and order; and too few international forces were available to fill the gap. Afghan insurgent groups took advantage of this anarchic situation. International relations scholars often differentiate domestic politics from international politics by their structures. In domestic systems, there are governmental institutions that establish law and order. The international system is characterized as anarchic because there is no higher authority to protect states from external aggression. But this dichotomy is not always appropriate. States are sometimes weak and unable to provide basic services to their populations or to establish order. In this environment, domestic politics begin to resemble international politics, and insurgencies be-

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4. Pamela Constable, "Gates Visits Kabul, Cites Rise in Cross Border Attacks: Defense Secretary May Recommend More U.S. Troops," *Washington Post*, January 17, 2007. On the deteriorating security environment, see also Barnett R. Rubin, "Saving Afghanistan," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 86, No. 1 (January/February 2007), pp. 57-78.

5. The data come from Adm. Michael Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. See, for example, Ed Johnson, "Gates Wants NATO to Reorganize Afghanistan Mission," *Bloomberg News*, December 12, 2007.

6. George W. Bush, "Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People, 2001" (Washington, D.C.: White House Press Office, September 20, 2001).

come more likely. In addition, the primary motivation of insurgent leaders in Afghanistan was neither grievance nor greed, but ideology. Leaders of the Taliban, al-Qaida, and other insurgent groups wanted to overthrow the Afghan government and replace it with one grounded in an extremist interpretation of Sunni Islam.

To assess the rise of the insurgency, I visited Afghanistan multiple times in 2004, 2005, 2006, and 2007. I conducted interviews with local Afghans and government officials from Afghanistan, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Pakistan, and India. Within the Afghan government, for example, I interviewed officials in the Presidential Palace, National Security Council, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Defense, and National Directorate for Security (Afghanistan's intelligence service). In addition to interviews, I reviewed a number of primary source documents that have thus far not been released. Examples include the Afghan National Directorate of Security's *Strategy of Insurgents and Terrorists in Afghanistan*, the Afghan National Security Council's *National Threat Assessment* from various years, and the Afghan Ministry of Defense's *National Military Strategy*.<sup>7</sup>

The purpose of this article is not to offer a comprehensive theory of insurgencies, but rather to examine why the Afghan insurgency began. Nonetheless, a broader explanation of the logic of weak governance is useful. Consequently, this article proceeds in six sections. The first section outlines key definitions and assesses alternative arguments for the rise of insurgencies. The second lays out a structural explanation for why they begin. The third section examines governance problems in Afghanistan. The fourth analyzes the ideological motivations of Afghan insurgent groups. The fifth section outlines the rise of Afghanistan's insurgency. And the sixth section offers policy recommendations.

### *Grievance or Greed?*

An insurgency is a political-military campaign by nonstate actors who seek to overthrow a government or secede from a country through the use of unconventional—and sometimes conventional—military strategies and tactics.<sup>8</sup> In-

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7. See, for example, Amrullah Saleh, *Strategy of Insurgents and Terrorists in Afghanistan* (Kabul: National Directorate of Security, 2006); Afghanistan National Security Council, *National Threat Assessment* (Kabul: National Security Council, 2005); and Afghanistan Ministry of Defense, *The National Military Strategy* (Kabul: Ministry of Defense, October 2005).

8. On the definition of insurgency, see Central Intelligence Agency, *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency* (Washington, D.C.: Central Intelligence Agency, published in the 1980s), p. 2; and Joint Chiefs of Staff, Publication 1-02, *Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, p. 266, <http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/doddict>.

surgeries can involve a wide range of tactics, from small-scale public demonstrations to large-scale violence.<sup>9</sup> There are two general theories for why insurgencies begin.

The first theory is tied to grievances among the population. The role of ethnic grievances in causing war is common in the literature on civil wars and insurgencies.<sup>10</sup> Ethnic ties, this theory claims, are stronger, more rigid, and more durable than the ties in ordinary social or political groups.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, ethnic combatants are more committed than other groups to their cause and less likely to make negotiated concessions. There is some evidence that the likelihood of ethnic violence is U-shaped: violence is less likely in highly homogeneous and highly heterogeneous countries, and more likely in countries (such as Afghanistan) with an ethnic majority and small ethnic minorities.<sup>12</sup> In addition, hypernationalist rhetoric and atrocities committed by one or both sides can harden identities to the point that cross-ethnic political appeals are unlikely to be made and even less likely to be heard. As a result, restoring civil politics in multiethnic states shattered by war is difficult because the war itself destroys the possibilities for cooperation.<sup>13</sup>

Following the overthrow of the Taliban government in 2001, Afghanistan's ethnic breakdown was approximately 50 percent Pashtun, with smaller percentages of Hazaras, Tajiks, Uzbeks, and other ethnic groups.<sup>14</sup> Such diversity created competing ethnic power centers.<sup>15</sup> Competition existed even among

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9. David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (St. Petersburg, Fla.: Hailer, 1964), p. 3.

10. Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); Rui J.P. de Figueiredo Jr. and Barry R. Weingast, "The Rationality of Fear: Political Opportunism and Ethnic Conflict," in Barbara F. Walter and Jack Snyder, eds., *Civil Wars, Insecurity, and Intervention* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), pp. 261–302; Chaim Kaufmann, "Possible and Impossible Solutions to Ethnic Civil Wars," *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (Spring 1996), pp. 136–175; and David A. Lake and Donald Rothchild, "Containing Fear: The Origins and Management of Ethnic Conflict," *International Security*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (Fall 1996), pp. 41–75.

11. See, for example, Stephen M. Saideman, *The Ties That Divide: Ethnic Politics, Foreign Policy, and International Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001); Stephen M. Saideman, "Explaining the International Relations of Secessionist Conflicts," *International Organization*, Vol. 51, No. 4 (Autumn 1997), pp. 721–753; Tatu Vanhanen, "Domestic Ethnic Conflict and Ethnic Nepotism: A Comparative Analysis," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (January 1999), pp. 55–73; and Kaufmann, "Possible and Impossible Solutions to Ethnic Civil Wars."

12. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*.

13. Kaufmann, "Possible and Impossible Solutions to Ethnic Civil Wars."

14. There is no definitive assessment of ethnic breakdowns in Afghanistan because there has been no census since 1979. Even the 1979 census in Afghanistan was partial. For estimates, see, for example, Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook, 2007* (Washington, D.C.: Central Intelligence Agency, 2006).

15. On Pashtuns and the Taliban, see Olivier Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan*, 2d ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil, and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2000); and William Maley, ed., *Fundamentalism Reborn? Afghanistan and the Taliban* (New York: New York University Press, 2001).

the United Islamic Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan (often referred to as the Northern Alliance), a loosely knit conglomeration of Hazara, Tajik, and Uzbek groups from northern Afghanistan. As one CIA assessment concluded in 2001, there were "serious rifts and competition between the Tajiks, Hazaras, and Uzbeks. Afghanistan truly is a zero-sum game. Anytime anyone advances, all others consider this to be at their expense."<sup>16</sup> Consequently, this argument assumes that the insurgency was caused by interethnic grievances. These grievances were particularly strong among Afghanistan's Pashtuns, who believed that they were marginalized by northern ethnic groups because "many of the most important and powerful ministries stayed in the hands of the Panjshiri Tajiks," the largest group in the Northern Alliance.<sup>17</sup> The result was that the United States and the Afghan government inevitably faced what one assessment concluded was "an extremely difficult challenge of unifying a fragmented society and fostering the development of a national identity because each ethnic group [attempted] to gain a foothold in government often at the expense of other groups." The assessment continued, "[The] attempt at entering government is taken from an ethnic approach, rather than a national one; the fragmentation of society will continue until either one dominant ethnic group controls all of the governmental power or ethnic politics makes way for increased internal conflict."<sup>18</sup>

There is little evidence to buttress this argument, however. The Taliban and its support network were not motivated to fight because of ethnic concerns. Nor did the Afghan population back the Taliban and other groups because of ethnic ties.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, there were deep divisions among the Pashtun ethnic majority regarding the Taliban. The Taliban had support from a number of Pashtun Ghilzai tribes, as well as such Durrani tribes as the Alekozai, Eshaqzais, and Norzais. But most Durrani Pashtuns did not support the Taliban, nor did a number of other eastern and southern Pashtun groups. Ethnicity was also not a major factor in how Afghans voted. Hamid Karzai won the 2004 presidential election with support in Pashtun provinces, as well as non-Pashtun northern provinces such as Balkh and Kunduz.<sup>20</sup> In a 2004 election-day survey, only 2 percent of Afghans said they voted for a can-

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16. Berntsen and Pezzullo, *Jawbreaker*, p. 219.

17. Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason, "Understanding the Taliban and Insurgency in Afghanistan," *Orbis*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (Winter 2007), p. 86. See also Thomas H. Johnson, "Afghanistan's Post-Taliban Transition: The State of State-Building after War," *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 25, Nos. 1–2 (March–June 2006), pp. 1–26.

18. Johnson, "Afghanistan's Post-Taliban Transition," pp. 7, 14.

19. Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 38–39.

20. The election results are from Afghanistan's Joint Electoral Management Body.

didate based on ethnicity.<sup>21</sup> In addition, public opinion polls carried out by in Afghanistan suggested that ethnic grievances were not a major concern of the Afghan population. An opinion poll carried out by the U.S. State Department in 2007, for example, found that most Hazaras, Pashtuns, Tajiks, and Uzbeks did not view ethnicity as a factor dividing them. Instead, a large majority (85 percent) thought it was essential for Afghanistan to remain one nation. The State Department poll concluded that the data showed that most Afghans did not see “their country headed toward an irresolvable ethnic clash,” but instead endorsed a “unified, multi-ethnic state.”<sup>22</sup> Even among disaffected Afghans most likely to support the Taliban, there was no evidence that ethnicity was a major worry. In a 2004 public opinion poll conducted by the Asia Foundation, for example, Afghans were most concerned about governance failures.<sup>23</sup> This finding was supported in later polls, such as a 2006 poll undertaken by the Asia Foundation that identified governance woes as the chief source of concern.<sup>24</sup>

A major reason for the absence of ethnic grievances was that the Afghan government was able to balance representation among the country’s ethnic groups. Despite the mainly Tajik and Uzbek military victory over the Taliban in 2001, Afghan representatives at the December 2001 Bonn Conference, which was convened to re-create the government of Afghanistan following the U.S. invasion, chose Karzai, a Pashtun, as their interim leader. As James Dobbins, the U.S. envoy at the conference, recalled, negotiators made a concerted effort to compose “a balanced cabinet, balanced among political factions, ethnicities, and gender.”<sup>25</sup> Over the next several years, the U.S. government and President Karzai made a determined push to establish an ethnic balance at the level of ministers and deputy ministers. For example, President Karzai appointed Ali Jalali, a Pashtun, as minister of interior, who began to select ethnically diverse governors and police chiefs.<sup>26</sup>

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21. International Republican Institute, *Afghanistan: Election Day Survey* (Washington, D.C.: International Republican Institute, October 9, 2004).

22. U.S. Department of State, *Afghanistan: Closer to One Nation Than a House Divided* (Washington, D.C.: Office of Research, January 29, 2007), pp. 1, 3.

23. Craig Charney, Radhika Nanda, and Nicole Yakatan, *Voter Education Planning Survey: Afghanistan 2004 National Elections* (San Francisco, Calif.: Asia Foundation, 2004).

24. Asia Foundation, *Afghanistan in 2006: A Survey of the Afghan People* (San Francisco, Calif.: Asia Foundation, 2006).

25. James Dobbins, U.S. special envoy to Afghanistan (2001–02), interview by author, Washington, D.C., July 11, 2007.

26. S. Frederick Starr, “Sovereignty and Legitimacy in Afghan Nation-building,” in Francis Fukuyama, ed., *Nation-building: Beyond Afghanistan and Iraq* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), pp. 107–124; and S. Frederick Starr, *U.S. Afghanistan Policy: It’s Working* (Washington, D.C.: Central Asia–Caucasus Institute, Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University, October 2004).

The second theory is that insurgencies are caused by greed. Building on a growing body of economic literature, this argument assumes that violence is an industry that generates profits from looting, making insurgents "indistinguishable from bandits or pirates."<sup>27</sup> Insurgents are motivated by greed. The incidence of war is explained by circumstances that generate profitable opportunities.<sup>28</sup> These opportunities can include the extortion of natural resources and other primary commodity exports, such as food, nonfood agricultural products, oil, and other raw materials (e.g., diamonds). As one study concludes, "At peak danger (primary commodity exports being 32 percent of GDP [gross domestic product]), the risk of civil war is about 22 percent, whereas a country with no such exports has a risk of only 1 percent."<sup>29</sup> In general, primary commodity exports substantially raise the risk of war by increasing the opportunities for extortion, making rebellion feasible and perhaps attractive. Launching an insurgency is therefore a rational decision that is influenced by the economic opportunity costs of violence. In some resource-dependent countries, such as Azerbaijan, Nigeria, and Senegal, the occurrence of war seems to justify the greed argument.

There is little evidence, however, that greed caused the insurgency in Afghanistan. To begin with, the country has few natural resources. Years of conflict left millions of people displaced and infrastructure destroyed. The human resource base was depleted through the flight of educated people, as well as the lack of access to education and health care. Agriculture was moribund, a situation compounded by the negative effects of drought. The economy improved after the fall of the Taliban regime largely because of the infusion of international assistance and some service sector growth. Real GDP growth exceeded 8 percent in 2006.<sup>30</sup> Despite this progress, Afghanistan, a landlocked country, was extremely poor. Its primary commodity exports included fruits, nuts, handwoven carpets, wool, and cotton. There was no competition over these exports, however, and they did not influence the decision of key groups such as the Taliban, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hizb-i-Islami,

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27. Herschel I. Grossman, "Kleptocracy and Revolutions," *Oxford Economic Papers*, Vol. 51, No. 2 (April 1999), p. 269. See also Herschel I. Grossman, "A General Equilibrium Model of Insurrections," *American Economic Review*, Vol. 81, No. 4 (September 1991), pp. 912–921; and Jack Hirscheleifer, "Theorizing about Conflict," in Keith Hartley and Todd Sandler, eds., *Handbook of Defense Economics* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1995), pp. 165–192.

28. Paul Collier, "Rebellion as a Quasi-Criminal Activity," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 44, No. 6 (December 2000), pp. 839–853.

29. Paul Collier, Anke Hoeffler, and Nicholas Sambanis, "The Collier-Hoeffler Model of Civil War Onset and the Case Study Project Research Design," in Collier and Sambanis, eds., *Understanding Civil War: Evidence and Analysis*, Vol. 2: *Europe, Central Asia, and Other Regions* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2005), p. 16.

30. Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook*, 2007.

and Jalaluddin Haqqani's network to seek the overthrow of the Afghan government.

Some observers might argue that the rise in the cultivation, production, and export of poppy caused the onset of the insurgency in Afghanistan. But this, too, is untrue. Competition over poppy cannot explain the timing or the motivation of the insurgent groups. The preponderance of evidence suggests that the increase in drug trade was a result of the insurgency, not a cause of it. As a joint study by the World Bank and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime concluded, "Following the fall of the Taliban, lingering insecurity and weak central government control" led to the increase in the drug trade.<sup>31</sup> Before being overthrown, the Taliban had curtailed the drug trade to historically low levels through the use of intimidation and a ban on cultivation.<sup>32</sup> When the insurgency began in 2002, the cultivation of poppy was low and the Taliban was not significantly involved in growing, producing, or trafficking poppy. More important, most of the Taliban's funding came from sources other than drugs, according to Afghanistan government intelligence estimates.<sup>33</sup> Examples include *zakat* (the Islamic practice of giving alms) collected at mosques in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the broader Muslim world; aid from wealthy Arab donors, especially from individuals in Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates; and other forms of profit, such as kidnapping.

Post-Taliban government officials and local warlords tended to be heavily involved in the narcotics trade. In June 2005, for example, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency and Afghan Counternarcotics Police raided the offices of Sher Mohammed Akhundzada, governor of Helmand Province. They found more than 9 metric tons of opium stashed in his offices.<sup>34</sup> As an editorial in the newspaper *Daily Afghanistan* noted, "People definitely do not trust the government. Governors warn that nobody should cultivate poppies and say the poppy fields will be destroyed, but they encourage farmers to keep up poppy cultivation by any means because the government officials make most of their

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31. Edouard Martin and Steven Symansky, "Macroeconomic Impact of the Drug Economy and Counter-narcotics Efforts," in Doris Buddenberg and William A. Byrd, eds., *Afghanistan's Drug Industry: Structure, Functioning, Dynamics, and Implications for Counter-narcotics Policy* (Kabul: World Bank and United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2006), p. 26.

32. See, for example, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Afghanistan: Opium Survey, 2006* (Kabul: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2006); United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Afghanistan: Opium Survey, 2005* (Kabul: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2005); and Doug Wankel, director of the U.S. Drug Control Office, interview by author, Kabul, Afghanistan, January 2007.

33. Said T. Jawad, Afghanistan's ambassador to the United States, interview by author, Washington, D.C., August 24, 2007.

34. Karen P. Tandy, administrator, U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency, testimony before the Armed Services Committee, U.S. House of Representatives, 109th Cong., 2d sess., June 28, 2006.



money from poppy cultivation. There are reports that a minister ordered farmers to cultivate only poppies. . . . The government should identify these corrupt officials and should not fail to cut off their hands; otherwise it will face further challenges.”<sup>35</sup>

In sum, neither grievance nor greed explains the origins of the insurgency in Afghanistan. Rather, the insurgency was caused by two other factors. First, the structural collapse of the state provided a permissive condition. Second, ideology was a direct motivation for insurgent leaders.

### *Governance Collapse*

A growing body of literature suggests that weak and ineffective governance is critical to the onset of insurgencies, though the logic of this argument has not been fully laid out. For example, James Fearon and David Laitin, who examined all civil wars and insurgencies between 1945 and 1999, found that financially, organizationally, and politically weak central governments render insurgencies more feasible and attractive due to weak local policing or inept counterinsurgency practices.<sup>36</sup> In their study of 151 cases over a fifty-four-year period, Michael Doyle and Nicholas Sambanis found that effective governance is critical to ending civil wars. They argued that success requires the provision of temporary security, the building of new institutions capable of resolving future conflicts peacefully, and an economy capable of offering civilian employment to former soldiers and material progress to future citizens.<sup>37</sup> In addition, Ann Hironaka argued that governmental capacity is a significant predictor of civil wars, and that between 1816 and 1997, effective bureaucratic and political systems reduced the rate of civil war activity.<sup>38</sup> Weak governance also contributes to lengthier insurgencies and civil wars.<sup>39</sup>

Governance, as used here, is defined as the set of institutions by which authority in a country is exercised.<sup>40</sup> It includes the ability to establish law and order, effectively manage resources, and implement sound policies. German

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35. Sakayi, “Hidden Hands for Damaging the Government,” *Daily Afghanistan*, February 25, 2007. The story was reprinted in English by the BBC. See “Afghan Daily Says Government under Attack from Within,” BBC Monitoring South Asia, February 26, 2007.

36. James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, “Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 97, No. 1 (February 2003), pp. 75–76.

37. Michael W. Doyle and Nicholas Sambanis, *Making War and Building Peace: United Nations Peace Operations* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 5.

38. Ann Hironaka, *Neverending Wars: The International Community, Weak States, and the Perpetuation of Civil War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005), p. 45.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 51.

40. World Bank, *Governance Matters, 2006: Worldwide Governance Indicators* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2006), p. 2.

sociologist Max Weber defined the state as “a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory.”<sup>41</sup> A key aspect of governance, then, is enforcement: Can the government force people to comply with the state’s laws? Can it establish law and order? Another aspect is the quality of public services.<sup>42</sup> Does the population have confidence in the state’s ability to enforce contracts as well as in the police and the courts?<sup>43</sup>

Structural changes, such as the overthrow of a regime, can create a condition of “emerging anarchy” within a state.<sup>44</sup> International relations scholars typically differentiate domestic politics from international politics based on the structure of their systems. As Kenneth Waltz argued, “Domestic systems are centralized and hierarchic. . . . International systems are decentralized and anarchic. The ordering principles of the two structures are distinctly different, indeed, contrary to each other.”<sup>45</sup> Although this characterization of domestic systems is true of strong states, it is not true of states with weak governance. A state of emerging anarchy is characterized by at least two governance problems.

First, the government is unable to provide essential services to the population.<sup>46</sup> Weak states do not possess sufficient bureaucratic and institutional structures to ensure the proper functioning of government. They often lack trained civil servants and can barely operate school systems, courts, welfare systems, or other essentials for social functioning.<sup>47</sup> Corruption can be a particularly invidious challenge that impedes the provision of services. It can undermine support for the government and increase support for insurgents. Corruption hampers economic growth, disproportionately burdens the poor, undermines the rule of law, and damages government legitimacy. It has a sup-

41. Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation,” in H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds., *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 78.

42. On governance, see Daniel Kaufmann, Aart Kraay, and Massimo Mastruzzi, “Governance Matters III: Governance Indicators for 1996–2002,” World Bank Policy Research Working Paper, No. 3106 (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, June 30, 2003); Daniel Kaufmann, “Myths and Realities of Governance and Corruption,” in World Economic Forum, *Global Competitiveness Report, 2005–2006* (Geneva: World Economic Forum, 2005), pp. 81–98; and Roland Paris, *At War’s End: Building Peace after Civil Conflict* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

43. Daniel Kaufmann, Aart Kraay, and Massimo Mastruzzi, “Governance Matters V: Aggregate and Individual Governance Indicators for 1996–2005,” World Bank Policy Research Working Paper, No. 4012 (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, September 1, 2006), p. 4.

44. Barry R. Posen, “The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict,” in Michael E. Brown, ed., *Ethnic Conflict and International Security* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 103–124.

45. Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979), p. 88.

46. Jane Stromseth, David Wippman, and Rosa Brooks, *Can Might Make Rights? Building the Rule of Law after Military Interventions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 137–140.

47. Hironaka, *Neverending Wars*, pp. 42–46.

ply side (those who give bribes) and a demand side (public officials who take them).<sup>48</sup> At its core, corruption is the misuse of entrusted power for private gain. It can involve high-level officials with discretionary authority over government policies or lower-level officials who make decisions about enforcing (or not enforcing) regulations. Corruption also slows economic growth. It is often responsible for funneling scarce public resources away from projects that benefit the society and toward projects that benefit specific individuals. It hinders the development of markets and distorts competition, thereby deterring investment. The most damaging effect of corruption, however, is its impact on the social fabric of society: corruption undermines the population's trust in the state's political system, political institutions, and political leadership.<sup>49</sup>

Second, poor governance increases the likelihood of an insurgency because the state's security forces lack legitimacy and are unable to establish law and order. As Robert Rotberg argues, "Failed states cannot control their peripheral regions, especially those regions occupied by out-groups. They lose authority over large sections of territory."<sup>50</sup>

Government forces may be badly financed and equipped, organizationally inept, corrupt, politically divided, or poorly informed about events at the local level.<sup>51</sup> Although military and paramilitary forces play a key role, the police are perhaps the most critical component of local forces. They are the primary arm of the government that is focused on internal security matters. Unlike the military, the police usually have a permanent presence in cities, towns, and villages; a better understanding of the threat environment in these areas; and better intelligence. This makes them a direct target of insurgent forces, who often try to kill or infiltrate them.<sup>52</sup> In fact, an insurgency reflects a process of state building, where insurgents compete to provide governance to the population. Insurgents take advantage of weak governance and assume statelike functions. They provide security, collect taxes, set up administrative structures, and seek to perform other government functions for the population they control. As Stathis Kalyvas argued, "Insurgency can best be understood as a pro-

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48. Transparency International, *Global Corruption Report, 2006* (Berlin: Transparency International, 2006).

49. Kaufmann, "Myths and Realities of Governance and Corruption," pp. 81–98.

50. Robert I. Rotberg, "The Failure and Collapse of Nation-States: Breakdown, Prevention, and Repair," in Rotberg, ed., *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 6.

51. Daniel L. Byman, "Friends Like These: Counterinsurgency and the War on Terrorism," *International Security*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (Fall 2006), pp. 79–115; and Daniel L. Byman, *Going to War with the Allies You Have: Allies, Counterinsurgency, and the War on Terrorism* (Carlisle, Pa.: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, November 2005).

52. Roger Trinquier, *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency* (New York: Praeger, 1964), p. 43; and Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, p. 31.

cess of competitive state building rather than simply an instance of collective action or social contention. . . . State building is the insurgent's central goal and renders organized and sustained rebellion of the kind that takes place in civil wars fundamentally distinct from phenomena such as banditry, mafias, or social movements."<sup>53</sup>

A condition of emerging anarchy creates an opportunity for nonstate actors to seize control of the state.<sup>54</sup> Because the state is incapable of controlling its territory, this weakness creates opportunities for insurgent groups. This is especially true in remote areas of the country, where insurgent groups can establish rural strongholds.<sup>55</sup> The more extreme the decline or absence of authority in a region, the more vulnerable its inhabitants become to those seeking to establish an alternative government.<sup>56</sup> Insurgents then set up new institutions and use violence against alleged spies, whose execution contributes to the insurgents' control of territory.<sup>57</sup> Warlords and political entrepreneurs often flourish under these conditions.<sup>58</sup>

A number of cases suggest a link between weak states and the onset of insurgency. In Lebanon a delicate sectarian balance led to the emergence of a weak state in the 1970s and, as a consequence, the government's inability to implement substantive administrative reforms. The prevailing political system tended to foster corruption and laxity in upholding the public interest. The weak state fueled competition between the three leading religious communities—the Maronites, Sunnis, and Shiites—and triggered an insurgency from 1975 to 1991.<sup>59</sup> A weak state in Mozambique led to infighting in various regions of the country in 1976.<sup>60</sup> After the collapse of the Soviet Union,

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53. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, p. 218.

54. World Bank, *Reforming Public Institutions and Strengthening Governance* (Washington, D.C.: Public Sector Group, Poverty Reduction and Economic Management Network, World Bank, 2000); and Jessica Einhorn, "The World Bank's Mission Creep," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 80, No. 5 (September/October 2001), pp. 22–35.

55. Hironaka, *Neverending Wars*, pp. 42–46.

56. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, p. 216; and Timothy P. Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America: A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes since 1956* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 35.

57. Jon Lee Anderson, *Guerrillas: Journeys in the Insurgent World* (New York: Penguin, 2004), pp. 212–213.

58. Stromseth, Wippman, and Brooks, *Can Might Make Rights?* pp. 137–140; and Kimberly Marten, "Warlordism in Comparative Perspective," *International Security*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (Winter 2006/07), pp. 41–73.

59. Samir Makdisi and Richard Sadaka, "The Lebanese Civil War, 1975–1990," in Collier and Sambanis, *Understanding Civil War*, Vol. 2, pp. 59–85.

60. Jeremy M. Weinstein and Laudemiro Francisco, "The Civil War in Mozambique: The Balance between Internal and External Influences," in Paul Collier and Nicholas Sambanis, eds., *Understanding Civil War: Evidence and Analysis*, Vol. 1: *Africa* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2005), pp. 157–192.

weak state institutions in Georgia played a major role in a series of insurgencies. As one study concluded, "The causes of the three Georgian wars shared some similarities. Institutional weakness was a shared element in all three."<sup>61</sup> In Bosnia state failure as a result of the crumbling Communist Party apparatus gave way to insurgency across the Balkans in the early 1990s. War in the Balkans was caused by "the collapse of central authority in Yugoslavia. The secession of Slovenia and Croatia led quickly to the disintegration of this weakly held together ethnofederal Republic."<sup>62</sup> Another study contended that the "dissolution of Yugoslavia was an important shock that increased the risk of civil war onset."<sup>63</sup>

### *The Collapse of Afghan Governance*

The collapse of governance in Afghanistan was a precondition for the onset of the insurgency.<sup>64</sup> By the end of the 1990s, the Taliban had established control over most of the country. It received strong backing from Pakistan's Directorate of Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI), which assisted in the recruitment of members and provided weapons, training, and technical assistance.<sup>65</sup> In 1996 the Taliban captured Afghanistan's capital city, Kabul, and conquered the northern cities of Mazar, Kunduz, and Taloqan in 1998. By 2001 the Taliban was in control of virtually all of Afghanistan. The only exception was a small sliver of land northeast of Kabul in the Panshvir Valley, where Ahmed Shah Massoud and his Northern Alliance forces had retreated. The Taliban instituted a repressive version of sharia law that outlawed music, banned women from working or going to school, and prohibited freedom of the press. While it was a detestable regime that committed gross human rights violations, the Taliban succeeded in establishing law and order throughout most of the country.

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61. Christopher Zürcher, Pavel K. Baev, and Jan Koehler, "Civil Wars in the Caucasus," in Collier and Sambanis, *Understanding Civil War*, Vol. 2, p. 273.

62. Doyle and Sambanis, *Making War and Building Peace*, pp. 162–163.

63. Stathis N. Kalyvas and Nicholas Sambanis, "Bosnia's Civil War: Origins and Violence Dynamics," in Collier and Sambanis, *Understanding Civil War*, Vol. 2, p. 210.

64. On governance, state building, and Afghanistan after the overthrow of the Taliban regime, see Robert I. Rotberg, ed., *Building a New Afghanistan* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution and World Peace Foundation, 2007).

65. Recently declassified U.S. government documents indicate that the ISI directly supported the Taliban. See, for example, "IIR [Excised] Pakistan Involvement in Afghanistan," memorandum from [excised] to DIA Washington, D.C., November 7, 1996; U.S. Department of State, "Developments in Afghanistan," memorandum from Ron McMullen (Afghanistan Desk), December 5, 1994; and U.S. Department of State, "Pakistan Support for Taliban," action cable from Karl F. Inderfurth to Embassy Islamabad, September 26, 2000. All are housed at the National Security Archive.

The October 2001 launch of Operation Enduring Freedom by the CIA and the U.S. military helped Northern Alliance forces led by Abdul Rashid Dostum, Mohammed Qasim Fahim, and other commanders overthrow the Taliban government.<sup>66</sup> The collapse of the Taliban government that followed, however, created a condition of emerging anarchy. The interim Afghan government established in late 2001 was able to control only small amounts of territory around Kabul, and it had little control over rural areas of the south, east, west, and north. On paper, Afghanistan looked like it had a central government. The UN helped organize a meeting of Afghan political leaders in Bonn, Germany, who, on December 5, 2001, signed the Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan Pending the Reestablishment of Permanent Government Institutions, referred to as the Bonn agreement. The agreement established a timetable for a transition to an elected government. The UN Security Council endorsed the outcome the following day in resolution 1383.<sup>67</sup> In practice, however, Afghanistan had a fragile government that became weaker over time.

#### ESSENTIAL SERVICES

The new Afghan government was unable to provide essential services to the population, especially in rural areas of the country. Governance woes worsened in the first few years after President Karzai's government was established. As one World Bank study concluded, the primary beneficiaries of assistance were "the urban elite."<sup>68</sup> This disparity triggered deep-seated frustration and resentment among the rural population. Indeed, the Afghan government suffered from a number of systemic problems, including fragmented administrative structures, and had difficulty attracting and retaining skilled professionals with management and administrative experience. Weak administration and lack of control in some provinces made tax policy and administration virtually impossible. In many rural areas, the government made no effort to collect taxes. As another World Bank study on Afghanistan warned, "The analysis . . . of a distant and hostile central administration that cannot provide pay or guidance to its staff in the provinces and districts in a timely manner serves only to emphasize the need for action on various fronts." It contended that Afghan government personnel "at the provincial and district levels urgently need the resources and support necessary to do their jobs. In

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66. On the overthrow of the Taliban regime, see Schroen, *First In*; Biddle, *Afghanistan and the Future of Warfare*; Berntsen and Pezzullo, *Jawbreaker*; and Woodward, *Bush at War*.

67. United Nations Security Council, Resolution 1383, S/RES/1383, December 6, 2001.

68. World Bank, *Afghanistan: State Building, Sustaining Growth, and Reducing Poverty*, Report No. 29551-AF (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2005), p. xxvi.

turn, mechanisms are needed at all levels of government to ensure that real accountability for service delivery is built into the administrative system."<sup>69</sup>

Electricity is a good example. In 2005 only 6 percent of the Afghan population had access to power from the electricity grid.<sup>70</sup> And most of it was characterized by low voltage, intermittent supply, and blackouts. The dire situation reflected a lack of investment by the Afghan government and the international community, as well as poor maintenance. In addition to grossly insufficient generation capacity (which was augmented by imports of power from neighboring countries), the system was plagued by inadequate transmission, poor distribution, and a lack of backup equipment. And most efforts focused on supplying electricity in urban areas of the country, not on targeting rural areas in danger of falling to the Taliban. The Afghan government's electricity strategy was to "increase coverage of the electricity grid in urban areas to 90 percent by 2015."<sup>71</sup> For those rich enough to buy generators, electricity was not a problem. The striking feature of Afghanistan's economic structure was the dominance of the informal sector. A large portion of the electricity supply, for example, was provided by small-scale generators.<sup>72</sup> The result was significant. As one World Bank assessment noted in 2004, "The bulk of Afghans still do not have reliable electric power supply and clean water. Thus the situation that prevailed in the 1970s and during the long period of conflict—basic social services not reaching most of Afghanistan's people—has not yet been fundamentally changed with the partial exception of primary education."<sup>73</sup>

A strategic assessment coordinated by Lt. Gen. Karl Eikenberry, commander of U.S. forces in Afghanistan, concluded in 2006 that governance in notable sections of the country was in dire shape. On July 15, for example, a briefing team told him that a range of governance programs "all need the attention, buy-in, and assistance of the [government of Afghanistan]," but they were "confusing, uncoordinated, and create staff redundancies."<sup>74</sup> According to other internal memos, international efforts to provide essential services to rural areas were plagued by problems. A study by the U.S. Defense Department's Joint Center for Operational Analysis, for example, stated that "as the

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69. Anne Evans, Nick Manning, Yasin Osmani, Anne Tully, and Andrew Wilder, *A Guide to Government in Afghanistan* (Kabul: World Bank and Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2004), p. 145.

70. World Bank, *Afghanistan*, p. 83.

71. *Ibid.*, p. 86.

72. World Bank, *Afghanistan: State Building, Sustaining Growth, and Reducing Poverty*, pp. 6, 25, 75.

73. *Ibid.*, p. 99.

74. Combined Forces Command–Afghanistan, "Update to LTG Eikenberry: ANSF Operational Primacy Process Planning Group," IPR No. 3 (Kabul: Combined Forces Command–Afghanistan, July 15, 2006), slide 10.

operational center of gravity for reconstruction and governance shifted to the provinces, [U.S. government] supporting programs did not keep pace." It continued that there were particular challenges with U.S. and other NATO Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), which generally consisted of between 60 and 100 civilians and soldiers deployed to operating bases to perform small reconstruction projects or to provide security for others involved in reconstruction. It noted that "many national-level programs that existed in the provinces were poorly coordinated with U.S.-led PRTs. Lack of coordination limited the ability of the U.S.-led PRTs to align these programs to support the broader stabilization and reconstruction strategy. Additionally, nationally implemented donor programs had limited geographic reach."<sup>75</sup>

#### LAW AND ORDER

The Afghan government was also unable to provide security outside of the capital. A major reason was the inability of the U.S. government to build competent Afghan security forces, especially the police. The result was a weak security apparatus that could not establish a monopoly of the legitimate use of force within the country. The police were not an international priority after the overthrow of the Taliban regime, and they received significantly less money and attention than the army.<sup>76</sup> The United States declined to provide significant assistance to the Afghan police in the aftermath of the Taliban's overthrow, and handed police training over to the Germans. By 2003, however, U.S. officials at the State Department, Defense Department, and White House began to argue that the German effort was far too slow, trained too few police officers, and was seriously underfunded.<sup>77</sup> German assessments of progress in rebuilding the police noted that "17 German police officers—men and women from both our federal and state police forces—are advising the Afghan Transitional Authority on this challenging task of crucial importance for the country's democratic future."<sup>78</sup> The low level of resources, however, demonstrated that the Germans were not serious about police training.

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75. Joint Center for Operational Analysis, *Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan: An Interagency Assessment* (Suffolk, Va.: Joint Center for Operational Analysis, U.S. Department of Defense, 2006), p. 12.

76. James Dobbins, U.S. special envoy in Afghanistan (2001–02), interviews by author, Washington, D.C., September 21, 2004, and November 15, 2006.

77. As one high-level U.S. official noted, "When it became clear that they were not going to provide training to lower-level police officers, and were moving too slowly with too few resources, we decided to intervene to prevent the program from failing." Senior U.S. official, interview by author, White House, September 2004. This view was corroborated in multiple interviews with U.S. officials in Washington and Afghanistan between 2004 and 2007.

78. German Federal Foreign Office and Federal Ministry of the Interior, *Assistance in Rebuilding the Police Force* (Bonn: Federal Foreign Office and Federal Ministry of the Interior, 2004), p. 3.



Consequently, the State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement contracted DynCorp International to train the police. But by 2004, officials in the White House and the Department of Defense had begun to express growing worries that the State Department effort was failing. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld wrote a series of "snowflakes" expressing concern that the police program was undermining U.S. and broader NATO counterinsurgency efforts.<sup>79</sup> Key problems included the failure to conduct follow-on mentoring of Afghan police, to provide significant institutional reform in the Ministry of Interior, and to curb deep-seated corruption in the police and Ministry of Interior. In 2005 the U.S. military took the lead in providing training, equipment, and other assistance to the Afghan National Police and internal security forces.

Nevertheless, the competence of the Afghan police remained low. As a German assessment of the border police noted in 2006, "Neither the Afghan border police nor the customs authorities are currently in a position to meet the challenges presented by this long border."<sup>80</sup> Internal U.S. government documents expressed deepening alarm at the state of the Afghan police. A report by the Offices of Inspector General of the U.S. Departments of State and Defense concluded that the Afghan police's "readiness level to carry out its internal security and conventional police responsibilities is far from adequate. The obstacles to establish a fully professional [Afghan National Police] are formidable." It found that key obstacles included "no effective field training officer (FTO) program, illiterate recruits, a history of low pay and pervasive corruption, and an insecure environment."<sup>81</sup> Another assessment, headed by Col. Ricky Adams, director of the Police Reform Directorate for the U.S.-led Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan, concluded that the Ministry of Interior was "ineffective," "poorly led," and "corrupt," and that the police forces were "poorly equipped."<sup>82</sup>

The Afghan police were needed to help establish order in urban and rural areas. But they were heavily outgunned by insurgent forces and plagued by

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79. Secretary Rumsfeld's "snowflakes" were internal memos to his staff; he sometimes produced as many as sixty a day. Senior Defense Department official, interview by author, Washington, D.C., August 21, 2007.

80. Government of Germany, *Assessment of Doha II Conference on Border Management in Afghanistan: A Regional Approach* (Berlin: Government of Germany, 2006), p. 2. See also U.S. Department of State, *Border Management Initiative: Information Brief* (Kabul: Afghanistan Reconstruction Group, 2005).

81. Inspectors General, U.S. Department of State and U.S. Department of Defense, *Interagency Assessment of Afghanistan Police Training and Readiness* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State and U.S. Department of Defense, 2006), p. 1.

82. Col. Ricky Adams, "Police Reform Directorate: Overview—Current Operations and Strategic Initiatives" (Kabul: Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan, 2006), slide 6.

corruption. In addition, they had no semblance of a national police infrastructure. They lacked uniforms, armored vehicles, weapons, ammunition, police stations, police jails, national command and control, and investigative training.<sup>83</sup> An Afghan trucker put it succinctly, "Forget about the Taliban, our biggest problems are with the police."<sup>84</sup> An after-action report that assessed a police-led operation to capture Taliban fighters in Sangsar village in Kandahar found that there was "no joint plan," "no unity of command," and "no intel sharing" with Afghanistan's intelligence service. The result was seven fatalities and one friendly fire incident. All Taliban escaped.<sup>85</sup>

U.S. force levels also were low, increasing the security vacuum in much of rural Afghanistan. The number of U.S. troops per capita in Afghanistan was significantly less than in almost every state-building effort since World War II.<sup>86</sup> By early 2002 a NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) of 5,000 troops had been deployed to help secure Kabul. In addition, 5,000 mainly U.S. forces under Combined Forces Command–Afghanistan conducted combat operations throughout the country. These numbers had increased to 20,000 U.S. and 10,000 NATO soldiers by 2005, which still left a ratio of only one soldier per 1,000 inhabitants.<sup>87</sup> U.S. military officials adopted a "light footprint" approach for at least two reasons: they wanted to prevent large-scale resistance similar to what the Soviet Union encountered in Afghanistan in the 1980s; and they believed that small numbers of ground troops and the use of airpower were sufficient to ensure security.<sup>88</sup> U.S. Gen. Tommy Franks, who

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83. Gen. Barry R. McCaffrey (ret.), memorandum of trip to Afghanistan and Pakistan to Col. Mike Meese and Col. Cindy Jebb, United States Military Academy, June 2006; and Gen. Barry R. McCaffrey (ret.), memorandum of trip to Afghanistan and Pakistan to Col. Mike Meese and Col. Cindy Jebb, United States Military Academy, February 2007.

84. Quoted in Chris Sands, "Bring Back Taliban to End Police Corruption, Say Afghan Truckers," *Independent* (London), May 10, 2007.

85. Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan, "Better Distribution of Afghan Uniformed Police—'Close the Gap'" (Kabul: Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan, 2006), slide 17.

86. James Dobbins, Seth G. Jones, Keith Crane, Andrew Rathmell, Brett Steele, Richard Teltschik, and Anga Timilsina, *The UN's Role in Nation-Building: From the Congo to Iraq* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 2005).

87. Michael E. O'Hanlon and Adriana Lins de Albuquerque, *Afghanistan Index: Tracking Variables of Reconstruction and Security in Post-Taliban Afghanistan* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, updated September 15, 2005).

88. Dobbins, interview by author, September 21, 2004; Richard A. Clarke, *Against All Enemies: Inside America's War on Terror* (New York: Free Press, 2004); "Afghanistan Stabilization and Reconstruction: A Status Report," report from hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate, 108th Cong., 2d sess., January 27, 2004, pp. 14, 17–18; Seymour M. Hersh, "The Other War: Why Bush's Afghanistan Problem Won't Go Away," *New Yorker*, April 12, 2004, pp. 40–74; and "Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security," UN Doc. A/56/875-S/2002/278, par. 98.

developed the operational concept for Afghanistan in 2001, argued that after major combat ended, "our footprint had to be small, for both military and geopolitical reasons. I envisioned a total of about 10,000 American soldiers, airmen, special operators, and helicopter assault crews, along with robust in-country close air support."<sup>89</sup> U.S. envoy to Afghanistan James Dobbins had pushed for a greater U.S., or even UN, military presence in Afghanistan after the collapse of the Taliban. In a discussion with Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld in Kabul in early 2002, for example, Dobbins noted that "the British believe a force of five thousand adequate to secure Kabul." He continued that given "that the next four or five cities are all considerably smaller, I would expect that a total of about 25,000 men might suffice to provide the same level of security for the other major population centers."<sup>90</sup> But he was rebuffed. This small footprint was inevitable once planning for U.S. operations in Iraq began.

The United States also provided significant assistance to local warlords, further undermining governance and weakening the ability of the Afghan state to establish law and order.<sup>91</sup> Given that increasing the number of U.S. forces in Afghanistan was not politically feasible in Washington, the U.S. desire to eliminate al-Qaida meant that the United States could not wait to develop Afghan government forces. Lt. Gen. John Vines, commander of Combined Joint Task Force 180 in Afghanistan, noted that "militias are part of the existing reality."<sup>92</sup> In the east, the United States gave money, arms, and other equipment to Pacha Khan Zadran, whose forces were based out of Paktia Province. As one U.S. military assessment from eastern Afghanistan noted, local warlord militia forces "led every mounted patrol and most major operations," partly because "they knew the ground better and could more easily spot something that was out of place or suspicious."<sup>93</sup> Such forces were often used for the outer perimeter of cordon-and-search operations. In several operations, such as the Battle of Deh Chopan in August 2003, militia forces were essential in passing on intelligence and making up the bulk of the maneuver force. In the west, U.S. forces provided assistance to Ismail Khan. This allowed him to establish significant political and fiscal autonomy in Herat Province. He controlled military and civil administration, which was supported by large amounts of cus-

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89. Gen. Tommy Franks, *American Soldier* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), p. 324.

90. James Dobbins, interview by author, Washington, D.C., August 27, 2007.

91. Ali A. Jalali, "The Future of Afghanistan," *Parameters*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (Spring 2006), p. 5.

92. Quoted in Andrew M. Roe, "To Create a Stable Afghanistan: Provincial Reconstruction Teams, Good Governance, and a Splash of History," *Military Review*, November–December 2005, p. 21.

93. David L. Buffaloe, "Conventional Forces in Low-Intensity Conflict: The 82d Airborne in Firebase Shkin," Landpower Essay, No. 04-2 (Arlington, Va.: Institute of Land Warfare, Association of the United States Army, 2004), p. 12.

toms revenues from trade with other Afghan provinces, as well as with Iran and Turkmenistan.<sup>94</sup> In the south, U.S. forces gave money and arms to Gul Agha Shirzai and other warlords to help target al-Qaida operatives.<sup>95</sup>

The U.S. assistance to warlords weakened the central government. President Karzai made a half-hearted attempt to reduce the power of warlords who served as provincial governors by reassigning them from their power bases. But their networks continued to influence provincial- and district-level administration.<sup>96</sup> Public opinion polls showed that the increasing power of warlords was alarming to many Afghans. One poll conducted for the U.S. military, for instance, concluded that “a high percentage of respondents identified local commanders as bringers of insecurity to their district.”<sup>97</sup> The Afghanistan National Security Council’s *National Threat Assessment* also noted, “Non-statutory armed forces and their commanders pose a direct threat to the national security of Afghanistan. They are the principal obstacle to the expansion of the rule of law into the provinces and thus the achievement of the social economic goals that the people of Afghanistan expect their Government, supported by the International Community, to deliver.”<sup>98</sup> An Afghan provincial governor reinforced this assessment, warning that “keeping warlords in power is weakening the government. The more the government pays them off, the stronger they will become and the weaker the government will be.”<sup>99</sup>

### *The Ideology of Jihad*

Much of the local Afghan population was motivated to support the Taliban—or too fearful to oppose it—because of governance failure. This was especially true in rural areas. As Kalyvas argued, “There is a clear epistemic bias, at least in the sociological and historical traditions, in favor of the assumption that all

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94. Evans et al., *A Guide to Government in Afghanistan*, p. 14.

95. On warlords and Afghanistan, see Roe, “To Create a Stable Afghanistan,” pp. 20–26; Government of Afghanistan, *Security Sector Reform: Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups Programme (DIAG) and Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration Programme (DDR)* (Kabul: Government of Afghanistan, October 2005); and Mark Sedra, “Challenging the Warlord Culture: Security Sector Reform in Post-Taliban Afghanistan,” BICC Paper, No. 25 (Bonn: Bonn International Center for Conversion, 2002).

96. Several warlords were reassigned as provincial governors, including Sher Mohammed Akonzada of Helmand (2005), Ismail Khan of Herat (2004), Gul Agha of Kandahar (2004), Haji Din Mohammed of Nangarhar, Mohammed Ibrahim of Ghor (2004), Gul Ahmad of Badghis (2003), and Syed Amin of Badakshan (2003).

97. Combined Forces Command–Afghanistan and Altai Consulting, “Afghan National Development Poll” (Kabul: Combined Forces Command–Afghanistan, 2005), slide 40.

98. Afghanistan National Security Council, *National Threat Assessment*, p. 3. See also Afghanistan Ministry of Defense, *The National Military Strategy*.

99. Quoted in Evans et al., *A Guide to Government in Afghanistan*, p. 14.

(or most) participants in conflicts are motivated by ideological concerns.”<sup>100</sup> This was certainly true of local Afghans, especially those in rural areas. But it was not true of insurgent leaders, most of whom were strongly motivated by ideology. An ideology is an organized collection of ideas. As Count Antoine Destutt de Tracy once noted, ideology is the “science of ideas.” For insurgents, an ideology provides a normative vision of how society, including its political system, should be structured.<sup>101</sup> The sections below examine the ideology of insurgent leaders in Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as their regional and international support network.

#### INSURGENT IDEOLOGY

There were three main insurgent groups operating in Afghanistan: the Taliban, al-Qaida, and Hizb-i-Islami. The Taliban were the largest group and were motivated by a radical interpretation of Sunni Islam derived from Deobandism. Deobandism is a conservative Islamic orthodoxy that follows a Salafist egalitarian model and seeks to emulate the life and times of the Prophet Mohammed. The Deobandi philosophy was founded in 1867 at the Dar ul-Ulum (Abode of Islamic Learning) madrassa in Deoband, India. Deobandi madrassas flourished across South Asia, and they were officially supported in Pakistan when President Mohammed Zia-ul-Haq assumed control of the Pakistani government in 1977. Deobandism became widely practiced in Pakistan, and to a lesser degree in Afghanistan, with the Jamiat-ul-Ulama-i-Islam as its primary political proponent. It holds that a Muslim’s primary obligation and principal loyalty are to his religion. Deobandis believe they have a sacred right and obligation to wage jihad to protect the Muslims of any country.

The Taliban’s leadership, including allied organizations such as Jalaluddin Haqqani’s network, adopted an extreme version of Deobandism. Women were not permitted to attend schools, and most were prohibited from working. As evidenced by their control of most of Afghanistan from the mid-1990s until late 2001, the Taliban enforced a stringent interpretation of the Islamic dress code. Women could not leave the house without a burqa, an outer garment worn by women that cloaks the entire body. Men were forced to grow beards, and the Taliban closed cinemas and banned music. They punished theft by amputating a hand and often punished murder by public execution. Married

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100. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Ethnic Violence*, p. 44.

101. On ideology and insurgency, see, for example, Michael F. Brown and Eduardo Fernández, *War of Shadows: The Struggle for Utopia in the Peruvian Amazon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), p. 98.

adulterers were stoned to death. Punishments in Kabul were carried out in front of crowds in the city's former soccer stadium. The Taliban also destroyed hundreds of cultural artifacts that they deemed were polytheistic, including major museums and countless private art collections. Mullah Mohammed Omar, the Taliban's leader, defended these actions by saying that they protected the purity of Islam. In April 1996, supporters of Mullah Omar bestowed on him the title *amir al-muminin* (commander of the faithful).<sup>102</sup>

The Taliban's extremist ideology partly explains Mullah Omar's affinity for Osama bin Laden and other al-Qaida leaders. Indeed, al-Qaida leaders were motivated by a similar extremist Sunni ideology, though they had more grandiose visions of spreading it to the Middle East. Many of al-Qaida's leaders were inspired by such influential Islamic scholars as Sayyid Qutb, a leading intellectual of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in the 1950s and 1960s. Qutb argued in his book *Maalim fi-l-tariq* that anything non-Islamic was evil and corrupt. A strict adherence to Islamic law would bring significant benefits to humanity.<sup>103</sup> This perspective explains the motivations of al-Qaida leaders to overthrow successive regimes in the Middle East (the near enemy), and to fight the United States and its allies (the far enemy) that supported these regimes.<sup>104</sup> In his book *Fursan taht rayah al-nabi*, for example, al-Qaida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri argued that "the issue of unification in Islam is important and that the battle between Islam and its enemies is primarily an ideological one over the issue of unification." Additionally he claimed that it "is also a battle over whom authority and power should belong—to God's course and sharia, to man-made laws and material principles, or to those who claim to be intermediaries between the Creator and mankind."<sup>105</sup>

Finally, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and the leadership of Hizb-i-Islami were motivated by a similar ideology. It was built on the Ikhwan model of Islamic revolution, which stresses the establishment of a pure Islamic state and, in the case of Hizb-i-Islami, was tied to a highly disciplined organizational structure built around a small cadre of educated elites. Hekmatyar was a Ghilzai Pashtun from the Imam Sahib district of Kunduz, who became a radicalized Islamist during his studies at Kabul University in the late 1960s. After a brief period of involvement with Afghan communists, he became a disciple of Qutb

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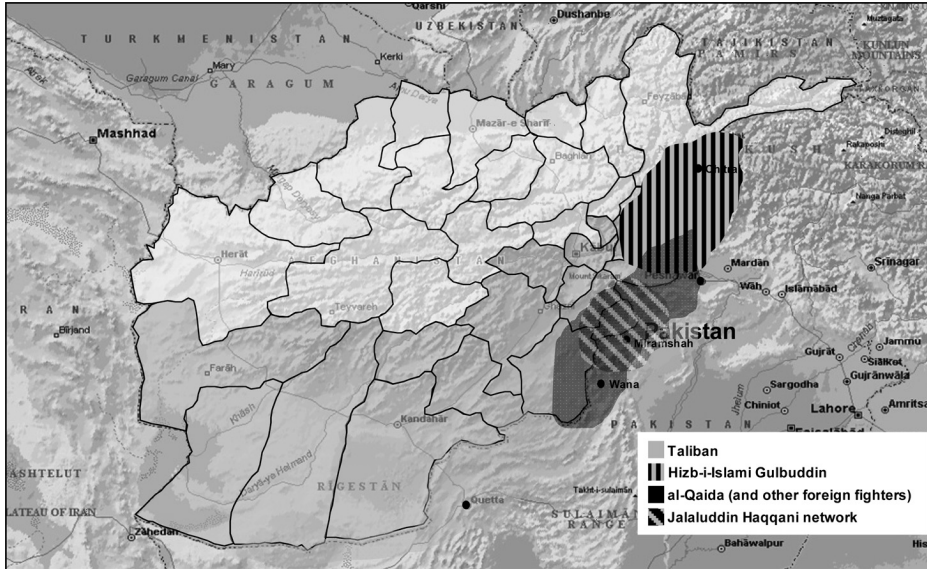
102. On the Taliban's ideology, see Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan*; Rashid, *Taliban*; and Maley, *Fundamentalism Reborn?*

103. Sayyid Qutb, *Maalim fi-l-tariq* [Milestones] (Karachi: International Islamic Publishers, 1981).

104. On the establishment of a caliphate, see, for example, Abu Bakr Naji, *The Management of Savagery: The Most Critical Stage Through Which the Umma Will Pass*, trans. William McCunts (Cambridge, Mass.: John M. Olin Institute for Strategic Studies, Harvard University, May 23, 2006).

105. Ayman al-Zawahiri, *Fursan taht rayah al-nabi* [Knights under the Prophet's banner], 2001, serialized in *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, a London-based, Saudi-owned daily newspaper, pt. 3.

Figure 1. The Afghan Insurgent Front



and the Muslim Brotherhood movement.<sup>106</sup> From the 1980s to the early 1990s, Hizb-i-Islami received more funds from Pakistan intelligence than any other mujahideen faction.<sup>107</sup> After the overthrow of the Taliban regime, Hekmatyar openly pledged to cooperate with al-Qaida and Taliban forces out of Pakistan to fight the “crusader forces.”<sup>108</sup>

Together, the leaders of these groups wanted to overthrow Hamid Karzai’s government and replace it with a regime that adopted an extremist version of Sunni Islam.

#### IDEOLOGICAL SUPPORT FROM ABROAD

The similar ideologies of the Taliban, al-Qaida, and Hizb-i-Islami allowed these groups to gain support from abroad. Sanctuary in Pakistan was particularly critical. As Figure 1 illustrates, the Taliban, Hizb-i-Islami, al-Qaida, and

106. Thomas H. Johnson, “Financing Afghan Terrorism: Thugs, Drugs, and Creative Movement of Money,” in Jeanne K. Giraldo and Harold A. Trinkunas, *Terrorism Financing and State Responses: A Comparative Perspective* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 107.

107. On Hekmatyar’s relationship with Pakistan, see Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Penguin, 2004), pp. 181–183, 210–211.

108. See, for example, “Al Jazeera Airstrikes Hekmatyar Video,” Al-Jazeera, May 4, 2006.

Jalaluddin Haqqani's network enjoyed sanctuary in Pakistan.<sup>109</sup> This allowed them to gain assistance from groups with similar ideologies.

Following the overthrow of the Taliban regime, its leadership structure moved to Pakistan and based its operations out of three main cities: Quetta, Peshawar, and Karachi. The Taliban's inner shura included the leadership structure and key commanders, and was headed by Mullah Omar. Shura in Arabic means "consultation," and includes the duty in Islamic law of the ruler to consult his followers in making decisions. The inner shura was divided into a series of functional committees: military, propaganda, finance, religious, political, and administrative. The political, military, and religious committees were based out of Quetta, where they enjoyed support from Pakistani groups with similar ideologies. Of particular importance was their relationship with Jamiat-ul-Ulama-i-Islam, which had a following largely confined to the Pashtun border belt of Pakistan, although it had support in several urban centers. It ran an extensive network of madrassas that trained most of the leadership and much of the early rank and file of the Taliban.<sup>110</sup> The Taliban and other groups recruited young Pashtuns from the local madrassas and financed their activities through forced religious contributions, often accompanied with death threats. The Taliban's headquarters in Quetta was critical because it allowed easy access to Afghanistan's southern provinces, such as Kandahar, where Mullah Omar grew up and which was a key military front for the insurgency.

The propaganda and media committees were based out of Peshawar, where there was a Sunni jihadist support network that had existed since the mujahideen war against the Soviets in the 1980s. The Taliban created a variety of websites, such as [www.alemarah.org](http://www.alemarah.org), and used al-Qaida's production company, as-Sahab Media, to make videos. The Taliban's strategic information campaign significantly improved after the September 11 attacks, due in part to al-Qaida. The Taliban's videos were notably better in quality and clarity of message, and its use of the internet dramatically increased to spread propaganda and recruit potential fighters. The Taliban also published a series of

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109. On cooperation among insurgents, see Barnett R. Rubin, *Afghanistan's Uncertain Transition from Turmoil to Normalcy* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2006); "Afghan Taliban Say No Talks Held with U.S., No Differences with Hekmatyar," *Karachi Islam*, February 24, 2005, pp. 1, 6; "Pajhwok News Describes Video of Afghan Beheading by 'Masked Arabs,' Taliban," *Kabul Pajhwok Afghan News*, October 9, 2005; "Spokesman Says Taliban 'Fully Organized,'" *Islamabad Ausaf*, June 23, 2005, pp. 1, 6; "UK Source in Afghanistan Says al-Qaida Attacks Boost Fear of Taliban Resurgence," *Guardian* (London), June 20, 2005; and "Taliban Military Chief Threatens to Kill U.S. Captives, Views Recent Attacks, Al-Qa'ida," *al-Jazeera TV*, July 18, 2005.

110. Senior UN, NATO, Afghan, and Pakistani government officials, interviews by author, Afghanistan, 2004 through 2007.



newspapers out of Pakistan, such as *Zamir*, and magazines, such as *Tora Bora* and *Sirak*. Finally, the Taliban's financial base was located in Karachi.

Pakistan was also critical to other insurgent groups. Hizb-i-Islami was based in Pakistan's North West Frontier Province, which had a significant network of Sunni jihadist groups. Al-Qaida and its affiliated foreign fighters were located in a swath of territory near the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. Key al-Qaida leaders such as Ayman al-Zawahiri were based out of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas in Pakistan. Finally, Jalaluddin Haqqani and his broader network were based out of Miramshah, Pakistan, as well as other areas of North Waziristan. A cleric who rose to fame as a mujahideen leader during the Soviet war in the 1980s, Haqqani served as minister of tribal affairs in the Taliban government. During the Cold War, he had close ties to the CIA.<sup>111</sup> He enjoyed a support base and ran madrassas around Miramshah and Mir Ali. His son, Sirajuddin Haqqani, also played a major role and was based in Pakistan.

Sanctuary in Pakistan was critical to the onset of the insurgency. The Taliban and other jihadist groups were able to develop their strategies, recruit new members, contact supporters around the world, raise money, and—perhaps most important—enjoy a respite from U.S. combat operations. There were some small U.S. task forces, such as Task Force 11, that hunted high-value targets in Pakistan, but U.S. military forces did not conduct sustained combat operations there.<sup>112</sup> Sanctuary allowed these groups to recruit new members—sometimes referred to as the “neo-Taliban”—at madrassas and other locations in Pakistan. There was a plethora of ideological recruits at madrassas and in refugee camps.

The Taliban and other jihadist groups were also able to gain support from outside actors, especially elements of the Pakistan government with a shared extremist ideology. Based on interviews with officials from NATO, the United Nations, and the Afghan government, officials in the Pakistan government provided assistance to Afghan insurgents groups, especially the Taliban. In particular, officials in Pakistan's Directorate of Inter-Service Intelligence and Frontier Corps provided assistance to the Taliban.

As Richard Armitage, a former deputy U.S. secretary of state, noted, “We had substantial information that there was direct assistance from the Pakistan government to the Taliban between 2002 and 2004.”<sup>113</sup> Some members of the

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111. Coll, *Ghost Wars*, pp. 131, 167, 202.

112. Task Force 11 was a joint Navy SEAL and U.S. Army Delta Force team that operated under the U.S. Joint Special Operations Command in Afghanistan and searched for senior Taliban and al-Qaida leaders.

113. Richard Armitage, deputy secretary of state (2001–05), interview by author, Arlington, Virginia, October 17, 2007.

ISI provided weapons and ammunition to the Taliban and paid the medical bills of some wounded Taliban fighters. They also helped train Taliban and other insurgents destined for Afghanistan and Kashmir in Mansehra, Parachinar, Quetta, Shamshattu, and other areas in Pakistan. One NATO document concluded that “external/local elements trained in Pakistan (Taliban/Hizb-i-Islami/Haqqani/ISI) enter through the Paktika border.”<sup>114</sup>

To minimize the likelihood of detectability, some ISI members also supplied indirect assistance—including financial assistance—to Taliban training camps. U.S. and NATO officials uncovered several instances in which the ISI provided intelligence to Taliban insurgents at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels. This included tipping off Taliban forces about the location and movement of Afghan and coalition forces, which undermined several anti-Taliban military operations. Some Pakistani intelligence officials were also reportedly involved in directing suicide operatives into the Afghan theater and conducting a range of attacks in Kabul, Kandahar, and other areas. Most of the ISI’s assistance appeared to come directly from individuals at the mid- and lower levels of the organization, often from individuals with a shared ideology. The Pakistani government repeatedly stated that it was not providing assistance to the Taliban, but the evidence to the contrary appears overwhelming.<sup>115</sup> In addition, Gen. Hamid Gul and Col. Sultan Amir Imam, pro-Taliban and pro-al-Qaida former leaders, gave widely reported speeches at Pakistani government and military institutions calling for jihad against the United States and the Afghan government.<sup>116</sup>

The Pakistani military also furnished support to some insurgent offensive operations. In one incident near Shkin, Afghanistan, Pakistani military observation posts provided supporting fires to a Taliban offensive operation against an Afghan observation post that consisted of heavy machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades. A U.S. military after-action report noted that the Pakistani military’s direct engagement was an integral part of the insurgent attack: “The Pakistani military actively supported the enemy assault on the [observation post] despite past assurances of cooperation with Afghan and Coalition forces. It was able to inflict major damage using its advantages of terrain.” The report continued, “Major damage to the [observation post] and friendly casualties would likely have been avoided had the enemy maneuver element been acting

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114. North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *Nationwide Research and Survey on Illegal State Opposing Armed Groups: Qualitative and Quantitative Surveys* (Kabul: International Security Assistance Force, NATO, 2006), p. 132.

115. Senior UN, NATO, Afghan, and Pakistani government officials, interviews by author.

116. Rubin, *Afghanistan’s Uncertain Transition from Turmoil to Normalcy*, p. 24.

alone.”<sup>117</sup> Provision of this assistance was consistent with the Pakistan government's past behavior, especially that of the ISI. Much like during the 1990s, Pakistani support was critical to the onset of the insurgency. It helped undermine Afghan governance by strengthening opposition groups that could move into rural areas of the east and south where the Afghan government was weak.

### *The Result: Afghanistan's Spiraling Insurgency*

In the spring and summer of 2002, Taliban and other forces began offensive operations to overthrow the Afghan government and coerce the withdrawal of U.S. and coalition forces.<sup>118</sup> Weak governance and a radical Sunni ideology combined to produce an increasingly violent insurgency. By 2003 the Taliban and allied insurgent groups had slowly pushed their way into rural areas of the east and south, co-opting some locals and coercing others through targeted killing.

The absence of government in rural areas was critical to the onset of the insurgency. Afghanistan's intelligence agency, the National Directorate of Security (NDS), undertook a candid assessment of the insurgency in 2006. The assessment was based on intelligence reports from NDS stations across Afghanistan; information from informants in Afghanistan and Pakistan; interviews with Afghan National Army commanders, police chiefs, governors, and district officials in Afghanistan; interrogations of detainees; meetings with Taliban commanders; and open source information.

One of the starkest findings of the NDS assessment was that the failure of governance in Afghanistan's rural areas was a leading cause of the insurgency. It concluded, “The first requirement of countering Taliban at the village level requires good governance, honest and competent leaders leading the institutions.” Reflecting on the spiraling violence in the south and east of the country, the document rhetorically asked, “Who are we?” The answer was ominous: “A lot of people in the villages of Zabul, Helmand, Kandahar, and Oruzgan have a simple answer to this question. They say this is a corrupt government.” The as-

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117. “Enemy Assault on North OP in VIC BCP 213 Shkin,” U.S. Marine After-Action Report, September 22, 2005, p. 3. I interviewed one of the U.S. Marines present at Shkin that night, who wished to remain anonymous, on February 7 and February 11, 2007. I also interviewed nearly a dozen U.S. soldiers with similar reports along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border between 2005 and 2007.

118. Some have argued that the insurgency began in earnest in June 2004. But Taliban offensive operations two years earlier suggest that it began in the spring of 2002. Walter M. Herd et al., *One Valley at a Time* (Fort Bragg, N.C.: Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-Afghanistan, 2005), p. 121.

assessment also noted that “government officials and people are equally critical of the justice sector. Criminals do not receive fair justice. This is another factor which has boosted the Taliban morale in southern Afghanistan. They are almost confident that they can buy justice at some stage.”<sup>119</sup>

In addition, the NDS assessment acknowledged that Afghan police and army forces were unable to provide security to the population in rural areas of the country: “When villagers and rural communities seek protection from the police, either it arrives late or arrives in a wrong way.” The government’s security forces, in short, did not enjoy a monopoly of the legitimate use of violence, especially in rural areas. The assessment contended that people who cooperated with the government, or even openly supported it, often faced grave dangers: “Those who are collaborating with the government or coalition forces are now forced to move their families to the cities fearing attacks from the Taliban. This exodus of government informants and collaborators from the villages is a welcome development for the Taliban, insurgents, and terrorists.” As a result, villages gradually fell into the hands of the Taliban and other insurgent groups. The assessment noted, “The villages are gradually emptied of pro-government political forces and individuals. These rural areas become sanctuaries for the Taliban and the population is left with no choice but to become sympathizers of the insurgents.”<sup>120</sup>

By 2005, there was growing Taliban penetration of rural areas in eastern and southern Afghanistan. Given sustained security and assistance, villages across this swath of territory might have sided with the government. But without that help, they moved toward the insurgents. As one internal UN assessment concluded about the Musa Qala area of Helmand, a Taliban stronghold: “Government capacity is virtually non-existent in most areas of Helmand. The limited level of government activity in Musa Qala reflects a similar level across the province.” It further stated that “the population and the Shura clearly want more assistance,” and that this was a significant factor fueling the insurgency.<sup>121</sup>

The logic is straightforward: the Afghan government’s inability to provide essential services and security to rural areas increasingly marginalized the population, and provided a target of opportunity for insurgents. As one joint memo by the government of Afghanistan and other key actors involved in the counterinsurgency concluded, the inability to provide services to rural areas

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119. Saleh, *Strategy of Insurgents and Terrorists in Afghanistan*, p. 4.

120. *Ibid.*

121. United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, *Assessment of the Effects of the Musa Qala Agreement* (Kabul: UNAMA, January 2007), p. 3.

“make people more susceptible to indoctrination and mean that the life of a fighter may be the only attractive option available.”<sup>122</sup> This concern was reiterated in internal Afghan documents, such as the *National Military Strategy*, which noted that if basic services were “not provided quickly, the people will be more vulnerable to extremist elements claiming to offer a better alternative.”<sup>123</sup> In an internal study conducted for NATO by Altai Consulting, a primary reason why local villagers supported the Taliban and other insurgent groups was the absence of governance—especially regarding the provision of key services such as water and electricity.<sup>124</sup>

By 2006, Afghan groups had developed a close relationship with Iraqi insurgent groups, who provided information on making and using various kinds of remote-controlled devices and timers. Islamic militants in Iraq furnished information through the internet and face-to-face visits on tactics to the Taliban, Hizb-i-Islami, and other groups. In addition, there is some evidence that a small number of Pakistani and Afghan militants received military training in Iraq; Iraqi fighters met with Afghan and Pakistani extremists in Pakistan; and militants in Afghanistan increasingly used homemade bombs, suicide attacks, and other tactics honed in Iraq.<sup>125</sup>

Insurgent groups used external support from like-minded jihadists to construct increasingly sophisticated improvised explosive devices (IEDs) to target U.S. and Afghan forces, including IEDs with remote control detonators.<sup>126</sup> For example, there were a handful of al-Qaida-run training facilities and IED factories in places such as North and South Waziristan. They ranged from small facilities hidden within compounds that built IEDs to much larger “IED factories” that doubled as training centers and laboratories where recruits experimented with IED technology. One effective IED was the “TV bomb,” a shaped-charge explosive that could be hidden under brush or debris on a roadside and set off by remote control from 300 yards or more. Taliban commanders received information from Iraqi groups on improving the Taliban’s ability to make armor-penetrating weapons by disassembling rockets and

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122. Joint Paper by the Governments of Afghanistan, Canada, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, the United States, United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, Combined Forces Command–Afghanistan, and International Security Assistance Force, *Assessment of Factors Contributing to Insecurity in Afghanistan* (Kabul: Government of Afghanistan, 2006), p. 3.

123. Afghanistan Ministry of Defense, *The National Military Strategy*, p. 3.

124. International Security Assistance Force, *Nationwide Research and Survey on Illegal State Opposing Armed Groups (ISOAGS): Qualitative and Quantitative Surveys* (Kabul: International Security Assistance Force, 2006).

125. Senior U.S. Department of Defense officials, interviews by author, Kabul, Afghanistan, September 2006 and January 2007.

126. Senior UN, NATO, Afghan, and Pakistani government officials, interviews by author. See also Jalali, “The Future of Afghanistan,” p. 8.

rocket-propelled grenade rounds, removing the explosives and propellants, and repacking them with high-velocity, shaped charges. The Taliban also developed or acquired new commercial communications gear and new field equipment, and appeared to have received good tactical, camouflage, and marksmanship training.<sup>127</sup>

In addition, insurgents increasingly adopted suicide tactics, especially in major cities such as Kandahar and Kabul.<sup>128</sup> The number of suicide attacks increased from 1 in 2002 to 2 in 2003, 6 in 2004, and 21 in 2005. There were 139 suicide terrorist attacks in Afghanistan in 2006 and 140 attacks in 2007.<sup>129</sup> The use of suicide attacks was encouraged by al-Qaida leaders in Pakistan, such as al-Zawahiri, who argued for the “need to concentrate on the method of martyrdom operations as the most successful way of inflicting damage against the opponent and the least costly to the Mujahedin in terms of casualties.”<sup>130</sup>

Insurgent-initiated violence in Afghanistan significantly increased in 2006 and again in 2007. One senior U.S. military commander remarked after a grisly suicide attack in Kabul on September 8, 2006, that killed two U.S. soldiers and fourteen Afghan civilians, “Afghanistan is starting to feel like Iraq in 2003.”<sup>131</sup> A couple of days later, on September 10, Hakim Taniwal, the governor of Paktia Province, was assassinated by a suicide bomber. (I was scheduled to visit him later that week.) The next day, nearly a thousand mourners attended Taniwal’s funeral, including the Afghan ministers of interior, refugees, communications, and parliamentary affairs. Another suicide bomber blew himself up at the funeral, killing at least seven people and wounding up to forty. Five of the dead were policemen and two were children. The act of targeting a funeral defied basic human dignity. President Karzai, who was a close friend of Taniwal, denounced the attack as a “heinous act of terrorism” and “an act against Islam and humanity.”<sup>132</sup> By 2007 Taliban penetration of Afghanistan’s rural areas had spread to such western provinces as Herat, as well as to central provinces such as Wardak.

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127. Senior Afghan government officials, interviews by author, Kabul, Afghanistan, August 2006. Al-Jazeera interview with Mullah Dadullah, July 2005. See also such press accounts as Sami Yousafzai and Ron Moreau, “Unholy Allies,” *Newsweek*, September 26, 2005, pp. 40–42.

128. On the rationale for suicide bombers, see al-Jazeera interview with Mullah Dadullah, February 2006.

129. Pamela Constable, “Gates Visits Kabul, Cites Rise in Cross-Border Attacks,” *Washington Post*, January 17, 2007; and Jason Straziuso, “U.S. Casualties in Afghanistan Hit Record,” *Navy Times*, January 2, 2008.

130. Al-Zawahiri, *Fursan taht rayah al-nabi*.

131. Senior U.S. military commander, interview by author, Kabul, Afghanistan, September 8, 2006.

132. “President Karzai Calls the Terrorist Attack on the Funeral Ceremony of Hakim Taniwal as Animosity against Islam and the People of Afghanistan” (Kabul: Office of the President, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, September 11, 2006).

## Conclusion

Following the U.S. invasion in late 2001, Afghanistan was supposed to be the initial battleground against al-Qaida. Yet U.S. and Afghan efforts failed to prevent the rise of an insurgency in that country. The conventional explanations about why insurgencies begin, which center around grievance or greed, do not convincingly explain this insurgency. Ethnic grievances were not significant in Afghanistan, and commodity exports—including poppy—were not the cause.

What does the insurgency in Afghanistan suggest about current theories of insurgencies? First, there does not appear to be a single theory that can explain the motivation of insurgent leaders.<sup>133</sup> Motivations can vary from case to case. Insurgent leaders may be inspired to overthrow a regime or secede from it for a number of reasons, such as grievance, greed, ideology, or some combination of these factors. In the Afghanistan case, the leaders of the insurgency were motivated by an extremist Sunni ideology. Second, the collapse of governance is a critical precondition for the onset of insurgencies. Weak governments that are unable to provide essential services or establish security appear to be more likely to suffer an insurgency or civil war, as Fearon, Laitin, and others have concluded.<sup>134</sup> This was certainly true in Afghanistan. The overthrow of the Taliban government led to emerging anarchy. The newly established interim government was too weak to provide essential services or security to most of the country, especially rural areas. "The Taliban are not strong," noted President Karzai about the rise of the insurgency. He went on, "It is not them that causes the trouble. It is our weakness that is causing trouble."<sup>135</sup>

The policy recommendations to reverse this trend are straightforward, though they would be challenging to implement and would likely take a long time to produce results. The average duration of civil wars since 1945 has been about ten years, with half lasting more than seven years.<sup>136</sup>

The first recommendation is to extend governance into rural areas of the country. This includes providing key essential services such as electricity to the population. A good example is the Kajaki Dam. It sits near the head of the Helmand River, 55 miles northwest of Kandahar City, surrounded by a picturesque landscape and Afghanistan's most fertile land. The dam was built in

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133. See, for example, Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 3–33.

134. Fearon and Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War," pp. 75–76; Doyle and Sambanis, *Making War and Building Peace*; and Hironaka, *Neverending Wars*.

135. C.J. Chivers, "Karzai Cites Taliban Shift to Terror Attacks," *New York Times*, June 20, 2007.

136. James D. Fearon, "Iraq's Civil War," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 86, No. 2 (March/April 2007), p. 4.

1953, and in 2007 it generated just 20 megawatts of power and provided only sporadic electricity to 380,000 people. Two of the three turbines did not function.<sup>137</sup> As NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer noted, a refurbished dam “will give power to 2 million people and their businesses. It will provide irrigation for hundreds of farmers. And it will create jobs for 2,000 people. The Taliban, the spoilers, are attacking this project every day to stop it from going forward.”<sup>138</sup> Successful efforts to rebuild the dam and protect it from insurgent attacks would pump electricity into key rural areas of the south.

The second recommendation is to establish effective law and order. The Afghan government, with international assistance, needs to make a concerted effort to strengthen the state’s security apparatus. This means increasing the competence of the police and curbing the power of warlords, who have become entrenched throughout the country and significantly undermine governance. What will it take? Security forces in the country in 2007 totaled only 143,500, including roughly 95,000 Afghan security personnel, 25,000 NATO soldiers, and 23,500 U.S. soldiers.<sup>139</sup> This amounted to less than 0.5 percent of the population. Although there is no fixed formula for the number of troops required for successful counterinsurgency operations, past efforts have often required a minimum of 10 security forces per 1,000 residents, or 1 percent of the population.<sup>140</sup> The personnel could be any combination of international troops plus local forces. There has been no census in Afghanistan since 1979, but current estimates of approximately 30 million people translate into a requirement of 300,000 security forces. This leaves a gap of more than 150,000 forces. Afghan police, paramilitary, and military forces should ideally fill this gap, but additional NATO forces would be helpful. U.S. troop commitments in Iraq, Japan, South Korea, and other countries make this challenging for the U.S. military, and most NATO countries except Britain have been unwilling to significantly increase their troop levels in Afghanistan. A large-scale U.S. engagement in Iraq makes Afghanistan virtually unwinnable in the short

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137. Michelle Parker, interview by author, August 15, 2007. Parker was a development adviser to NATO’s International Security Assistance Force in Kabul, where she was responsible for the U.S. Agency for International Development/Afghanistan portfolio.

138. Ron Synovitz, “Afghanistan: Workers Still Await Security Clearance to Repair Kajaki Dam,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, June 12, 2007.

139. David Rohde and David E. Sanger, “How the ‘Good War’ in Afghanistan Went Bad,” *New York Times*, August 12, 2007.

140. On the number of soldiers per capita, see James Dobbins, Seth G. Jones, Keith Crane, and Beth Cole DeGrasse, *The Beginner’s Guide to Nation-Building* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 2007), pp. 40–41; and Seth G. Jones, Jeremy M. Wilson, Andrew Rathmell, and K. Jack Riley, *Establishing Law and Order after Conflict* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 2005), p. 202.



run, and requires a long-term effort to train and mentor Afghan security forces.

Third, success in Afghanistan will require a much more sustained effort by the Pakistani government to capture or kill jihadists and undermine their ideological support base. U.S. policymakers should devise a much tougher policy that pressures Pakistan to curb public recruitment campaigns for the Taliban, close training camps, and conduct a sustained unconventional campaign that undermines popular support for Afghan insurgents in Pakistan and captures or kills leaders and guerrillas. Individuals within Pakistan's intelligence apparatus and military must also end direct support to the Taliban and other insurgent groups. Although these steps may take time, they are achievable. Pushing Pakistan's leadership to conduct a sustained campaign against insurgents will require finding pressure points that raise the costs of failure. Perhaps the most significant is tying U.S. assistance to Pakistani cooperation. The United States gives Pakistan more than \$1 billion in military and economic assistance each year. This covers such areas as economic development, law enforcement, and military assistance. The United States should tie assistance in some of these areas, as well as implicit U.S. support in multilateral bodies such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, to Pakistan's progress in defeating Afghan insurgents and their support network.

Skeptics might argue that this strategy would be too costly. Such measures by Islamabad could cause significant bloodshed. Pakistan has a weak institutional architecture, an underdeveloped economy, simmering internal tensions, and nuclear weapons. A sustained effort by Pakistani leaders to stop funding insurgents and to crack down on them in areas such as Baluchistan and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas could trigger major violence. Yet Pakistan's military has conducted a number of large sweeps in North and South Waziristan against foreign fighters, without causing massive violence. In fact, the failure to counter militant groups operating in Pakistan is more likely to cause bloodshed, as the December 2007 assassination of Benazir Bhutto demonstrated. Concerns that an offensive by Pakistan would bring radical Islamist organizations such as the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) into power are also exaggerated. In the February 2008 Pakistani elections, the secular Awami National Party handily defeated the MMA in the North West Frontier Province.

In sum, improving essential services and the effectiveness of the Afghan police in rural areas of the country could have a stabilizing affect over the long run. Together they would likely undermine the Taliban's support base and increase the government's monopoly of the legitimate use of force

within Afghanistan. So would greater efforts to counter insurgent ideology in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Most Afghans are not asking for much. They crave security and a reason for hope, and perhaps something to make their difficult lives a bit better. After thirty years of near-constant war, they certainly deserve it.