



THE POLITICS OF DISARMAMENT AND REARMAMENT IN AFGHANISTAN

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ABOUT THE REPORT

This report examines why internationally funded programs to disarm, demobilize, and reintegrate militias since 2001 have not made Afghanistan more secure and why its society has instead become more militarized. Supported by the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) as part of its broader program of study on the intersection of political, economic, and conflict dynamics in Afghanistan, the report is based on some 250 interviews with Afghan and Western officials, tribal leaders, villagers, Afghan National Security Force and militia commanders, and insurgent commanders and fighters, conducted primarily between 2011 and 2014.

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Cover photo: Former Taliban fighters line up to handover their rifles to the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan during a reintegration ceremony at the provincial governor's compound. (U.S. Navy photo by Lt. j. g. Joe Painter/RELEASED). Defense video and imagery distribution system.

The views expressed in this report are those of the author alone. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Institute of Peace.

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Summary

- Four internationally funded disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs initiated after 2003—two targeting government-aligned militias and two targeting insurgents—have failed to make Afghanistan more secure. Instead, society has become more militarized.
- Many shortcomings stem from the fact that the programs were shaped by the post-Bonn political context.
- Tension has been acute between building capable and accountable state institutions in a chronically weak state on the one hand and hunting terrorists or fighting insurgents by rearming local militias on the other.
- Western powers tended to use DDR programs and language to demobilize specific armed groups for perceived short-term political or security gains while rearming and protecting others.
- Programs targeted different groups at different times. Commanders understandably resisted demobilizing their militias as they realized that their rivals would remain armed.
- Powerful commanders used DDR programs to weaken rivals as they secured government positions or rearmed as anti-Taliban militias. This approach reinforced factionalization and strengthened the Taliban.
- In sum, DDR programs reflected existing power dynamics and deepened political exclusion, which are among the main drivers of violence and support for the insurgency.
- Full disarmament in Afghanistan is unrealistic, but a peace process with the Taliban might at least reduce levels of informal rearmament and pave the way to holding the worst criminals accountable, provided Northern Alliance power brokers are brought along.
- Key to any deal will be the support of mid-level commanders whose lead fighters usually follow.

Introduction

The disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) of ex-combatants has been central to the statebuilding agenda in Afghanistan since 2001—at least according to public statements of Western politicians and diplomats. Donors have invested hundreds of millions of dollars in four programs: DDR (2003–05), the Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups Programme (2005–ongoing), Programme Tahkim Sulh (Strengthening Peace Program, or PTS) (2005–10), and the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP) (2010–ongoing).¹

Data in Afghanistan are generally unreliable, but the four programs have likely demobilized tens of thousands of armed men over the past decade. They led to the cantonment of some heavy weaponry. They may also have meant temporary improvements in security, especially by dismantling checkpoints where militias harassed locals. But if the programs' goal was to stabilize Afghanistan by reducing the number of armed groups, then the current insecurity, numerous nonstate militias, and vast numbers of men with guns show that collectively they have failed.

Why is this the case? Why have armed groups in Afghanistan proliferated or persisted over the past almost decade and a half? What can be learned from this experience as the international presence in Afghanistan winds down? DDR now has a bad reputation in Afghanistan, and many Afghans perceive it as humiliating. But the question of what to do with the tens of thousands of nonstate armed groups and their weapons is more urgent and challenging than ever. Can they be integrated in the state apparatus or in civilian society? What would such a process look like? Is it feasible to disarm them, given that much of society is armed? Or should the government give up on attempting to control its territory and accept that strongmen rule rural areas?

The Programs

Three points on the wider political context in which the four programs were conceived, and which to a great extent influenced their chances of success, are worth emphasizing.

First, Afghanistan has a long history of reintegrating armed groups in the state apparatus or civilian society. During hostilities, enemies typically remained in contact with each other, and many commanders hedged their bets. When one side appeared to be winning, commanders on their opponents' side often sought to jump ship, or at least to deepen ties with those winning. Resources and the chances of winning tended to inform decision making more than ideology. Reintegration, possibly after disarmament in return for amnesty, could also occur after hostilities ended, depending on the attitude of the victorious commanders.

The government of Mohammad Najibullah, for example, used these opportunities when, in 1987, it launched the National Reconciliation Program, which sought to enroll members of the anti-Soviet mujahideen into state-affiliated militias. It also paid mujahideen commanders to sit on the fence.² In 1992, the government collapsed with the disintegration of the army; many commanders joined the mujahideen. In the second half of the 1990s, the Taliban occupied most of Afghanistan after deal making with local commanders and integrating them in their armed forces. Similarly, in 2001, many Taliban commanders joined the U.S.-funded anti-Taliban militias en masse.

For the most part, however, the four programs ignored this history and local practices of reintegration and reconciliation. Instead, they were largely based on a template informed by international peacebuilding operations in Africa and Latin America in the 1990s, which was

consolidated in UN reports from 2000 onward.³ In line with this approach, former combatants are first disarmed and then demobilized, which involves the discharge of combatants from armed forces or nonstate armed groups. Demobilized fighters can then receive what is known as a reinsertion package, which can include food, shelter, training, employment, tools, or cash. The last phase, reintegration, sees combatants acquiring civilian status and sustainable employment. It is “essentially a social and economic process with an open time frame, primarily taking place in communities at a local level.”⁴ The sequence of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration and the emphasis on the first two components ran counter to both Afghan tradition and political reality.

Second, the U.S.-led military campaign against the Taliban—the hunt for al-Qaeda and Taliban that later, as the armed opposition against the government grew, morphed into counterinsurgency operations—posed a major constraint for DDR. The campaign against the Taliban shaped the political order established through the Bonn Conference in 2001. The Taliban were excluded, and former Northern Alliance leaders and some Pashtun power brokers secured the most prominent positions in the new government. Afghanistan’s new leaders, particularly Pashtun U.S. allies and their local commanders, manipulated the United States’ anti-Taliban focus to exclude their personal rivals (whom they labeled as Taliban) from national and local government, preventing their reintegration into the state apparatus. Meanwhile, efforts to demobilize some of the forces allied with the United States were overshadowed by their simultaneous rearmament to fight the Taliban.

Third, the Afghan state in 2001 not only collapsed but also was historically weak and had traditionally been challenged by a strong society, including charismatic religious figures and tribal leaders and their followers, so-called solidarity groups.⁵ The state had never enjoyed a monopoly of force. Decades of war since the 1970s had by 2001 led to a collapse of the army, the police, the judiciary, and the fiscal system. The war had also led to a proliferation of local commanders and fighters in the countryside. The weakness of the Afghan state, its lack of control over its territory, and the proliferation of militias meant that a DDR process that ultimately aimed to endow a state a monopoly on the use of violence that it had hitherto never enjoyed would always be a difficult enterprise.

The four DDR programs were ill fitted to this reality. They failed for many reasons, mostly because of the constraints that the military campaign imposed against the Taliban and the massive rearmament of militias, constraints that simply added to an already hugely challenging context. These dynamics reinforced one of the main flaws in the UN template on which the programs were largely based: prioritizing demobilization and reinsertion over long-term reintegration.

Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration

After the 2001 Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan Pending the Re-establishment of Permanent Government Institutions, better known as the Bonn Agreement, Western powers gradually realized that their early accommodation of Northern Alliance leaders could prove problematic as warlords such as Atta Mohammad Noor, General Abdul Rashid Dostum, and Ismael Khan fought each other and resisted government interference in areas under their control. Without a functioning Afghan police force or army, and amid fears of factional control in Kabul, the UN Security Council mandated the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to provide security. However, the initial U.S. resistance to an ISAF role outside Kabul meant that only in 2003 did the council authorize it to help secure the countryside.

By that time, warlords had asserted their control. In Kabul, the Shura-ye Nazar faction was consolidating its grip on security ministries. The militias of Defense Minister Mohammad Qasim Fahim (also known as Marshal Fahim) were in Kabul, albeit in barracks, which worried diplomats. As a journalist at the time wrote, “Karzai finds himself a virtual prisoner in the palace, guarded by U.S. personnel because the Northern Alliance troops of his defense minister, General Mohammed Fahim, may not be sufficiently trusted with his life.”⁶ Fahim used his position to appoint Shura-ye Nazar affiliated commanders in the new Afghan Military Force (AMF), an eight corps structure superimposed on the militias of the Northern Alliance, which was formally dissolved in April 2002.⁷ Kabul and the northeast, the Panjshiri heartland, “saw an almost immediate proliferation of military units, with no less than 14 divisions and several smaller units in existence by the end of 2002.” The west was given only four divisions and the south another four (AMF unit names do not correspond to Western military unit sizes).⁸ The payroll was hugely inflated, defense officials claiming “outrageous figures” up to 230,000 AMF, and reportedly incorporated many “ghost soldiers,” according to a former high-level DDR official.

Problematically, the Bonn Agreement contained no detailed provision on DDR. According to Barnett Rubin, drafters’ initial inclusion of a paragraph calling for DDR of unofficial forces—a common component in peace deals—received a “furious” reaction. Northern Alliance delegates “claimed it was dishonourable to take arms from the mujahideen.”⁹ The final text read, “Upon the official transfer of power, all mujahidin, Afghan armed forces and armed groups in the country shall come under the command and control of the Interim Authority, and be reorganized according to the requirements of the new Afghan security and armed forces.” The agreement also included a pledge by the conference’s participants “to withdraw all military units from Kabul and other urban centers or other areas in which the UN mandated force is deployed.”¹⁰

Diplomats and policymakers saw the disarmament of the AMF militias as a precondition for security, but they also recognized that it could provoke a negative reaction from Panjshiris (a reference to the Panjshir Valley from which many members of the Shura-ye Nazar faction of Jamiat-i Islami—once led by Ahmad Shah Massoud—came). They were “already under considerable pressure to release their stranglehold on the Ministry of Defense”—one of many times foreigners in Afghanistan confronted trade-offs between short-term stability and long-term reform. Western powers had initially been reluctant to antagonize the Panjshiris.

During conferences in Tokyo and Geneva in 2002, international policymakers agreed to security sector reform measures: army training, police training, justice, counternarcotics, and DDR. Lead nations would take responsibility for each component: the United States for the army; Germany, the police; Italy, the justice sector; the UK, counternarcotics; and Japan, DDR. When pressure for DDR began to build in 2003, other elements of security sector reform (SSR) were lagging behind. Opium production had soared, and Afghanistan “reclaimed its position as the world’s foremost supplier of opiates.” Italian-led judicial reform, crucial to tackling the culture of impunity and to institutionalizing the rule of law, was in 2004 deemed to be “drifting rudderless.”¹¹ The security sector was “in a state of disarray, its infrastructure destroyed, resources limited and facing a shortage of human capacity.”¹² The police and army had not been regularly replenished with newly trained officers since the Najibullah government collapsed in 1992, and ministries had fallen prey to the patronage of whoever controlled them at any given time.¹³

International concern about the security situation grew through 2003, when the U.S. government—distracted by the Iraq war—wanted to show progress in Afghanistan in advance of

both the U.S. and the Afghan presidential elections of 2004. During a meeting of diplomats and UN and ISAF officials in August 2003 to discuss the continued presence of Fahim's militia in Kabul, the deputy head of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Jean Arnault, stated that the demilitarization of the main population centers by June 2004 was "a necessary condition for the holding of free and fair elections."¹⁴

In 2003, as pressure from donors and some Karzai allies mounted, the AMF Deputy Defense Minister General Atiqullah Baryalai—a close ally of Fahim—proposed a plan in which a new Afghan National Army (ANA) was formed from "demobilized, reorganized, retrained and winnowed-down units of mujahidin" to be led by the Defense Ministry. In essence, his plan amounted to the Panjshiris' retaining power, "further legitimized by the international community's support for the DDR program and ANA." By then, however, the United States and the UN favored a new army made up of recruits untainted by factional allegiances. They also envisaged reforming the Defense Ministry, with the ultimate aim of removing Fahim.¹⁵ The first DDR program thus became an attempt to push back against the influence of former Northern Alliance power brokers, particularly Fahim; paving the way for a new army; and also securing the Afghan presidential elections, scheduled for 2004.

Even the expedient, short-term training of troops and police progressed more slowly than planned. The original aim was to train eighteen thousand troops by October 2003. Yet by June 2004 only eleven thousand recruits had graduated.¹⁶ Thus, when the international community started to discuss seriously the disarmament of the AMF in 2003 the UN had only just mandated the ISAF to expand its presence. As a result, no viable international or Afghan force could provide security in place of warlords.

Planning continued regardless. The UN would lead the first DDR program on behalf of the Afghan government, and in 2003, the Afghanistan New Beginnings Program (ANBP) was created for this purpose. It was headed by UN official Sultan Aziz, who was later replaced by retired British Army officer Peter Babbington, who had been involved in DDR in Sierra Leone. A former senior DDR official who played an important role in the design of the first program said, "I am not sure any of us had DDR experience. But we did research into previous DDR literature and lessons learned. Of course the UN was institutionally well aware of DDR."

The Defense Ministry would select individuals and units for participation in the ANBP. These individuals would then be vetted by regional verification committees of one government official, one ANBP official, and three to five village elders. Reintegration would be carried out by the ANBP. This program—costing almost \$150 million, most of which was paid for by Japan—only targeted members of the AMF. The DDR program's two overarching goals were "(1) to break the historic patriarchal chain of command existing between the former commanders and their men; and (2) to provide the demobilised personnel with the ability to become economically independent—the ultimate objective being to reinforce the authority of the government."¹⁷

The design for the most part followed the UN template: disarmament followed by demobilization and then reintegration. But whereas in other countries disarmament took place in camp-like settings, Afghanistan's geography made such an approach unrealistic. Instead, former combatants would hand in weapons in mobile disarmament units and then go to ANBP regional offices for demobilization. Ex-combatants were provided with clothes and sacks of rice or flour and cooking oil. Initially the reinsertion package also included money (\$200), but this led to problems with participants having to hand it over to commanders, so it was dropped. Participants were, however, offered employment and educational options and advised to come back two weeks later to select one of the reintegration packages. The reintegration element was

copied from elsewhere, the former DDR official explained: “We analyzed the type of reintegration programs established elsewhere and their success rates. All reintegration programs we looked at were in Africa.”

DDR in Afghanistan was, therefore, mostly copied from elsewhere. But Afghanistan's post-2001 politics differed fundamentally from those in other countries that hosted DDR programs. In Angola, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, El Salvador, and Nicaragua, DDR had been an outcome of peace negotiations between formerly warring parties. In Afghanistan, however, as Barnett Rubin wrote at the time,

one side in the armed conflict, the Taliban and al-Qaeda, was in the process of being bombed out of office by the US military, while four factions met in Bonn under UN auspices to decide how to create a successor government. Only one of those groups, the Islamic United Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan (UF or Northern Alliance) commanded troops in the field, and it was a loosely organized coalition of very different groups, brought together only by their opposition to the Taliban.¹⁸

Afghanistan thus lacked the preconditions for successful DDR described later by the UN Department for Peacekeeping Operations: a negotiated peace deal that provides a legal framework for DDR, trust in the peace process, willingness of the parties to the conflict to disarm, and minimum security guarantee.¹⁹ Despite low levels of violence and weariness of fighting, many commanders and fighters still feared for their safety. It was unclear who would provide security when they disarmed. Many still competed for power with rivals, for which ties to militias were crucial, even if violence was seldom used openly. In the south, commanders backed by foreign forces to fight against the Taliban could use the money and weapons they were given to target their rivals. The statebuilding language and policies, and DDR in particular, were used to push back the military power of one group only when it was politically convenient and without taking into consideration the fact that related policies, like the reform of the security forces, were lagging behind.

That DDR focused on only one group was visible in its implementation and keenly felt by the Panjshiris. First, it targeted the AMF. The strategic implications of that were obvious to the Panjshiris who dominated the AMF and to allied commanders across the country. Non-AMF commanders would remain armed, as would the thousands of Taliban who had slipped across the border to Pakistan with their weapons. Fearful of rivals exploiting their disarmament, commanders generally kept as many weapons as they could, facilitated by the fact that there was no way to verify that they were handing in all their weapons and no mechanism to force them to do so.²⁰

Second, DDR was most concerned with former Northern Alliance commanders in their northern and western heartlands. In the south, U.S.-led coalition forces hunting Taliban and al-Qaeda, without official Afghan security forces, relied on AMF militias for combat operations and to secure military bases, and opposed including these militias in DDR. “The Americans refused to let us do DDR in southern Afghanistan in the first one and half years,” former program director Peter Babbington observed. “That created suspicion among the Tajiks that the U.S. was supporting the Pashtuns.” Baryalai confirmed the statement:

The constitution praised the mujahideen, but in reality it was insulting them by taking their weapons. It was a zero-sum game for the mujahideen. They thought they were the targets of this process. A small minority were prepared to give up their weapons. But the majority did not want to do it at all, or said that they would only submit their weapons if they could get a government position. My suggestion was to reintegrate any suitable mujahideen in the ANA and ANP [Afghan National Police]. Those who are not capable for the army should join the civil sector. Other people should be paid, an amount commensurate with their rank.

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Third, given that DDR was meant to pave the way for a new army of recruits untainted with past factional affiliations, few reintegration opportunities in the ANA existed for the AMF commanders, even though it would have been the most logical route for many of them, given their little work experience off the battlefield. U.S. army general Karl Eikenberry, responsible for SSR and aiming to build a new army, insisted on a 10 percent cap on DDR participants entering the ANA.²¹ Although this decision was perhaps understandable, former ANBP officials considered it a “strategic mistake.” This lack of opportunities in the new ANA was compounded by the overall lack of attention to reintegration. Afghans pushed for more reintegration incentives. Donors and the ANBP, which was managed by ex-military figures, however, focused more on the disarmament and demobilization. “When the program was set up we were very focused on preparing the groundwork for disarmament and demobilization, at the expense of reintegration,” a former DDR official explained. “In hindsight we would focus much more on reintegration before disarmament and demobilization.”

According to official figures, in July 2005, as the program ended, 63,380 ex-combatants had been demobilized and 55,054 had received reintegration benefits.²² However, Caroline Hartzell estimates that 80 percent of the participants were “selected to participate in the process by commanders who sought to retain control of seasoned troops.”²³ DDR could not break the link between mid-level commanders and their men—its primary goal. Often it even reinforced patron-client relations between commanders and their men.

DDR paved the way for the ANA, which is generally regarded as more competent than the ANP. However, the case studies show that a DDR program aimed only at the AMF, offering only limited reintegration opportunities in the new army, and staged amid multiple continuing conflicts (the war on terror often mapped onto local conflicts) resulted in powerful actors either not supporting DDR or using it to their own ends. DDR thus proved largely ineffective at disarming AMF commanders, was overshadowed by rearmament campaigns, and deepened the political exclusion that became a main driver of militarization, insurgency, and other violence.

Former AMF commanders who had good connections with political patrons in Kabul, mostly those at the senior (regional and provincial) level, were able to obtain attractive government positions. Many ended up in the ANP. This “reintegration” took place through personal connections rather than the formal DDR program and left command structures intact. “The commanders just took their fighters into the police, but they were not under control of the MOI [Ministry of Interior],” former U.S. Agency for International Development official Richard Scarth explained. “The government gave the bad guys to the MOI,” a former high-level MOI official pointed out.

There were differences among the international community and the Afghan government. One group [President Karzai and U.S. Ambassador Khalilzad] wanted stability first and the other ones [the Westernized faction of the Karzai government, which at that time included MOI minister Jalali] wanted the rule of law first. But the last group was sidelined. We compromised for short-term stability and we can see the consequences in the long run, the bad rule of law, the instability.

Former AMF commanders without good connections in Kabul, many of them mid-level (provincial and district-level) commanders, were not able to obtain an attractive government position, as political connections rather than DDR procedures determined reintegration. Most of their foot soldiers had self-demobilized after 2001 and had gone home to a life of farming, but the commanders’ careers had been made on the battlefield.²⁴ As mentioned, the official DDR process offered only limited reintegration opportunities in the new army. However, because their non-AMF rivals remained armed, the commanders also sought to remain armed. Some in the south could rearm as Afghan Security Guards, which were militias working with the U.S. Special Operations Forces to secure their bases and assist them in combat.

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Other commanders who lost out through DDR started operating against the government, some joining the insurgency—examples of this run throughout the case studies. This development contributed significantly to rising insecurity after 2004, at about the time the Taliban was reorganizing in Pakistan, a factor that so far has received little attention in the mainstream analysis of Afghanistan's destabilization. "For three years [after the Bonn Conference] we had everything, there was peace and security," Marshal Fahim said in a 2008 interview. "When Karzai tried to make his own government and ousted the mujahideen, [this led to] insecurity. Now there is fighting everywhere." His former right-hand man Baryalai was more direct: "The generation who fought against the communists started fighting against the government."

Disbanding Illegal Armed Groups

In December 2004, the top American commander in Afghanistan, Lieutenant General David W. Barno, overseeing seventeen thousand coalition troops, argued that three wars were raging: the hunt for Taliban and al-Qaeda leaders, the campaign against Taliban and al-Qaeda networks, and the battle against provincial warlords, drugs traffickers, and other "centrifugal forces."²⁵ This last group included former AMF commanders who had been able to keep their now illegal militia intact in spite of the first DDR program. The UN wrote, "The groups supporting illegal weapons ownership perpetuate the drug industry, impose illegal taxes on individuals in reconstruction projects and impede the progress of state expansion."²⁶

The initiative for a program targeting illegal militias (the term *illegal armed groups*, or IAGs, was adopted later) appears to have come from the Westernized faction of the Karzai administration, which included former communication minister Mohammad Masoom Stanekzai and Minister of Interior Ali Ahmad Jalali. Presidential Decree no. 50 from July 2004 defined all groups outside the Afghan Military Forces as illegal and called for their disbandment. In 2005, a planning cell within the ANBP identified 1,870 illegal militias, numbering about 129,000 men and some 336,000 small arms and light weapons. The problem was probably graver. An internal ISAF document on the Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups program (DIAG) estimated four to six million small arms in Afghanistan.²⁷ A later internal DIAG study listed 3,200 commanders, each with between five and three hundred men.

The DIAG program was more Afghan owned than the internationally driven DDR. The Disarmament and Reintegration Commission (including representatives of the relevant ministries, foreign donors, UN, EU, ISAF, and the coalition forces, and chaired by then Vice President Mohammad Karim Khalili) assumed "the dual role of DIAG steering committee and high-level policy lead for the process, giving it strategic direction and coordinating the various actors engaged in it at the political level." The Joint Secretariat (JS)—which included representatives from security institutions, UNAMA and ISAF, and DIAG provincial committees (chaired by the governor and with provincial representatives from relevant ministries)—was principally responsible for implementation. The blueprint was flexible, allowing for regionally specific implementation.²⁸

In its first five years, the program received more than \$36 million.²⁹ Again Japan was the main donor. Publicly, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)—involved through its management of the ANBP—stated that DIAG was meant to be more than a nationwide weapons collection and was created in part to rid the country of parallel-armed structures. "Its ultimate objective is to allow the re-establishment of the rule of law through the promotion of good governance."³⁰ Internally, however, DIAG was seen as "a weapons collection programme supported by community development incentives."³¹

The JS compiled a list of 1,108 candidates with potential links to armed groups and passed it to the independent Electoral Complaints Commission, which provisionally disqualified 207 candidates, leading to the submission of 4,857 weapons from 124 candidates.

In advance of its main phase, DIAG sought to reduce the number of public officials with links to IAGs. First, it targeted commanders who had registered as candidates in the parliamentary elections in September 2005. The JS compiled a list of 1,108 candidates with potential links to armed groups and passed it to the independent Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC), which provisionally disqualified 207 candidates, leading to the submission of 4,857 weapons from 124 candidates.

Eventually, however, the ECC, under pressure from the government and the international community, chose to exclude only thirty-four of the remaining eighty-three candidates from the ballot. After the vote, the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission argued that more than 80 percent of the winning candidates (60 percent in Kabul) maintained ties to IAGs. The effort to reduce the number of government officials with links to such groups was similarly inauspicious. The JS compiled a list of six hundred suspected cases but could reach consensus on only forty-one, five of which were dismissed and eight partially or fully complied with the request to disarm.³²

DIAG's initial failures showed again how deeply entrenched patronage networks were in the Afghan government and society.³³ The Disarmament and Reintegration Committee head, Vice President Khalili, appeared second on DIAG's list of ten most politically influential commanders, according to a former DIAG official. As with DDR, DIAG suffered from the accommodation approach of the Karzai government and its international allies. Especially in the run-up to the 2005 parliamentary polls, they preferred to avoid taking on commanders they believed could cause instability. This "sent a signal to non-state actors that the government was not serious about disarmament."³⁴

As a result, DIAG was unable to break patronage links—not only between commanders and their fighters but also between commanders and their patrons in government, who helped the commanders evade disarmament. As the case studies show, during the program's main phase, which targeted IAGs across the country, high-profile government ministries, even those directly involved in the program, obstructed and subverted it. Locally, the composition of the DIAG provincial committees often included governors or chiefs of police whose close ties to IAGs were widely known.

Again reintegration proved challenging. After some debate among the ANBP, ISAF, American coalition forces, main donors, and the Defense Ministry, it was decided that participants should not get individual reintegration packages. This was a major shift from DDR and reflected Western reluctance to reward "criminals."³⁵ Instead, DIAG provided only development projects "to those districts which become compliant and free of IAGs," assuming that communities could influence the mobilization and demobilization of militias. This assumption, however—which both DIAG and the later ALP program were based on—was outdated.³⁶ As a former DIAG official said, "That idea was based on the Afghan social structure before 1978."³⁷ Wars had since disrupted this structure, and community enforcement was not feasible.

DIAG differed from DDR in other ways too. It provided for the use of force by government forces or, failing that, ISAF against those who refused to comply. However, from the start, ISAF had strong reservations about disarming militias forcibly. As early as January 2005, ISAF officials warned that without reinforcements of Afghan police, "the destabilization of whole regions is at stake."³⁸ International troops encountered more resistance than expected during their expansion into the southern provinces in 2006 and were immediately drawn into intensive counterinsurgency operations. With so much effort spent on fighting the Taliban, ISAF was reluctant to support the forceful disarmament of IAGs. A former DIAG official said that ISAF's unwillingness to contribute to DIAG significantly weighed on its failure. "They did not want to

upset the balance of power in their area; they were thinking in six-month terms. They torpedoed us in any way they could,” a former DIAG official said.

DIAG officials thus tended to target “low hanging fruit,” focusing on districts that “could easily be brought up to DIAG compliance levels.”³⁹ These were generally areas with low levels of violence, where militias were weak, and where there was little at stake for international actors. High-threat illegal armed groups were excluded.⁴⁰ Therefore, as with DDR, efforts focused on northern and western provinces.⁴¹ As they did with DDR, former Northern Alliance commanders saw the program as a one-sided move against them, only now coming as the threat from the Taliban mounted.

Another reason behind ISAF’s and the coalition forces’ reluctance to support DIAG was their frequent collaboration with unofficial militias targeted for disbandment. As the training of a new army and police progressed more slowly than expected and the insurgency staged ever more violent attacks, international forces increasingly relied on militias for combat operations and securing bases. Internal documents on DIAG reveal how desperate ISAF and coalition forces were for additional troops. One, an ANBP discussion document from January 25, 2005—which included comments from donors, the UN, the Ministry of Defense (MOD), ISAF, and the coalition forces—discusses the DIAG category of local militias, or “small armed groups protecting villages against raiders.” ISAF commented, “To come up with security gaps, could some of those local militias be temporarily registered and assist ANP? They would promise to follow a code of conduct and obey the governor.”

Another internal ISAF document, this one from March 16, 2005, states that these militias can be disbanded “only after Afghan National Police reaches the capability to provide security throughout Afghanistan.” Later documents list militias working for foreign troops and international security companies separately from other IAGs. They suggest that the Afghan government would legitimize these particular militias: “By giving these groups legitimacy, they can immediately be discounted as far as an illegal militias disbandment programme is concerned.”⁴²

For some militias—those working with the international military troops or operating in areas where they were deployed—DIAG therefore resulted not in their disbandment but in a push for their legalization. This was done mostly through the registration of private security companies and a series of militia programs that the United States supported from 2006 onward: the Afghan National Auxiliary Police in 2006, the Afghan Public Protection Program, the Community Defense Initiative, the Local Defense Initiative, the Critical Infrastructure Program (CIP), and most recently the Afghan Local Police (ALP), which was started in 2010 and continues today. International forces did not initiate all programs. Formally, many were managed by the government. In reality, though, “they often had closer relationships with foreign forces than with the government.”⁴³

By the beginning of 2011, DIAG had collected 49,786 weapons. These were fewer than 15 percent of the program’s target, and fewer than 50 percent were categorized as usable.⁴⁴ The last UNDP annual report from the end of 2010 said in total 759 IAGs had been disbanded. It claimed this was 94 percent of its target, even though initial estimations put the number of militias between 1,870 and 3,200. The DIAG program, originally planned to end in 2007, still exists as part of the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Program and has cells in the MOI and the MOD. According to Afghan officials, DIAG collected only weapons from participants in the APRP and from defeated insurgents. However, according to a well-informed, high-level Afghan government official, “DIAG still exists on paper, but in term of content and quality it does not.” His view, which others shared, was that

By the beginning of 2011, DIAG had collected 49,786 weapons. These were fewer than 15 percent of the program’s target, and fewer than 50 percent were categorized as usable.

everyone has a different perception about DIAG, but I believe the increasing insurgency and the widening corruption are rooted in the poor implementation of DIAG and the presence of irresponsible armed groups in Afghanistan.

On paper, DIAG had perhaps the most potential of all DDR programs in that it covered all illegal armed groups in Afghanistan. It came at a crucial time, when some former commanders were deciding whether to join the expanding insurgency—especially in the south and the east. However, it offered no benefits to individual participants, and at the same time, foreign troops who were supposed to enforce compliance refrained from doing so because they were wary of rocking the boat in an already insecure environment. DIAG lacked both carrots and sticks and overall has had scant impact on Afghanistan's informal security sector. The commanders featured in the case studies, who participated in DIAG, actually became more heavily armed afterward. Some benefited from the legalization of their militias, which, ironically, was arguably DIAG's main impact.

DDR reinforced political exclusion because it enabled powerful commanders to take out their rivals and obtain attractive government positions. DIAG targeted illegal militias, many of whom were ex-AMF commanders who were not well-connected enough to enter government after DDR and also not effectively disarmed. As the insurgency gathered pace, the most powerful among them benefited from the militia programs, which enabled them to take on weaker commanders, a dynamic that again reinforced political exclusion. The next two sections examine what happened to those who were left out and the programs designed to bring insurgents back into the fold.

Programme Tahkim Sulh

Although Taliban commanders and fighters had been disarmed ad hoc after their regime collapsed, they had not been officially included in a DDR program. In 2005, rather than including them in the DIAG program, a separate program—Programme Tahkim Sulh, or Strengthening Peace Program—would be created for them. Thus different programs targeted different groups—and at different times, given that the first program started in 2003. As the case studies show, this had a profoundly negative effect on the calculations of the commanders targeted and their willingness to participate.

The Taliban's separate treatment was rooted in the fact that the post-2001 political order was based not on a peace agreement between the warring parties but on the victory of U.S. allies and the exclusion of the Taliban. The head of the UN delegation, Lakhdar Brahimi, later said that the Taliban's exclusion at the Bonn Conference was a mistake but that "any talk about reaching out to the Taliban or those of them who might agree to join the Bonn process was unceremoniously dismissed." Francisc Vendrell, the personal representative of the secretary-general in Afghanistan at the time of the Bonn Conference, observed that everyone knew that inviting Taliban leaders would be unacceptable to the United States and as a result none of the parties to the talks suggested doing so.⁴⁵

The U.S. response to negotiations in Kandahar in December 2001 between Karzai and high-level Taliban officials who said they acted on Mullah Omar's behalf also revealed the uncompromising American position. In return for amnesty, the Taliban reportedly agreed to surrender Kandahar to a mediator, hand over weapons, go home, and abstain from politics. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said amnesty was unacceptable.⁴⁶ President George W. Bush declared, "No cave is deep enough to escape the patient justice of the United States of America."⁴⁷ The overriding concern was to seek retribution for the September 11th attacks and prevent terrorist groups from sheltering in Afghanistan. Many Taliban ended up in Guantanamo, where some remain.

In reality, loyalties were more fluid than simple Taliban versus anti-Taliban. In the autumn of 2001, Taliban commanders and fighters switched sides en masse, showing the same pragmatism that Afghan combatants have displayed through decades of war. Examples in the case studies abound: Taliban commander Amir Gul from Baghlan district Baghlan-e-Jadid joined Jamiat troops before they entered Kunduz; in Kunduz, former Hezb-e Islami commanders from an influential Uzbek family, the Ibrahimis, incorporated fighters who had previously defected to the Taliban into their militias; in Helmand, many Taliban fighters joined the militias of former jihadi commanders Sher Mohammad Akhunzada and Malem Mir Wali; and in Uruzgan, Taliban fighters joined the former jihadi commander Sultan Mohammad Barakzai's militia. In fact—despite the official reintegration programs for insurgents in the second half of the 2000s—it appears that the most successful reintegration of Taliban mid-level commanders and foot soldiers since 2001 took place informally and around this time.

Once victorious commanders claimed positions, particularly in new local administrations, it became clear that former regime members would be excluded. Many of “those who found themselves in power in the system that emerged after 2001 benefited from maintaining the Taliban as a hostile force and the main threat to the regime,” writes Michael Semple.⁴⁸ New power brokers targeted even those former Taliban who had surrendered for disarmament. In the best-case scenarios the ex-combatants were able to strike a deal, handing over their weapons to a trusted tribal elder or to the local strongman and then go home or escape to Pakistan. But for many surrendering Taliban, disarmament was at gunpoint and accompanied by looting, beatings, rape, and killings.

In the predominantly Pashtun south, the new power brokers often portrayed their personal rivals as Taliban, who were then targeted for disarmament. As the case studies on Uruzgan and Helmand show, this often included violent repression. The case studies on Kunduz and Baghlan illustrate how, in the ethnically diverse north, revenge was taken on Pashtuns seen as associated with the Taliban rule. As early as 2002, Human Rights Watch highlighted the “killings, sexual violence, beatings, extortion, and looting” in Pashtun villages in the northern provinces.⁴⁹

In 2005, the United States, apparently motivated to free up troops for Iraq, supported plans to offer amnesty to mid-level insurgent commanders and their fighters in exchange for their surrender. In anticipation of the Afghan government's launch of the PTS, the U.S. military started to register low-level Taliban willing to disarm and return home. “By next summer we'll have a much better sense if the security threat is diminished as a result of, say, a significant reconciliation with large numbers of Taliban,” Lieutenant General Barno said in December 2004.⁵⁰

In the meantime, Karzai, contending with strong former Northern Alliance factions in the transitional administration, tried to reach out to marginalized Pashtuns. In a speech to a gathering of *ulema* (religious scholars) in Kabul in April 2003, he said that “the ordinary Taliban who are real and honest sons of this country” were different to those “who still use the Taliban cover to disturb peace and security in the country.” No one had “the right to harass/persecute anyone under the name of Talib/Taliban anymore.”⁵¹

The PTS was established in March 2005 by presidential decree. It had twelve offices, mostly in the south and east, and was supported by the United States, the UK, and the Netherlands. Participants had to disarm and accept the constitution in exchange for guarantees they would not be arrested. The program also saw detainees released from the U.S.-controlled Parwan detention center and Guantanamo (529 detainees were released, according to the *Small Wars Journal*).⁵² None were high-level commanders; in fact, Karzai and U.S. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad made a list of around 150 Taliban who were not eligible for amnesty, though that was later reversed.

Lieutenant General Barno predicted that the Taliban insurgency would collapse in a few months' time as rank-and-file Taliban accepted the government's reconciliation offer. However, an expanding insurgency showed this was not the case. Despite the expanding insurgency, PTS administrators' claimed to have brought in 8,700 by the program's end in July 2011. The International Crisis Group quoted UK and U.S. officials saying that figure was highly inflated. Also, half of those benefiting from PTS support were not actually insurgents, according to an unreleased UN study cited in a report from Harvard and Tufts Universities, and research for this report supports these findings. According to a tribal elder who supported the PTS, the head of its Uruzgan office compiled lists of fake Taliban. "They registered 'fake Taliban'—no one knew them. It was a total lie. In reality, the PTS head was bringing his men from his own tribe. I didn't know even one of those so-called Taliban."⁵³

What went wrong? Although, in contrast to DDR, the program was Afghan owned, its influence seemed limited to the patronage network of its head, Sigbhatullah Mojaddedi, a former speaker of the National Assembly's upper house, former interim president after the fall of the Najibullah government in 1992, and leader of *Jebh-e Nejat-e Milli* (National Liberation Front). It had no clear strategy for the reintegration of insurgents. PTS also suffered from weak institutional arrangements. It had few offices, was understaffed, underresourced, and opaque.

According to PTS officials, outreach to the Taliban was left to elders of the particular areas who also functioned as a vetting committee. If they believed a candidate qualified, they sent a letter guaranteeing his cooperation to Kabul. In response, the commission would issue a letter signed by Mojaddedi and with a fingerprint from the participant, which stated that he accepted the constitution. The commission would also request that the governor help him, for example, by giving land.

However, interviews in June 2008 with participants who were in the Kabul PTS office and claimed to be with the Taliban or *Hezb-e-Islami* in Helmand, Kunar, and Uruzgan, suggest that the PTS program offered little beyond the letter. They had no place to stay in Kabul but could not return to their home provinces. Fighting was still raging there. The letter from PTS head Mojaddedi would not guarantee help from local governments, who, until recently, they had been fighting. Instead, they said, they feared for their lives.

The challenges that the PTS program faced went beyond simple issues of management and funding and reflected the fact that neither side was genuinely interested in reconciliation. The Taliban, possibly influenced by Pakistan, blocked the PTS scheme. Mullah Obaidullah Akhund, a deputy of Mullah Omar, told Reuters that the Taliban would "never surrender."⁵⁴ In reality, the movement was divided: Hard-liners were intent on the armed struggle, and a more politically oriented faction "hoped for encouragement from the Afghan government, and in its absence [was] paralyzed."⁵⁵ Mullah Omar's chief lieutenants, as mentioned, failed to reach a settlement with Karzai in the last phase of the war in 2001. A subsequent initiative to create a political party also faltered. By the time the Karzai government started to show some interest in the political party initiative in 2005 because of the growing insurgency, it was too late for "potential peace-makers" on the insurgent side to play a major role in reconciliation.⁵⁶

Karzai himself had what is described as an "irresolute" and "short-sighted" approach to negotiations with insurgent leaders and used his appeals to Mullah Omar and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar mostly to his own political advantage, "portraying himself and his politics of patronage as the lynchpin of any future power-sharing arrangement." Attempts to cultivate members of Hekmatyar's *Hezb-e-Islami* faction yielded more promising results. *Hezb-e-Islami* registered as a party in 2005, and by 2012, negotiations had led to almost fifty members of its political

wing to “hold positions in the cabinet, parliament and civilian ministries or serve as provincial governors and in district-level government offices,” even though an armed wing under command of Hekmatyar kept operating against the Karzai government.⁵⁷

Senior Taliban who did reconcile (as happened with twelve of the 142 Taliban figures named in the UN Security Council sanctions list by 2008) usually did so not through official programs but through what Semple calls “political sponsorship”—an informal process in which Taliban leaders sought the protection and support of a senior figure in the administration based on an old acquaintance or network links. The National Security Council, which included officials close to Karzai, played a central role in holding secret talks and reconciling insurgent commanders. The former president’s brother, Abdul Qayum Karzai, was also closely involved.⁵⁸

Meanwhile, international efforts to talk with insurgents “suffered from too many external actors with diverse interests and divergent strategies,” with many bilateral contacts between insurgents and officials from the United States, the UK, Germany, and other European countries.⁵⁹ Without structured peace talks, the UK and United States considered the PTS a national security instrument used to encourage insurgents to surrender and yield intelligence rather than to reconcile. On U.S. efforts to release Taliban detainees from the Parwan detention center and Guantanamo, Colonel David Lamm, who served as chief of staff of the Combined Forces Command in Afghanistan in 2004 and 2005, wrote, “The purpose was not simply one of goodwill, but sound strategy: We sought to create seams, fissures and doubt among the insurgent groups, al-Qaeda, the Taliban and the home-grown organization of Afghan Islamist warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.”⁶⁰

In the absence of a wider peace process that included all parties to the conflict and neighboring countries, and addressed insurgent grievances like the predatory government and the presence of foreign forces, the PTS offered participants only unconditional surrender to former foes. They had little reason to believe that these officials would give them a decent job or piece of land. Taliban leaders had not consented to the reintegration, so participants risked retaliation. Amid heavy fighting, the Afghan government and international military could not guarantee security, despite their promises. The same problems complicated the many ad hoc and smaller-scale provincial reintegration activities by officials, tribal elders, and international provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs). Eventually those who profited most from official and unofficial reintegration programs were the local and national elites and their patronage networks. This again strengthened a political order that excluded important leaders and those that relied on their patronage.

Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program

After the start of the PTS, the insurgency expanded and adopted new tactics, such as suicide bombings and the use of improvised explosive devices. By 2008, the U.S. military started to request more troops to Afghanistan, and in 2009, newly inaugurated President Barack Obama decided on a “surge” of thirty thousand U.S. troops, bringing their total to just over one hundred thousand in 2011. However, he also put a deadline on their deployment, stating they would start coming home by July 2011.

In this context, the APRP was started in June 2010, combining (at least on paper) the “reintegration” of mid-level Taliban commanders and fighters with high-level “reconciliation” talks. At strategic and political levels, efforts would focus on the leadership of the insurgency. At the operational level, it would be geared toward reintegration of foot soldiers, small groups, and local leaders.⁶¹ Behind this two-track approach lay considerable divergences between the various Afghan and international stakeholders on what the program aimed to do.

Eventually those who profited most from official and unofficial reintegration programs were the local and national elites and their patronage networks. This again strengthened a political order that excluded important leaders and those that relied on their patronage.

At the January 2010 London Conference on Afghanistan, Western donors pledged \$140 million to reintegrate “reconcilable” insurgent commanders and their foot soldiers. ISAF, now under the command of General David Petraeus, and those donors funding APRP hoped that the reintegration of low- and mid-level fighters would help convince insurgent leaders to negotiate. It would complement an increase in the number of Afghan and international troops and an intensified kill-capture campaign designed to sow “distrust and discontent inside the ranks of insurgent groups, ultimately persuading them they have no chance of succeeding militarily.”⁶² This view understood reintegration as “a COIN [counterinsurgency] instrument, a military-driven surrender mechanism, but not a serious mechanism to make peace.”⁶³

In contrast, many UN and Afghan officials believed that the two tracks should run in parallel. “It is very difficult to have reintegration without a peace process,” one UN official observed. However, during a National Consultative Peace jirga in early June 2010 that preceded Karzai’s signing off on the APRP, major donors, especially ISAF, pressed for quick implementation of the reintegration component. The APRP thus evolved based on divergent conceptions of how reintegration should be related to military and political processes. It is led by the seventy-member High Peace Council (HPC), the public face of negotiations with insurgents, which was headed first by Professor Burhanuddin Rabbani and then, after his assassination, his son. It is implemented by the same Joint Secretariat (currently under the direction of its chief executive officer Minister Masoom Stanekzai) that worked on DIAG.

The official APRP documents list ISAF and UNAMA as participants in the JS to assist with information, security operations, strategic communications, and government delivery down to the local level.⁶⁴ Both the HPC and the JS were established in the autumn of 2010. Many have criticized the HPC membership, the complaints centering on the prominence of former mujahideen factional leaders, the lack of neutral figures, and the continuity between the sluggish administration for past DDR initiatives and the current secretariat.

Provincial peace councils and technical teams to support provincial and district governors replicated this setup in the provinces. The governors played a central role “in coordinating the support of line ministries with local peace and reintegration processes.”⁶⁵ The UN and ISAF (through its Force Reintegration Cell F-RIC) were responsible for coordinating the support of the international community for the APRP, though the F-RIC is now disbanded.

The program does aim to incorporate lessons from its predecessors. Compared with previous programs, reintegration assistance was more comprehensive. APRP would offer not only employment to participants but also better protection, opportunities for grievance resolution—for both them and the communities into which they would reintegrate—and a ninety-day period of “deradicalization.”

The reintegration process as described in the APRP documentation consists of three phases. The first—social outreach, confidence building, and negotiation—involves district and provincial officials and peace council members reaching out to interested insurgents and mediating between them and the communities in which they will reintegrate to resolve grievances that may generate violence.

The second—demobilization—includes vetting (a review of both identity and past actions), being registered (including the collection of biometric data), assessing the individual and community, managing weapons, protection from targeting by government or international forces, and providing security and transition assistance to meet basic needs (\$120 monthly for three months). The individual is eligible for political amnesty if he agrees to respect the Afghan Constitution and renounces violence and terrorism.

The third phase—consolidation of peace—presents demobilized combatants and communities with “community recovery packages based on a standard needs assessment.” Options include integration into the Afghan National Security Forces, vocational and literacy training, religious mentoring, education and enrollment in a public works or agriculture conservation corps, and work on local projects.

Having been in operation for five years, and a few months before its official end date in June 2015, the APRP has around ten thousand participants. However, analysts, diplomats, and some donors express concerns about its output: numbers are low, they include many noninsurgents, and most come from the north and west of the country—not the Taliban heartlands.⁶⁶ These results are particularly disappointing given that on paper the APRP offers the most comprehensive reintegration package of all four DDR programs and that its design includes lessons from previous ones. “We took the lessons into account and still it is not working,” one diplomat said.

A primary initial challenge was setting up its ambitious infrastructure that included peace councils and local secretariats in the provinces, which took longer than anticipated.⁶⁷ Despite that, and difficulties with coordination at all levels and between all partners, the APRP program began reintegrating insurgents from the outset, at first in northern and western provinces. This led to a number of problems.

First, each of the three phases of reintegration was only partially implemented, leaving little room for grievance resolution, problems with vetting, a lack of clarity regarding amnesties, no functioning database, and only short-term reintegration assistance available. Second, ISAF assumed many reintegration responsibilities, which reinforced perceptions that the program was driven by international military imperatives. Third, ISAF’s lead and the lack of guidance and financial assistance from Kabul alienated potential key partners, such as local government officials, tribal elders, and civil society organizations. Within the UN, many suspected that the lack of peace talks with the Taliban leadership would undermine the reintegration of rank-and-file insurgents: a suspicion many Afghans shared.

Four and a half years later, some improvements have been made. Most notably, the program’s infrastructure seems to be in place, allowing for a higher level of Afghan ownership. Research for the four case studies in Uruzgan, Helmand, Kunduz, and Baghlan in 2014 found peace councils and local secretariats up and running. A midterm evaluation report commissioned by the UN reported in February 2013 that

the APRP has made noteworthy progress in developing its structures, policies and methodologies for the past 2 years, all from the ground up. APRP has established itself with a strong but as yet unrealized potential to serve all corners of Afghanistan . . . Because APRP is not reaching its potential, there is too little social outreach, too few armed groups joining the program, and too few communities, namely those in rural areas where insurgents wield influence, are receiving recovery projects.⁶⁸

Despite these technical advances, the APRP’s political side faces much graver challenges—much like PTS and indeed the other DDR programs. Since the program’s start, the differences of opinion described previously on the sequencing of reintegration of mid-level commanders and fighters and peace talks with the Taliban leadership have hindered its progress. The High Peace Council’s outreach to the Taliban so far appears to have yielded little. Although Western donors, most importantly the United States, have publicly shifted their stance on talks, accepting their necessity, and the current (Ashraf) Ghani government has announced the start of peace talks, at the moment a comprehensive political settlement including the main Taliban factions still seems far away.

In southern provinces, many insurgents who lay down their weapons choose not to go through the APRP, even if that means they receive no assistance. They would rather demobilize quietly, afraid of retaliation by their former comrades, who, as the case studies show, have assassinated APRP participants and their relatives in the past.

Ties of loyalty and patronage within the Taliban movement, according to current and former Taliban commanders and officials and experts on the insurgency, make the engagement of high-level leaders a precondition for the reintegration of low-level fighters. Although men join the insurgency for a variety of reasons, over time they are socially, financially, and ideologically integrated into the movement. Strong ties of loyalty exist between commanders and their men and upward to the leadership.⁶⁹

Even if loyalty is wearing thin, defection carries enormous risks if Taliban leaders are not on board. In southern provinces, many insurgents who lay down their weapons choose not to go through the APRP, even if that means they receive no assistance. They would rather demobilize quietly, afraid of retaliation by their former comrades, who, as the case studies show, have assassinated APRP participants and their relatives in the past. Those who do participate often end up in the ALP by way of protection rather than finding a civilian job as the reintegration program originally intended, as the case studies show. A former Taliban official explained, “As long as there are no negotiations with the Taliban leadership, reintegrating mid-level commanders or fighters will be ineffective.”

Ties within the Taliban movement—and, in turn, its ties with Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence—are not the only reason that reintegrating masses of low-level fighters has proven difficult. Without a peace process, underlying drivers of the insurgency remain. The APRP can provide its participants with temporary assistance to get them on their feet in civilian society. But only genuine political change at the national level can reverse the politically exclusive character of local administrations. Because they do not have the political, economic, and military support of an established patronage network that in turn has ties in the local and national government, mid-level commanders and fighters cannot see a future for themselves in society, as the case studies show.

Combined, these factors mean that few Taliban are interested in the APRP, which they see as surrendering to an unsavory government and its international allies. “The government should not ask the Taliban to surrender,” Haji Utmanzai, an HPC member and prominent tribal elder from Kunduz, said in an interview. “That is not peace. Both the Taliban and the government should compromise.” Hakim Munib, the former deputy minister of Haj and Religious Affairs and former Taliban official explained:

Afghanistan needs a durable peace, which covers all the dimensions, including national, regional, and international dimensions. The local dimension should also be addressed. The bulk of the Taliban movement consists of Afghan brothers with problems with the government. Their needs and concerns should be addressed.

Without a peace process, the APRP’s reintegration component has acquired a different character than originally planned. First, it reinforces existing power structures rather than reforming them by offering excluded militants a way to rejoin society. Doubts are widespread on the extent to which local peace councils are genuinely working to reintegrate insurgents. “Peace is business” was a recurring comment of well-informed Afghan officials and tribal elders, who assert that the councils’ main goal is to receive funds from Kabul. Patronage drives resource allocation in the APRP on all levels. Although progress has been made on the demobilization phase, intelligence gathering and assessment for vetting takes place in a “black box,” hidden from scrutiny.” This lack of transparency allows political players to subvert the process.⁷⁰

Accordingly, many participants seem to have not belonged to the insurgency, or at best have operated only in its periphery. This situation is explained by a number of factors: the Taliban are not interested, program officials and international stakeholders need to show numbers of participants, no consensus has been reached over who was eligible for the program, the vetting

process is not transparent, and some APRP officials seem to have included people connected to them who are not in the insurgency rather than Taliban.

The APRP leadership has not been able to secure the commitment of potential key partners—governors, civil society organizations, and religious leaders—for the reintegration of insurgents. The midterm evaluation report noted that most governors were making “very little effort,” which had a negative impact on social outreach to the insurgency.⁷¹

Furthermore, politically sensitive issues, such as amnesties and grievance resolution, have been neglected, even though these are areas widely viewed as the APRP’s most important elements. Again, these issues are difficult to tackle absent a wider peace process. Western officials in 2011 described amnesties as a Pandora’s box that can kill the program and as an 800-pound gorilla in the room. They refer to the controversy surrounding the 2007 Amnesty Law—formally the National Reconciliation, General Amnesty, and Stability Law—which provides blanket amnesties for human rights violations during recent conflicts, as contravening Afghanistan’s international commitments in treaties.⁷² Without clarity on the issue of amnesties at the national level, possibly as part of a peace process, a reintegration program like the APRP will struggle to form a clear policy on it.

Although the extra attention paid to reintegration is welcome, that this has taken the form of providing participants and their communities with economic incentives is problematic. If most participants are noninsurgents, resources go to the wrong people. In addition, many insurgents do not fight primarily for economic reasons. Also, given that the lack of their leaders’ consent means their lives are threatened, former insurgents are more interested in joining the ALP than taking a civilian job. The ALP can temporarily offer jobs and security to former insurgents, but doing so is unsustainable in the longer term as foreign funding decreases.

In sum, the APRP’s most important elements (social outreach, grievance resolution, amnesty) are tied into the wider political system in Afghanistan. Without addressing the militarized patronage networks at multiple levels, the APRP’s impact will be limited. It is more likely to strengthen existing power brokers than bring in those excluded.

What will happen after June 2015, the program’s official end date, is unclear. The former Karzai administration considered whether to integrate the APRP, which currently has a separate institutional structure, into regular government ministries. While this integration would be cheaper, community development projects implemented by ministries generally take too long to fit within the short timelines that reintegration programs require. Moreover, in the event of a peace process, former insurgents may themselves have to be involved in the program’s implementation to make it sustainable. Their involvement, and the commitment of civil society and other key nonstate actors, will possibly be harder to achieve if the program sits within regular government structures. As the case studies also show, PTS and APRP resources so far seem to have been mostly captured by elites in the provinces and in the capital. If the APRP institutional structure is integrated in regular government ministries, this dynamic would presumably be reinforced. This would again strengthen political exclusion rather than bringing previously excluded groups into the fold.

Case Studies

These case studies examine how the four Afghan programs have been shaped by and reinforced existing power relations in Uruzgan, Helmand, Kunduz, and Baghlan. It argues that perhaps the programs’ gravest impact has been to deepen the post-Bonn patterns of political exclusion that underlie much of the violence and that have driven support for the insurgency.

Uruzgan

In the southwest of the country, both Uruzgan and Helmand, new power brokers used the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan to remain armed and gain leverage in their local disputes. Their race for power, funded by international aid and a booming illicit drugs industry and backed by patrons in the Karzai government, contributed to the resurgence of the Taliban. In this environment, any group complying with a DDR program would be weakened—particularly given that programs targeted different groups at different times. The incentive to remain armed was strong, and many avenues for doing so were available.

The accommodation policy of the Karzai government and its international allies led, in 2001, to the return to local government of many commanders who had fought in the jihad against the Soviets and the communist regime in the 1980s. These commanders had mobilized their solidarity groups or *qaums* to fight the Taliban in 2001 just as they had done during the jihad. After the defeat of the Taliban, they brought their followers with them into the new government, including into the AMF. These solidarity networks, which were always shifting, could be based on shared experiences, such as having fought on the same side in the past, having grown up in the same village, or having attended the same school. Alternatively, they could revolve around religious or economic networks. But the most important focus of loyalty, conflict, and obligations of patronage in the south were tribal and subtribal affiliations.

DDR played into existing conflicts between local power brokers, which entered a new phase under the Karzai government.⁷³ Political backing in some cases overlapped and in some cases competed with financial and military support from foreign forces and international reconstruction companies operating in these provinces. Competition between power brokers for these resources was intense. The more successful among them were able to obtain positions as government officials or as commanders cooperating with the American Special Operations Forces (and in some cases both), to maintain links to militias (preferably militias on the payroll of a government institution or the international military), and to control part of the illicit economy. Commanders with such ties could avoid DDR or, at worst, comply only in part and receive attractive government positions. Those without connections faced the prospect of losing their source of protection in a volatile security environment.

DDR

Uruzgan illustrates how the first DDR program tended to reinforce existing power relations, strengthening power brokers Jan Mohammad and Matiullah of the minority Popalzai against their rivals of the majority Barakzai and Achekzai tribes.⁷⁴ Jan Mohammad, who had risen to prominence in the 1980s as a jihadi commander, was in a strong position because of his close and long-standing ties to President Karzai and to the U.S. Special Operations Forces, who relied on him and his militias to assist in hunting Taliban and provide intelligence. After Karzai appointed him governor in 2002, Jan Mohammad lost no time inserting his allies in positions across Uruzgan's ten districts—including in Achekzai- and Barakzai-dominated areas.

Jan Mohammad's excellent connections rubbed off on his nephew Matiullah, who became a commander of one of the four units (*kandaks*) of the provincial AMF 593 Brigade under Sultan Mohammad Barakzai, though in reality he answered to his uncle.⁷⁵ In the first years after 2001, Jan Mohammad informally disarmed some of the Achekzai and Barakzai militias. Then, in 2004, the DDR program to a great extent disarmed Sultan Mohammad and his subcommanders, with the exception of Matiullah, so that they no longer posed a threat to Jan

The most important focus of loyalty, conflict, and obligations of patronage in the south were tribal and subtribal affiliations.

Mohammad's family. Matiullah kept his weapons and men and was appointed as head of the Highway Police in Uruzgan, securing the road from Kandahar to Tirin Kot. This enabled him to expand his militia and, together with Jan Mohammad, to sideline provincial police commander and Barakzai power broker Rozi Khan.

President Karzai, Jan Mohammad's and Matiullah's main political patron in Kabul and a fellow Popalzai (though from a different clan), tried to replace Rozi Khan with Matiullah as provincial police commander in the nationwide police reform of 2006.⁷⁶ However, the Dutch government, which was deploying troops to Uruzgan, vetoed the initiative. Rozi Khan was removed, but Matiullah did not get his job. DDR often worked this way: Afghan and international actors rather than program procedures decided what happened to whom. The most powerful local power brokers were able to get rid of rivals using these mechanisms. Despite not becoming the provincial police commander until much later, Matiullah would become one of the ten most influential commanders in Afghanistan, according to former DIAG officials. He did so through the combined support of the Karzai family and the foreign forces in Uruzgan, who continued to prioritize short-term considerations on stabilization over long-term sustainable peace through the statebuilding agenda.

DDR often worked this way: Afghan and international actors rather than program procedures decided what happened to whom.

Early Informal Disarmament of Insurgents and the PTS

The nature of the new provincial government in Uruzgan—exclusive, predatory and operating with impunity, and its support by foreign forces—arguably drove much of the local support for the expanding insurgency in the province since 2004.

Those who lost out in 2001 or through later DDR programs and those who were badly treated by the new government officials often looked to the Taliban. Community or family feuds further fuelled the insurgency, as did other dynamics. Ideological considerations played a role but were often secondary to more pragmatic grievances. The growing insurgency in Uruzgan was further facilitated both by its being home to many Taliban leaders and by its general socioeconomic backwardness, the central government having seemingly neglected it after it came to power in 2001, leaving many young men unemployed or underemployed. As the Taliban's presence grew, communities in areas under its control often had to join simply to survive.

The composition of the insurgency in Uruzgan has been relatively consistent over the past decade, core members being from the same armed networks Jan Mohammad and Matiullah had targeted in the early days of the international intervention. The imperative of disarming Taliban commanders provided Jan Mohammad—who described himself as a governor in flak jacket—with an excuse to raid homes. Many of those targeted were not former Taliban, and of those who were most seemed willing to disarm voluntarily by handing in weapons to the governor, his proxies in the districts, or a trusted tribal elder who could plead their case. Networks of traditionally marginalized tribes, such as the Ghilzai and the Panjpai, who had had more members in the Taliban regime than in former governments, were immediately pressured by both Jan Mohammad and U.S. Special Operations Forces.

As a tribal elder from the Hotak tribe in Mehrabad, an area east of Tirin Kot, recalled,

Just before the Taliban regime fell, they distributed weapons among people to resist the foreign troops and the militias. They carried away everything they could and hid the rest. After the fall of the Taliban regime, Jan Mohammad Khan appointed me to collect weapons from people. Two Taliban told me they wouldn't fight and would give away everything in return for safety. We went with their demands to Jan Mohammad Khan. He said he accepted them but immediately after we left he broke his promise. His militia raided their houses, and as a result both mullahs fled. This was the beginning of insurgency in Mehrabad.

Particularly haunting for former Taliban commanders was the fate of Mullah Pai Mohammad, who had also surrendered to the government and had reportedly handed in around sixty weapons. He was murdered and his body publicly displayed in Tirin Kot. Former local Taliban saw that they had no place in the new political order; meanwhile, their former leaders were reorganizing in Pakistan. “The historical links of the Taliban movement to the area...provided a robust and revivable network of fighters and supporters.”⁷⁷

The insurgency could also draw from the alienation of power brokers who had not supported the Taliban regime but were bullied by Jan Mohammed and his allies, usually because of tribal issues, conflicts from the time of the jihad, or competition over land and opium. In Dehrawud district, Khalifa Sadat, district governor and Jan Mohammad ally, competed with Haji Gholam Nabi over who would lead the Babozai tribe. Their rivalry was an old one but entered a new phase with Sadat knowing he had Jan Mohammad’s backing. “He came to Gholam’s house every day, and eventually the police and the army arrested him and took him to Bagram,” one former government official from Dehrawud explained. “When he came back he joined the Taliban, even though he had not been with the Taliban before.” At other times, militias connected to Jan Mohammad harassed locals for land or opium. Many of these militias worked as Afghan Security Guards for the American Special Operations Forces, which signaled to locals that they had U.S. support and thus could act with impunity.⁷⁸

All in all, many rival power brokers during Jan Mohammad’s governorship were either killed; fled their area, leaving it open for Taliban to enter and revive their networks; or joined the insurgency. Once they had fled or become insurgents, getting them back on the side of the government was difficult. Since 2006 there have been a series of Taliban reintegration efforts under the umbrella of the PTS and later the APRP. However, without fundamental change at the international, national, and local levels toward support for a more politically inclusive and just government, convincing insurgents to lay down their weapons was difficult.

By 2006, foreign troops operating in Uruzgan had become more aware of the destabilizing effects of Jan Mohammad’s rule in Uruzgan. Relations between him and the U.S. Special Operations Forces cooled—although the Americans would remain very close to Matiullah. When the Dutch government decided to deploy troops to Uruzgan, they conditioned the deployment in the summer of 2006 on Jan Mohammad’s removal (he was assassinated in Kabul in 2011). His replacement Mullah Hakim Munib, a former Taliban deputy minister, was a positive change, according to elders from marginalized Ghilzai tribes, who say he reached out to them. Munib said this about the challenges:

In Uruzgan, we had two major issues to deal with. One was reintegration of Taliban and the second was tribal differences and disputes. Tribal feuds had paved the ground for insecurity. If one tribe was friendly with the government, the rival tribe was against the government. As I got appointed, I managed to bring unity among tribes.

However, the broader political context remained adverse to the Taliban’s laying down their weapons. Although the governor and the PTS program intended to reintegrate low-level insurgents, neither the national government nor its international allies had tried to engage the Taliban leadership in peace talks. The Taliban launched large-scale offensives in the spring of 2007 in Chora district and in the winter of 2007–08 in Dehrawud district. Moreover, Jan Mohammad was still backed by President Karzai, who had brought him back to Kabul and formally designated him as tribal adviser. From Kabul, Jan Mohammad tried to undermine Munib by further destabilizing the province. In response to the increasing violence, troops from both ISAF and the U.S.-led coalition Operation Enduring Freedom launched aggressive

Without fundamental change at the international, national, and local levels toward support for a more politically inclusive and just government, convincing insurgents to lay down their weapons was difficult.

military operations. In this environment, persuading Taliban commanders to disarm and seek tribal unity was almost impossible. Munib provided an example:

Malem Farooq was a Hezb-e-Islami commander in Khas Uruzgan when he joined the reconciliation program [PTS]. His participation was accepted by the international forces and the government in Kabul and in Uruzgan. But when he came he was arrested and imprisoned in Bagram. He spent a month in Bagram and due to our efforts, we could get him out. He must be somewhere in Afghanistan now.

In 2008, Munib was replaced by Governor Assadullah Hamdam with the consent of Jan Mohammad, who held sway over him from Kabul. Hamdam organized what he called a peace jirga in 2008, which was attended by hundreds of tribal elders from the province. The majority of them, however, were likely more connected with the local government than with the Taliban. Former governor Jan Mohammad played a prominent role in proceedings, and Matiullah provided security.

Hamdam also claims to have reintegrated 252 low-level fighters with support from the Dutch PRT, mostly by offering them jobs in Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development projects, such as schools, bridges, and roads. “The cooperation of the people was helpful. They would come to me and say that if I could guarantee that such and such Taliban would not be harassed, they could bring them in. I promised them that I could do that. I informed NDS [the local branch of the National Directorate for Security—the Afghan intelligence service], police, and other security people.”⁷⁹

Hamdam admits that he could not reintegrate Taliban commanders because of the actions Jan Mohammad took. Some of these commanders were, however, in touch with foreign forces, he explained. “Foreign troops were negotiating independently with the Taliban. For example, X was exchanging messages with the Dutch. I also heard that Y had links with Australians. Z was another Taliban commander who had contacts with the Americans. The foreign forces didn’t share these things with us. I was not happy from this and neither was the government.”⁸⁰

Dutch efforts to persuade disenfranchised elders to return to Uruzgan from exile also led to the return of Hashem Khan Tokhi and Mohammad Nabi Khan Tokhi, two tribal elders who had been wrongfully accused by Jan Mohammad of being Taliban in 2001. Hashem was killed in his village in June 2010 by local Taliban, who were possibly hired to do the job.⁸¹ Mohammad Nabi is still alive and benefited from a project asphaltting a road from Tirin Kot to Chora, as well as other reconstruction projects. But a close family member, who also fled, says the family remained furious with the local government that gradually became dominated by Matiullah after his uncle Jan Mohammad was called to Kabul. During an interview in the spring of 2013, he said, “The ruling people have succeeded in excluding all other tribes, including only one tribe and some individuals loyal to their interests.”

Efforts by Dutch, American, and Australian actors in Uruzgan to reintegrate Taliban commanders and disgruntled elders brought some changes but in the end did not fundamentally alter the political environment in the province, for several reasons. First, the players each had different agendas for Taliban reintegration. Whereas some Western officials worked to establish a more inclusive local government, others were merely preoccupied with luring Taliban commanders off the battlefield with the goal of short-term stabilization.

Second, no consensus was reached on how to proceed and no coordination was established between countries, and even between departments within a country. Australians and the American Special Operations Forces worked with Matiullah’s militias, but the U.S. Department of State was at times quite critical of him. The Dutch PRT officially did not talk to him and supported Rozi Khan instead. Everyone had their own “tribal darlings.”

The players each had different agendas for Taliban reintegration. Whereas some Western officials worked to establish a more inclusive local government, others were merely preoccupied with luring Taliban commanders off the battlefield with the goal of short-term stabilization.

Third, although ISAF's mandate included supporting the central government to extend its authority to the provinces, in reality the PRT and President Karzai often clashed in their approach, as the examples of contacts with Taliban commanders and the veto on Matiullah's appointment to provincial police chief show.

Last, although the expansion of ISAF to the provinces after 2003 resulted in lead nations wanting to put their stamp on "their" areas, the broader national and international environment limited what they could achieve. In Uruzgan, nothing fundamental would change without political changes in Kabul toward a more inclusionary government, which partly depended on the nature of the international intervention that included a military campaign against the Taliban.

DIAG

Matiullah handed in 264 weapons under the DIAG program on January 18, 2007, an action presumably meant to mark the end of his job as highway commander, six months after the Dutch troops' arrival in Uruzgan. Official statistics logged the event as a successful case of disbandment, and the ANBP paraded his participation proudly in its monthly newsletter.⁸² DIAG's managers had included Matiullah in their top ten most politically influential commanders in Afghanistan, so his participation in the program indeed seemed a great achievement.

In reality, for commanders like Matiullah, participating in DIAG was a way to get registered as having had their militias disbanded while continuing business as usual, according to a former DIAG official. When he was asked in an interview in 2013 about his participation in DIAG, Matiullah said he did not remember it. He had little reason to because it did not change anything for him and his militia. Some of the weapons he handed in were so old that an American officer reportedly asked to take one antique rifle home with him as a souvenir. He continued as de facto highway commander on the Kandahar-Tirin Kot road, and as violence increased in Uruzgan, foreign troops became ever more dependent on him. American Special Operations Forces also saw in Matiullah an energetic and efficient hunter of Taliban.⁸³ Even Dutch troops, who were wary of his human rights background, employed him to protect their convoys.

In 2006, Matiullah's highway militia was renamed Kandak-e Amniat-e Uruzgan (KAU). The Dutch government wrote in 2011,

Since 2007 the men of Matiullah Khan [the Kandak-e Amniat-e Uruzgan] have not formally existed and should be part of the Afghan police. In practice, Matiullah Khan's men functioned like a militia that controlled the main roads in and to Uruzgan and which helped him to generate a high income. The men were not controlled by the Afghan government. At the national political level, there was unfortunately not enough political Afghan will and courage to put an end to the militia of Matiullah Khan and the way was free for him to continue with his own policy and activities.⁸⁴

Most of his network existed beyond the control of any state institution until, when the Dutch troops left in 2010, he became the provincial police commander—and even then it was not fully incorporated until 2014. As police commander, he moved trusted commanders into the ANP and ALP. In contrast to Jan Mohammad, who had a broad provincial network from his time in the jihad, Matiullah recruited family and friends from his Popalzai village who remain his inner circle and occupy the province's most important security positions. In a second tier, district commander level, he included commanders from the majority Achekzai tribe and the Barakzai. Few members are from Ghilzai and Panjpai. Matiullah's rule in Uruzgan thus had a narrow base, which had implications for efforts to reintegrate insurgents (see the following section).⁸⁵

Thus, despite his participation in DDR and DIAG, and in fact often thanks to the process of demobilization of rivals, Matiullah and his most trusted men dominated the provincial govern-

ment, both formally—by occupying top ANP and ALP posts—and informally—by influencing most provincial government appointments. Neither program broke up their networks or severed ties between them and their men, as has been intended. If anything, such relationships have been strengthened. The incorporation of Matiullah's militia, which still acted with impunity, into the ANP and ALP means that the Afghan government enjoyed little popular support and that the latest reintegration program for insurgents, the APRP, failed to attract many Taliban participants.

The APRP

The APRP was rolled out in Uruzgan in 2011, the year Matiullah became police commander. In 2014, the provincial peace council and its secretariat seemed to be in operation and included twenty-five elders and five support staff. According to the head of the secretariat, Amir Mohammad Muzafar, the program offered many incentives for Taliban to join the program. Transitional financial assistance was available, including special allowances for senior commanders. After the first phase, opportunities are available in development projects, such as the building of dams or mosques, with the help of line ministries. After six months, however, Muzafar explained, participants “must find a job for themselves.”

The APRP clearly offers participants better economic incentives than the PTS did. In a poor province like Uruzgan, where large numbers of men are unemployed, the money and projects on offer seem attractive for commanders and fighters. But all interviewees, including even those from the peace council, say that in fact the APRP attracts fewer Taliban than informal channels, such as tribal and village elders. According to the local secretariat, the APRP reintegrated 137 commanders and fighters.⁸⁶ In reality, over the past year, hundreds of Taliban rank and file have stopped fighting outside the program, especially in areas around Tirin Kot. They receive no financial benefits, however, and have to find their own way back into society. This suggests that economic incentives alone will not persuade Taliban fighters to join a reintegration program.

Even the number of 137 APRP participants is disputed. “As far as I know, not more than ten real Taliban have joined the provincial peace council,” Matiullah said. “Some of the others were in the police force with us. This peace process is a total failure.” A peace council member explained: “No one knows most of these people. APRP officials make lists of ghost Taliban and send them to Kabul to financially benefit from the program.” APRP officials deny this. They are, however, able to specify only a few names of Taliban commanders who have joined—making the claim of 137 Taliban participating dubious. Everyone mentioned Mullah Samad, the local poster child for the APRP, who joined in 2012 with twenty-five fighters and then became an ALP commander in his district of Khas Uruzgan. An ISAF commander in Uruzgan at the time called him the most high-profile person reintegrated in the country. However, a tribal elder said that his joining the government did not make much difference for the province: “At best, Samad provides security for a small locality.”

Other APRP participants are less well looked after. Mullah Amir Mohammad Akhund, from Shahidi Hassas district in western Uruzgan, claimed that he joined the program with fifty-eight Taliban but that he and his group were then neglected. Although Akhund was dismayed about the lack of financial support, his most pressing concern was the lack of protection for him and his people. “We are between two rocks: the government on the one side and the Taliban on the other,” he explained. “They both cause insecurity. We want protection.”

A member of the peace council admitted, “The most important thing that insurgents want is security, and many times the government is unable to provide that.” Most of those interviewed confirmed that the lack of security guarantees was the APRP's most problematic aspect. The Tali-

ban actively target commanders who have joined, which is why those who want to lay down their weapons want to do so quietly: “Going through the peace council is risky because of the media. Exposure in the media puts their life in danger. They don’t want the small amount of money that the peace council pays them. Their AK-47 is far more expensive.” That ANA, ANP or ALP commanders target reintegrated commanders in fights between government troops and the insurgents—especially in peripheral and volatile areas like Shahidi Hassas and Khas Uruzgan, where most participants seem to be from—is also a risk.

These issues seem to be only symptoms of a more fundamental problem, however, one that neither the APRP nor the PTS can resolve. The consensus among interviewees involved in the APRP and informal efforts to reconcile insurgents in Uruzgan was that a reintegration program can be effective only if real political change is made toward a more inclusive government. The late police commander (Matiullah was assassinated in Kabul in March 2015) and his former subcommanders have taken some steps in this direction, such as by establishing *shuras*, or councils, where communities can discuss issues with local police commanders. But the majority of interviewees say these changes were cosmetic. Matiullah’s camp’s approach to those they portray as insurgents (often simply their enemies) remained fundamentally the same.

Allegations of people being killed or tortured after having been arrested by ANP and ALP commanders were numerous. “Some tribal elders are on the run out of fear that they will be assassinated by them,” a former government official said in an interview. APRP officials and tribal elders said in interviews in 2014 that Matiullah and his allies in the ANP and ALP had no interest in local reconciliation. “The more insecure the province, the more money they make,” one explained. “They’re even in touch with local Taliban fighters.” An APRP official identified “elements in Uruzgan” that try to sabotage the program. “We have major problems.” Matiullah denied these allegations and argued that he ensured that those who commit human rights abuses were apprehended.

Most recognize that shifts in the local power structure—essential for successful disarmament and reconciliation—can come about only through changes in the wider political environment, specifically in Kabul. Many also mention Pakistan’s influence and that it needs to make peace with the United States. Others hoped the 2014 presidential elections would yield changes and that the new government would engage the Taliban. “Military operations are not the solution, rather we need negotiation to create common goals for both sides,” a tribal elder explained. Another said before President Ashraf Ghani took office that

everyone is waiting for political change, even the Taliban. At the moment they can’t trust the government. It has arrested them, bombed them and they were forced to leave their homes, so how can they join a peace program? And we can’t convince them to come and join us because even we don’t trust the government. I know there are many groups of Taliban who are waiting for the results of the election and are willing to lay down their arms. We are desperate for a change.

After the research for this report was completed, Matiullah was assassinated in Kabul on March 18, 2015. It remains to be seen what impact his death might have on the local political order in Uruzgan. As mentioned, he installed close allies and family members in top positions in the ANP and ALP, who may continue to rule in much the same way. However, this may be difficult. No one has so far had a similar level of influence on local politics in Uruzgan as either Matiullah or Jan Mohammad before him. Therefore Matiullah’s death may, in the long term, open the doors for a more equitable distribution of local power. In the short term, however, it may result in more insecurity.

Helmand

As in Uruzgan, power struggles in Helmand have traditionally been over seeking prominence within tribes or subtribes as well as securing resources. In the twentieth century, externally funded canal projects to increase the amount of arable land brought many migrants to Helmand and diversified the province's tribal and ethnic composition, aggravating existing conflicts. Given a comparatively smaller Popalzai population than in Uruzgan, the main elite rivalry was between Alizai and Barakzai power brokers. The Barakzai were historically favored by Afghanistan's kings, themselves mostly Barakzais, but after 2001 Karzai supported Alizai power broker Sher Mohammad Akhunzada.

All four disarmament programs in Helmand, as well as numerous local reintegration deals, took place amid competition between power brokers over government positions, access to foreign funds, and domination of the poppy trade. After the Taliban's ouster in 2001, the best government positions were distributed to four main strongmen who had risen to prominence in the jihad against the Soviets. Sher Mohammad Akhunzada (Alizai) became provincial governor; Abdul Rahman Jan (Noorzai) took over as police chief; Dad Mohammad (Alikozai) aka Amir Dado became chief of the National Security Directorate; and Malem Mir Wali (Barakzai) took charge of the 93rd AMF Division. Communities who lost out in Helmand included the Ishaqzai in Sangin, the Kharotei in Nad-e Ali, and the Kakars in Garmsir.

The predation of the power brokers in Helmand drove local support for the Taliban to a great extent. The four also competed fiercely with each other, employing every possible means, including denouncing rivals as Taliban to the U.S. Special Operations Forces and collecting bounties.⁸⁷ The competition, which manifested itself in low-level violence rather than open warfare, became linked with the objectives and operations of foreign troops in the province, especially the American Special Operations Forces (from 2003), the British Army (from 2006), and the American Marines (from 2009).⁸⁸

DDR

In Uruzgan, the first DDR program ended up helping to concentrate power and the means of violence in one family's hands. In Helmand, targeting only one armed group for disarmament—the AMF—in a crowded political landscape also had unintended consequences, leading losers to join forces with an expanding Taliban movement. The example of Barakzai power broker Malem Mir Wali and the resurgence of the Taliban in “his” district, Nahr-e-Saraj, is instructive.⁸⁹

A few weeks after the fall of Kabul in November 2001, Mir Wali returned to Helmand and assumed command over the 93rd Division, a collection of militias with its headquarters in Gereshk, the former capital of Helmand and a traditional stronghold of Barakzai power brokers. Mir Wali, who had originally trained as a teacher (*malem*) in Kandahar, had fought with Hezb-e-Islami against the Soviets before joining the Najibullah government's National Reconciliation Program, when he came under pressure from Sher Mohammad Akhunzada's uncle Nasim, who commanded the local Harakat-i Enqelab force.

When the Taliban had come to Helmand in the 1990s, Mir Wali fled to Iran and later went to the Panjshir Valley, where he joined Ahmad Shah Massoud. He claims he was involved in the liberation of Kabul in November 2001 and subsequently rewarded by Marshal Fahim with the command of the 93rd Division. Although he leaned heavily on his old Hezb-e-Islami network and his own Barakzai clan for the recruitment of commanders and fighters for the 93rd Division, it was, nonetheless, a mixed group, including Ishaqzai and Noorzai commanders and

commanders from other Barakzai clans. It was a time of “tribal rapprochement,” in the words of former British officer and cultural adviser Mike Martin, who also pointed to the many Taliban fighters who had switched sides during the U.S.-led intervention in 2001 and joined Sher Mohammad Akhunzada’s militia.

Most former 93rd Division members and some Barakzai elders in Nahr-e-Saraj looked back at that time as a period of stability, with 93rd Division commanders across Helmand securing their areas. Most other interviewees, however, recalled infighting between commanders and predation (looting, kidnapping, and illegal taxation) on communities not represented in the local government. For some victims, this provided a reason to join the Taliban, who were reorganizing in 2003 and 2004 to launch an insurgency and were looking for recruits. “We saw a lot of cruelties from Sher Mohammad Akhunzada, Malem Mir Wali, Dad Mohammad Khan, and Daoud,” a former Taliban commander from Qala-e-Gaz village in the Upper Gereshk Valley said in an interview. “They kept asking for money. I was just a farmer. I had not been with the mujahideen or the Taliban before. I had to join the Taliban to defend myself.”

Competition revolved around the lucrative opium and heroin trade, in which the division commanders and the militias of other Helmandi power brokers were heavily involved, according to the 93rd Division former deputy commander Haji Kaduz and other interviewees. Ishaqzai villages in the Upper Gereshk Valley and the Lower Sangin Valley were known to harbor major drug smugglers. The four Helmand power brokers were trying to eradicate competition, or at least profit from it. The Mistereekhel clan in the Upper Gereshk Valley was protected by having commanders in the 93rd Division. However, the Chowkazai clan in the Lower Sangin Valley suffered at the hands of both the 93rd Division Barakzai commanders and the brother of Alikozai power broker Dad Mohammad, Sangin district governor Daoud.⁹⁰ In response, they joined the Taliban. An Ishaqzai elder explained:

I am not saying that all Ishaqzai are with the Taliban. Some are with the government. But it is true that most are with the Taliban and that some high-ranking commanders come from our tribe. That is the situation now. Up to 2005 there was no Taliban in our area. The Ishaqzai elders invited them in, because the Alikozai and Barakzai people were in the government and they misused their power.

As the four power broker militias were disbanded, the security situation worsened, around the time of the arrival of more than three thousand British troops in Helmand in 2006. The removal of the power brokers from their positions and the disbanding of their militias took place unevenly; different power brokers were targeted at different times. The first was Mir Wali, in the autumn of 2004. As the commander of an AMF division, he was expected to take part in the first DDR program. His rivals Sher Mohammad Akhunzada, Abdul Rahman Jan, and Dad Mohammad stayed in power and remained armed.

Although Mir Wali participated in DDR, the militia of his deputy Haji Kaduz did not. This was not because of DDR procedures but because Haji Kaduz had managed to win the trust of the U.S. Special Operations Forces and thereby exclude his rival and nominal superior, Mir Wali, with whom he had a dispute over land. Kaduz’s brother Idris and sixty members of the 93rd Division had in 2003 begun securing Camp Price, where the U.S. Special Operations Forces were based, and assisting them in combat operations against the Taliban. They also provided local intelligence on rivals, including on Mir Wali, who lost the U.S. Special Operations Forces’ support, his main source of power in Helmand. Because Kaduz’s brothers and their fighters had been put on the U.S. Special Operations Forces payroll, they were presumably taken off the AMF list before the DDR process in Helmand got under way. Mir Wali no longer had the protection of the U.S. Special Operations Forces and at the same time

President Karzai was backing his archenemy, Sher Mohammad Akhunzada. Mir Wali claimed that he had no choice but to disband the 93rd Division and leave Helmand, afraid for what Akhunzada—governor at the time—and the Taliban might do to him.⁹¹

A second group of 93rd Division members found new paymasters in international companies working on reconstruction. Only 121 of the 677 soldiers who existed on paper in the 93rd Division turned up for DDR. A former official compared the plan for DDR in Kabul with the reality in Helmand. “We were trying to squeeze a bunch of farmers, who were organized along tribal lines, into a formalized process. We had sheets of paper with names, but half of them could turn up for the day for all we knew. It was a well thought out plan in Kabul, but the mechanisms at the local level didn’t exist.”

Many of the supposed soldiers who appeared told him that it did not matter that they were handing in their weapons: They had just signed a contract to provide security on the reconstruction of the ring road between Kandahar and Herat, therefore would be rearmed as security guards. “USPI, a Louis Berger subcontractor, was at that time working on the ring road between Kandahar and Herat (that runs through Helmand) [and] had a massive camp in Gereshk. The people we disarmed said, ‘We will start tomorrow with USPI.’”

A third group of former 93rd Division members—according to some sources as many as 40 percent—joined the Taliban and therefore also remained armed. Malem Mir Wali “allowed this to happen and took advantage of it.”⁹² A local source close to the Taliban said, “A lot of people who were first with Malem Mir Wali in Hezb-e-Islami and then in the 93rd Division ended up in the Taliban. They still have a connection with him.”

Similar patterns were reported when Sher Mohammad Akhunzada and Abdul Rahman Jan were removed from their positions. Once they were no longer part of the provincial government, and their militias were disbanded, they reportedly started working against it.⁹³ A well-informed former 93rd Division commander explained: “The insecurity in Helmand is the result of four people, Malem Mir Wali, Abdul Rahman Jan, Dad Mohammad, and Sher Mohammad Akhunzada. All four had their own Taliban. They wanted a force on the government side and on the Taliban side.”

When Mir Wali was disarmed in 2004, the other power brokers were still in their positions. Certain Ishaqzai families in the Upper Gereshk Valley had been protected against the predation of government officials because they had members serving as commanders in Mir Wali’s 93rd Division. The Mistereekhel clan, for example, was linked to him through ties from the jihad, when they were his subcommanders in Hezb-e-Islami and fighting against the Chowkazai clan. When the 93rd was disarmed, their protection fell away. They became easy targets for Dad Mohammad and Sher Mohammad Akhunzada, who disbanded their militias only later. (Dad Mohammad did so because he wanted to participate in the parliamentary elections in 2005 and Sher Mohammad Akhunzada when he was removed as governor in December of the same year.) Mir Wali’s Ishaqzai commanders Qari Hazrat and Lala Jan, for example, who operated in Qala-e-Gaz northeast of Gereshk, joined the insurgency to protect their interests.

In the Ishaqzai’s lower ranks, other considerations played a role. When they lost their income from their employment in the 93rd, rank-and-file soldiers had to return to their villages, in many cases under Taliban control. To survive they had to join the insurgency. “What should they have done?” a fifty-year-old resident of Qala-e-Gaz asked. “They did it for their own security.” The Taliban also offered new ways of making money. “The Ishaqzai have a big problem and that is that the canals in their areas are all blocked and their agricultural land is infertile,” a thirty-year-old resident of Qala-e-Gaz explained. “[Ishaqzai members of 93rd Division militias] joined the Taliban because they became jobless. The division had kept them busy.”

All told, many former 93rd Division commanders and fighters joined the Taliban. The two main Taliban commanders operating in Nahr-e-Saraj in 2010 had both been in the 93rd (one came from Qala-e-Gaz). This was true not only in the Ishaqzai-dominated villages north of Gereshk but also in other remote areas in Helmand. For example, the late Mullah Tor Jan, who would play a crucial role in the insurgency in Musa Qala, is also believed to be a former commander of the 93rd Division.

The PTS and APRP

The origins of the insurgency in the Upper Gereshk Valley and the Lower Sangin Valley show that in Helmand, as elsewhere in Afghanistan, the label *Taliban* masked many different groups and motives. Much of the violence had little to do with the Taliban movement directly, let alone its ideology. But insurgent leaders in Pakistan recognized the opportunity to exploit local conflicts and grievances against the new government and recruited fighters from the local population, especially after it became clear by 2006 that insurgents who came from madrassas in Pakistan blended in poorly and were less well suited to guerrilla warfare. Communities that provided fighters also acted as a support network, giving them food, accommodation, and intelligence. The Taliban functioned as a “catalyser for many grievances that existed among the population.”⁹⁴

The PTS and APRP tried to reintegrate insurgents but without tackling these grievances, either locally or through peace talks with Taliban leaders. They offered insurgents little more than surrender or co-optation, which in many cases meant participants would return to the same situation that had led them to join the Taliban in the first place. The programs also failed to consider that their targets were part of a larger organization that would take revenge and the government could not guarantee participants’ security. The only protection the APRP could offer was joining a militia program, like the ALP, but that solution exists only as long as foreign funds for it are available. In the volatile security environment in Helmand, most sources agree that few takers were genuine Taliban.⁹⁵

Gulab Mangal, Helmand governor from May 2008 until September 2012, argued that no genuine insurgents joined the PTS or the APRP while he was in office. Like his counterparts in other provinces, he preferred an informal process that, according to him, yielded “thousands” of genuine Taliban, who were “tired of fighting” (thousands seems an exaggeration, but it would be safe to assume there were more than those in the APRP). The ALP served as one channel to reintegrate Taliban commanders, and NDS militias were another.⁹⁶

The APRP program, on the other hand, generated little interest from genuine insurgents:

The people who came officially and were exposed to the media were part of a symbolic process. The symbolic Taliban found a few weapons, then they contacted the peace council and then the media were invited to show off the program. It was more or less like a business in Afghanistan. There were people who joined once in one province and then the same people went to another province to join again, to get more benefits.

Six mid-level Taliban commanders operating in Helmand confirmed that they were not interested in joining the APRP. Security was a main consideration, with one commander saying he would like to join but was afraid of Taliban retaliation. “Yes, I heard about the peace process, it’s a good process, but we don’t trust the Afghan government. I myself would like to join with the Afghan government in this process, but who guarantees our life? Many Taliban have joined the Afghan government, but some of them were killed by Taliban again. It means that Afghan government can’t ensure our security.”

The other five were simply not interested. They almost invariably said that the foreign forces were their main enemy and they would not be able to join a reintegration program as long as foreign forces remained. They also distrusted the government:

If I really decide to join the government, with which government should I join? With Karzai who is directly under control of the U.S.? Or with the U.S.? I am fighting the U.S. since 2008 and two times I was wounded. It is impossible to join this government I have fought for so many years. Moreover, what has changed in the Karzai government that I should join the APRP? When I joined the Taliban there was corruption, fraud, bribes and government officials were disturbing people. What has changed? Nothing has changed. We are fighting for change.

All six said that if their leaders consented to reintegration, they would be happy to lay down their weapons. Some were tired of fighting. “I am not crazy about fighting and spending my life in the mountains,” said one commander from the district Nad-e-Ali. “I would also like to be with my family in a safe situation and live in a safe country.”

Among the Ishaqzai communities in the Upper Gereshk Valley, tribal elders and Taliban commanders showed that, like elsewhere in Helmand, many were wary of the continuous fighting but at the same time had no faith in the government or foreign forces. A former Taliban commander, who had left the insurgency two years earlier, said he did not want to go through the APRP:

I joined the Taliban to fight against the foreign troops and the cruelty of government. But then I saw Pakistanis among us, Punjabis who don't care about Afghan families. They kill Afghans. I thought we are not Afghan Taliban but Pakistan Taliban. If I joined a program, I would become a public figure. So I left secretly. Some people know that I have left, but if I would have come on TV with the program they would have all known me and killed me.

Elders in the area where this commander operated said that as long as the government provides no security and jobs the population supports the Taliban, willingly or not. “There is no government in our area and neither can it come here, so the Taliban are here and they maintain security,” an elder from Qala-e-Gaz explained. “When the Taliban dominate an area, no one can say they are not good. But if the government provides jobs for people then the government is obviously good.”

Elders in the area said that as long as the government provides no security and jobs the population supports the Taliban, willingly or not.

Informal Foreign-Backed Reintegration Efforts

Other efforts in Helmand were made to reintegrate Taliban informally, with foreign involvement, in the districts of Musa Qala in 2006 and Sangin in 2010, both in northern Helmand.⁹⁷ However, the prioritization of the military campaign over a political approach tended to doom such initiatives, which also suffered from a lack of coordination and infighting. Air strikes and aggressive patrolling by foreign troops negatively affected the foreign-backed deals between Taliban commanders and the Afghan government in Musa Qala and Sangin. The lack of parallel high-level talks meant that the Taliban leadership was also not on board. In March 2011, a local Barakzai Taliban commander from the Sarwan Qala area in Sangin, where a foreign-backed deal between Alikozai Taliban commanders and the Afghan government was in place, said, “The [Alikozai] elders came to me, but I rejected them. I told them that until the time these foreign troops are in Afghanistan and until the time that Mullah Omar tells me to stop fighting I will continue my fight.”

Reversing DDR: Militia Programs and Local Police

Returning to the district of Nahr-e-Saraj in central Helmand and the development of the political landscape there since the failed disarmament of the 93rd Division in 2004, it becomes clear that the same power brokers are still in place in spite of the first DDR program and DIAG. DIAG had no significant effect in the district. Their presence meant that reintegrating Taliban would return to a situation similar to the one they had fled.

In the years after DDR, former 93rd Division commander Malem Mir Wali gradually recovered his influence on the local security sector in Nahr-e-Saraj from Kabul, where he became a member of parliament in 2005. Some 250 former 93rd commanders and fighters still connected to him, he claimed, joined the five-hundred-strong ALP. This apparently included some of those who had previously joined the Taliban.⁹⁸ Mir Wali's biggest triumph, though, was the appointment in 2013 of his son Hekmatullah as district police chief in command of 510 ANP and the ALP. Mir Wali explained in a 2013 interview that Hekmatullah is his plan B, that he lets Hekmatullah fight his battles now. Asked if he still thought DDR was a mistake he said,

If it was not a mistake why did they make the ALP? What is the difference with the old militias? The old militias defended the villages. I would like to add that the old militias that got DDR-ed were much better organized and they knew how to be nice with the villagers. They were much better than the current militias. The old militias were not addicted to drugs. The ALP has no knowledge, they are into narcotics. The old militia were 100 percent better.

In contrast to Mir Wali, Hekmatullah is a professionally trained police commander focused on keeping the Taliban out of Gereshk. Some Barakzai elders said that he is keeping people safe. Others complained that nothing has changed. Some locals claimed last year that a network of a few strongmen in Nahr-e-Saraj can do what they want and that people who challenge them in court are intimidated. They said they were less afraid for the Taliban after the foreign forces left than for the local officials, who according to them are corrupt and engage in drug trafficking.

The formation of the ALP in Helmand basically rehatted the old militias. Although officials claimed that the ALP program improved security by keeping Taliban out, often it simply involved "paying many Talibs not to fight because they were members of the ALP." Many old warlords, such as Mir Wali, did well—by inserting their militias into the local police.⁹⁹

Former 93rd Division deputy Haji Kaduz—who is still at odds with Mir Wali in spite of several reconciliation attempts—also remains influential. After DDR, he became a police chief for a year before being charged with security on the highway from the provincial capital to Gereshk until 2008. When the government stopped paying him, Malgir and Babaji south of Gereshk fell to the Taliban. He explained that he now commands fighters in his area of Chargandaz in Malgir.¹⁰⁰ However, the main basis of his family's influence in Gereshk after the DDR program was its work with the foreign troops, first the American Special Operations Forces and, after 2006, the ISAF troops. The construction company of Kaduz's brother Mullah Daoud was involved in the construction of Camp Bastion. After their brother Idris, who was in charge of base security for Camp Price, was assassinated, Kaduz claims that Mullah Daoud took over until the contract ended in 2011. They employed about 110 fighters, many of whom were former members of the 93rd Division. As mentioned earlier, they were not disarmed under the DDR program, presumably because they had been taken off the MOD payroll beforehand. They also did not seem to have participated in DIAG, at least not to an extent that it effectively disbanded their militia. Even though they were prominent militia commanders in Nahr-e-Saraj at the time, neither Kaduz nor Mullah Daoud appear on an internal DIAG chart of commanders, dated January 27, 2005, that includes a section on illegal armed groups in Nahr-e-Saraj.

Kunduz

Kunduz and Baghlan are among the provinces with the most participants overall in the DDR programs. However, many participants retained much of their weaponry and later entered official and unofficial militia initiatives, undermining any benefits of the programs.

Former AMF commanders who had become unemployed after the first DDR program saw their chance to rearm from 2009 onward when the insurgency gathered pace in Kunduz and Baghlan. Although foreign troops operating in the area supported them to fight the insurgency, factions in Kabul, including Shura-ye Nazar power brokers and the Karzai camp, saw the militia remobilization drive as an opportunity to expand their influence in the northeast about the time of the 2009 presidential election campaign. Commanders who participated in the APRP as Taliban were often integrated, immediately, into the ALP.¹⁰¹

Both northeastern provinces have a history of conflict, given their strategic location connecting Kabul to the north and ample land and water resources. Various historical waves of immigration, mostly Pashtun—now the largest ethnic group in Kunduz and the second largest in Baghlan—but also non-Pashtun settlers, had triggered conflicts over land, water, and political representation.

The 1970s and 1980s saw the emergence of commanders mobilizing solidarity networks under the banner of various jihadi parties operating in this area.¹⁰² Hezb-e-Islami, led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar (born in Kunduz district Imam Sahib), had a strong base in Pashtun-dominated areas. However, its influence weakened in the second half of the 1990s. Many Hezb-e-Islami and other, mostly Pashtun commanders then joined the Taliban, enabling the movement to capture most of the northeast. Several important Junbesh and Jamiat commanders also entered into deals with them. The Taliban's main rival was Buhanuddin Rabbani's Jamiat-i-Islami, mainly made up of educated Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Turkmens. Massoud's Shura-ye-Nazar faction became particularly strong within Jamiat.

In both Kunduz and Baghlan after the overthrow of the Taliban, former Northern Alliance commanders, particularly Tajiks in the Shura-ye Nazar, claimed the best government positions, especially in the security sector. Many Pashtun power brokers were sidelined, even in Pashtun-majority districts. As Pashtuns were associated with the former Taliban regime—in many cases wrongly—the former mujahideen and other armed men could take advantage of their vulnerability. This contributed to the insurgency's rise in Kunduz and Baghlan in the second half of the 2000s.

Shura-ye Nazar: The Case of Mir Alam

Mir Alam's appointment in 2001 as commander of the 54th Division of the AMF—which secured Kunduz—by the Northern Alliance's northeastern commander Atiqullah Baryalai typified the beginning of the post-Taliban dominance of the security sector by Jamiat in Kunduz. Mir Alam was a local Tajik power broker in Kunduz who had made his career in the jihad.¹⁰³ He subsequently appointed many of his allies to serve under him. Given that, in 2003, Kunduz was a “relatively benign area,” the 54th was the first unit nationwide to be targeted by DDR.¹⁰⁴ Mir Alam's immediate question to visiting ANBP officials was if only AMF commanders would disarm. For him, this was a crucial question. His career had been made on the battlefield, and control over militias was his most important asset against rivals, both those from other former jihadi parties and those within Jamiat.

In the first three days of DDR in Kunduz, which began on October 21, 2003, 982 ex-combatants handed in 901 functioning weapons, according to the official statistics. They paraded by President Karzai during the official launch of the ANBP on October 24. Also present were Defense Minister Fahim, Vice President Khalili and the UN Senior Representative of the Secretary-General Lakhdar Brahimi.

Despite the high-level attendance—one former DDR official observed that it seemed that the VIPs’ bodyguards had more weapons than were being surrendered—it was unclear who those parading were. The headquarters of the 54th in Kunduz had been quite empty before the process, according to an observer who had visited in spring of that year. After the Taliban’s ouster from Kunduz, many of the 54th Division’s foot soldiers, though they remained on the payroll, had gone home. “There was no army,” said a former high-level DDR official. “What were we disarming? A group of Afghan farmers who had been called to arms and since the fighting had gone back to farming. There was no certainty on who we were disarming.”

Although foot soldiers returned to a life of farming and Mir Alam’s well-connected boss General Daoud Daoud secured an attractive position in the new government (much like other corps commanders in the north and west, including Mohammad Atta and Ismael Khan), the implications of the DDR process for Mir Alam and his subcommanders were potentially disastrous. He hoped to be provincial police chief, but another Jamiat commander, Motaleb Beg, was appointed instead. Mir Alam handed a list to DDR officials that included only part of his arsenal and boasted to a French newspaper that he retained four thousand heavy weapons and maintained contact with his men.¹⁰⁵ The DDR process led to the loss of his prestigious position, but it did not effectively disarm him and his men or disrupt the command structure in place. He made sure that commanders loyal to him stayed armed as rival commanders were disarmed. The program had just made his network informal and eliminated any control the central government may have had over it previously—similar to what unfolded elsewhere in Afghanistan under DDR. Moreover, it aggravated tensions between the Karzai government and former jihadi commanders, like Mir Alam, who failed to win attractive government posts.

Mir Alam then seems to have pursued a tactic of deliberate destabilization as a show of strength—a tactic common for those removed from official positions (as seen in the examples of Jan Mohammad in Uruzgan and of Sher Mohammad Akhunzada, Abdul Rahman Jan, and Malem Mir Wali in Helmand). Thus, for example, his fighters clashed with those of Motaleb Beg over an appointment that was not to Mir Alam’s liking. In 2006, he became police commander in neighboring Baghlan, a position that allowed him a stake in the drug routes passing through Baghlan, according to Western officials. As mentioned earlier, many former AMF commanders like Mir Alam ended up in the police through patronage, usually with their militias and command structures intact.

In 2007, Mir Alam was fired as part of a police reform process, reportedly having used his position to engage in criminal activities, including extortion, bribery, and drug trafficking, according to Western officials and analysts.¹⁰⁶ He returned to Kunduz unemployed. His fortunes changed again that May. As part of DIAG, he handed in the largest number of weapons (nine hundred) of all local Kunduz commanders, probably as a gesture of goodwill to the German PRT, “to offer his services as a cooperation partner.”¹⁰⁷ This came two days after a heavy attack on foreign forces in Kunduz.

Until then, the German PRT had little time for him. After the attack, however, and as the insurgency in Kunduz expanded, Mir Alam became a local intelligence source for German and American military forces. German attempts to recover weapons he had retained during DDR and DIAG yielded limited results: An operation to uncover suspected weapons depots in the Siah Ab area of Kunduz district failed, for example, perhaps because, following the official rules, they cooperated with the local NDS chief, who was a friend of Mir Alam.¹⁰⁸

The fight against the Taliban marked a new and profitable phase for former 54th Division and other commanders connected to Mir Alam. DDR programs and the police reform excluded

them from government positions but had not disarmed them or offered them other attractive alternatives to operating as illegal militias and making money in the illicit economy. Now, rather than incorporating the militias in the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) to help fight the Taliban, they were supported to continue operating illegally.

The rearming of militias in Kunduz accelerated in the lead-up to the 2009 presidential elections. President Karzai, Jamiati power brokers, and others vied for influence through local appointments and by giving or withholding support to local militias. Mir Alam and other former jihadi commanders, such as Amir Gul in Baghlan, appear to have been used in the northeast by Fahim to strengthen his position, especially from the time he was running for vice president on President Karzai's ticket.¹⁰⁹ Sources in Kabul and Kunduz—specifically, tribal elders and Afghan officials—confirm that until Fahim died in February 2014, he was Mir Alam's main patron.

The militias were also relied upon to secure the 2009 elections. In July of that year, the Kunduz provincial governor, Engineer Omar, asked the NDS to recruit and support local militias, or *arbakai*, to stem the insurgency's rise and help secure the vote. The NDS program was headed by Mir Alam's brother-in-law, General Mohammad Daoud, and Mir Alam became its chief beneficiary, though later other commanders also benefited. These *arbakai* were the most successful militia initiative in fighting the Taliban back in Kunduz.

Some foreign and Afghan officials expressed concern that the proliferation of militias reversed any disarmament progress made under DDR and DIAG. However, the short-term considerations of political patrons in Kabul wanting to expand their influence in Kunduz against rivals, and of foreign forces seeking quick results in the fight against the Taliban, continued to be prioritized. They resulted in Mir Alam becoming the main power broker in Kunduz on the basis of their support. But because of the previous failure to either incorporate his militias into the ANSF or to effectively disarm them through the DDR process, the central government had little grip on his expanding informal influence. In fact, although some of the commanders recruited into the ALP from November 2010 onwards—a process in which the U.S. Special Operations Forces were involved—were reportedly connected to him, according to several sources he preferred to keep most of his men operating as *arbakai* so as to have more freedom.

Overall, the fight against the Taliban and the rearmament of militias in northern Afghanistan strengthened the Shura-ye Nazar power brokers that the first DDR program aimed to weaken. Bismullah Khan became the minister of interior in 2010. General Daoud Daoud returned as the 303rd Pamir Zone commander to the north. Last, the charismatic General Abdul Rahman Sayed Kheili from the Shura-ye Nazar stronghold of Shomali became the provincial police commander in Kunduz. Bismullah allotted Kunduz 1,125 ALP positions, which Sayed Kheili used to “establish a clientele” of mostly non-Pashtun commanders.¹¹⁰

Although official militia programs and support for illegal armed groups countered the insurgency effectively in Kunduz in the short term, it strengthened an already exclusive and predatory formal and informal government structure, which arguably perpetuated instability in the medium and long term. As noted, Mir Alam is the main informal power broker and the most divisive, and his loyalty and the loyalty of his men—the most trusted of whom go back with him to the 54th Division and some even to the jihad—are not with government institutions but with individual political patrons in Kabul.¹¹¹ If anything, his network profits from a weak government and continued violence in the province, which means continued support for him and his militias and limited checks on illegal activities like taxation and drug smuggling. Enabled by the political and financial support from political patrons in Kabul, commanders connected to Mir Alam—mostly Tajik, Aimaqs, and Uzbeks—aggressively sought to expand their areas of con-

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trol, including in Pashtun communities, some of whom seek help from the Taliban to counter this expansion—leading to a continuous escalation of violence in the province.

Two of the many violent incidents over the past years exemplify how the central government has no more control over Mir Alam and his commanders now than they did before DDR and DIAG, and probably even less. In one incident, on September 2, 2012, twelve civilians were killed in a raid on the predominantly Pashtun village of Kanam-e-Kalan, northeast of Kunduz City, in a revenge attack for the killing of a militia member. The raid was reportedly carried out by Qadirak and Faizak, two commanders with ties to Mir Alam.¹¹² Afghan officials trying to investigate, arrest, or disarm Mir Alam's subcommanders after these incidents claimed to have received phone calls from the late vice president Fahim telling them to stop. When Mir Alam learned of Police Chief Samiullah Qatra's intention to arrest Qadirak and Faizak, "he had requested Vice President Fahim's intervention." A few days later, Qatra was fired. When his deputy Ghulam Farhad moved to arrest the subcommanders, he was also sacked, though other reasons for his firing are possible.¹¹³ A government commission sent by President Karzai to investigate the Kanam incident concluded that

Mir Alam Khan is one of the influential irresponsible armed commanders in Kunduz. The Kunduz officials should have disarmed his irresponsible armed men...or his men should have been recruited into the ALP. As has been seen, these measures have not been taken.

The commission summoned Mir Alam to ask him questions about the incident, but "he avoided to come for clarification." Qadirak and Faizak remained free and kept operating as militia commanders. However, in early August 2014, Qadirak was killed by the Taliban in Kanam.¹¹⁴

Another example is Khanabad, a Pashtun-majority district, another main area of Mir Alam's influence and extremely insecure. Various *arbakai* commanders—some of whom were in the 54th Division—carve out mini-fiefs and fight with each other and with insurgents over resources, especially over the illegal taxation of villagers. They also prevent the delivery of government services, such as education and health care. Afghan government officials estimate that there are 2,300 members of illegal armed groups ("irresponsible armed groups," as they are locally called), about half of whom are connected to Mir Alam. According to locals, they can operate with impunity because of his support. Most seem to share a connection to the Shura-ye Nazar faction of Jamiat. They come from all ethnic groups but are mostly Tajiks, Aimaqs, and Uzbeks and usually operate in groups from five to fifteen men. In 2011 and 2012, the Afghan government announced their disarmament, but the weapon collection was very limited. The Taliban are even perceived as more supportive of the population's needs than of those of the militias, and therefore attract more and more support. The presence of illegal militias therefore challenges government presence directly and indirectly through fuelling support for the insurgency.¹¹⁵

The APRP and "Flipping" Insurgents

The Taliban always had a lighter footprint in Kunduz and Baghlan than in Helmand and Uruzgan and it took longer for the insurgency to take hold there.¹¹⁶ It picked up pace in 2008 and 2009, mainly initiated from the outside, with arms and men coming from Pakistan and the south, though anecdotal evidence suggests locals also asked old comrades operating in Kandahar and elsewhere to contact the Taliban leadership in Quetta on their behalf. In late 2010, four thousand U.S. troops deployed to the region, marking the start of an aggressive campaign to root out insurgent groups, which by that time included the Taliban, the Taliban-affiliated Haqqani network, Hezb-e-Islami, and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. Intensive counterinsurgency and kill-or-capture missions in Kunduz from 2010 onward were paralleled by

and became linked to efforts to reintegrate insurgents. Initially, the emphasis was on reintegration into civilian society through the APRP.

Thus far APRP has registered 385 participants in Kunduz.¹¹⁷ All are Taliban, according to Wahidullah Rahmani, the head of the local secretariat, although only fifty-five are ideological and fully integrated into the movement.¹¹⁸ This implies that the rest, a large majority, operated in the insurgency's periphery. In fact, the identity and numbers of participants are disputed, with well-informed sources claiming that the program has attracted few genuine insurgents, and that at best participants are small commanders and fighters looking for benefits. Afghan and international actors involved in the program have also alleged fraud (putting relatives in the local secretariat and taking money that is supposed to go to community development), though this is denied by the local APRP management.

Of the APRP participants however, around three hundred originally reintegrated not through the APRP but instead through an informal militia initiative of Sayed Kheili, who bought off Taliban commanders in Chahardara and Aliabad in 2010 with his own money. A Western officer in Kunduz at the time said, "It was Afghan reintegration, we were amazed by how quickly it went." After Sayed Kheili's assassination in 2011, these commanders and other noninsurgent militia commanders were employed in the CIP militia, which aimed to ensure that they would not revert to the insurgency or other illegal activities. Karzai took steps to abolish the program by the end of 2011.

The hundred or so who did reintegrate through the APRP were from the district of Imam Sahib, where Taliban fighters joined after an internal fight with members of al-Qaeda who were reportedly supposed to support them with military advice but were instead accused of stealing money. The local population withdrew support for the insurgency and the local Taliban commanders switched in December 2010. These first reintegration efforts were driven partly by ISAF because the local peace council and secretariat had not been set up. Little infrastructure was in place to support participants. "We started [the APRP] in the district Imam Sahib. We tried to get funding to get them a safe house, money, projects. This was in December, but we're still waiting for Kabul," a former Western officer said in March 2011. Instead, with American funds (a special fund of \$50 million called the American National Defense Authorization Act), the participants received short-term aid, such as rice and cooking oil.

In these circumstances, guaranteeing their security was impossible. On May 9, 2011, former comrades killed ex-Taliban commander Maulawi Mohammad Nabi and four of his bodyguards in Imam Sahib. In the first year of the APRP in Kunduz, three other reintegrated commanders were killed by either Taliban or nominally progovernment militias. As a result, high-level provincial officials withdrew support for the official program even before its infrastructure was in place and would only cooperate with informal reintegration, away from media attention. The German and American military also appeared to lose interest. A Western official in Kunduz at the time observed that "by the autumn of 2011 the APRP had basically ceased to exist in Kunduz. It was a child born dead."

Baghlan

In the second half of the 1990s, many Hezb-e-Islami commanders in Baghlan joined the Taliban, enabling the movement to capture the province. During the U.S.-led intervention in 2001 some of these former Hezb-e-Islami commanders, including local Pashtun power brokers Amir Gul and Mullah Alam, again switched sides and joined Jamiat forces. After the defeat

of the Taliban the predominantly Tajik Shura-ye Nazar elite claimed the top local government positions, especially in the security sector, with other commanders playing a secondary role.

DDR, DIAG, and Amir Gul

In July 2004, disarmament of the 20th Division began. The 20th was a collection of militias in Baghlan under the command of Mustafa Mohseni, a member of a powerful Tajik family in the province. The militias had been causing trouble after 2001, including fights with the police in the provincial capital Pul-e-Khumri. Governor Fakir Mohammad Mohmodzai also accused the militias of being involved in the drugs trade.¹¹⁹ After DDR, the Shura-ye Nazar elite of the 20th Division had little trouble recycling AMF militias into the ANP. Division commander Mustafa Mohseni became the police chief of Logar. But for the ex-Hezb and ex-Taliban commanders like Amir Gul (who had been put in charge of the 20th Division's 733 Brigade, which he asserted boasted some three hundred fighters) and Mullah Alam (who said in an interview he was in charge of a smaller unit, a *kandak*), who were operating in Pashtun-dominated areas of Baghlan, reintegration opportunities were fewer. Amir Gul was also banned from running in the 2005 parliamentary elections because of his ties to illegal armed groups.

The example of Amir Gul is instructive. Reminiscent of Mir Alam's case in Kunduz, he appears, after DDR, to have turned to antigovernment activities. In 2006, he was arrested after his house was searched by ISAF and ANA forces, who suspected him of launching attacks against their troops, drug smuggling, and other criminal activities. Tellingly, during the raid on his house the ISAF and ANA forces found not only bomb-making materials but also several letters to the Ministry of Interior requesting a position. Much like Mir Alam, Amir Gul was eventually rewarded rather than punished for creating instability. Elders from Baghlan put pressure on President Karzai, who released him from prison and appointed him as district governor of Baghlan-e-Jadid in 2007.

After his arrest in 2006, Amir Gul handed weapons over to DIAG. However, local and national government officials, tribal elders, and villagers from the area all claimed that, despite having participated in both DDR and DIAG, he maintained connections to illegal militias in Baghlan-e-Jadid, numbering some hundred men, and in other districts of Baghlan. They claim that Amir Gul, like Mir Alam, received financial and political support from Marshal Fahim and that militias connected to him engaged in illegal taxation of villagers, harassment, looting, and killing of civilians. Few dared to complain as Gul also managed an effective spy network to inform on noncomplying villagers.

Later, Gul became a commander of the 6th Brigade of the Civil Order Police, commanding four hundred police for around six months. Interviewees claimed that Marshal Fahim pushed the appointment but differed on when it happened. It seems to have been after 2009, possibly in connection with the presidential elections. Gul also maintained links with former AMF subcommanders and fighters who joined the ANSF, according to tribal elders and government officials. The most publicized example is of Gul cooperating with former Brigade 733 subcommander Mohammad Kameen, who after DDR had become district police chief in Baghlan-e-Jadid, taking forty to fifty of his men with him.

Gul's relationship with Kameen became a focus of national media attention after the killing by local ANP of three Afghan Special Forces (ASF) on October 25, 2012. Four ASF attempted to disarm an armed and uniformed bodyguard of Ridi Gul, a former jihadi commander loyal to Amir Gul, in the bazaar of Baghlan-e-Jadid. Kameen's police came and stopped the soldiers, who had continued their patrol. After an altercation, the police opened fire and killed three of

the four soldiers. Kameen and Amir Gul were fired as police chief and district governor, but simply refused to leave. An attempt to dislodge Gul and Kameen in November 2012 ended in a standoff between provincial police chief Assadullah Shirzad and twenty ANP against Amir Gul's men outside Gul's house. Although warrants were issued for Kameen for the killing of the ASF and the fight against the provincial police, and against Gul for the latter incident, they are still free and live in Baghlan-e-Jadid. As in Kunduz, as a result of the support of factional leaders to provincial power brokers, the central government had little influence over Gul and commander Kameen, who had not been fully disarmed nor fully integrated into government institutions—another failure of DDR.

Gul denies having been involved in any type of antigovernment activities. He also claims never to have had links with the Taliban or been a member of Hezb-e-Islami and to have always been affiliated with Jamiat. He knew Fahim from the time of the jihad, describing him as a “sympathetic man, to me and to all people.” He claimed to have fully disarmed under DDR and DIAG and that some of his former subcommanders and fighters were in the ALP, the ANP, and the ANA (but denied having an illegal militia). However, he also claimed that his former subcommanders and fighters—his *andiwal*—were still loyal to him: “We have spent [a] long time together in the strongholds against Russians and Taliban. They are my own people from Baghlan, and they support me and I support them.”

Amir Gul's fight against Shirzad and an earlier battle against the Taliban in November 2009 in Baghlan-e-Jadid illustrates that despite his assertion that he was “an old man” not in command of any militias, he could still easily mobilize hundreds of armed men, most of whom had been with him in Hezb-e-Islami and in the AMF.¹²⁰ Although he was officially replaced as district chief, provincial officials had limited reach into his areas of influence—reportedly mostly because of Fahim's patronage of Gul. Most villagers in Baghlan-e-Jadid were convinced that Gul was untouchable. Many said that the impunity with which both he and the commanders connected with him operate was a reason to join the Taliban or help them. “Amir Gul's commanders and the police were killing, stealing cars, kidnapping, and keeping people in private jails,” an elder from Mullahkheil explained. “So when the Taliban came we didn't call the police, we supported them.”

Members of the Gadi tribe in Baghlan-e-Jadid, a group often accused of having links with the insurgency, accused commanders linked to Amir Gul and Kameen (and other former jihadi figures) of harassing them. Not openly saying they supported the Taliban, elders nonetheless expressed sympathy for men from their areas who had joined the insurgency. They claimed that the insurgency in Baghlan (most active in the Pashtun-dominated Baghlan-e-Jadid district, the Dand-e-Ghori area of Pul-e-Khumri, and the Dahane-Ghori district) is caused by the dominance of former Northern Alliance parties in the local administration, specifically Shura-ye Nazar power brokers. Pashtuns, the second largest ethnic group in the province, have been sidelined and their land grabbed. One said, “The Northern Alliance is in power now in Baghlan. They have defamed the Pashtuns by different names. Pashtuns have been forced to migrate to Pakistan where they can be influenced by Pakistani intelligence and send back for destructive acts.” Haji Wakil Alam Jan, a provincial council member, agreed:

The Pashtuns had a horrible life after the fall of Taliban in Baghlan. Even those who had no connection with the Taliban were accused of being affiliated with them. I remember a shopkeeper paying up to 2,000 US dollars to stay out of prison when he was falsely accused of having links with the Taliban. Some people ran away to Pakistan and some started a real fight against the government.

The APRP: Rehatting Insurgents as Local Police

Most attempts at reintegrating insurgents in Baghlan took place, as in Kunduz, after 2010, when the insurgency picked up in the province, and mostly involved the APRP program. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some Hezb-e-Islami commanders who had supported the Taliban regime and lost out after 2001—or after DDR in 2004—started cooperating with the insurgency, which increased its activity in Baghlan after 2007. However, in the winter of 2009 and 2010, the two sides fell out and started fighting each other in the north of the province, including in Amir Gul's district Baghlan-e-Jadid.

Around this time, a number of Hezb-e-Islami commanders, under pressure from both the Taliban and intensified U.S. operations, joined the government. Afghan government officials—especially those connected to the Karzai camp—and U.S. military supported them to get Pashtuns back on the government side. Karzai's camp had been trying for years to counter Jamiat's influence in Baghlan, partly by appointing government officials with a Hezb-e-Islami background. The Fahim-backed remobilization drive in the northeast before the 2009 elections prompted the Karzai camp to support the rearmament of former Hezb-e-Islami militias in Kunduz and Baghlan.

Whereas in Kunduz the local power brokers, including Jamiat, had been successful in exploiting the ALP program, in Baghlan the U.S. Special Operations Forces and the Karzai camp used its resources to lure locals, especially those with a Hezb-e-Islami background, away from the insurgency, at least temporarily. Many accounts detail ALP commanders switching back and forth, to and from the Taliban. The ALP program's initiation in Baghlan (in three Pashtun-dominated districts) from February 2011 onward therefore partially offset Pashtun marginalization in the province. However, all sides had an interest in “durable disorder” rather than in a strong and inclusive government.¹²¹

One Pashtun power broker who appears to have been strengthened most through the ALP is the former 20th Division subcommander Mullah Alam, from Dand-e Ghor, an area in the district of Pul-e-Khumri. Like Amir Gul, he became unemployed after DDR. Alam benefited from Karzai's support and that of the U.S. Special Operations Forces. According to some sources, he and his men joined the Taliban after he had become unemployed as a result of the DDR program, but he denied this.¹²² By the end of 2010, Interior Minister Hanif Atmar reportedly gave permission and support to arm 120 of Alam's fighters to fight on the government side. The Baghlan police commander at the time, General Abdul Rahman Rahmani, who was trying to counter the Jamiat influence in the local security apparatus, reportedly supported this initiative. After the ALP was rolled out in Baghlan in 2011 under U.S. Special Operations Forces' supervision, Mullah Alam's fighters were integrated into the program. Although Mullah Alam had no official position, he influenced appointments to the ALP in the Pashtun areas in Baghlan, especially in the Dand-e-Ghor area.

As in Kunduz, U.S. Special Operations Forces and German troops started reintegrating commanders and fighters who announced themselves as insurgents immediately as plans for the APRP were announced in January 2010. But without program infrastructure, the only way to offer them security was not by reintegrating them into civilian life but by rearming them in the ALP. One early case was that of commander Sher and his fighters, who claimed to belong to Hezb-e-Islami, had been defeated by the Taliban north of Pul-e-Khumri in March 2010, and then sought the government's help. All of these fighters—at that time under command of Nur ul Haq, Sher having been killed in another battle with the Taliban in September 2010—joined the ALP when it was established a year later in Baghlan.

Commander Nur ul Haq's joining the ALP through the APRP had a profound impact on perceptions of the program in Baghlan. It raised hopes of small militia commanders and fighters looking for a paymaster and simultaneously led to concerns in the Shura-ye Nazar faction, which was afraid to lose its influence over the local security sector. Shura-ye Nazar power brokers denounced the program even as they tried to insert their allies into it. A member of the local peace council explained in a 2011 interview:

Now in Baghlan there is a big problem between Tajiks and Pashtuns because of reintegration. Because Tajiks think that most of the Pashtuns join with government. Again they get weapons and they become powerful in the area. Tajiks are trying themselves to get power.

Many small militia commanders who claimed to have been fighting alongside either the Taliban or Hezb-e-Islami also signed up. It seemed these developments followed the old rationale of commanders joining the side with most resources—as long as these resources lasted.

Many, however, could not enter the ALP. Former 20th Division (310 regiment of the third kandak) subcommander Jumadin Kandak from Shahabuddin, for example, joined the APRP with ten fighters in 2010, expecting to get into the ALP because his main rival, commander Nur ul Haq, had been admitted. He claimed to have joined the Taliban (“They asked me to pick up weapons and call myself Taliban”) after having been demobilized through DDR and after Sher's and Nur ul Haq's harassment of his community. Kandak felt that he also needed to get into the militia program to protect himself. The American Special Operations Forces, however, presumably having received intelligence from Nur ul Haq, opposed it.

Jumadin Kandak survived, but another commander, Bismullah, a former Hezb-e-Islami commander from Baghlan-e-Jadid, did not. He claimed to have joined the Taliban in 2008 because of death threats by a local Junbesh commander. He was then caught up in the fight between Hezb-e-Islami and Taliban in the district, apparently over the right to tax the local population. He fled to Chahardara in Kunduz, where some of his fighters were killed in a bombardment. He and the surviving fighters then joined the APRP and were given jobs maintaining a road. In May 2014, Bismullah was reportedly killed by former Taliban comrades who wanted to retaliate for his joining the APRP and convincing other commanders to do the same. After his death, his fighters were fired from their jobs. Other commanders also hoped to reintegrate by joining the ALP but realized it was not possible and returned to the insurgency instead.

APRP participants interviewed for this research between 2011 and 2014 seemed to belong primarily to small militias, some of whom may have joined the insurgency only temporarily. Tribal elders and Afghan officials support this conclusion. By contrast, the main Taliban commanders in Baghlan in 2011 said they wanted nothing to do with the APRP as long as their leaders did not consent. A local mid-level Taliban commander, reportedly fighting against Sher and Nur ul Haq, said, “Taliban high-ranking people will not ask me to lay down my weapons. They will only do this when they are in negotiations with the government of Afghanistan and once the foreign troops leave. Then I am okay to lay down my weapons.”¹²³

The provincial peace council has been accused by many, including some involved in the APRP, of giving jobs to friends and relatives rather than reintegrating Taliban commanders. The same allegation has been leveled against provincial peace councils in many provinces. APRP officials deny the allegations. But Baghlan in 2014 had one of the highest numbers of participants in the country, despite concerns expressed by a peace council member in 2011 that the council simply did not have the right members to reach out to the Taliban.¹²⁴ “Most of them are Jamiat, and there are just a few Pashtuns. But they are just for show.” Moreover, after an initial rush into the APRP by commanders hopeful to join the ALP, it quickly became clear

that most of them would not be taken in. Although the program brought some Pashtun power brokers back to the government, at least temporarily, it seems unlikely that the current political context in Baghlan will allow space for local insurgents to reintegrate into civilian society.

Conclusion

Why, after four DDR programs in Afghanistan since 2001, are more men armed, armed groups more numerous, and society more militarized now than thirteen years ago? This report argues that all four programs were heavily shaped by the post-Bonn political context: the initial U.S. reliance on Northern Alliance and some Pashtun power brokers; the Taliban's exclusion; and the American-led "counterterrorism" campaign—the hunt for Taliban and al-Qaeda leaders—and then later wider counterinsurgency efforts, which both led to a massive influx of weapons and aggravated local conflicts.

In this context, DDR programs tended to magnify existing power dynamics, as the four case studies demonstrate. Powerful factions could use these programs to disarm rivals, many of those who lost out joining the Taliban. Any potential benefits of the programs were also overshadowed by the large-scale rearmament of militias to beat back an expanding insurgency. Today many anti-Taliban commanders and fighters targeted for DDR over the past decade are still armed and influential. Efforts to disarm insurgents were unrealistic and ineffective without a parallel peace process with Taliban leaders. Overall, DDR programs have contributed little to Afghanistan's stability—in fact they are part and parcel of broader trends that have made the country less secure.

The first program (2003–05), Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration, targeted the AMF that had helped the U.S.-led coalition oust the Taliban from Kabul and other major towns in 2001. Although it was presented as a neutral statebuilding exercise, major foreign powers saw it as a tool to reverse the consolidation of political and military power of the former Northern Alliance, especially the Shura-ye Nazar faction of Jamiat, which they viewed by then as a security threat.

AMF commanders had few reintegration opportunities in the new army, which would have been the most obvious destination for many of them. Those with connections in Kabul used that patronage to reintegrate into the ANP and other government departments. They usually took their men with them, which deepened the factionalization of the police and government. Those without connections in Kabul lost their jobs but often kept their networks, which instead of being disbanded were simply pushed underground. In the southwest, they either joined the Taliban or remobilized as anti-insurgent militia. In the northeast, they often pursued criminal activities until they remobilized later, when the insurgency spread there after 2007. In sum, the first DDR program, although it paved the way for an ANA generally regarded as more competent than the ANP and ALP, had a number of negative effects. In general, it worsened the factionalization of the state, especially the ANP, contributed to an expanding informal security sector, and fed the insurgency.

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The second program, the Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups, which started in 2005 and continues today, targeted illegal militias, including former AMF militias that the first program had been unable to disarm. It was rolled out, however, as the insurgency gathered force, which meant donors' support for the disbandment of militias was at best half-hearted. In part, donors feared that demobilizing the most powerful commanders' militias would prove destabilizing, particularly in the lead-up to the 2005 parliamentary elections. But donors also wanted to use militias to fight insurgents, given the weakness at the time of the regular Afghan forces.

Internal DIAG documents reveal that international force commanders resisted the disbandment of militias working with them and instead supported their legitimization through militia programs such as the Afghan Local Police. Thus, DIAG ended up targeting only weaker commanders, and more powerful armed groups were strengthened through militia programs. The second program therefore again deepened the exclusive political order. The prevalence of militias today presents a security challenge for Afghanistan almost as grave as the insurgency.

The other two programs, the Programme Tahkim Sulh (2005–10) and its successor the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme (2010–ongoing), aimed to reintegrate Taliban commanders and fighters. They were implemented for the most part in the absence of parallel talks with insurgent leaders, however, as part of a fierce counterinsurgency campaign rather than a broader strategy of reconciliation. They could not offer Taliban commanders long-term reintegration in the local government and security forces. Nor could they guarantee their physical security, unless rearming them in the ALP. Taliban commanders interviewed for this report were not interested in joining. Many more Taliban were reintegrated informally, during the 2001 U.S.-led intervention and, to a lesser extent, afterward through the personal intervention of tribal leaders and Afghan officials. Funds for the PTS and APRP programs seem to have mostly enriched already influential elites in the provinces and Kabul, and their followers, again strengthening an exclusive political order.

What do these experiences mean for the future of DDR in Afghanistan? The conventional UN model, with its emphasis on demobilization and short-term reinsertion assistance for fighters rather than on providing long-term jobs and finding a way to include their commanders in the local political order, is not viable. Experiences have given DDR a bad name in Afghanistan. It is seen as something embarrassing, something to be avoided at all costs.

However, simply discarding the idea of demilitarization and instead devolving power to local militias, as some statebuilding critics have argued, is not a solution. Despite the international community's statebuilding rhetoric, this is what has been happening since 2001, foreign troops supporting militias to fight the Taliban. Much like the government in Kabul, when local commanders become accountable primarily to their foreign sponsors, and able to enforce their will on rather than needing to win over local communities, they have tended to become more abusive. Their legitimacy in the eyes of those communities suffers.

The violence resulting from the proliferation of these anti-Taliban militias and of insurgent groups over the past years is now among the main obstacles to a sustainable peace in Afghanistan. The question of how to deal with them is a crucial issue for the current national unity government. President Ghani has vowed to take on the warlords and impose the rule of law, which would have a positive effect over time. However, his election could not have been possible without the support from local strongmen, who now expect to be rewarded with a government position. Excluding them could trigger more violence in the short term, amid an already unstable security situation. If peace talks with Taliban leaders are held, this would provide a major opportunity for demilitarization. But they and their commanders will also expect government positions and, like the local strongmen, will not readily agree to disarmament.

Lessons Learned

With this in mind, what are the main lessons from the past Afghan DDR experience for future efforts?

The success of demilitarization hinges entirely on the broader context and is a deeply political rather than a technical exercise. The wider political and military interests of foreign

powers, government factions, and other national and local power brokers undermined DDR. In Afghanistan, the continuation of multiple conflicts meant that powerful Afghans either did not support DDR or used it to their own ends. Meanwhile, foreign powers continued supplying allies with weapons even as they ran programs aimed at disarming them. Even the best designed DDR program would fail in this context. The drawdown of the foreign troops, an improvement in the relationship with Pakistan, and peace talks with the Taliban could prove a more conducive environment for armed groups on all sides to lay down their weapons. Much will also depend on President Ghani's and Chief Executive Officer Abdullah Abdullah's willingness to address militarized patronage networks at multiple levels.

Demilitarization reinforces existing power dynamics. The past four DDR programs strengthened the hand of those already in power and excluded commanders without good connections, often leading them to join the Taliban. They thus reinforced the patterns of exclusion that were among the major drivers of the insurgency. A reasonably inclusive government is both a prerequisite for and an outcome of successful demilitarization. President Ghani's new government could try to accommodate factions who have been left out of the post-2001 political order, either through a comprehensive peace agreement including all factions, which is arguably the best option but perhaps not feasible, or through deals with individual factions at the local and national levels.

Warring parties understandably resist surrendering military capability unless their interests are secure and they have achieved some of their political goals. DDR was attempted piecemeal, different groups targeted at different times. Commanders understandably resisted the effort when they realized rivals would remain armed. Demilitarization will not work unless embedded in a wider political process. It will take a long time for the warring parties to trust each other enough to actually disarm, and in any case, the enormous number of weapons in Afghanistan make complete disarmament a remote prospect. A deal with the Taliban, however, could at least diminish the high-level support for the rearmament and backing for strongmen in the provinces, provided key northern power brokers are brought along. Furthermore, it might also open the way to future prosecution of individual commanders inside and outside the ANSF who commit crimes and violate human rights. That could diminish local support for the insurgency and pave the way for further demilitarization.

The name, concept, and ownership of DDR must be revisited. DDR programs have so far been strongly influenced by the UN concept, which was developed based on experiences elsewhere in the world. Foreign donors hailed the importance of Afghan ownership but in practice were themselves often in the driver's seat on crucial decisions regarding the design and management of the programs. When Afghans were in control, they were usually elite groups in government and used the programs to further their personal interests. Foreign donors also often ignored or undermined locally owned informal initiatives to demobilize commanders. When designing programs, they also ignored Afghanistan's rich history of reintegration and reconciliation.

A new concept needs to be designed and managed with input from across the spectrum of Afghan society, including government officials, tribal and religious leaders, and militia and insurgent commanders and fighters. Decisions need to be taken as part of an inclusive political process that can guarantee the core interests and safety of all groups. International funding and support should only be available for a broadly supported initiative.

An alternative formulation for DDR will have to be used. The APRP already emphasizes reintegration in its name. In other countries, different words have been adopted. In some countries, ex-combatants are rehabilitated rather than reintegrated. Disarmament is usually associated with

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surrender. The terms *demilitarization* or *decommissioning* are often used. This paper mostly uses demilitarization, the idea of reversing the trend of the militarization of Afghan society.

Reintegration is the most important and most difficult, but often neglected, component of DDR. In Afghanistan it would require political inclusion. Since the Taliban's ouster in 2001, the loyalty of commanders to the government has usually been determined not by their history or ideology but by whether they were offered positions or opportunities in it. The resurgence of violence reflects the lack of such prospects. In a patronage-based society like Afghanistan, where the foreign-funded government is a main source of jobs and protection, political inclusion is vital.

Looking after mid-level commanders is important, even critical. Senior commanders often enjoyed the ties necessary to secure government positions, whereas mid-level commanders, with little experience off the battlefield and fewer political connections, did not. Yet their cooperation is crucial. Disarming them by force is unrealistic, and their fighters will usually follow their lead.

To achieve the cooperation of mid-level commanders, a high-level deal between the government and leaders of the Taliban, the former Northern Alliance, and other groups is a prerequisite, but not enough. Although the demilitarization of the countryside cannot happen without high-level support, the case studies also show the importance of local reconciliation and measures to address local grievances driving support for armed groups. Without these, local actors will simply find another outlet for their dissatisfaction. The Taliban movement may absorb these grievances now, but if its leaders become part of the establishment, disenfranchised local actors' affiliations will shift again.

Create attractive reintegration opportunities but impose conditions. The Afghan government lost control over commanders and fighters by cutting them loose through the first DDR program without effectively disarming and demobilizing them or integrating them into either civilian society or the ANSF. The best connected among the commanders used patronage networks to integrate with their men in the state apparatus. This strengthened particular factions in the government, who then used the state apparatus to fund private militias and protect criminals and human rights abusers.

This experience shows, first, that offering attractive reintegration opportunities is vital for successful demilitarization. It shows, second, that keeping command and control structures intact while integrating militias into the state apparatus creates insecurity. Offers of integration into the state apparatus, especially in the security forces, should be conditioned on individuals' breaking ties with commanders. Reintegration in the foreign-funded state apparatus may be the most feasible option for many given that the economy is fragile and the unemployment rate is high. This should be a consideration for foreign donors when deciding on funds for the ANSF.

It will not be easy to lure commanders and fighters away from profitable criminal activities, including the smuggling of drugs, weapons, precious stones, and timber. However, as the case studies show, the lower paid government positions do offer prestige, which drugs do not. Realistically, however, in many cases illegal activities will continue even if, or especially if, commanders obtain government positions. This is an additional reason to try to break up militias before integrating them in the security forces or elsewhere in the local government.

Accountability can reinforce but also challenge demilitarization efforts. Factions are unlikely to give up weapons if their leaders face punishment for previous crimes. On the other hand, the impunity with which progovernment militias operate undermines the Kabul government's legitimacy and fuels support for the insurgency. The new government's appointments, including local appointments, will be crucial. It must strike a balance between, on the one hand,

including potential troublemakers, ideally breaking their ties with militias in the provinces, and on the other, pursuing accountability for the worst crimes. Amnesties for Taliban leaders—who cause the majority of civilian casualties—are sensitive and should be decided through wider consultations. But the Taliban are not the only ones to have violated international human rights and humanitarian law and any accountability should be evenhanded.

Tying DDR to elections can generate momentum toward disarmament. Requiring prospective candidates to disarm ahead of the presidential and parliamentary elections resulted in many weapons—though often of dubious quality—handed in to the DDR and DIAG programs. But government factions and donors, fearing, respectively, the erosion of their support base and the destabilization of the countryside ahead of voting, only half-heartedly supported disarmament. If genuinely supported, the requirement could become a powerful incentive for militia commanders to hand in weapons in the future.

Nonstate armed groups should not be used to fight the insurgency or provide security. Given ANSF weakness, supporting nonstate actors is understandable. Militias' association with foreign forces and patrons in the Karzai government, however, have in many places distanced them from their communities, as they became primarily accountable to external sponsors and locally abusive. Villagers often have no control over them, and many fall victim to harassment, extortion, or unlawful killing. As foreign forces draw down, donors should support militia members' reintegration into the ANSF or wider society. This holds true particularly for militias guarding military bases and military transportation routes that lose their jobs as international troops leave.

This report makes it clear that the mechanics and design of DDR programs matters much less than the political context in which they take place. The four Afghan programs over the past decade have been shaped by, and reinforced, existing power relations. They have strengthened some of the most ruthless and divisive leaders. Perhaps their gravest impact has been to deepen the post-Bonn patterns of political exclusion that underlie much of the violence and that have driven support for the insurgency. They have also been eclipsed by the international rearmament and mobilization of informal militias. Attempts to disarm insurgents invariably failed when they were used as a tool to defeat the Taliban rather than as part of a broader political strategy to end the war. Demilitarization is only part of a wider political process, both with Taliban leaders and between progovernment factions. Until prospects for such a process exist, any demilitarization effort is likely to suffer the same shortcomings and is unlikely to contribute to peace in Afghanistan.

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Notes

1. Mats Berdal and David H. Ucko, *Reintegrating Armed Groups After Conflict: Politics, Violence and Transition* (Abingdon/New York: Routledge, 2009), introduction.
2. Interview with high-level Afghan official in Kabul, November 10, 2013; Michael Semple, *Reconciliation in Afghanistan* (Washington, DC: U.S. Institute of Peace, 2009), 19; Antonio Giustozzi, *War, Politics and Society in Afghanistan, 1978–1992* (London: Hurst Publishers, 2000), 172, 186–87.
3. The UN, which led one of the four programs in Afghanistan and supported two more, had in 2003, when the first DDR program started, just consolidated its DDR policies with the 2000 High Level Panel on Peace Operations report (the Brahimi Report), stressing DDR's importance and making recommendations how to plan, finance, and organize it. In 2001, the secretary-general's report *Prevention of Armed Conflict* recommended that the Security Council include a DDR component in the mandates of UN peace operations. In 2006, the UN would publish its *Operational Guide to the Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards*, which included among the goals of DDR "to contribute to security and stability in post-conflict environments so that recovery and development can begin." Bart Klem, et al., "The Struggle After Combat: The Role of NGOs in DDR Processes" (The Hague: Cordaid, 2008), 8, 9; UN, *Operational Guide to the Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS)* (New York: United Nations, 2006), 9.
4. UN, *IDDRS*, 24–25.
5. A solidarity group, or qaum, a key concept in Afghan society, "designates a group as a whole as compared to anyone outside it." Whitney G. Azoy, *Buzkashi: Game and Power in Afghanistan* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), 30. Solidarity groups can be based on familial, ethnic, tribal, and subtribal relations, but "other important affiliations include those based on the mujahedeen political parties or tanzims (which can represent a shared political or religious outlook, shared battlefield experiences or simply being part of a shared network with the access and the resources that provides), area of origin, shared economic interests, ties through marriage, and the bonds between former brother in arms, classmates and colleagues (the andiwali or comrade networks)." Martine van Bijlert, "The Taliban in Zabul and Uruzgan," in *Talibanistan: Negotiating the Borders Between Terror, Politics, and Religion*, ed. Peter Bergen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 99.
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7. International Crisis Group (ICG), "A Force in Fragments: Reconstituting the Afghan National Army," Asia Report no. 190 (Brussels: International Crisis Group, May 2010).
8. Antonio Giustozzi, "Military Reform in Afghanistan," in *Confronting Afghanistan's Security Dilemma: Reforming the Security Sector*, ed. Mark Sedra (Bonn: Bonn International Center for Conversion, 2002).
9. Barnett R. Rubin, "Identifying Options and Entry Points for Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration in Afghanistan," in Sedra, *Confronting Afghanistan's Security Dilemma*, 40.
10. UN, "Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan Pending the Re-establishment of Permanent Government Institutions" (Bonn Agreement), December 5, 2001, www.un.org/News/dh/latest/afghan/afghan-agree.htm. The agreement also urged the UN and the international community "in recognition of the heroic role played by the mujahidin in protecting the independence of Afghanistan and the dignity of the people" in coordination with the Interim Authority "to assist in the reintegration of the mujahidin into the new Afghan security and armed forces."
11. Mark Sedra, "Security Sector Reform in Afghanistan" (Geneva: Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, 2003), 11, 12.
12. Sedra, "Security Sector Reform," 1.
13. ICG, "A Force in Fragments"; Sedra, "Security Sector Reform," 1, 6; Antonio Giustozzi and Mohammad Isaqzadeh, "Afghanistan's Paramilitary Policing in Context. The Risks of Expediency" (Kabul: Afghanistan Analysts Network, 2011), 2.
14. As quoted in UN Code Cable on "DDR in Kabul," August 18, 2003, UN Assistance Mission, "DDR in Afghanistan," Unpublished Code Cable, August 18, 2003. See also Astri Suhrke, *When More Is Less: The International Project in Afghanistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 76; Richard Scarth, interview with the author, London, February 12, 2014.
15. Rubin, "Identifying Options," in Sedra, *Confronting Afghanistan's Security Dilemma*, 41, 42.
16. Sedra, "Security Sector Reform," 1–4.
17. As stated on the official ANBP website from the UNDP, www.anbp.af.undp.org/homepage/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2&Itemid=3 (accessed June 8, 2012). Mark Sedra, "Afghanistan and the Folly of Apolitical Demilitarisation," *Conflict, Security & Development* 11, no. 4 (2011): 473–96.
18. Rubin, "Identifying Options," 40.
19. UN Department for Peacekeeping Operations, "Second Generation Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) Practices in Peace Operations," (New York: United Nations, 2010), 4.

20. Michael Bhatia and Mark Sedra, *Afghanistan, Arms and Conflict, Armed Groups, Disarmament and Security in a Post-War Society* (New York, Routledge, 2008), 125.
21. DDR process as described on the website of the Afghanistan New Beginnings Programme, www.anbp.af.undp.org (accessed April 3, 2015); Antonio Giustozzi, "Bureaucratic Façade," in Berdel and Ucko, *Reintegrating Armed Groups*, 79.
22. ANBP, www.anbp.af.undp.org (accessed June 8, 2012). Under the DDR program, 57,629 light and medium weapons were also collected. More successful than DDR in terms of collecting weapons was the Heavy Weapons Collection program, which was formally launched by presidential decree on March 27, 2004, as part of the ANBP. At the time, a national survey estimated some 5,606 heavy weapons to be in circulation. But when the program ended in June 2006, 12,248 heavy weapons had been collected and cantoned. However, there are two qualifications to this success, according to Mark Sedra. First, the initial survey was limited. Second, commanders realized that the international military presence made heavy weapons redundant. Next to the Heavy Weapons Collection program efforts were also made to destroy stockpiles of ammunition through the Anti-Personnel Mine and Ammunition Stockpile Destruction project. (Sedra, "Afghanistan and the Folly," 485–86; Bhatia and Sedra, *Afghanistan, Arms and Conflict*, 129, 133, 134, 146.
23. Caroline Hartzell, "Missed Opportunities: The Impact of DDR on SSR in Afghanistan," Special Report no. 270 (Washington, DC: U.S. Institute of Peace, 2011), 9.
24. However, for the vast majority it was difficult to make ends meet. Problematically, many of those who were dependent on the reintegration packages of the DDR program to find sustainable employment faced challenges. The DDR program was initiated without skills and needs assessments of the ex-combatants, making it hard to select appropriate reintegration packages. Neither was the advice ex-combatants received regarding the reintegration package informed by technical studies, market analysis, feasibility studies, "and indeed understanding of the complexity of rural livelihoods." Even as early as the spring of 2005, 30 percent of the monitored ex-combatants' small businesses had folded. Antonio Giustozzi, "Bureaucratic Façade and Political Realities of Disarmament and Demobilisation in Afghanistan," *Conflict, Security & Development* 8, no. 2 (2008): 174. Reintegration therefore did not prevent ex-combatants from being reabsorbed into commanders' patronage systems.
25. Eric Schmitt, "Afghan's Gains Face Big Threat in Drug Traffic," *New York Times*, December 11, 2004.
26. UN, *IDDRS*, 13.
27. International Security Assistance Force, "Concept of Operations," unpublished manuscript, March 16, 2003.
28. Bhatia and Sedra, *Afghanistan, Arms and Conflict*, 136–38.
29. See ANBP website, www.undp.org.af/WhoWeAre/UNDPinAfghanistan/Projects/psl/prj_anbp.htm (accessed July 15, 2014).
30. ANBP, "Introduction to DIAG," www.anbp.af.undp.org/homepage/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=13&Itemid=28 (accessed June 8, 2013).
31. ANBP, Discussion paper, draft 2, unpublished document (Kabul: Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, January 19, 2005), featuring comments from Afghan MOD, American coalition forces, British embassy; ANBP, Discussion paper, draft 3, January 25.
32. Bhatia and Sedra, *Afghanistan, Arms and Conflict*, 138, 139.
33. *Ibid.*, 140.
34. *Ibid.*, 138, 139.
35. Christian Denny, "Disarmament, Demobilization and Rearmament? The Effects of Disarmament in Afghanistan" (Tokyo: Japan, Afghan NGO Network, June 6, 2005), 9; DIAG Joint Planning and Coordination Cell Planning Document, draft 3, unpublished document (Kabul: Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, April 17, 2005).
36. ANBP, "Introduction to DIAG,"
37. Skype interview with former DIAG official, November 27, 2013.
38. ANBP, Discussion paper, draft 2; Discussion paper, draft 3; DIAG progress report, first quarter 2007 (Kabul: Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2007).
39. See "Quarterly Project Report [First Quarter, 2007]," United Nations Development Programme, Afghanistan: Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG), www.undp.org.af/whoweare/undpinafghanistan/Projects/Reports/DIAG/Q1%202007%20DIAG%20Report.pdf (accessed April 4, 2015).
40. Internal ANBP planning documents identified 395 high threat groups of which twenty-five groups would likely not comply. Though the documents recommend targeting a few high threat groups to send a signal to others, they note that neither ISAF nor coalition forces committed to using force against these groups. Barbara Stapleton points out that ISAF support in extremis was agreed to in principle in 2006 but that in 2008 ISAF officials seemed not aware of the agreement's existence. Stapleton, "Disarming the Militias," Swedish Committee for Afghanistan Conference, 2009. Forced disbandment of militias was also not acceptable to factions of the Afghan government. This became clear when a pilot operation targeting a very minor Junbesh commander was stopped in 2007 and the topic of forced disbandment was not raised again by the management of the DIAG program. Skype interview with former DIAG official, November 27, 2013.

41. Giustozzi shows that the north, northeast, and western provinces account for 71 percent of the weapons collected and the south, southeast, and east account for only 16 percent. Giustozzi, "Bureaucratic Façade."
42. ANBP, discussion paper, draft 3, January 25, 2005.
43. Jonathan Goodhand and Aziz Hakimi, "Counterinsurgency, Local Militias, and Statebuilding in Afghanistan," *Peaceworks Report no. 90* (Washington, DC: U.S. Institute of Peace, 2014), 9. Afghan and international security actors—factions in the Karzai government; the international military, the C.I.A. for example—also unilaterally backed militias outside the programs listed above, such as the Kandahar Strike Force and the Khost Protection team, and often resisted officially registering them.
44. Sedra, "Afghanistan and the Folly," 483–84.
45. Lakhdar Brahimi made the comments during a round table discussion at the Brookings Institution. "Memo to the President: Expand the Agenda in Pakistan and Afghanistan," December 18, 2008; Francesc Vendrell, interview, Oslo, June 25, 2014.
46. Interview with member of Karzai's delegation to the talks, Kabul, May 2013; Anand Gopal, interview, New York, March 2014.
47. Speech of President George W. Bush to The Citadel Military College of South Carolina, December 11, 2001, "Selected Speeches of President George W. Bush 2001–2008," 91.
48. Semple, *Reconciliation in Afghanistan*, 48.
49. Human Rights Watch, "Paying for the Taliban's Crimes: Abuses Against Ethnic Pashtuns in Northern Afghanistan," *Human Rights Watch* 14, no. 2 (2002): 1–51.
50. "Countries Draw Up Taliban Proposal," *Chicago Tribune*, December 6, 2004, http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2004-12-06/news/0412070018_1_president-hamid-karzai-taliban-gen-david-barno. See also David Lamm, "Success in Afghanistan Means Fighting Several Wars at Once," *Armed Forces Journal*, November 2005.
51. Amin Tarzi, "Afghanistan: Is Reconciliation with the Neo-Taliban Working?" *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, June 2, 2005.
52. Luke Coffey, "Detainee Operations in Counterinsurgency Operations: Lessons from Afghanistan 2005–2006," *Small Wars Journal*, September 2009. The Afghanistan National Independent Peace and Reconciliation Commission's official website doesn't feature a description of the reintegration procedure, therefore the description of the International Crisis Group is used. ICG, "Talking About Talks: Towards a Political Settlement in Afghanistan," *Asia Report no. 221* (Brussels: International Crisis Group, March 2012). For more on the PTS program, see also Joanna Nathan, "A Review of Reconciliation Efforts in Afghanistan," *CTC Sentinel*, August 15, 2009, www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/a-review-of-reconciliation-efforts-in-afghanistan.
53. Telephone interview with tribal elder from Uruzgan, April 2014; ICG, "Talking About Talks," 19; Matan Chorey and Jake Sherman, "The Prospects for Security and Political Reconciliation in Afghanistan: Local, National, and Regional Perspectives," Workshop report (Cambridge, MA/Medford, MA: Harvard Kennedy School/Tufts University, 2010), 9; David Rohde, "Afghan Suicide Attacks Rising, Report Shows," *New York Times*, September 9, 2007; N. C. Aizenman, "General Predicts Taliban's Demise," *Washington Post Foreign Service*, April 17, 2005.
54. Simon Cameron-Moore, "US General Sees Taliban Split Over Ending Struggle," *Reuters*, October 12, 2004.
55. Anand Gopal, "Flash to the Past: Missed Opportunities for Reconciliation," *Afghanistan Analysts Network*, November 15, 2010; ICG, "Talking About Talks," 30; Semple, *Reconciliation in Afghanistan*, 47.
56. Kate Clark, "Another Hit at the High Peace Council: Arsala Rahmani Killed (amended)," *Afghanistan Analysts Network*, May 13, 2012; Gopal, "Flash to the Past."
57. ICG, "Talking About Talks," 23, 30, 31.
58. Semple, *Reconciliation in Afghanistan*, 39–41, 52; ICG, "Talking About Talks," 23, 28.
59. ICG, "Talking About Talks," 25.
60. Lamm, "Success in Afghanistan"; Astri Suhrke, Chaudhary Wimpelmann, Hakimi Torunn, Aziz Hakimi, Kristian Berg Harpviken, Akbar Sarwari, and Arne Strand, "Conciliatory Approaches to the Insurgency in Afghanistan: An Overview" (Bergen: Chr. Michelsen Institute, 2009), 8, 17, 18.
61. Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, "Afghanistan Peace and Reconciliation Program (APRP): Final Program Document" (Kabul: National Security Council Disarmament and Reintegration Commission, July 12, 2010), 1, 14.
62. Pentagon adviser Lt. Col. John Nagle (ret.) in PBS documentary *Kill/Capture*, aired May 11, 2011, www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/afghanistan-pakistan/kill-capture/transcript; interview with UN official in Kabul, May 30, 2011; interview with Western officials Kabul, April 10, 2011.
63. Interview with UN official, Kabul, May 30, 2011. The ISAF Reintegration Guide from the Force Reintegration Cell went as far as stating: "Reintegration is an essential part of the counterinsurgency campaign."
64. Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, "APRP," 16.
65. Ibid.
66. Ibid.

67. In May 2011, the JS was still opening provincial bank accounts and setting up provincial peace councils, though this should have been finished within the first hundred days. In Kabul it took longer than anticipated for the ministries involved in APRP to recruit dedicated staff and set up 'cells' to process project proposals from the provinces.
68. "Mid-Term Evaluation Report," commissioned by the UN, February 2013 (executive summary) unpublished report on the APRP.
69. Telephone and in-person interviews with current and former Taliban commanders, tribal elders, Afghan government officials, UN officials and insurgency experts, Helmand, Baghlan, Uruzgan, Kunduz, Kabul, 2011–14; Thomas Ruttig, codirector Afghanistan Analysts Network, interview with the author, Kabul, spring 2011; Anand Gopal, interview with the author, New York, March 2014.
70. UN, "Mid-Term Evaluation Report," 6, 16. The demobilization phase has shortened; improvements have been made in the collection of biometric data and other data necessary to assess a participants skills and community needs, and there is a clear vetting procedure involving a provincial level shura and the three security ministries.
71. UN, "Mid-Term Evaluation Report," 10, 11, 12.
72. Amnesties are not explicitly prohibited by international treaty law, but States are obligated to prosecute certain serious crimes, according to the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) and Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC). "Afghanistan is currently a member of the Geneva Conventions I-IV (ratified 1956); Additional Protocols (ratified 2009), the Genocide Convention (1956), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1983), the Torture Convention (1987), the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (2003). In addition, Afghanistan is a party to the Convention on the Non- Applicability of Statutes of Limitations to War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity (1983), which specifically bars State Parties from enacting legislation that provides for statutory or other limitations to the prosecution and punishment for crimes against humanity and war crimes and requires them to abolish any such measures which have been put in place (Art. IV)." ICTJ and AIHRC, "Discussion Paper on the Legality of Amnesties" (Kabul: Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, 2010).
73. The Kandahar region had historically seen tensions between Durrani and Ghilzai tribal confederations, and between the Zirak and Panjpaj branches of the Durrani. Under the Karzai government, the old Zirak Durrani elite who had been ousted under the Taliban regime returned to the Kandahar region, including Uruzgan and Helmand, to claim their positions, at the expense of the Ghilzai and Panjpaj power brokers. Historically, tension also existed within Zirak Durrani elite between power brokers of the Popalzai on the one hand and the Barakzai and Achekzai on the other. After 2001, President Karzai (a Popalzai) sought to boost the profile of former jihadi commanders from the Popalzai against those from the Barakzai and Achekzai.
74. They are thought to have once been part of the same Barakzai tribe, and tribal leaders still often act together. The Achekzai are Uruzgan's largest tribe.
75. The respective military strengths were two hundred men in the brigade against eight hundred to two thousand by Jan Mohammad. Jan Mohammad commanded eight hundred fighters according to Van Bijlert, "Zabul and Uruzgan." According to an unpublished commander chart of the DIAG program dated January 25, 2005, the figure was two thousand.
76. Interview with former senior MOI official, Kabul, March 4, 2013. The police pay and rank the reform process started in 2005 and aimed at "reducing the top-heavy officer class while vetting and testing five tiers." ICG, "Reforming Afghanistan's Police," Asia Report no. 138 (Brussels: International Crisis Group, August 2007), 12.
77. Van Bijlert, "Zabul and Uruzgan," 94. Janan Agha, a former Taliban governor, had married into the Barakzai and was able to live for some time near Tirin Kot under the protection of police commander Rozi Khan. But when Rozi Khan was fired in May 2006, this protection fell away and he went to Pakistan, according to local sources.
78. The U.S. Special Operations Forces operating in Uruzgan in the early years after 2001 seemed to have little knowledge of the local conflict dynamics. The Afghan Security Guards or Afghan Security Force (ASF), the same entity, provided base security and also often acted as a source of intelligence and assisted in military operations. About the close relationship between the ASF and the American troops Daniel Green writes, "The ASF...were very much part of our life." Green, *The Valley's Edge: A Year with the Pashtuns in the Heartland of the Taliban* (Sterling: Potomac Books, 2012), 24.
79. It could not be verified whether this claim was correct and what happened to these fighters.
80. Full names have been replaced with random letters for security reasons. Hamdam's assertions are confirmed by some of those involved in these contacts.
81. Van Bijlert, "Zabul and Uruzgan," 123.
82. ANBP newsletter, issue 5, January 2007.
83. Interview with U.S. Special Operations Forces commander, March 2008.
84. Translated from Dutch by the author. "Eindevaluatie Nederlandse bijdrage aan ISAF, 2006–2010" [Final Evaluation of the Dutch Contribution to ISAF, 2006–2010] (Den Haag: Ministerie Buitenlandse Zaken en Defensie, September 23, 2011), 56.

85. Around the time of his participation in DIAG in 2007, Matiullah said he had 570 men on his payroll as KAU commander. In 2013, that number rose to 1,100. Around 130 men assisted the American and Australian Special Forces in combat operations. Of the 1,100 men on Matiullah's payroll as highway police in 2013, only 300 were official police, leaving 800 men unregistered and operating outside government control. As a provincial police commander, he also commanded 2,300 ANP and 1,800 ALP in addition to the KAU. In 2014, he commanded 1,583 ANP and 2,250 ALP, and the highway police was included in the ANP. Interviews with Matiullah, Tirin Kot, 2013 and 2014.
86. This was the number the local JS gave in spring 2014; a year later, the official number, according to the national JS, came to seventy-nine. This shows how arbitrary the numbers are. See also the other case studies.
87. Mike Martin, *An Intimate War: An Oral History of the Helmand Conflict* (London: Hurst Publishers, 2014), 123.
88. The ISAF deployment increased from 3,300 British troops in 2006 to 30,000 troops from the United States, UK, Denmark, Georgia, and Estonia in 2010 and 2011. The Danish battle group was in command of the district Nahr-e-Saraj from 2007. Christian Denny, *Military Intervention, Stabilisation and Peace: The Search for Stability* (New York: Routledge, 2014).
89. The author is grateful to Mike Martin for his suggestion to explore this example.
90. See also Martin, *An Intimate War*, 126.
91. In the meantime, the DDR program had been adjusted to include special packages for mid-level commanders. However, from the ANBP's side, the new reintegration measures for mid-level commanders consisted primarily of short-term measures, such as workshops in Japan, literacy and Internet courses, and payment of salary for a couple of years. The Karzai government in some cases offered government positions, but again good connections with patrons within the administration were crucial for obtaining support. When he got back from his ANBP sponsored trip to Japan, Malem Mir Wali got financial support from the deputy chairman of the National Security Council to run for parliament. In 2005, he won the race to represent his district of Nahr-e-Saraj in Kabul. This in spite of maintaining links to militias in Helmand, which was against the electoral law. He was again elected in 2010. Malem Mir Wali, interview with the author, Kabul, February 2013.
92. Martin, *An Intimate War*, 151.
93. "When I was no longer governor the government stopped paying for the people who supported me," Akhonzada himself said in an interview with the *Daily Telegraph* in 2009 (Damien McElroy, "Afghan Governor Turned 3,000 Men Over to the Taliban," *Daily Telegraph*, November 20, 2009). "I sent 3,000 of them off to the Taliban because I could not afford to support them but the Taliban was making payments. Lots of people, including my family members, went back to the Taliban because they had lost respect for the government." Former provincial police commander Abdul Rahman Jan's men attacked the British troops in Nad-e-Ali after an eradication campaign had targeted poppy fields belonging to him and his followers. He also reportedly invited Taliban into the area. Dad Mohammad disarmed voluntarily in 2005 through the DIAG program in order to run in the parliamentary elections. Martin, *An Intimate War*, 174.
94. Theo Farrell and Antonio Giustozzi, "The Taliban at War: Inside the Helmand Insurgency, 2004–2012," *International Affairs* 89, no. 4 (July 2013): 845–71.
95. At the time of these interviews in the summer of 2014, the APRP in Helmand listed some three hundred participants, half of whom had been released from prisons; a year later the JS in Kabul listed a total of 215 participants in Helmand. The PTS program listed 172 participants. However, allegations of corruption in Helmand on both programs are widespread.
96. According to Mangal, most informally reintegrated Taliban join the ALP, making the militia program the main track for informal reintegration. Around 80 percent of those Taliban joined the ALP, he asserts, and only 20 percent of APRP participants joined the militia program. Mike Martin writes that "The [ALP] programme recycled some of the security actors' armed interests away from the 'Taliban' and temporarily towards the 'government'" (Martin, *An Intimate War*, 220).
97. In the fall of 2006, British forces backed a deal brokered by then governor Mohammad Daoud and elders from Musa Qala. The British moved out of the district in return for the Taliban pledging not to attack the district center. In the Alikozai-dominated area of Sarwan Qala in Sangin, local elders brokered a deal with U.S. troops in December 2010. According to an ISAF press release, "insurgent fighting would cease against coalition forces and foreign fighters would be expelled from the area" in exchange for reconstruction and development projects and the participation of Afghan forces in searches of compounds and patrols. Seven Taliban commanders signed the document outlining the deal that elders presented to the U.S. troops. ISAF Joint Command-Afghanistan, "Afghan, Coalition Leaders Broker Peace Deal in Sangin," Kabul, 2011. One of the commanders confirmed this in a telephone interview.
98. Martin, *An Intimate War*.
99. Ibid.
100. He gave different answers, however, as to whether they are part of the ALP and what their number is. In one interview he said eighteen, in another forty.
101. In the program document, reintegration into the ANSF is given as an option. However, APRP, ALP, and ISAF officials have said different things in interviews on the link between the APRP and the ALP. Some asserted that reintegration into the ALP was an option, and others that it was not. Generally, they

- emphasized the civilian nature of reintegration under the APRP. In practice, however, many APRP participants have been included in the ALP. See also Deedee Derksen, "Peace from the Bottom-Up? The Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program" (Oslo: Peace Research Institute Oslo, 2011).
102. Including Jamiat-e Islami-ye Afghanistan (Islamic Society of Afghanistan)/Shura-ye Nazar, Hezb-e Wahdat-Islami (Islamic Unity Party), Ittehad-e Islami bara-ye Azadi-ye Afghanistan (Islamic Union for the Liberation of Afghanistan), Harakat-e-Inqilab (Islamic Revolution Movement), Hezb-e-Islami-ye Afghanistan (with one faction led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and another by Maulawi Yunus Khalis), and others. In 1992, former PDPA officer General Dostum established Jombesh-e Melli Islami-ye Afghanistan (the National Islamic Movement of Afghanistan).
 103. Mir Alam's background is modest: He was trained as a mechanic. In 1989, he joined the Shura-ye Nazar faction of Jamiat after having fought for another jihadi party. He declined to be interviewed for this report.
 104. Peter Babbington, former head of the ANBP, telephone interview with the author, March 7, 2014.
 105. The two well-informed sources for this assertion can not be described for security reasons, interviews in Kabul in February 2013; Françoise Chipaux, "L'Afghanistan Sous le Joug des Milices," *Le Monde*, September 15, 2004.
 106. See also Philipp Münch, "Local Afghan Power Structures and the International Military Intervention: A Review of Developments in Badakhshan and Kunduz Provinces," Thematic Report (Kabul: Afghanistan Analysts Network, 2013).
 107. Ibid.
 108. Ibid.
 109. In a September 2008 interview with the author in Kabul, less than a year before he became vice president, Marshal Fahim expressed his dissatisfaction with the ousting of the mujahideen from the army in 2004, saying that he would support an initiative of former jihadi commanders in the northeast who had gone through the DDR process to take up weapons against the Taliban. Former jihadi commanders who had gone through DDR told the author about this initiative during a visit to Takhar in September 2008. During the interview, Fahim expressed anger with the Karzai administration, saying the mujahideen were against the government and for this rearmament initiative they wanted to work with their own "system, strategy, and ideology." However, he also added that if they were given "high positions" after the 2009 elections they could work with the government. Therefore, his support for the initiative seems to have been at least partly informed by electoral considerations and appears to have followed the logic also encountered at the local level (see case studies) that actors (threaten to) cause insecurity if they are not part of the government.
 110. Münch, "Local Afghan Power Structures," 40. In 2012, the majority of ALP commanders were non-Pashtun.
 111. No hard evidence exists on Mir Alam exercising day-to-day command over all the *arbakai*, which are thought to be connected to him, and they seem to operate with some autonomy. He is probably best viewed as their patron at provincial level.
 112. Interviews with Afghan officials in Kunduz and Kabul, 2013–14; Human Rights Watch, "Tomorrow We Shall All Die: Afghanistan's Strongmen and the Legacy of Impunity" (New York: Human Rights Watch, March 2014); and Gran Hewad, "For a Handful of Bolani: Kunduz's New Problem with Illegal Militias," Afghanistan Analysts Network, October 8, 2012.
 113. Lola Cecchinell, "The End of a Police Chief: Factional Rivalries And Pre-Election Power Struggles in Kunduz," Afghanistan Analysts Network, January 31, 2014. More than a year later, in November 2013, the provincial police commander Khalil Andarabi, and long-time rival of Mir Alam, was replaced with Mir Alam's ally Mustafa Mohseni. Many sources claimed that Fahim and Mir Alam had pushed Khalil Andarabi out with an eye to the 2014 presidential elections. Interviews with tribal elders from Kunduz, Kabul, October 2013; Cecchinell, "End of a Police Chief."
 114. Final report from the government commission investigating the Kanam incident, in possession of the author. Lola Cecchinell, "Taliban Closing in on the City: The Next Round Of The Thug-Of-War Over Kunduz," Afghanistan Analysts Network, September 2, 2014; Ghanizada, "20 Civilians Killed Following Clashes in Kunduz," *Khaama Press*, August 11, 2014, www.khaama.com/20-civilians-killed-following-clashes-in-kunduz-province-6536.
 115. Interviews with government officials, tribal elders, and ALP commanders, Khanabad, 2013–14.
 116. It was not possible to track the participants of the PTS program. However, as the PTS mainly operated in the time when there was very limited insurgency in Kunduz and Baghlan (donors started pulling out of the program in 2008, and after that time until the start of APRP in 2011 the program therefore mainly existed on paper), it is improbable that the high numbers of participants cited on the PTS website (1,077 participants in Kunduz alone) are realistic.
 117. How the APRP numbers in Kunduz evolved is difficult to assess. The head of the provincial peace council Assadullah Omarkheil said in an interview in June 2014 that around four hundred insurgents had reintegrated, which would correspond with the assessment of the head of the APRP secretariat. However, in October 2011 Omarkheil had already said to Pajhwok news agency that some four hundred insurgents had reintegrated under the APRP, a number widely quoted at the time. In April 2015, the national JS had listed 389 participants. Wahidullah, "Taliban Kill Ex-Comrade in Kunduz," Pajhwok, May 9, 2011.

118. Rahmani also claimed that another 215 Taliban commanders and fighters were “informally reintegrated,” meaning that they laid down their weapons without going through the APRP.
119. Françoise Chipaux, “Guns Still Call the Shots in Afghanistan,” *The Guardian*, September 30, 2004; Manoel Almeida da Silva, spokesman for the special representative for the secretary-general on Afghanistan, UN News Service press briefing, July 4, 2004. Transcription available at www.un.org/apps/news/printinfocus-news.asp?id=764; (accessed August 14, 2013).
120. During a fight of militias connected to him against the Taliban near Pul-e-Khumri in 2009, Amir Gul had reportedly mobilized four hundred men. Interviews with tribal elders, former provincial police commander Assadullah Shirzad, government officials, Kabul, 2011–14; Amir Gul, telephone interview with the author, May 2014. See also Hakimi and Goodhand, “Counterinsurgency,” 27.
121. Hakimi and Goodhand, “Counterinsurgency,” 31; interviews with tribal elders and officials, Kabul and Baghlan, 2011–14.
122. Another source of controversy are the accusations of human rights abuses in his area when he was working as a jihadi commander and later as a Taliban commander (interview with Western official in Pul-e-Khumri, May 24, 2011).
123. Mamor’s point of view was shared by other Taliban commanders, including Mullah Yunus, a former jihadi commander who reportedly was the main Taliban commander in Baghlan at the time.
124. In the spring of 2014, APRP participants in Baghlan numbered some 740, one of the highest numbers in the country. On September 3, another twenty-five joined. Habib Rahman Sherzai, “25 Militants Join Peace Process in Baghlan,” Pajhwok, September 3, 2014. In April 2015, the JS in Kabul listed 1,197 participants.



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Why—after four international programs designed to disarm, demobilize, and reintegrate militias in Afghanistan since 2001—are more men armed, armed groups more numerous, and Afghan society more militarized now than thirteen years ago? This report uses case studies in four provinces to illustrate how all four programs were heavily shaped by initial U.S. reliance on Afghan powerbrokers, the exclusion of the Taliban, and the American-led counterterrorism campaign. Full disarmament in Afghanistan, it suggests, is unrealistic—though a peace process with the insurgency might at least reduce levels of informal rearmament.

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- *Managing Conflict in a World Adrift* edited by Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson, and Pamela Aall (USIP Press, 2015)
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- *Talking with the Taliban* by Sean Kane (Special Report, January 2015)
- *The Afghan National Police in 2015 and Beyond* by Michelle Hughes (Special Report, May 2014)
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