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**War on its Head
An Oral History of the Helmandi Conflict 1978-2012**

Martin, Michael Peter

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War on its Head

An oral history of the Helmandi conflict 1978–2012

ABSTRACT: *War on its Head* demonstrates that the public understandings of the last thirty-four years of conflict in Helmand province, Afghanistan, have been poor descriptors and predictors of the conflict's dynamics. Examples of these public understandings include the holy mujahidin defeating the atheist Soviets, or the United States and Britain attempting to support a transition to democracy whilst being resisted by a fundamentalist insurgency: the Taliban. Drawing on extensive experience in Helmand province, one hundred and fifty anonymous interviews with Helmandi notables and Taliban commanders, and detailed secondary research in English and Pushtu, this thesis explores the Helmandi view of the last thirty-four years of their conflict, through three eras of external influence: Soviet, Pakistani and Western. It clearly shows that the same Helmandi private actors, feuds and narratives are driving the conflict, rather than the changing era-specific public narratives. The evidence presented here shows that this is because external actors have failed to understand the local, interpersonal nature of conflict in Helmand. The consequences for policymakers and scholars are discussed in the conclusion.

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**KCL Doctoral Thesis
War Studies Department
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for Chloe

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War on its Head began as a gut feeling and a meeting on a dusty helicopter pad in Helmand with a travelling academic, Theo. That he took me on that day, on the basis of an unconscious pitch, says something about his vision. However, between that point in 2009 and starting the PhD in 2011 (and beyond), many, many people supported me in shaping my ideas and helping me gain funding. Chief among those was Douglas Chalmers, but (alphabetically and without ranks) Alex Alderson, Newton Astbury, Richard Iron, Alisdair Johnson, Veronique Malone, Quentin Naylor, Mike Potter, Rich Roberts, Sir Bill Rollo and Kathryn Tomlinson were all exceptionally helpful in their comments and support.

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Being asked to read an obscure manuscript such as this is a deflating request to receive. My great thanks are due to those who offered their time in commenting on versions of the draft, including Mark Beaument, Martin Bayly, Andy Corcoran, Irene Dare, Christian Dennys,

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However, the biggest debts of gratitude that I have are reserved for the Helmandis, and for Chloe. To the former, for sitting, laughing, obsessing, explaining, scheming, hosting, conniving, dealing with, and manipulating me over the years. You have taught me more about humanity than a thousand years of study. To the latter, for saying yes, and making me the luckiest man in the world.

Note on referencing and footnotes

The ‘boxes’ that people are placed in (i.e. their public narratives) are at the heart of this thesis. The two main types of personal classification that I have used—by tribe and jihadi party—are problematic. To aide future scholars, I have included these details in parentheses after a person’s first occurrence in the text. This should be treated with some caution, as many of my interviewees habitually manipulated the labels that they applied to others. I accept that in ‘fixing’ them in this thesis, I am adding to them more weight than I should; however, I decided that the benefits of clarity outweigh the costs inherent in their arbitrariness. For example, if there are three Hamids, then often the best way of differentiating between them is to indicate tribe or jihadi affiliation.

With regards to tribe, many in Helmand re-interpret tribal lineage in order to reflect the current political situation. ‘Tribe’ is both genealogical and political and this ‘untrue’ depiction of ‘history’ is one way in which Helmandis explain the present. People change tribe.¹ In the text ‘tribal hierarchy’ is shown as Tribe/Sub-tribe/Clan/Sub-clan e.g. Barakzai/Nasratzai/Khanzai/Arabzai. Jihadi party is even more problematic. Several individuals depicted here changed jihadi party affiliation multiple times during the jihad, as well as working concurrently for the government. I indicate their contemporaneous party affiliation at that point in the text. I also accept that some government organisations—such as Khad—changed names several times. For simplicity, I have used the main name that Helmandis use for that organisation. Finally, I have gone against the usual practice of italicising foreign names in the text because of their ubiquity, instead reserving italics for emphasis.

Footnotes: Due to the variety of different sources used, I use a shorthand system of interview and secondary source codes, depicted over the page. For interviewee descriptions see Appendix 1.

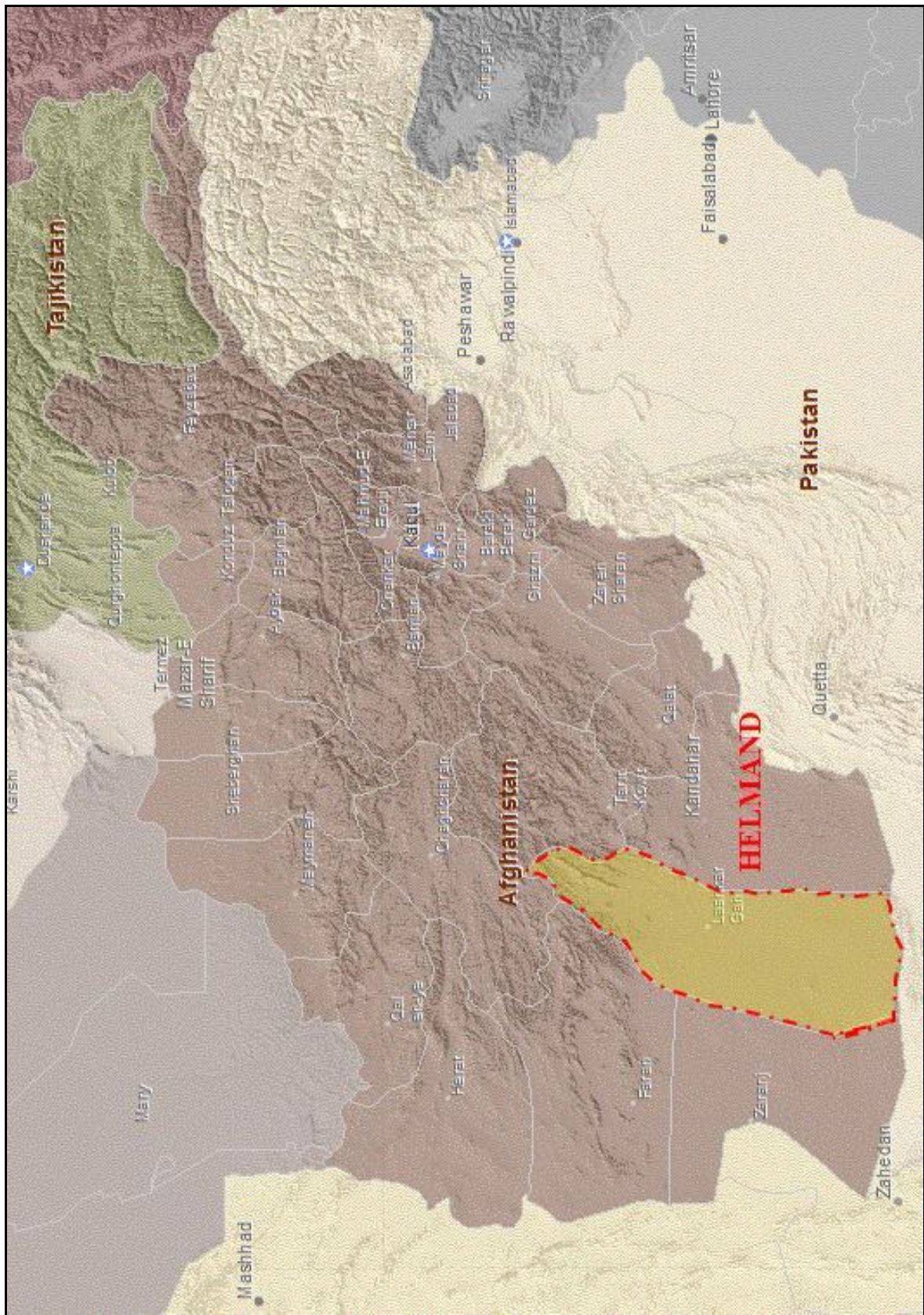
¹ Benjamin Hopkins and Magnus Marsden, *Fragments of the Afghan Frontier* (London, 2011): 44.

Three-digit code beginning 0 (i.e. 001)	Anonymous interview of Helmandi notable.
Three-digit code beginning 1 (i.e. 101)	Anonymous interview of ISAF officer.
Three-digit code beginning 2 (i.e. 201)	Anonymous interview of Taliban commander.
Three-letter code or name (i.e. MMW)	On-the-record interview of senior Helmandi or westerner.
Three-digit code with a 'G' (i.e. G102)	Refers to a Helmandi Guantanamo prisoner number. Source documentation and more details given in Appendix 6.
PersExp (i.e. PersExp, Bolan, 2008)	Refers to my personal experience.
Wiki (i.e. Wiki: '...' (05 June 2009)	From Wikileaks. Followed by cable subject and date. Archive available at http://cablegatesearch.net/
Redacted	An interview conducted by me where I have withdrawn the code to protect the interviewee.

Shorthand system of interview and secondary source codes

I have made great efforts to be accurate in my referencing; however it is inevitable that I may have made mistakes. If you feel that you have not been adequately referenced, the please let me know, and I will endeavour to rectify any problems.

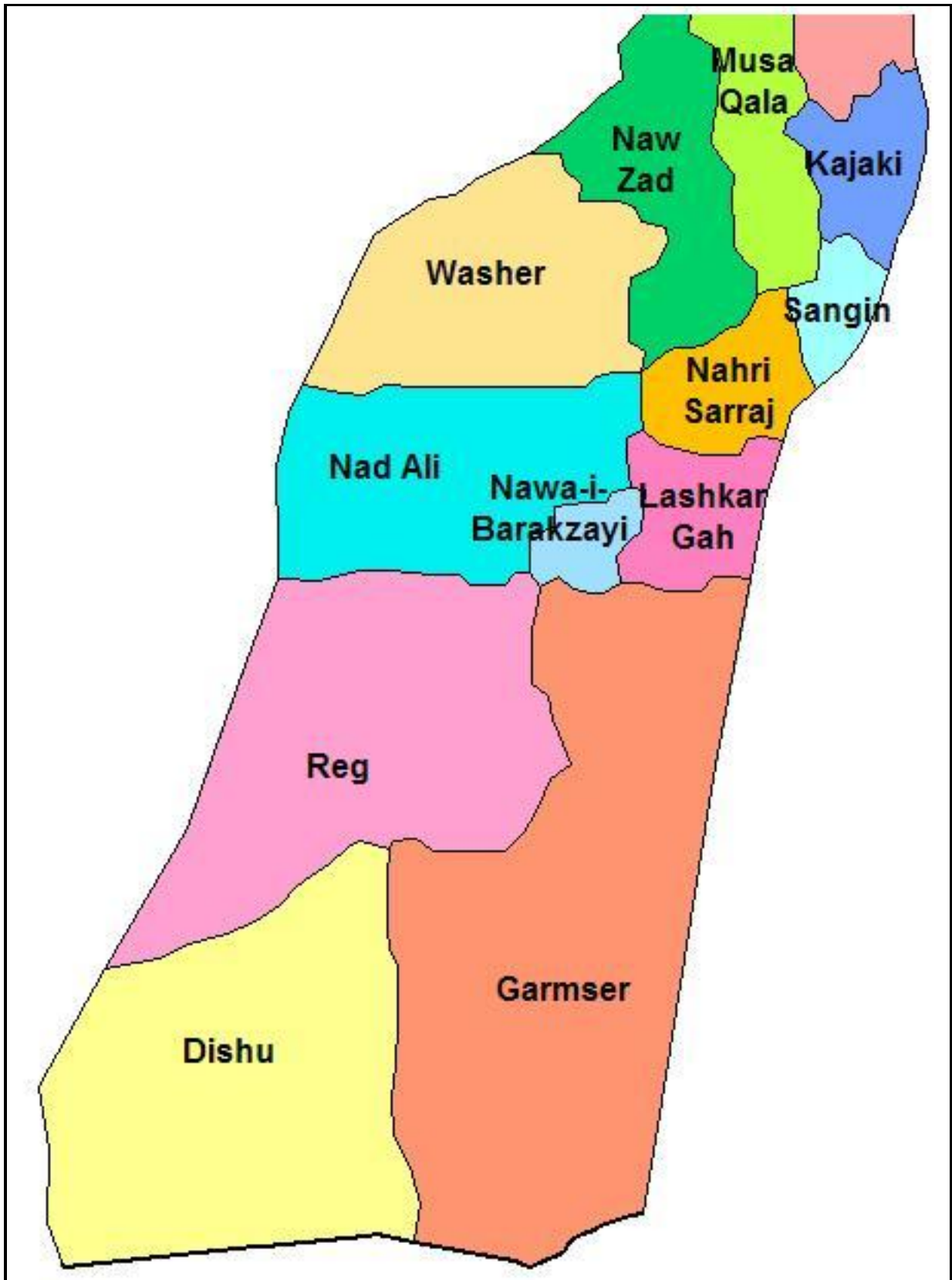
Maps



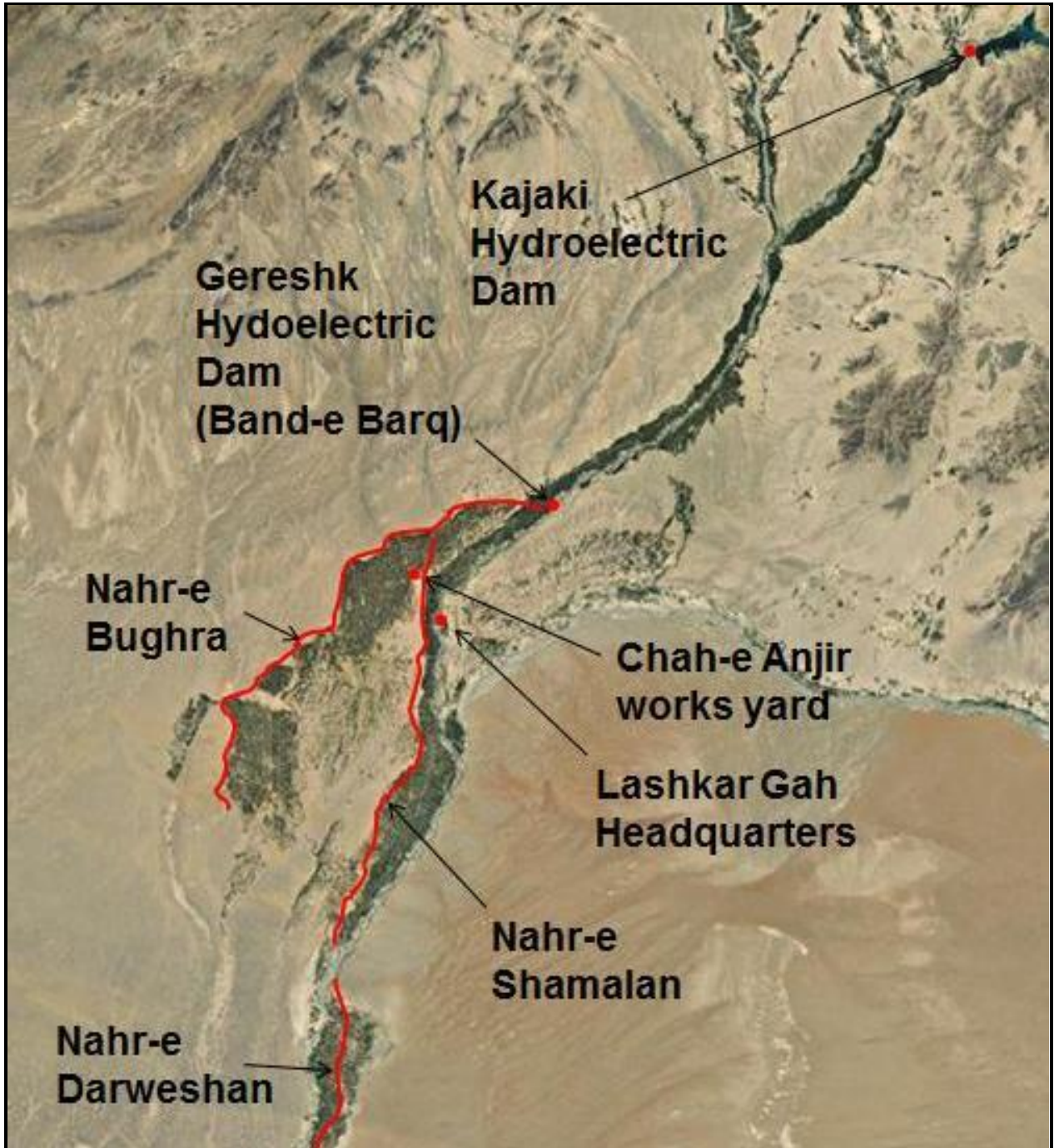
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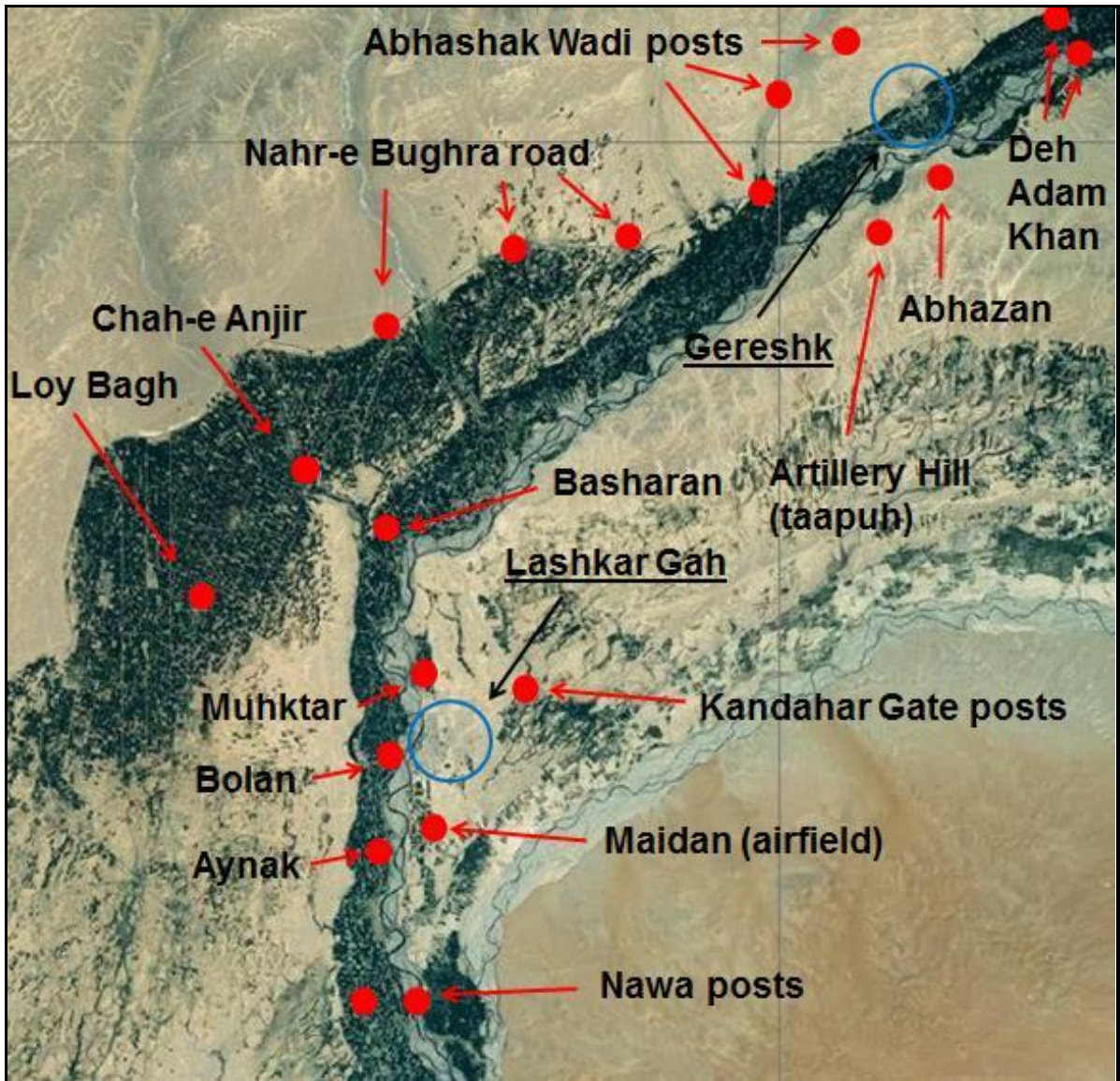
Map 2: Helmand indicating District Centres (map produced by Alcis Holdings Ltd).



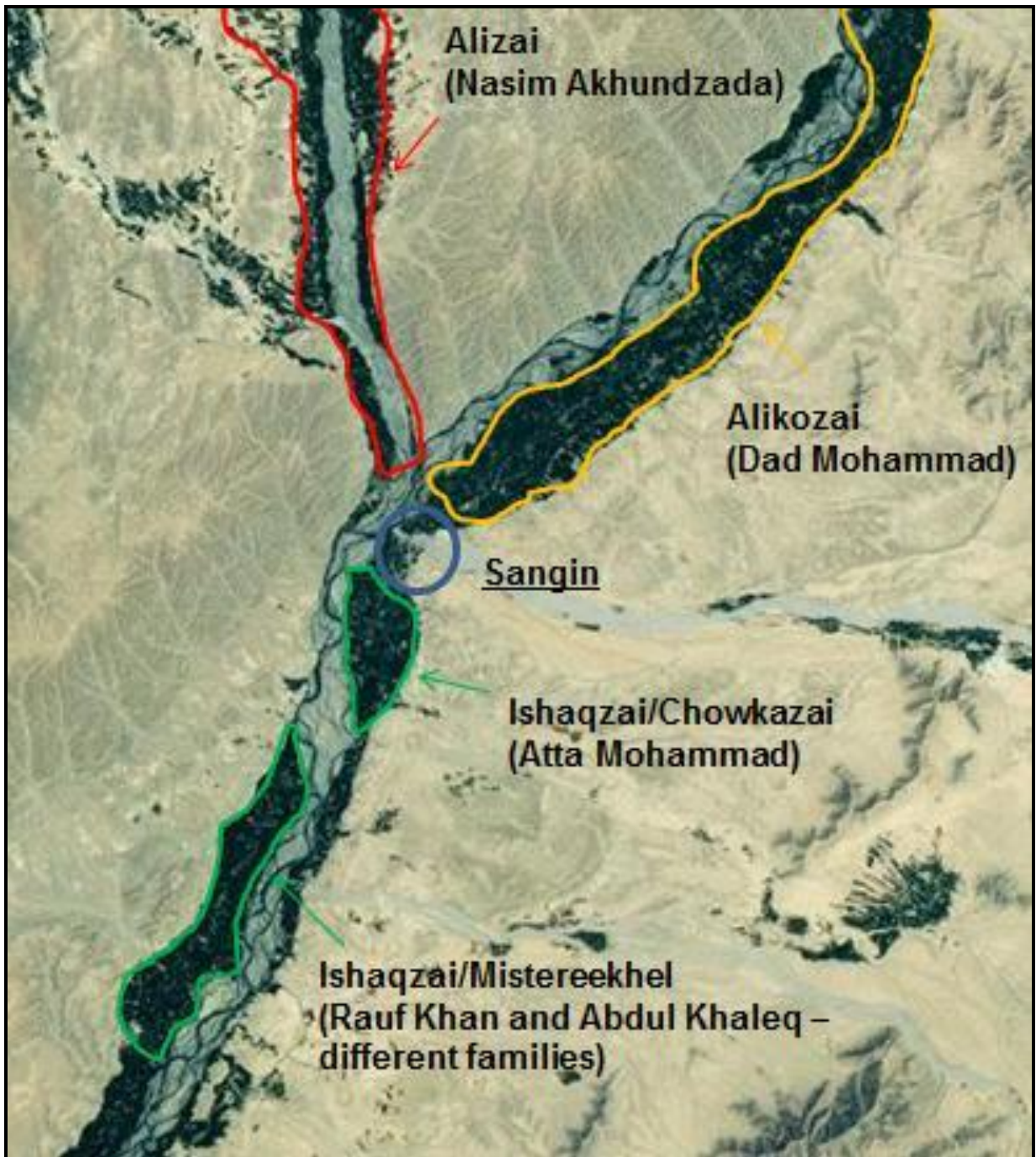
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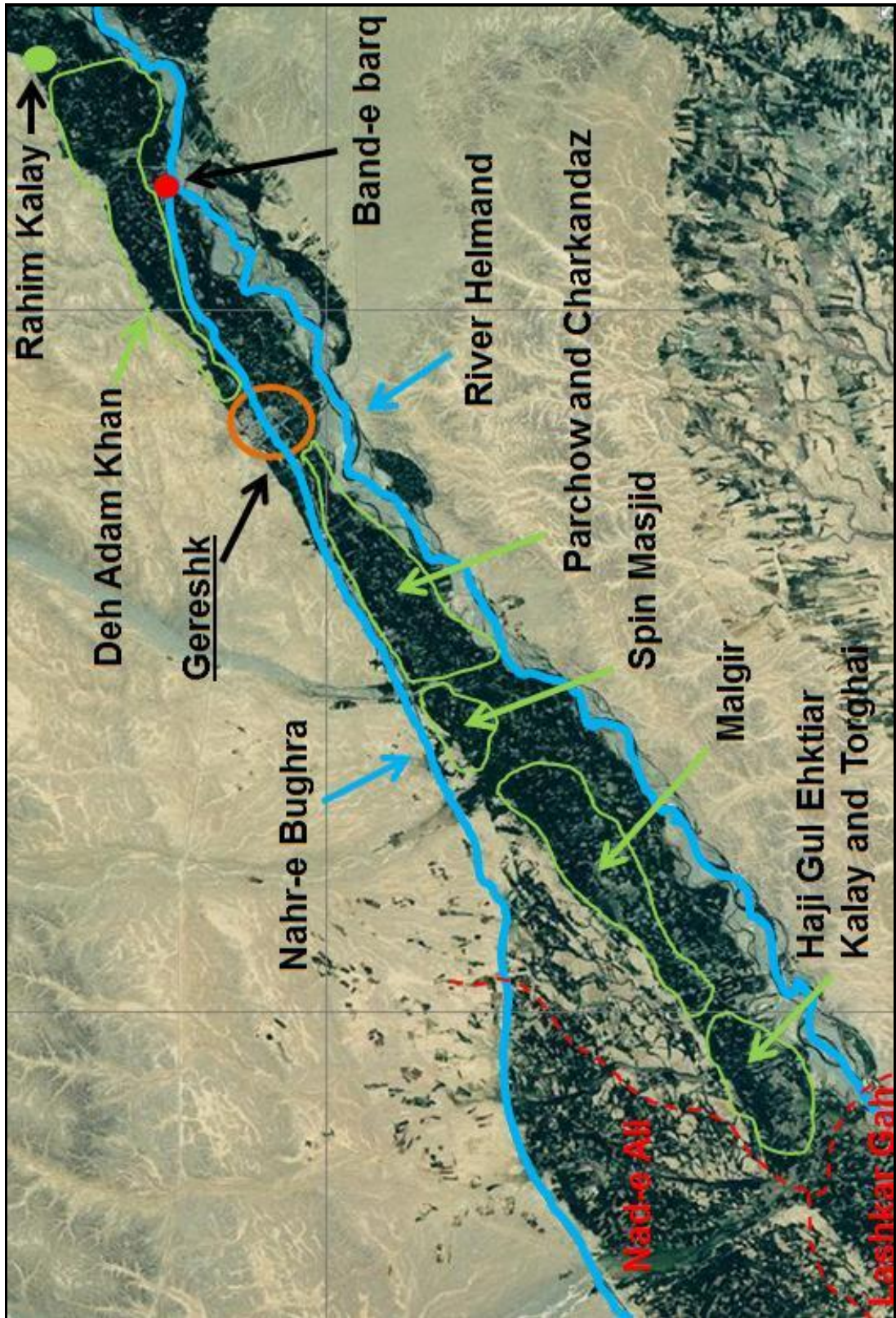
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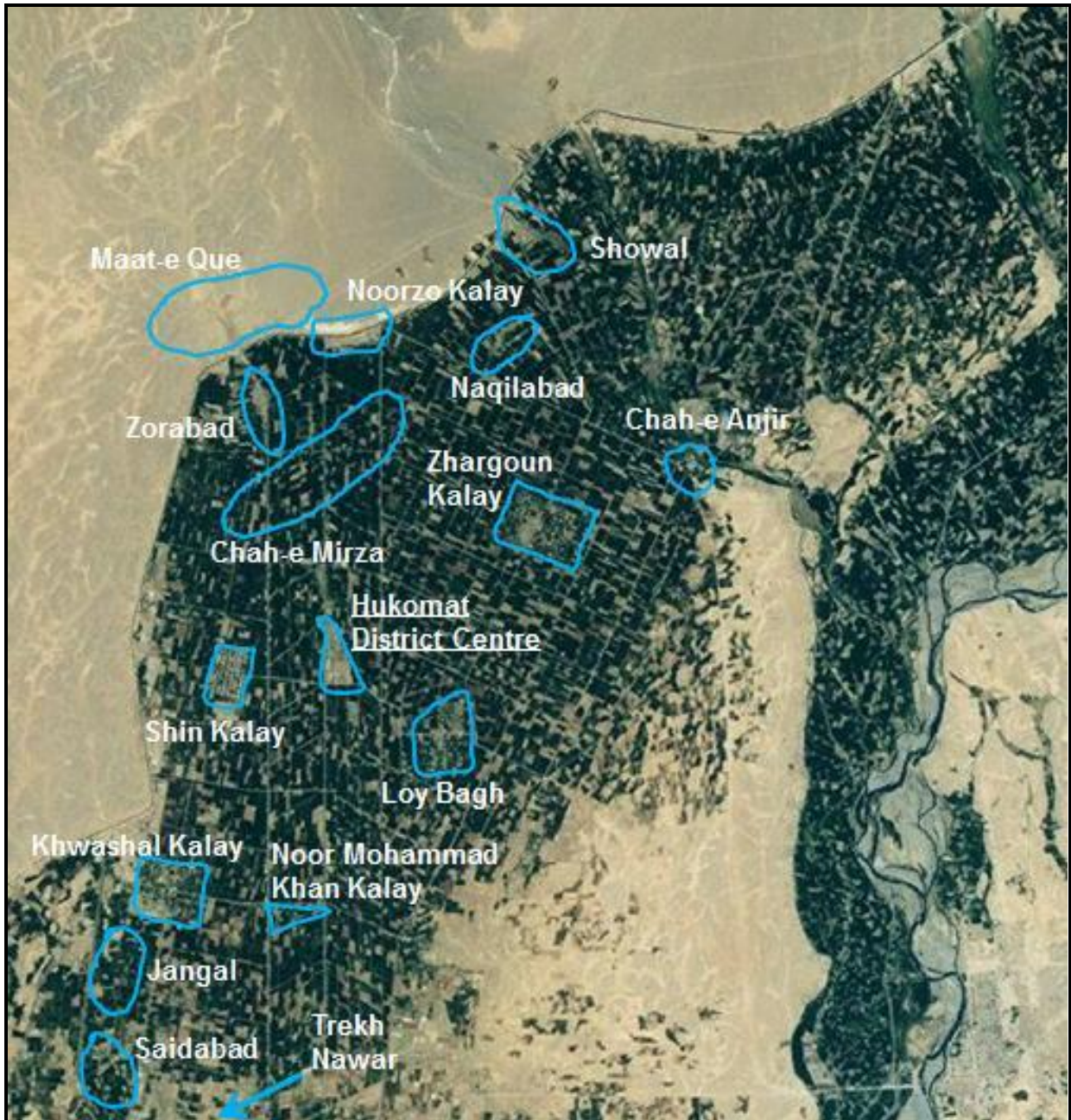
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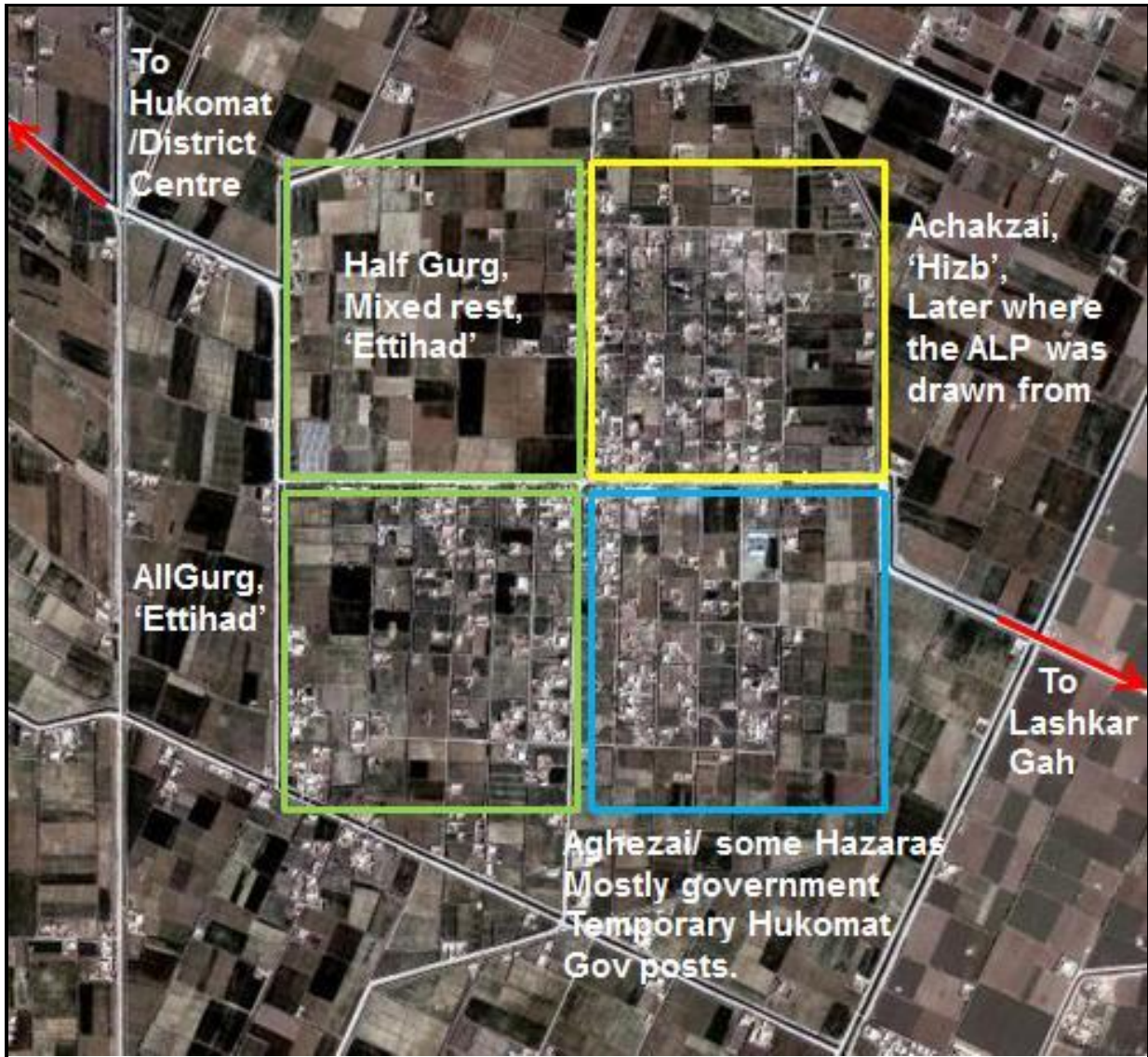
Map 6: Tribes and clans in Sangin—simplified (map produced by Alcis Holdings Ltd).



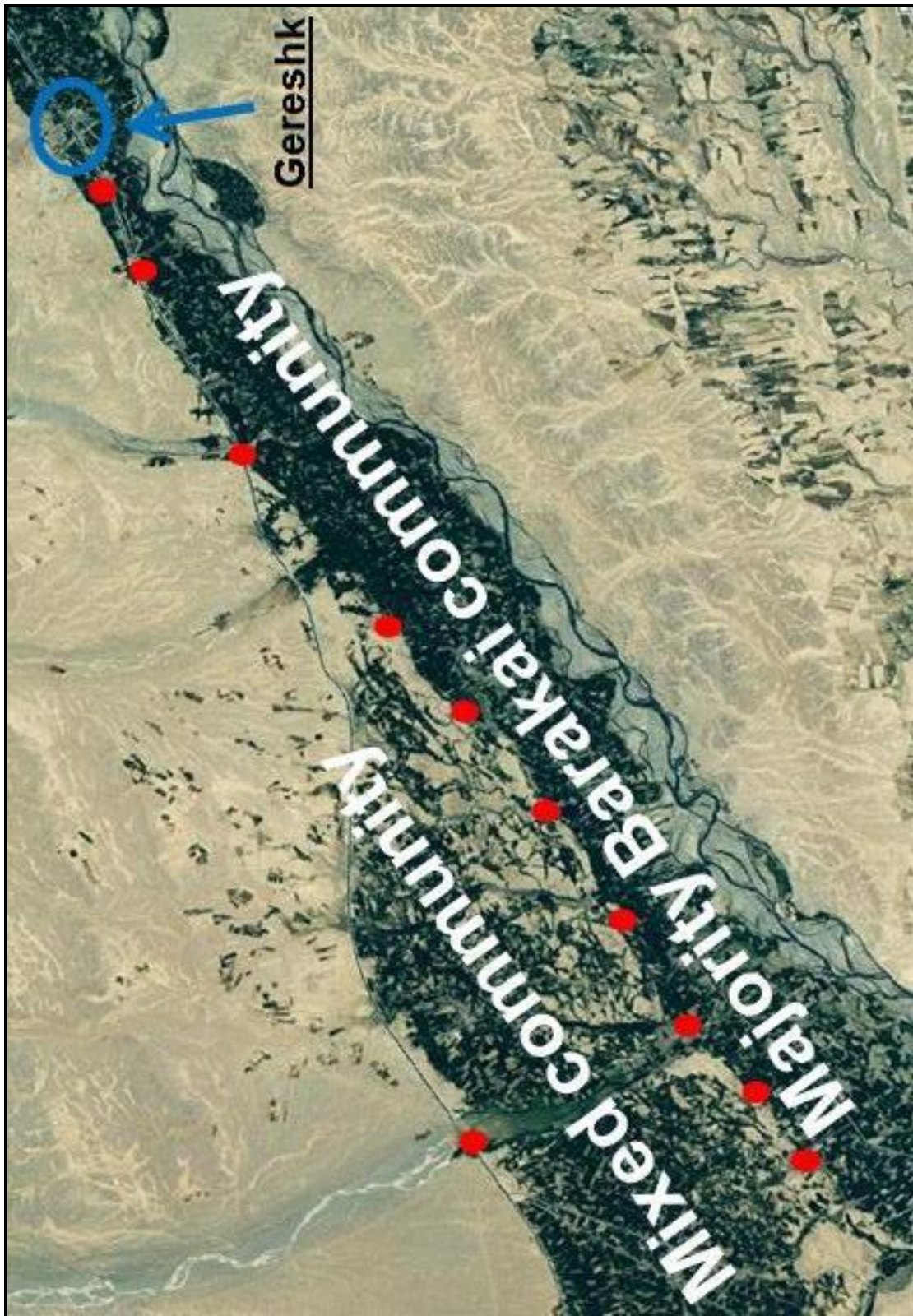
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Map 8: Central Nad-e Ali (map produced by Alcis Holdings Ltd).



Map 9: Loy Bagh (map produced by Alcis Holdings Ltd).



Map 10: Hajj Kadus' militia CPs—in red (map produced by Alcis Holdings Ltd).

Chapter 1: Introduction

The supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgement that a statesman and commander have to make is to establish...the kind of war on which they are embarking, neither mistaking it, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature. This is the first of all strategic questions and the most comprehensive.

Carl von Clausewitz²

They place before them the Qur'an
They read aloud from it
But their actions not a one
Conforms with the Qur'an

Khushal Khan Khattak³

Insurgency is a pejorative term, useful to governments in establishing their own or their allies' legitimacy and in defining their enemies. This thesis will argue that the current western⁴ view of the Helmand conflict as an insurgency is completely different from how Helmandis themselves perceive the conflict. Further, it will argue that the previous eras of the same conflict have also been mischaracterised both in popular understanding and the scholarly literature. *War on its Head* challenges tired clichés about this most individualist⁵ of lands.

The Helmandi conflict since 1978 may be defined according to three periods, each by main external foreign actor. The first period, running from 1978 to 1992, encompasses Soviet influence. The second period, running from 1992 to 2001, represents increasing and then dominant Pakistani influence. And the third period, from 2001 to present, has been one of American, and to a much lesser degree European, influence. This thesis will conclude that consecutive mischaracterisation across these three eras has exacerbated the Helmandi conflict. The epigraph demonstrates that this is not new thinking. However, in the context of the conflict in Afghanistan, and Helmand, it appears to be.

The violence in Helmand is currently viewed by non-Helmandis through the narrative of the International Community (IC)—I term this the 'insurgency narrative'. It is widely espoused by western governments,⁶ western militaries fighting in Afghanistan,⁷ western⁸ and Afghan⁹

² Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, 1984 ed. (Princeton, 1976): 88-9.

³ 17th century Pushtun poet.

⁴ Hereafter taken to mean America and European countries.

⁵ When I first went to Helmand, my 93-year-old grandmother wrote to me to wish me luck, whilst wondering how I would get on with the Afghans who were, she wrote, 'unrepentant individualists'.

⁶ House of Commons Defence Select Committee, *Operations in Afghanistan: Fourth Report of Session 2010-12*, vol. 1 (London, 2011): 31.

⁷ Farrell and Giustozzi (forthcoming) quoting *COMISAF Initial Assessment*: 2-6.

media and a broad variety of scholarly works¹⁰ and states that the IC supports the 'legitimate' Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA), and that there is a movement of insurgents called the Taliban, who have sanctuary in Quetta, Pakistan and violently oppose GIROA. From this perspective, the Taliban are seen as religiously inspired insurgents who are, for example, against the women's rights and democracy offered by GIROA. This is all true, and will not be refuted here. However, it will be argued that the Taliban are not the main drivers of violent conflict in Helmand. This thesis will also show that the Soviet era, and the civil war/Taliban era, have been similarly misconstrued. In the current era, much of the observed violence in Helmand is mischaracterised as 'Taliban' insurgent violence, when in fact it is not linked to the Taliban or GIROA, but driven by micro-dynamics between groups and individuals on the ground.

The 'insurgency narrative' of the Helmandi conflict did not fit my experiences in Helmand whilst serving as a British Army officer. I went several times to Helmand, with appropriate gaps between visits for study and reflection, and each time I returned this analysis of the conflict seemed further from the events that I was observing and participating in. As I witnessed the conflict, it appeared to be shaped and driven by (mainly) Helmandi individuals and their personal motivations. This thesis was born from my disquiet at that discordance. Over the last four years in Helmand, I have watched many foreigners (including myself) struggle with the portrayal of this conflict as an 'insurgency'. Often the words 'Taliban', or 'government', would often be caveated with 'but of course there are many different types of Taliban' or 'but government officials also smuggle drugs'.¹¹ This thesis is about the 'but'. I will show, for example, that the reason the 'policeman' is in the 'government' is to protect his other business. 'Government' is a temporary label, nothing more. In the outsiders' world, however, once caveated, we would continue to use the words and concepts of 'government' and 'Taliban' as units of functional analysis around which strategy could be planned, or ideologies computed. We became victims of our own labels for the phenomena that we were observing, because we had retreated to easy constructs that would support us in our attempts to plan, analyse and act.

This thesis will not assert, nihilistically, is that the Taliban do not exist. There is a movement, based loosely around the leadership of the ousted Taliban government, based somewhere in

⁸ 'Afghan Insurgency 'clearly on back foot', [BBC News](#) (1 Feb 2012); 'Taliban attacks show Afghan insurgents' resilience', [The Guardian](#) (21 Jan 2013).

⁹ 'ISI accused of backing Taliban's [sic] insurgency', [Pajhwok](#) (13 Feb 2012).

¹⁰ e.g. Antonio Giustozzi, [Koran, Kalashnikov and Laptop](#) (London, 2008); Thomas Johnson and Chris Mason, "Understanding the Taliban and Insurgency in Afghanistan" [Orbis](#) 51, no. 1 (2008); Farhana Schmidt, "From Islamic Warriors to Drug Lords: The Evolution of the Taliban Insurgency" [Mediterranean Quarterly](#) 21, no. 2 (2010).

¹¹ 'Is Afghanistan a Narco-State', [NY Times](#) (27 Jul 2008); PersExp, Helmand, 2008-12.

Pakistan. Similarly, this thesis does not seek to question that there was a Soviet-backed government in Kabul, or several mujahidin parties based in Peshawar. But the fact that the Helmandi conflict has been continuing for thirty-four years—involving, as documented here for the first time, the same individuals, family networks and clan disputes—yet has been described as a succession of different conflicts, demonstrates that something is amiss with this commonly-held public understanding. This concept of intergroup dynamics driving violence has led me to the civil war literature in the hope that it may offer more explanatory power than the insurgency literature when studying Helmand.

Following on from Rob Johnson's ground-breaking *The Afghan Way of War*, this thesis is a modest attempt to articulate the idea that the views generally espoused in the West of the Afghan war, and specifically the Helmandi war, have not been the views that Helmandis subscribe to, or even recognise, as the primary explanation for the violence that is occurring around them.¹² To them, more often than not, 'communist', 'government', 'Hizb-e Islami' (to choose a mujahidin party at random), 'Taliban' and so on are merely labels that are chosen and discarded depending on circumstances or context, and imply little presumption of genuine ideological affiliation. This thesis is going to explain how Helmandis view their own conflict.

This chapter has so far discussed the 'insurgency narrative' in Helmand and proposed an alternative: that the concept of 'civil war' offers more utility in understanding the Helmandi conflict than the concept of 'insurgency'. To that end a review of the theoretical literatures on insurgency and civil war is next presented. This review will conclude that the differences between the two literatures are slight, yet the terms 'insurgency' and 'civil war' mean different things etymologically. This is particularly important when/if foreign leaders decide to intervene in another country's internal war. I conclude by exploring the work of Stathis Kalyvas, upon whose work is based the theoretical framework for this thesis: his work echoes my observations whilst serving in Helmand province as an army officer.

This will be followed by reviews of the anthropological and historical literatures. Then I will discuss my antithesis and thesis, before offering the research methodology, caveats and limitations. The chapter will conclude with a brief outline of the rest of the thesis. In sum, this first chapter shows where this research sits both theoretically, anthropologically and historically, and describes how it was conducted.

¹² Rob Johnson, *The Afghan Way of War* (London, 2011): x & 2.

1.1a - Insurgency and civil war

Insurgency and civil war are generally analysed and written upon by different types of people. Insurgency theory primarily derives from the writings of either insurgents or counterinsurgents; ergo first or second hand. Civil war theory is mainly written by academics; ergo third hand.¹³ They are looking at the same process from different viewpoints—insurgents and counterinsurgents generally participate in and study the process from the beginning, so even when combatants take control of territory and move in regular formations, they are still classified as insurgents, guerrillas or rebels.¹⁴ On the other hand, civil war scholars usually take a more temporally removed, theoretical viewpoint where insurgents are but an expression of the asymmetric stage of the civil war dynamic.¹⁵

The etymology of these two terms allows another way of analysing the difference, and offers clues as to the different connotations that people draw from them, should they not be well versed with the theoretical nuance. The word insurgent is defined in the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* as a 'person who rises in *active* revolt against authority; a rebel, a revolutionary [author's italics]', and comes from the Latin *insurgere*, meaning to rise up. A civil war is defined in the same dictionary as 'a war between citizens of the same country'; the word civil comes from the Latin *civilis*, meaning relating to citizens. The word 'revolutionary' firmly associates the practice of insurgency with politics and ideology, whilst 'rebel' bestows the romantic notion of small groups of men fighting for a cause, hopelessly outnumbered. The words 'civil' and 'relating to citizens' imply wars fought between groups that are more equal in standing and in form; it is a conflict fought between defined groups whereas an insurgency is about forming groups.

There are two crucial differences in the etymologies and their respective evocations. First, the concept of legitimacy. Thus, an insurgent will be seen to have a different level of legitimacy to the government that he is fighting, either higher or lower. Intuitively, this is linked to the degree of preference for the espoused insurgent ideology by an 'objective' outsider. So, if a western government intervenes to support another government, then the insurgents must have a lower legitimacy, by definition; and this may differ from how

¹³ Of course, there are academics who write on COIN (see, for example, David Ucko, *The New Counterinsurgency Era: Transforming the US Military for Modern Wars* (Washington DC, 2009)), but more widely read (i.e. the 'classics') are those works by counterinsurgents (for example, David Galula or David Kilcullen, discussed later in more detail) or those works by former practitioners of COIN (for example, John Mackinlay or John Nagl). Moreover, those insurgency tomes written purely by academics rely heavily on the writings on insurgents and counterinsurgents (for example, David Betz, "Insurgency and Counterinsurgency," in *The International Studies Encyclopedia*, ed. Robert Denemark (Oxford: Blackwell Reference, 2010)). Conversely, for example, whilst the British Army has a COIN doctrine, it does not have a counter-civil war doctrine.

¹⁴ Claire Metelits, *Inside Insurgency* (New York, 2009): 79-80.

¹⁵ Stathis Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge, 2006): 67.

members of the population in that country may feel. Conversely, in a civil war, where *everyone* is a citizen, legitimacy of the two sides will be perceived as commensurate, either high, or more likely, low. The second difference is that if there is an insurgency, there must be a government ('...against authority'); this need not be the case in a civil war, although it usually is. Figure 1 shows a representative spectrum of these differences; the spectrum does not list absolute qualities of an insurgency or a civil war, but illustrates those qualities that the two types of warfare will tend to, as conceptualised in the expert and non-expert mind.

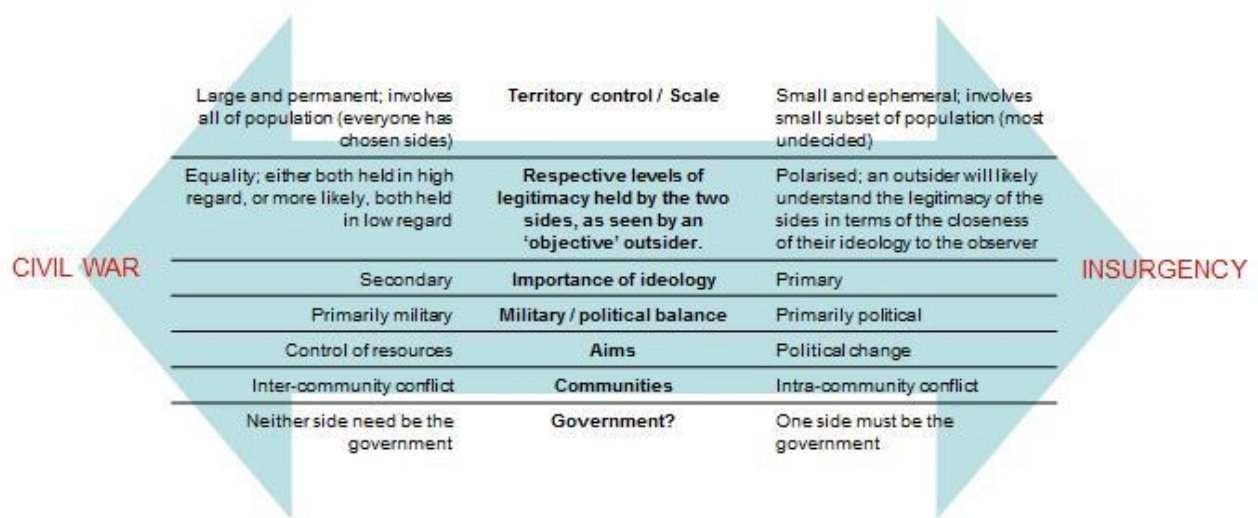


Figure 1: Spectrum of the etymologically based connotations of the words 'insurgency' and 'civil war'.

The common understanding is that insurgency and civil war are two very different forms of conflict, and personal involvement has led insurgents and counterinsurgents to elevate insurgency into a separate type of warfare, rather than a different stage of the same conflict, as the theory will now demonstrate.

1.1b - Insurgent theorists

Insurgency is as old as conventional warfare,¹⁶ but traditionally they have been studied separately.¹⁷ Much has been written about insurgency, especially recently,¹⁸ and although there has been a clear developmental trend in understanding over the last century, the theory is neater than the object of study would have us believe. That is the nub of the issue: every 'insurgency' is different and there is a danger of imposing a generalised narrative on specific events.

¹⁶ Here defined as "a form of warfare conducted by using conventional military weapons and battlefield tactics between two or more states in open confrontation. The forces on each side are well-defined, and fight using weapons that primarily target the opposing army".

¹⁷ Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World* (London, 2006): 1-3.

¹⁸ The publication of new US COIN doctrine (US Army, "Field Manual 3-24: Counterinsurgency," (Washington DC: Department of the Army, 2006) sparked an almost evangelical rush to rediscover the 'lost' tenets of COIN, even amongst the general public.

Insurgency can be defined as ‘an organised, violent subversion used to effect or prevent political control, as a challenge to established authority’.¹⁹ This is a broad definition that covers almost all types of non-interstate warfare—as will be discussed in greater detail when insurgency and civil war theory are compared. The final introductory point to make about insurgency theory is that much of it is written by counterinsurgents: insurgents generally only publish books once they have achieved success, and most insurgencies are unsuccessful.²⁰ Therefore, special attention will be paid to the work of Lawrence, Mao, Che Guevara and Gerry Adams—all insurgents, albeit of different types. These insurgents have been selected because they epitomise developments that are pertinent to the ‘insurgency narrative’ discussed above: insurgent military tactics, ideology/revolutionary politics, prominent events and counterinsurgent overreaction, and the importance of the diaspora safe haven and the counterinsurgent’s home population.²¹

The four insurgents and the methods they espouse are not unique in the literature: the military tactics discussed by Lawrence were used, for example, by the Spanish guerrillas in the peninsular war of the early 1800s,²² and he emphasises the virtue of propaganda,²³ something one might associate with later writers like David Galula or Mao. Mao, for his part, is perhaps the most copied insurgent in the whole of history: his ideology and modus operandi were a fortuity in the de-imperialistic cold war context. Che Guevara’s methods were considered unsuccessful by many at the time,²⁴ yet his idea of encouraging the people to fight through explicit deeds and provoking overreaction has found resonance in 21st century terrorism. Furthermore, many other insurgencies are reliant upon these themes, or a combination of them: the French maquis used insurgent (military) tactics during the run up to Operation Overlord, or D-Day, in 1944, but had no unified ideology save for anti-Nazism;²⁵ the Tamil Tigers rely (relied?) heavily on their diaspora for supplying funding in their struggle for a Tamil homeland, but were less able to use the counterinsurgents’ home population

¹⁹ British Army, Field Manual Vol 1. Part 10 Countering Insurgency (London, 2009): paras 1-10; the British Army’s definition of insurgency is deliberately used throughout this thesis in order to ensure consistency with the NATO / IC insurgency narrative discussed above.

²⁰ Ben Connable and Martin Libicki, How Insurgencies End (Washington, 2010): xvi.

²¹ Most western news reports on the NATO-Taliban conflict in Afghanistan will mention at least one of the following frameworks to understanding: 1) Taliban use of asymmetric tactic (e.g. road-side bombs); 2) Taliban ideology, especially religious conservatism; 3) Potential or desire to do (spectacular) suicide attacks; 4) NATO using too much force and killing civilians and 5) The importance of Pakistan as a haven for the Taliban.

²² Smith, Utility: 157.

²³ TE Lawrence, "The 27 Articles" The Arab Bulletin 20(1917).

²⁴ Timothy Wickham-Crowley, Exploring Revolution: Essays on Latin American Insurgency and Revolutionary Theory (New York, 1991): 45-6.

²⁵ Matthew Cobb, The Resistance: The French Fight Against the Nazis (London, 2009): 4.

against them;²⁶ conversely, al-Qaeda understood very well the importance of the counterinsurgent nation's home audience and provoking counterinsurgent overreaction.²⁷

Lawrence would most likely not have been successful in China or even Belfast: each of the insurgents, and the tactics that they chose to use, were a product of personality and conditions. Lawrence, Mao, Guevara and Adams have been chosen as all four developed successful insurgencies, and *then wrote about their experiences*. Their success stems from choosing the correct application of strategy and tactics to their idiosyncratic situations. In choosing these examples, and those developments outlined by counterinsurgents such as David Kilcullen, I will lay the foundations for a modern understanding of insurgency relevant to Afghanistan and Helmand. We are unlucky in that 21st century insurgents such as Mullah Omar, the leader of the Afghan Taliban, or Osama Bin Laden,²⁸ the late leader of al-Qaeda, have not written detailed accounts of their experiences as insurgents.²⁹

Before the 20th century, 'insurgent' warfare was seen primarily as a military form of conflict and it is only since the 1930s and 1940s that it has been theoretically understood as 'revolutionary' or 'political',³⁰ although in practice it has been 'political' since Lawrence (see below). This is perhaps the result of its separate treatment from conventional warfare, which Clausewitz described as 'a continuation of politics by other means'.³¹ Arguably, revolutionary insurgency is a continuation of war by political means.³² The addition of revolutionary politics has allowed insurgency to become much more potent and an *offensive* form of warfare, taking ground and achieving objectives, rather than the *defensive* form, focussed on preventing the enemy taking ground, that Clausewitz saw.³³

This addition of politics to insurgency began with perhaps the most influential western insurgent theorist of all time³⁴—T E Lawrence—who catalysed Arab forces to defeat the Turks during World War 1. In his seminal work, *The 27 Articles*, he outlined what he saw as

²⁶ Gordon Weiss, *The Cage: The Fight for Sri Lanka & the Last Days of the Tamil Tigers* (London, 2011): 55.

²⁷ Brian Jenkins, *Countering al-Qaeda* (Washington DC, 2003): 7.

²⁸ Although the US government would label him a 'Terrorist', the academic community label him a 'Global Insurgent'. See John Mackinlay, "Osama Bin Laden - Global Insurgent" *African Security Review* 10, no. 4 (2001).

²⁹ The nearest thing is Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's account, but this does not cover his period as an insurgent, but rather as a member of the Interim Islamic Government from 1992-6: Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, *Secret Plans Open Faces: From the Withdrawal of Russians to the Fall of the Coalition Government*, ed. SF Yunas, trans. SZ Taizi (Peshawar, 2004).

³⁰ Ian Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-insurgencies: Guerrillas and their Opponents since 1750* (New York, 2001): vii.

³¹ Clausewitz, *On War*: xiv.

³² See, for example, International Crisis Group, *Somalia: Continuation of War by other Means?—Africa Report No. 88* (Brussels, 2004).

³³ John Nagl, *Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam: Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife* (Westport, 2002): 24.

³⁴ Betz, "*Insurgency and Counterinsurgency*": 3.

the characteristics of insurgents. They were ‘an influence, a thing invulnerable, intangible, without front or back, drifting about like a gas’. In attempting to achieve a political goal against a military force, they were going to use ideas to generate power, rather than the factories and parade grounds so beloved of conventional commanders: ‘the printing press is the greatest weapon in the army of the modern commander’.³⁵

Although he recognised the importance of psychology, and what we would call propaganda, T E Lawrence was a British officer and much of his writing focused on military non-conventional tactics, for example, the composition of raiding parties. Thus, he often contrasted himself to Marshal Foch, the French military theorist and general, who had fought original, but conventional, battles in Flanders during the period when Lawrence was in the desert. Foch advocated massing strength at the critical moment of attack and attempting to destroy the enemy army by destroying its will,³⁶ Lawrence, by contrast, saw that:

‘The Arab war should be a war of detachment...not disclosing themselves till the moment of attack. This attack need be only nominal, directed not against his men, but against his materials: so it should not seek for his main strength or his weaknesses, but for his most accessible material. In a railway cutting this would be usually an empty stretch of rail. This was a tactical success’³⁷

Time was always on the side of the insurgent. Lawrence was advocating what Mao Tse-tung would call ‘innumerable gnats biting a giant...[to] ultimately exhaust him’.³⁸ Writing twenty years after Lawrence, Mao helped lead the Red Army to victory against the Chinese Nationalist government. He put political and psychological action at the heart of his strategy and it is hard to overstate Mao’s influence on the theory of insurgency. For him, the first fundamental step leading to victory was ‘arousing and organising the people’.³⁹ Whereas Lawrence had discussed the political dimensions of guerrilla warfare as being important, for Mao it was a sine qua non—the essence of insurgent warfare was revolutionary.⁴⁰ The population was a ‘sea’ and the insurgent was a ‘fish’.⁴¹

Mao advocated a three sequentially-phased process in effecting political control over a state. First, organisation and consolidation: where political cadres would be formed and sent forth to ‘persuade’ and ‘convince’ the populace, attempting to ensure their support for insurgent actions. The people would not be forced to support the insurgency.⁴² Military

³⁵ Lawrence, 27 Articles, both quotes.

³⁶ As analysed by Lawrence in 27 Articles.

³⁷ Op Cit.

³⁸ Tse-tung Mao, Yu Chi Chan (Guerrilla Warfare), trans. SB Griffith, 2007 ed.(New York, 1937): 54.

³⁹ Ibid., 43.

⁴⁰ Op Cit.

⁴¹ Mao, Guerrilla Warfare: 8.

⁴² Ibid., 82 & 89.

operations would be sporadic. During the second phase, military activities using insurgent tactics would increase including sabotage, assassination and ambush. It is of note that the military activities of phase two were entirely contingent on intelligence drawn from the people whose support was garnered during the first phase. Whereas Lawrence recognised the importance of intelligence,⁴³ he did not explicitly link it to political action in his writings. For Mao, political activity was the insurgency and once complete, the political agents could move to other areas, restarting the process. Once sufficient military advantage had been obtained, the third phase would begin, which was a transitional phase to open warfare and involved the establishment of military formations to contest the state conventionally.⁴⁴

Mao's writing was so influential that his ideas have shaped tens of movements around the world, including in the present era.⁴⁵ When scholars and practitioners talk about 'classical' or 'popular' insurgency, they mean Maoist insurgency.⁴⁶ Arguably, the Afghan mujahidin completed phases one and two fighting against the Soviets, but failed to make the transition to conventional war when they tried unsuccessfully to capture Jalalabad from the post-Soviet communist regime in 1989. Few manage all three phases and Mao's success in this was down to his relationship with the population.⁴⁷ Che Guevara was one of the few.

Born in Argentina, Guevara played a pivotal role in the communist insurgency in Cuba. His theory of insurgency—foco⁴⁸—was Maoist in outlook and relied on the support of the people.⁴⁹ The critical difference was that phases one and two were concurrent, or even inverted: a group of insurgents could create the conditions for revolution militarily and did not need to rely solely on political action for preparatory work.⁵⁰ Fighting, and leading by example, were enough to spark an insurgency, particularly if an oppressive government could be provoked to overreact against the population by the foci.⁵¹ This combination of military and political action would then lead to Mao's third phase of a regular conventional army challenging the state on its own terms.⁵²

The foco model was put forward by Guevara as the reason for the success of the revolution against the US-backed Batista regime in 1959, however some have since argued that the

⁴³ TE Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, 1997 ed.(London, 1922): 91.

⁴⁴ Mao, *Guerrilla Warfare*: 20-22.

⁴⁵ For example, the self-described Maoist insurgency in Nepal that ended in 2006.

⁴⁶ Betz, "*Insurgency and Counterinsurgency*": 6.

⁴⁷ John Mackinlay, *The Insurgent Archipelago* (London, 2009): 16-7.

⁴⁸ From the Spanish foquismo or focalism.

⁴⁹ Ernesto Che Guevara, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, 2007 ed.(Miami, 1961): 9.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁵¹ Wickham-Crowley, *Exploring Revolution*: 64.

⁵² Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*: 11-2.

social and political conditions for insurgency already existed in Cuba prior to the start of Guevara's development of foci.⁵³ After a brief period of international diplomacy, Guevara tried the foco method of insurgency in the Congo and Bolivia. Both were unsuccessful insurgencies and the latter led to his death. The failure can be seen as a vindication of Mao's assertion that 'the fountainhead of guerrilla warfare is in the masses of the people'.⁵⁴ This was something that Gerry Adams, President of Sinn Féin in Northern Ireland, understood instinctively.

Irish republicanism has a long history, but by focussing on the period from the 1960s to the 1990s, developments in insurgency theory clearly stand out. Throughout, the politics of freedom from perceived British oppression had been the driver and Adams saw it as the basis of support for Sinn Féin and the Irish Republican Army (IRA). Indeed, following Mao, Adams began to represent people on issues—such as social housing—that really mattered to them, always presenting them within a republican ideological framework.⁵⁵ Thus under Adams, Sinn Féin became a political party rather than a protest movement. This was common to other movements of the era, such as Hezbollah in the southern Lebanon. The degree to which armed struggle was seen as a useful way of progressing the ideological framework has fluctuated over time: in the period under focus it was once again seen as a potential way forward.⁵⁶ This was particularly true during the 'troubles' when, according to Adams, the IRA protected Catholic communities from state- or protestant-led 'pogroms',⁵⁷ and the British Army inflamed nationalist tensions with its deployment to Belfast.⁵⁸

Adams was a thoroughly modern insurgent, at least to begin with. He held down a job and—this point is controversial—claims he did not become involved directly in large scale violence or murder.⁵⁹ Certainly, what is uncontested is that as time progressed, Adams became more of a politician and less of an insurgent political activist. Whilst members of Sinn Féin and the IRA did read and learn from their contemporary Guevara,⁶⁰ they did not adopt his foco strategy. Against a strong, if not always effective, British counterinsurgency effort, the IRA came to epitomise the major developments of insurgent groups in the 1970/80s. First, they

⁵³ Wickham-Crowley, *Exploring Revolution*: 45-6.

⁵⁴ Mao, *Guerrilla Warfare*: 73.

⁵⁵ Gerry Adams, *Before the Dawn* (Dingle, 2001): 83 & 100.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 106-7.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁵⁹ Certainly within the UK there was a popular perception that Sinn Féin were the 'front' for, or political arm of, the violent activities of the IRA. See, for example, 'Sinn Fein's Gerry Adams denies McConville death claims' http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/8591844.stm (accessed 09 Aug 2011).

⁶⁰ Adams, *Dawn*: 115-6.

leveraged the US diaspora for funding and support,⁶¹ and second, they attempted to influence the home audience of the intervening (British) troops and the global audience, particularly through the use of hunger strikes.⁶² These are major theoretical stepping-stones on the way to global insurgency (a point expanded upon in the following section) and were also practiced by other contemporaneous groups such as the Palestinian Liberation Organisation.

Through looking at four insurgents, major developments in insurgency that are potentially relevant to the Helmandi conflict, have been traced. First, that of guerrilla military tactics, as opposed to conventional military tactics; second, the centrality of ideology as a motivator. Third, the role that prominent events and counterinsurgent overreaction can play, and finally, the role of diaspora funding and support. These elements all led into the development of modern insurgency theory where, due to a lack of insurgent texts, the narrative is authored by counterinsurgent theorists.

1.1c - Counterinsurgent theorists

A study of insurgency would not be complete without considering what counterinsurgents have written about the subject as part of their discussion on how to counter the problem. Studying counterinsurgent theory allows us to categorise those aspects of insurgency not explicitly mentioned by insurgents in their texts. Woven through the writings of the eminent theorists Robert Thompson,⁶³ David Galula⁶⁴ and Frank Kitson⁶⁵ are descriptions of insurgency taken from those they faced in Malaya, Algeria and Kenya during the 1950–60s. These countries all faced nationalist insurgencies that took advantage of weakened imperial powers⁶⁶ and, seeking to challenge the status quo, all borrowed elements from Mao's doctrine — at the time, the most effective insurgent doctrine. Thus, insurgency was framed as a protracted, internal struggle with a gradual transition—at a time and place of the insurgent's choosing—to war.⁶⁷ Kitson stated that insurgents must have a cause,⁶⁸ sometimes expressed as an ideology, that exploits disenfranchisement or discontent in the population and drives the conflict. Galula emphasised the role of propaganda, calling it a

⁶¹ Ibid., 146 & 322. This is similar in many ways to the camps in Baluchistan that shelter the 'Taliban' and their families: whilst not offering financial support, the camps offer a rear area.

⁶² Ibid., 279 & 297.

⁶³ Robert Thompson, Defeating Communist Insurgency: The Lessons of Malaya and Vietnam (New York, 1966).

⁶⁴ David Galula, Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice, 2006 ed. (Westport, 1964).

⁶⁵ Frank Kitson, Low Intensity Operations: Subversion, Insurgency, Peace-keeping (London, 1972); Frank Kitson, Bunch of Five (London, 1987).

⁶⁶ Nagl, Soup: 24.

⁶⁷ Galula, Counterinsurgency: 5-6.

⁶⁸ Kitson, Low Intensity Operations: 29.

'one sided weapon' as insurgents could be freer with the truth than the government.⁶⁹ According to Thompson, an insurgency is a 'war for the people'.⁷⁰

The principles of insurgencies had not altered with the passage of time. Insurgents were unlikely to succeed without a wilderness or safe haven out of reach of the counterinsurgent.⁷¹ They avoided the enemy's strength, and instead looked to overwhelm isolated outposts. As far as possible they relied on superior intelligence for surprise and deception.⁷² Attempts were made to try and provoke the counterinsurgents into an overreaction, thus pushing the population closer to the insurgents.⁷³ In line with Mao, the insurgents would remain unconventional in form, right until the very end.⁷⁴ Finally, Kitson described the inherent asymmetry between the insurgent and counterinsurgent, in organisation, in funding, and in tactics.⁷⁵

This classical understanding of insurgency forms the basis of current thinking. But as the world has changed since the mid-20th century, so too has insurgency: globalisation has led to global insurgents with global objectives. Improvements in transport and communications coupled with (perceived) cultural homogenisation and changes in the international economic system have driven adaptations to the Maoist model.⁷⁶ Yet following the precepts of classical insurgency, the centre of gravity for the insurgent is still the population and the insurgent campaign. Except now, the population and the cause are now transnational.⁷⁷

Mao's precepts have been updated for the modern world, to the extent that global insurgents are referred to by Mackinlay as post-Maoist insurgents.⁷⁸ The innovation of worldwide, 24hr media has allowed the insurgent to appeal directly to his (global) audience, particularly through terrorism of the deed.⁷⁹ A safe haven is still vital, but now it may be virtual.⁸⁰ The internet is used to link up the same cellular structure advocated by Mao, except that the cells are in different countries around the world. It is interesting that global insurgents have taken the central tenet of Guevara's failed theory—that of creating the conditions for revolution through direct action—and applied it in the modern world using mass media (the obvious

⁶⁹ Galula, *Counterinsurgency*: 9.

⁷⁰ Thompson, *Defeating Insurgency*: 51-7.

⁷¹ Galula, *Counterinsurgency*: 12.

⁷² Nagl, *Soup*: 15-6.

⁷³ Daniel Marston and Carter Malkasian, *Counterinsurgency in Modern Warfare* (Oxford, 2008): 34.

⁷⁴ Nagl, *Soup*: 23.

⁷⁵ Kitson, *Low Intensity Operations*: 29.

⁷⁶ Mackinlay, *Archipelago*: 29-35.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁷⁹ Thus, terrorism is a method, rather than a type of warfare (*ibid.*, 226).

⁸⁰ David Kilcullen, "Counterinsurgency Redux" *Survival* 48, no. 4 (2006): 113.

example of this is the al-Qaeda attack of 11 September 2001). Like Maoist insurgencies, they are seeking to challenge the status quo, but on a global scale. According to Kilcullen and Mackinlay, so-called revisionist counterinsurgents,⁸¹ global insurgency exists alongside lots of smaller, national, popular insurgencies, which it feeds and finances.⁸² This makes it an order of magnitude more difficult to counter: the degree of cooperation required to defeat traditional national Maoist insurgencies is not currently possible across several countries at once.⁸³

Further complicating the issue is a development articulated by David Kilcullen in his highly insightful book, *The Accidental Guerrilla*. Whereas Maoist and post-Maoist insurgents all seek to challenge the status quo, accidental guerrillas seek to maintain it—in old parlance they are resistance movements. The difference is that here, foreign occupation⁸⁴ of a country to counter a globalised insurgent threat (for example, the 2001 US intervention in Afghanistan) causes the local population to react negatively and form an insurgency.⁸⁵ This can lead to a curious role reversal where the insurgent is no longer able to initiate the start of hostilities to a time and place of his choosing—that honour is given to the counterinsurgent who provokes the insurgent into fighting by invading.⁸⁶

Insurgency theory is still evolving. In his 2009 book of the same name, Mackinlay describes the rise of the ‘insurgent archipelago’. To the categories of global insurgent (al-Qaeda) and popular insurgent (Mao’s Red Army) he adds feral militias (many of the extant groups operating in Somalia). These are largely the product of state collapse,⁸⁷ and can be seen as the reassertion of de facto local control, often against the backdrop of state predation on the population. In the absence of the state, and contrary to popular and global insurgencies, feral militias could control territory permanently. They can be organised along tribal, ethnic, sectarian or political lines (that is, they are linked to a political party) and differ, critically, from the other two types of insurgency in that they can be apolitical.⁸⁸

At this stage insurgency theory broadens to such an extent that it includes phenomena that are not traditionally considered insurgencies. There are two key distinctions. Firstly, with

⁸¹ Although for other revisionist writers see, Robert Cassidy, *Counterinsurgency and the Global War on Terror: Military Culture and Irregular War*, 2008 ed.(Stanford, 2006); Thomas Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone: On War in the 21st Century* (St Paul, 2006).

⁸² Mackinlay, *Archipelago*: 83 and David Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency* (New York, 2010): 185.

⁸³ Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency*: 191.

⁸⁴ Not necessarily from another country, but just *perceived* as foreign by the host population.

⁸⁵ David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla* (New York, 2009): 34, Fig. 1.1.

⁸⁶ Kilcullen, *Redux*: 112-3.

⁸⁷ Mackinlay, *Archipelago*: 72.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 38.

feral militias, included are groups that attempt to *prevent* political control rather than to *effect* it, for example in the face of government corruption or oppression, or to re-establish de facto local control in the face of government weakness. They may not be seeking to overthrow the government (*effect* political control) or follow the Maoist revolutionary ideal (cf. insurgent definition: 'person who rises in *active* revolt against authority; a rebel, a revolutionary [author's italics]'). Secondly, feral militias, even when fighting each other and when neither side is fighting the government, are still categorised as an insurgency. All—popular and global insurgencies, and feral militias—are described in terms of their effect on, and relationship with, the state. And worryingly for the scholar, all three types of insurgency can coexist temporally and spatially.⁸⁹

Insurgency scholarship, pursued either from the point of view of the insurgent or counterinsurgent, has focused on the *modes* of insurgency, although as discussed above, the modern debate is conceptually confused. By contrast, key civil war scholarship has tended to focus on the *causes* of civil war from a third-party, academic point of view, often to inform third-party policy makers considering intervention. Arguably civil war theory offers more explanatory power than the insurgency literature when seeking to understand the Helmandi conflict.

1.1d - Civil war theory

Civil wars—intrastate wars—have been written about for as long as there have been states. During the 20th century, numerous viewpoints have proliferated on the causes of civil war, mostly based on juxtaposed dichotomies: the literature pertaining to civil wars is much more contested than that dealing strictly with insurgency. For clarity, civil war is defined as 'combat within the boundaries of a recognised sovereign entity between parties subject to common authority at the start of the conflict, entailing a de facto territorial division'.⁹⁰ Others have specified the number of deaths that must be involved, and that both sides must suffer casualties. These strict criteria have been applied in order to structure quantitative analysis.⁹¹ This thesis is qualitative, thus Kalyvas' definition is adequate—it is intrastate warfare.

First among the explanations for civil wars, and perhaps the most intuitive, is that conflicts are driven by primordial desires; that is, groups of humans are linked psychologically to

⁸⁹ Ibid., 162.

⁹⁰ Kalyvas, *Logic*: 5-6.

⁹¹ Nicholas Sambanis, "What is Civil War? Conceptual and Empirical Complexities of an Operational Definition" *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48, no. 6 (2004): 829.

certain features of their environment, chiefly territory.⁹² This idea finds its basis in hunter-gatherers defending territory from raiding parties.⁹³ Much later, with the rise of the concepts of ethnicities and cultures, theorists talk of ancient hatreds of other groups of humans, guided by perceived histories.⁹⁴ Both espouse something understood by all: we are 'Us' and they are 'Them'.⁹⁵ The intuitive nature of these explanations is what makes them so popular, particularly in the West, where narratives about more primitive, less civilised (other) people are still prevalent.⁹⁶ And whilst history is an excellent guide to the present, particularly when analysing group dynamics, human groups, including ethnic ones, are not fixed, but highly flexible.⁹⁷ Moreover, links to territory can be redefined.⁹⁸

These psychological, sociological and anthropological analyses have been rightly challenged by a substantial body of economic analysis.

Of these, the most influential were a controversial series of papers written by two economists, Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, who attempted to model quantitatively the causes of civil war.⁹⁹ They argued that a 'useful conceptual distinction in understanding the motivation of civil war is that between greed and grievance',¹⁰⁰ and used statistical proxies such as GDP/capita derived from primary exports or ethnic and linguistic factionalism, to model for greed or grievance (respectively). Greed, in their original analysis, referred to economic factors that might motivate non-state actors such as control of natural resources and opportunity to loot. Grievance represented those factors similar to, and developed from, the ancient hatreds explanation, such as ethnic or religious divisions in society and political repression or inequality.¹⁰¹ Their findings were clear: greed statistically outperformed grievance as a cause of civil war.¹⁰²

⁹² Steven Grosby, "Territoriality: The Transcendental, Primordial Feature of Modern Societies" Nations and Nationalism 1, no. 2 (1995): 1.

⁹³ Azar Gat, War in Human Civilisation (New York, 2006): 18-19.

⁹⁴ See, for example, Crawford Young, The Politics of Cultural Pluralism (Madison, 1979) for modern accounts of this old phenomenon.

⁹⁵ Gat, War: 50.

⁹⁶ Human Rights Watch, Leave None to Tell the Story: Genocide in Rwanda (New York, 1999): Obfuscation and Misunderstanding.

⁹⁷ Stuart Kaufman, Modern Hatreds: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War (New York, 2001): 4.

⁹⁸ Anthony Smith, "Culture, Community and Territory: The Politics of Ethnicity and Nationalism" International Affairs 72, no. 3 (1996): 455.

⁹⁹ e.g. Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, "Greed and Grievance in Civil War" The Centre for the Study of African Economies Working Paper Series (2002).

¹⁰⁰ Paul Collier, "Doing Well out of War," in Greed & Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars, ed. MR Bernal and DM Malone (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000): 91.

¹⁰¹ Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, "Greed and Grievance in Civil War" Oxford Economic Papers 56(2004): 565-72.

¹⁰² Ibid., 1.

According to Mats Berdal, this body of work had a profound impact on international policy making, largely because it simplified what had previously been intractable 'ethnic' issues into manageable policy challenges.¹⁰³ Collier and Hoeffler's work sparked a vast debate in the literature that argued, among other things, that the proxies for greed and grievance were inadequately chosen and could be conceptually mistaken for each other, including confusing correlation and causation.¹⁰⁴ More broadly, and as any statistician will tell you, a model is only as good as the data that is used, and in the third world economic data is often absent, incomplete or biased.¹⁰⁵ Critically though, they were trying to model that most human event, war, with statistical methods based on Gaussian (normal) probability distribution, yet human events do not respond well to this treatment due to having extreme (that is, dominated by outliers), rather than normal, distributions.¹⁰⁶

The ahistorical quantitative approach has considerable limitations when it comes to explaining the causes of civil war. Some of the expressed criticisms were recognised by Collier and Hoeffler and the theory was later modified with greed becoming the (economic) feasibility of rebellion. Where economically feasible, for example leaders could afford to pay rebel fighters, rebellion would occur.¹⁰⁷ This has been expanded upon by some authors¹⁰⁸ and rejected by others,¹⁰⁹ but even previously critical authors have pointed to the clarifying effect Collier et al's work has had on the field of civil war research.¹¹⁰ Scholars, rather than advocating 'greed' or 'ancient hatreds' presaging conflict, now advocate 'rationality' or 'identity' based arguments. And although the genesis of these arguments predate the quantitative analysis of the late 1990s and early 2000s, that same analysis helped reinforce scholars' acceptance of rationality and identity as the two dichotomous viewpoints through which different theories of civil wars are now articulated.

Rationality-based theorists of war argue that even extreme events such as genocide can be explained rationally. Their arguments are based on economic rational choice theory where individual actors are all free to make rational choices based on the evidence presented to

¹⁰³ Mats Berdal, "Beyond Greed and Grievance – And Not Too Soon..." Review of International Studies 31, no. 04 (2005): 688.

¹⁰⁴ See, for example, Laurie Nathan, "The Frightful Inadequacy of Most of the Statistics: A Critique of Collier and Hoeffler on the Causes of Civil War" Crisis States Research Centre Discussion Papers, no. 11 (2005); Francisco Sanín, "Criminal Rebels? A Discussion of Civil War and Criminality from the Colombian Experience" Politics & Society 32, no. 2 (2004).

¹⁰⁵ Paul Collier, Anke Hoeffler, and Dominic Rohner, "Beyond Greed and Grievance: Feasibility and Civil War" Oxford Economic Papers 61, no. 1 (2009): 2.

¹⁰⁶ Nassim Taleb, The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable (London, 2007): 35-7.

¹⁰⁷ Collier, Hoeffler, and Rohner, Feasibility and Civil War: 1.

¹⁰⁸ James Fearon and David Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War" American Political Science Review 97, no. 01 (2003): 75.

¹⁰⁹ Michael Kniss, "Intertwined Inequities: Micro-Level Economic Determinants of Civil Conflict" Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland Working Paper(2009): 5-6.

¹¹⁰ Berdal, Beyond Greed and Grievance: 689.

them.¹¹¹ Rationalist explanations for civil war abound in the literature,¹¹² and seek to explain a central dilemma: in rational terms, why would anyone go to war, when war entails destruction and an almost certain loss of utility (wealth), even for the victor? Two possible reasons will be discussed here, in addition to the obvious solution, that embarking on a particular war will give the instigator a clear and obvious advantage in terms of spoils. One explanation is inter-group and the other intra-group: that of the security dilemma and that of the predatory elite.

The security dilemma theory states that groups will start conflicts with other groups because of fears about the future.¹¹³ These fears can stem from several sources, but usually include incomplete information about the other group's strength or intentions¹¹⁴ and problems of 'credible commitment' where a negotiated settlement has been reached that at least one side does not have the perceived ability to enforce.¹¹⁵ Predatory elite (also called elite manipulation) theorists argue that civil wars are caused by leaders who incite violence for their own (domestic) ends. In this scenario, identity, or ethnic/religious factors, are used by leaders as motivators or exacerbators in the achievement of rational goals.¹¹⁶

The identity-driven approach to civil war finds its roots in the ancient hatreds argument. That is, groups go to war because of their identity, often defined in terms of relationships with, and fear of, other groups. Thus, even in the absence of contemporaneous evidence to the contrary, group fear narratives of previous persecution at the hands of another group may be enough to start a conflict.¹¹⁷ This concept was brilliantly developed by Stuart Kaufman in his 2001 book *Modern Hatreds*. In it, he argues that 'people make political choices based on emotion and in response to symbols'.¹¹⁸ Kaufman's work is refreshing in that he cites a number of interdependent causes for civil war. His previous work had focused on the interplay between ancient hatreds, security dilemmas and elite manipulation (that is, one identity- and two rationality-based drivers for civil war).¹¹⁹ In *Modern Hatreds*, he focuses on the relationship between the symbols and myths that define ethnicity and the ways in which

¹¹¹ Stuart Kaufman, "Symbolic Politics or Rational choice? Testing Theories of Extreme Ethnic Violence" *International Security* 30, no. 4 (2006): 45-6.

¹¹² James Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War" *International Organization* 49, no. 03 (1995): 379.

¹¹³ David Lake and Donald Rothchild, "Containing Fear: The Origins and Management of Ethnic Conflict" *International Security* 21, no. 2 (1996): 41.

¹¹⁴ Fearon, Rationalist Explanations: 381.

¹¹⁵ Robert Powell, "War as a Commitment Problem" *International Organization* 60, no. 01 (2006): 170.

¹¹⁶ Rui Figueiredo and Barry Weingast, "The Rationality of Fear: Political Opportunism and Ethnic Conflict," in *Civil Wars, Insecurity and Intervention*, ed. B Walter and J Snyder (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999): 262-3.

¹¹⁷ Elizabeth Crighton, "The Evolution of Protracted Ethnic Conflict: Group Dominance and Political Underdevelopment in Northern Ireland and Lebanon" *Comparative Politics* 23, no. 2 (1991): 128.

¹¹⁸ Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds*: 29.

¹¹⁹ Stuart Kaufman, "Spiraling to Ethnic War: Elites, Masses and Moscow in Moldova's Civil War" *International Security* 21, no. 2 (1996): 108.

those myths are evoked to mobilise groups. He then identifies foundational factors for civil war drawn from across the literature: the presence of myths justifying hostility, fear of group extermination and the opportunity to mobilise.

To Kaufman, ethnic groups are flexible entities, and myths and symbols are factors that help keep them coherent, especially so if they define a group in contrast to another group. Myths (and symbols) are particularly potent when they justify hostility to another group, and when imbued with ethnic chauvinism (that is, my group is better than yours). They can be recast by leaders, however this takes time and is unlikely to immediately precede violence.¹²⁰ An ethnic group's fear of extermination, or of serious threat, is what justifies their extreme demands for self-defensive measures—including going to war. These security dilemma-like fears are often founded on demographic threats (e.g. Israel), mixed settlement patterns (e.g. Northern Ireland) or previous persecution or domination by another group (e.g. Iraq). Thus, we can see that there is a key inter-reliance between myths (which may define the fear) and fear of extermination (which rely on the group coherency and shared history defined by the myths).¹²¹ Myths and fear of extermination, and the relationship between them, are key mechanisms of ethnic mobilisation leading to war, but if that mobilisation is to be realised, then groups require opportunity.

Whilst not explicitly acknowledged in *Modern Hatreds*, the opportunity argument appears similar in form to Collier's feasibility argument—that of having enough money for weapons or salaries. But it is also further developed by the addition of factors like the removal of political repression or a monopoly of violence, thus allowing violent mobilisation. Thus, these factors can combine to become a mass-led mobilisation, or, in a scenario where particular leaders arise that are able or willing to manipulate the situation, an elite-led scenario.¹²² Analyses, such as Kaufman's, that bring together identity and rationality, are important as both schools have their conceptual weaknesses. Solely rationality-based approaches are insufficient as they often rely on group cohesion and group norms that are defined by identity,¹²³ and solely identity-based approaches largely fail to account for situations where ethnic polarisation exists in peaceful communities.¹²⁴ Concepts such as fear are appropriated by both sides, either as an ethnic fear (identity),¹²⁵ or as a security dilemma (rational).¹²⁶

¹²⁰ Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds*: 30.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 32 & 36-7.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹²⁴ Lake and Rothchild, *Containing Fear*: 54-5.

¹²⁵ Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds*: 31.

¹²⁶ Fearon, *Rationalist Explanations*: 381.

In comparing these approaches, one is reminded of the ‘Nature versus Nurture’ debate coined in Victorian times: the question of whether a trait in a human (e.g. height) owes more to innate qualities (genes) or to upbringing (environment). In modern times, this debate has been resolved through the basic idea that a trait is caused by genetic variation *plus* environmental variation *plus* (genetic *times* environmental variation), or, Trait = G + E + (G x E).¹²⁷ Because of the interdependence, biologists still struggle to quantify the causes of most traits; it seems intuitive that the causes of civil war, identity and rationality, or greed and grievance, will similarly interact to produce violence. Understanding that it might be an interaction between factors that was important is a key conceptual leap that echoed my previous experiences in Helmand as an Army officer. I return to the issue of interactions between factors below.

However, it is perhaps for these conceptual difficulties that scholars have begun to look at different approaches to understanding civil war. The new millennium signalled a change in scholarship from macro-level scale studies of violence—as described above with respect to insurgencies and civil wars—to an ever-decreasing scale. A key mechanism has been to study the application of violence in itself, and not just as an obvious consequence of civil wars.¹²⁸ Jeremy Weinstein, for example, has found that differing levels of violence can be attributed to the initial conditions that confront ‘rebel’ leaders.¹²⁹ Thus, for example, those groups with external funding will use more violence against civilians in their area of control, as the funding weakens the link between combatants and populace.¹³⁰ Or, groups that rely on the same geographical pool of resources as rival groups (including the state) will tend to use greater violence against civilians: contested areas experience more violence.¹³¹ Developing these ideas, and combining them with a micro-approach to data collection, has brought fascinating insights, not least that by Stathis Kalyvas in *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*.

In the preceding analysis, civil war has largely been discussed in terms of its grand, macro, public narratives, however the literature is replete with case studies of the private, intra-societal cleavages that characterise any dispute.¹³² This thesis, with detailed local oral data collection, will also provide information on private cleavages, or local politics, in Helmand, yet the war in Afghanistan is characterised by many in the West (and seemingly their Afghan

¹²⁷ Michael Lynch and Bruce Walsh, *Genetics and Analysis of Quantitative Traits*, vol. 24(Sunderland, 1998): 657.

¹²⁸ Metelits, *Insurgency*; Jeremy Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion* (New York, 2007); Kalyvas, *Logic*.

¹²⁹ Weinstein, *Rebellion*: 7.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 327.

¹³¹ Metelits, *Insurgency*: 11.

¹³² Christopher Clapham, *African Guerrillas* (Bloomington, 1998).

clients) through the rival ideologies of westernised and modern values Islamic and traditional values.¹³³ In his book, Kalyvas argues that identifying clear political groups and their ideologies 'fails to match the vast complexity, fluidity and ambiguity that one encounters on the ground'.¹³⁴ He goes further to argue that studying violence allows us to analyse the interaction between public (strategic/ideological) and private (micro/local) causes of civil war.¹³⁵ It is a confluence of economics, politics and sociology at the public level, with anthropology and micro-history at the private level. This idea of an interaction between public, ideological factors and private, personal narratives matched closely my observations of the conflict from serving in Helmand. For example, the Afghan government militia leader who abuses his position and annexes a neighbour's land is utilising 'public' resources, for his own 'private' gain.

Kalyvas' theory of selective violence argues that there is a privatisation of the politics of war, through the role of denunciations and collaborations that are driven by interpersonal cleavages.¹³⁶ Thus, individuals will exploit armed groups and their ideologies to settle their personal scores and gain resources, and armed groups will exploit local individuals and their grievances in order to mobilise fighters and gather information.¹³⁷ This leads to the key question—where does the locus of agency lie? Or, as Kalyvas quotes Lenin, '*Who [is using] whom?*'¹³⁸ This realisation throws into sharp relief previous discussions about identity versus rationality: they may be counterproductive and unsolvable, because both approaches may be true at the same time at different levels. Thus, grand labels, whether ideological or ethnic, do not fit at all at the micro level, and local grievances are irrelevant at the strategic level.¹³⁹ Kalyvas concludes that the focus of study should be the interaction, or 'alliance', between the levels.¹⁴⁰ This alliance, driven by mutual interest, shapes the violence. Furthermore, the phenomenon of fluid or shifting allegiances is caused by overlapping labels, from different levels of the conflict, being applied at the local level.¹⁴¹ Civil wars, he concludes, are a mosaic of discrete mini-wars.¹⁴² Kalyvas' arguments will be discussed further below and used to develop my own theoretical framework around which the oral history data is organised in this thesis.

¹³³ Huma Ahmed-Ghosh, "History of Women in Afghanistan: Lessons Learnt for the Future or Yesterdays and Tomorrow: Women in Afghanistan" *Journal of International Women's Studies* 4(2003).

¹³⁴ Kalyvas, *Logic*: 10.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 382.

¹³⁸ 'Kto Kovo?' *ibid.*, 376.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 366.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 383.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 370.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 371.

So far, insurgency and civil war have been treated separately. From the broad definitions, ‘an organised, violent subversion used to effect or prevent political control, as a challenge to established authority’ (insurgency) and ‘combat within the boundaries of a recognised sovereign entity between parties subject to common authority at the start of the conflict, entailing a de facto territorial division’ (civil war), there is little to differentiate them. Yet, the authorship is different, the etymology and common understandings are different, and the theoretical understandings are different—this will be explored in the next section.

1.1e - Insurgency versus civil war

Insurgency and civil war are the two major strands of intrastate conflict scholarship. Careful study of the literature reveals that there is common acceptance of the slight theoretical difference between the two, but this difference does not align with the semantic perception that they are different types of war. Theoretically they belong to the same type of warfare. The semantic perception discussed above (see figure 1) potentially stems from the separate authorship of the two strands in the literature: Mao was an insurgent,¹⁴³ Yugoslavia faced a civil war in the 1990s;¹⁴⁴ Kilcullen writes about insurgencies, Kalyvas about civil wars. Even when both schools of work misappropriate each other’s terminology, this is still the case.¹⁴⁵

Insurgency is a military tactic or stage of civil (intrastate) warfare caused by an inherent asymmetry of power and means, and the causal factors of both are the same. Politics and ideology can be used as methods to overcome that asymmetry, or not. As Mao described it, guerrilla bands would come together to form an ‘orthodox establishment capable of engaging the enemy in conventional battle’ (his third stage).¹⁴⁶ Galula states that ‘an insurgency is a civil war’ with the difference being the ‘form’ which the war takes.¹⁴⁷ Guevara talks of practicing civil war in a similar way to Mao, with a progression from ‘guerrilla’ to ‘regular’.¹⁴⁸ Mackinlay, a modern insurgency scholar, talks of a ‘rash of civil wars...using quite different insurgent strategies’.¹⁴⁹

This is echoed in the civil war literature: James Fearon, a renowned rationality theorist, states clearly ‘insurgency is a technology of military conflict characterised by small, lightly

¹⁴³ See, for example, Bishnu Upreti, The Price of Neglect: From Resource Conflict to Maoist Insurgency in the Himalayan Kingdom (Kathmandu, 2004).

¹⁴⁴ See, for example, Eugene Hammel, "Demography and the Origins of the Yugoslav Civil War" Anthropology Today 9, no. 1 (1993).

¹⁴⁵ Nathan, Frightful Inadequacy: 2.

¹⁴⁶ Mao, Guerrilla Warfare: 21-2.

¹⁴⁷ Galula, Counterinsurgency: 2.

¹⁴⁸ Guevara, Guerrilla Warfare: 14.

¹⁴⁹ Mackinlay, Archipelago: 36.

armed bands practicing guerrilla warfare from rural base areas'.¹⁵⁰ Kalyvas states that 'the insurgents are the first movers...imposing the tactics to be used'.¹⁵¹ Thus, insurgency is merely that stage of war where 'insurgent' tactics are used as a product of military asymmetry and is not its own type of war, and while politics *can be* used as a tool to overcome opposed military might in an insurgency, they do not alter that fact that it is still a civil war. What has obscured the issue is the Maoist addition of politics into the insurgency literature, thus leading scholars to classify it as another type of war, but politics and ideology do not need to be present or adhered to for there to be insurgency.

The domination of insurgency theory by the Maoist ideal (vide definition of insurgency '... *political* control [author's italics]') is further conflated with the inclusion of new types of insurgency—such as feral militias, phenomena that appear at first glance to belong to the civil war literature rather than the insurgency literature—leading to confusion. They often hold ground, and two feral militias can be opposed without one of them being the government. The expansion of the definition of insurgency led by Mackinlay has clouded its distinction with civil war and confuses the conceptual space: the inclusion of feral militias (and clan rivalries in some doctrines)¹⁵² conflates those groups that wish to *effect* political control with those that seek to *prevent* it. This is dangerous as any given counter would not be suitable for both: that is, is protecting the population the best approach when the population want to be left alone? Only when one considers (political or non-political) insurgency as a tactic of civil war (that is, a subset), and consider Mackinlay's additions as aberrations more relevant to civil wars than insurgency, does clarity prevail.

However, if civil war and insurgency are differing manifestations or stages of the same phenomenon, and share the same causes, then it is worth asking in the context of this thesis whether it matters if a conflict is classified as an insurgency or a civil war. Surely the strategy for countering such violence and neutralising the causes would be the same? Theoretically yes, but semantically there are two crucial differences. Firstly, the equality of legitimacy between the two sides is different in the two constructs (see figure 1). Secondly, insurgency suggests an ideologically driven armed opposition to a government, as opposed to micro-conflicts and intergroup dynamics that are nothing to do with the government, driving the violence. These etymological subtleties mask a nuance that does not yet exist in theory and argue for more developed countering strategies.

¹⁵⁰ Fearon and Laitin, *Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War*: 75.

¹⁵¹ Kalyvas, *Logic*: 217.

¹⁵² British Army, *Countering Insurgency*: Annex A to Chapter 2.

The difference is important: policy makers do not have the time or inclination to analyse theoretical differences, but, arguably, do use different thresholds for intervention in a civil war vice intervening in an insurgency, all other things being equal.¹⁵³ Even if a truly Machiavellian viewpoint is taken and it is argued that governments drive foreign interventions for their own geo-strategic reasons, a post-facto description (civil war or insurgency) is still used to shape domestic and international support for said intervention. This is the same as the freedom fighter versus insurgent argument outlined at the beginning of the chapter, and centres on the concept of legitimacy: an intervening state may want to be seen to be taking action *against* an insurgency, but not *taking sides* in a civil war.

If a war is prosecuted according to its mischaracterised or incorrect post-facto label (that is, it were treated as if it were an insurgency, when it is in fact a multi-focal civil war), then this creates the potential for the non-achievement of the intervention's aims. This could be because the intervening forces misattribute the violence that they observe to an (Maoist) insurgency rather than to a civil war between many groups, and any countering strategies employed will be misconstrued. This theme will be returned to in the conclusions.

1.1f – Theory versus intuition

So what of the Helmandi conflict? My experiences there did not fit the paradigm of insurgency at all, particularly the central importance of politics or ideology in insurgencies. Whilst the Taliban are an overtly political and ideological movement, the 'Taliban' fighting on the ground fought for personal reasons—often to keep the police from stealing their opium. The police, on the other hand, were not overly imbued with democratic fervour—many of them openly laughed when we had to organise special procedures so that women could vote in the 2009 elections in Nad-e Ali—but were fighting too for personal reasons: they had been pushed out of their villages, for example. These examples will be discussed in chapters 4-6.

The civil war literature, with its narrative of group-on-group conflict, is a much better fit. Whether motivated by greed (Helmand is a major opium producer), grievance (Helmand is a hyper-factionalised society) or ancient hatreds (the inter-tribal dispute between the Alizai and the Barakzai has been going on for at least two hundred years), the idea of equally legitimate groups fighting each other was much more commensurate with my experiences. But, it is the combination of elements of the two offered by Kalyvas that is especially appealing in terms of explanatory power: the Taliban and the Afghan government do offer

¹⁵³ For example, in Iraq in 2004 UK forces were battling 'insurgents', for which they had some degree of domestic support; yet, when the conflict began to be labelled as a 'civil war', calls for withdrawal intensified (see 'Ancram calls for Britain to pull out of Iraq' <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/ancram-calls-for-britain-to-pull-out-of-iraq-475141.html>, accessed 24 June 2011).

ideologies and resources to individuals and groups, yet the violence appeared to me to be driven at a low level. It is this interaction of the two, as theorised by Kalyvas, that forms the basis of the framework outlined below (see section 1.5).

Whereas section 1.1 has considered the theoretical literature in detail, sections 1.2 and 1.3 will consider elements of the anthropological and historical literatures necessary for the conceptual and factual 'ground-clearing' that is appropriate for a study of this type. These literatures will increase the explanatory power of my analysis by helping in the categorisation of events according to the theoretical framework described below. Firstly, I will look concisely at the cyclical nature of Pushtun society at war. This will be followed by a brief précis of pre-1978 Helmand history. Readers who wish for a more detailed discussion of Helmand's history from 661-1978 are advised to read my *A brief history of Helmand*¹⁵⁴ published in 2011, or the excellent paper by Rob Johnson, *Managing Helmand Province: From Bost to Bastion*, published in 2012.¹⁵⁵

1.2 - Pushtun society at war

Pushtun society can be succinctly described through a trinity of lenses—those of tribal power, state power and religious power (hereafter 'tribe', 'state' and 'mosque').¹⁵⁶ These power centres are represented at all levels of society. For example, within a village three of the most influential people will be the tribal leader (patriarch of a genealogy), the mullah and the malik (government representative). Similarly, the tribesman will ideally have access to three different types of dispute resolution: that of the tribal jirga governed under pushtunwali,¹⁵⁷ that of Islamic sharia, or for serious crimes, the secular, institutional justice offered by the state. The three power centres, or lenses, exist in equilibrium and exert different, and often competing, pulls on the individual tribesman.¹⁵⁸

This equilibrium is an ideal. Scholars consistently emphasise that Afghanistan is experiencing great change, and the balance between the three power centres is in upset. This was commented on in 1970 by Leon Poullada,¹⁵⁹ as in the most recent era by Thomas

¹⁵⁴ Available on Google books.

¹⁵⁵ Rob Johnson, "Managing Helmand Province: From Bost to Bastion" *International Area Studies Review* 15, no. 3 (2012).

¹⁵⁶ Leon Poullada, "The Pashtun Role in the Afghan Political System" *The Afghanistan Council of the Asian Society Occasional Paper No 1*(1970): 12.

¹⁵⁷ The highly idealised tribal code of the Pushtun focussing on reciprocity (including revenge), hospitality (including offering asylum), bravery, protection of women and protection of honour (Erinn Banting, *Afghanistan the People* (New York, 2003): 14).

¹⁵⁸ David Edwards, *Heroes of the age: Moral fault lines on the Afghan frontier* (Ewing, 1996).

¹⁵⁹ Leon Poullada, "Problems of social development in Afghanistan" *Journal of The Royal Central Asian Society* 49, no. 1 (1962): 33.

Barfield,¹⁶⁰ but actually the idea of flux is repeatedly mentioned in the literature: vide the British sources discussing the tribal rebellion of the Alizai in Helmand in 1923¹⁶¹ or the much better documented overthrow of Amanullah in 1929.¹⁶² This appears to be a paradox: great change, yet a tripartite ideal dividing power that has had remarkable steadfastness over the years. The reality is one of constant flux: when scholars look at any particular era in detail they often observe and comment upon the struggle between tribe, state and mosque, yet at a less detailed chronological scale, one can see the movements in Pashtun society, either towards or away from, but always around, this ideal.

Louis Dupree, when talking about the balance between tribe and state, described a process of fusion and fission as tribes (or small genealogical units) broke up or aggregated depending upon each one's particular military context.¹⁶³ This context could be internal to Pushtun society, perhaps driven by competition between lineages, or even cousins. Cousin warfare is exceptionally common among the Pushtun, so much so that the word for enmity is 'cousiness' (turborwali). This is mainly caused by a lack of primogeniture in Pushtun society such that patriarchal first cousins violently contest their grandfather's land inheritance.¹⁶⁴ Thus, the importance of land in Pushtun society cannot be overstated. Alternatively, the military context driving this fusion and fission could be external, caused by perhaps the invasion of a foreign enemy. At this, authors have commented, the 'tribes' are said to unite in the face of the outsider.¹⁶⁵ But there is a subtler process going on as well, not often described: that is, those internal fissures in Pashtun society are exacerbated by the presence of outsiders because the internal factions jockey for support from the outsiders in order to help them prosecute their local conflict, say, a land dispute with another clan.¹⁶⁶

These are the processes of fusion and fission: external intervention *exacerbates both of them*. That is, tribes will unite, often under religious leadership, to fight wars and battles against an external enemy, but at the same time, some Pashtun factions will be nearer to the outsider than others, causing further disunity. These centrifugal and centripetal processes are often depicted in the same source,¹⁶⁷ making it difficult for the scholar to define trends: the key difficulty is identifying whether a Pashtun leader (and the group that he currently

¹⁶⁰ Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History* (Oxford, 2010): 348.

¹⁶¹ Richard Maconachie, "Precis on Afghan Affairs, 1919–1927," (Simla: Foreign and Political Department, Government of India, 1928): 335.

¹⁶² e.g. Leon Poullada, "Reform and Rebellion in Afghanistan, 1919-1929: King Amanullah's Failure to Modernize a Tribal Society." *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 412, no. 1 (1973): 318.

¹⁶³ Louis Dupree, *Afghanistan* (New Delhi, 1980): 344.

¹⁶⁴ Hugh Beattie, *Imperial Frontier Tribe and State in Waziristan* (London, 2001): 120.

¹⁶⁵ Louis Dupree, "The Retreat of the British Army from Kabul to Jalalabad in 1842: History and Folklore" *Journal of the Folklore Institute* (1967): 59.

¹⁶⁶ Poullada, Pashtun Role quoted in 'Pashtun Tribal Dynamics', *Tribal Analysis Centre* (2009).

¹⁶⁷ Dupree, *Retreat*: cf.59 & 66.

leads) will react to an external intervener by aggregating with other Pashtun leaders (their differences temporarily buried) or by aggregating with the outsiders (to bring pressure to bear on his enemies within Pashtun society). The balance between the two forces rests on the individual leader's micro-personal history and his relationship with the wider societal context in which he lives, from village to nation state. And of course, that wider societal context changes as other Pashtun leaders make their own calculations and choices. These processes, and the difficulties of outsiders determining their true course, are writ large in this thesis.

The question arises of whether these power centres and processes can amalgamate in a long-term process of state building (here I am using the term state to mean nation state, rather than meaning government as I have used it in the previous paragraphs). This has occurred in other countries, through various means. England, for example, although detribalised a millennium ago, united church and state during the time of Henry VIII. The English monarch is still the *Defender of the Faith*. In Afghanistan, there have been periods where the a similar fusion has occurred, for instance during Zahir Shah's reign in the twentieth century, when the Mujaddidi family of religious leaders married into the Royal lineage, enhancing stability (I accept that the two examples are not strictly comparable due to the non-unitary nature of Afghanistan's religious sphere, compared to the Church of England).¹⁶⁸

Afghanistan is currently enduring processes of fusion and fission: tribal, religious and state.¹⁶⁹ This has been occurring since 1978, the starting point for this thesis, and has been caused by the multiple foreign interventions over the period, and the resulting conflict(s). The violence is both an outcome of the dynamics, and a cause: it, itself, has a communicative property within the society. To counter this, there have been formal attempts over the last thirty-four years of conflict at 'rebalancing' Afghan and Pushtun society, some more sincere than others. Take, for example, the process of the national Loya Jirgas (big councils) enacted in Kabul every so often. Frequently used by Afghan rulers to legitimise their imposed decisions, the Loya Jirgas of 2002 appeared, at the time, to be the beginning of a period of equilibrium.¹⁷⁰ On a smaller scale, the three periods of Helmandi tribal rapprochement documented for the first time in this thesis point to a similar process: the most recent of these was in 2012 (and is still continuing), the outcome yet undetermined.

¹⁶⁸ David Edwards, *Before Taliban* (London, 2002): 259.

¹⁶⁹ Gilles Dorransoro, *Revolution Unending: Afghanistan, 1979 to the Present* (London, 2005): 1-6.

¹⁷⁰ Afghans for Civil Society, *Loya Jirga Focus Groups: Kandahar and Helmand Provinces* (Kandahar, 2003).

Lastly, it is appropriate to discuss the concept of, and processes surrounding, warlordism. Antonio Giustozzi sees this as part of the process of state building. His definition focusses on those military leaders who have risen to warlord status by exerting political power in the areas that they control by dint of being the most powerful military leader.¹⁷¹ This is a very apt definition when one considers some of the leaders in Helmand (particularly in chapter 4). These mini-states fulfil the role of the traditional state in the tripartite equilibrium mentioned above, yet the leader may originally have been a religious leader, or a tribal leader—thus two of the power centres may overlap. Authors sometimes treat the rise of warlordism in Afghanistan as a new phenomenon,¹⁷² when actually it is an age-old process and merely represents the modern description of the rise of new leaders—often using religious or tribal networks—into positions of political, quasi-state power.

Take, for example, the Alizai, the major tribe in northern Helmand. There, Akhtur Khan (a religious leader), and Abu Bakr Khan (a tribal leader), who led the Alizai against the British in the first and second Anglo-Afghan wars respectively, rose to prominence and led the Alizai, usurping the ‘traditional’ tribal leadership.¹⁷³ Neither however, was subsumed into, or co-opted by, the state, although arguably, as per the above definition, they were warlords. And in the modern era Nasim Akhundzada rose from clerical status to become the *primus inter pares* in the Alizai leadership in the 1980s.¹⁷⁴ His brothers, who inherited the dynasty, became the provincial governors of Helmand. It is clear from our definition that Nasim was a warlord, as were his brothers, even though they had very different relationships with the state. More confusing is his nephew, Sher Mohammad, who, as shown in this thesis, is both part of the Afghan state as a Senator, whilst simultaneously working against them with the Taliban (chapters 5 and 6). Yet, arguably, in northern Helmand he is still a warlord, as a politico-military leader. These examples will be explored further throughout the thesis.

In conclusion, this brief discussion of Pushtun society has outlined the tribe, state and mosque tripartite equilibrium and the inherent processes of fusion and fission, much exacerbated by external interventions. The central importance of land was emphasised and warlordism was discussed in the context of state building. All of these elements show us that Pushtun society (particularly rural society, such as Helmand’s) is remarkably resilient when viewed over the long term. I now go onto discuss the pre-1978 history of Helmand, where these structures and processes are clearly evident.

¹⁷¹ Antonio Giustozzi, *Empires of Mud: Dynamics of Warlordism in Afghanistan, 1980-2007* (London, 2009): 2, 5-6.

¹⁷² Ana Pejcinova, "Post-Modernizing Afghanistan" *CEU Political Science Journal*, no. 05 (2006): 38-40; Seth Jones, "The Rise of Afghanistan's Insurgency: State Failure and Jihad" *International Security* 32, no. 4 (2008).

¹⁷³ Mike Martin, *A brief history of Helmand* (Warminster, 2011): 16 & 18.

¹⁷⁴ See chapter 2.

1.3 - Pre-1978 Helmandi history

In 1731 a Persian King, Nadir Shah, defeated the Durrani (the Pushtun tribal confederation indigenous to Helmand) in Herat. He then incorporated them into his army, and in 1737 captured Kandahar from the Ghilzai, another Pushtun tribal confederation.¹⁷⁵ For their service, Nadir Shah granted the Durrani the lands they occupy in modern Helmand and Kandahar. The land grants were allocated according to the size of the kinship groups and given on condition of providing men for military service—‘a horseman for every plough’. Thus, for example, the Alikozai had to give eight hundred and fifty horsemen annually and the Barakzai nine hundred and seven.¹⁷⁶

Otherwise, they were not taxed: in fact, they received plunder from foreign expeditions commensurate with the number of men provided to the king (that is, how much they could carry back). The land grants enshrined and strengthened the hierarchical—rutbavi—social structures that the Durrani enjoy. Everything that has happened since to land ownership in Helmand is seen as an aberration from the status quo established at that time.

Ahmad Shah (Popalzai), Nadir’s successor, established hereditary government positions as a way of reflecting tribes’ power relative to their size—a de jure recognition of their de facto power—and massively expanded the new ‘Afghan’ state. In this way the Barakzai, as the most powerful Durrani tribe, secured the understanding that they would always be ministers to the Popalzai crown, and possess the best land in central Helmand on the alluvial plains of four rivers.¹⁷⁷ As loyal and important servants to the crown, it is not a coincidence that Gereshk, a strategic crossing point on the major fluvial barrier between Herat and Kandahar, is held by the Barakzai.

Unfortunately, Ahmad Shah’s death in 1772 led to weaker rulers and successional struggles, and eventually allowed a Barakzai dynasty, led by Dost Mohammad, to usurp the Popalzai throne in 1826.¹⁷⁸ This was key for Helmand: there are very few Popalzai in Helmand, and so the monarchy had treated the Helmandi tribes in an equal manner. Following the Barakzai takeover, the monarchy was drawn from one of the biggest tribal groups in Helmand leading to the Alizai-Barakzai rivalry that still dominates Helmandi politics today.

¹⁷⁵ Mountstuart Elphinstone, An Account of the Kingdom of Caubul, and its Dependencies in Persia, Tartary and India, 2010 ed. (Milton Keynes, 1839): 279-82.

¹⁷⁶ Lt Col CM MacGregor, Central Asia: Part 2 - A Contribution Towards the Better Knowledge of the Topography, Ethnology, Resources and History of Afghanistan (Calcutta, 1871): 99 & 170.

¹⁷⁷ Olaf Caroe, The Pathans (Oxford, 1958): 253-5.

¹⁷⁸ Barfield, Afghanistan: 107-9.

Dost Mohammad instituted harsh tax collection on the Alizai, the northern Helmandi tribe, using Barakzai tax collectors.¹⁷⁹ This regime was brought to a close by the British intervention of 1839, which was an attempt to limit Russian influence by re-installing the previous Popalzai dynasty under Shah Shuja. At that time, both Kandahar and Gereshk were governed by brothers of Dost Mohammad. Once Kandahar fell to the British in April, the governors fled to the family home in Gereshk and a British brigade was dispatched in an abortive attempt to capture them, before leaving some months later.¹⁸⁰

Shah Shuja, however, kept the previous Barakzai tax collectors on, and one of them was killed by Alizai tribesmen in May 1840. Failing to understand that they were embroiled in a local fight, the British supported the Barakzai, beginning the Alizai-British conflict. Subsequently, there was outright Alizai rebellion led by Akhtur Khan, who eventually captured Gereshk with six thousand men.¹⁸¹ Akhtur Khan is remembered to this day as a hero by the Alizai. He was then driven off by British forces who then launched punitive expeditions into Alizai areas. Eventually, the British intervention collapsed and Dost Mohammad was reinstated to the throne, with a later British subsidy starting in 1857. This reinforced the Barakzai position in Helmand.

Again, in November 1878, British forces invaded Afghanistan over fears of Russian influence. Kandahar was occupied, as was Gereshk, albeit briefly, but not briefly enough. The Alizai mobilised fifteen hundred men and attacked the British as they were withdrawing from Gereshk in February 1879—the Alizai memories of the 1840s were still fresh. Shortly after, the British were forced to reoccupy Gereshk to defend Kandahar from Ayub, a pretender to the Afghan throne, based in Herat.¹⁸²

This led to the Battle of Maiwand in July 1880 and a crushing defeat for the British. This was administered at the hand of Ayub, ably supported by Abu Bakr Khan, another Alizai leader, who mobilised three thousand Helmandi men.¹⁸³ The Battle of Maiwand is a key story in Helmand, and Helmandis will tell you proudly that their 'grandfather' fought against the British. Abu Bakr Khan, as well, is seen as a hero by the Alizai, and to a lesser degree by the Noorzai and Barakzai.¹⁸⁴ The British left Afghanistan again leaving the Barakzai Abdur Rahman on the throne with another subsidy.

¹⁷⁹ Henry Rawlinson, Report on the Dooranee Tribes (1841): paras 21-3.

¹⁸⁰ John Kaye, History of the War in Afghanistan (London, 1878): 446.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 102-4.

¹⁸² Ludwig Adamec, ed. Historical and Political Gazetteer of Afghanistan, vol. 2 (Graz, 1985): 94.

¹⁸³ Stephen Tanner, Afghanistan: A Military History from Alexander the Great to the War Against the Taliban (Philadelphia, 2009): 216.

¹⁸⁴ PersExp, Helmand, 2011-2.

Abdur Rahman campaigned in Helmand and Abu Bakr was beaten and exiled, and the Alizai began paying tax.¹⁸⁵ Elements of the Ishaqzai and the Noorzai were banished to Turkestan, in the north-west. Stability reigned until the death of Abdur Rahman's son, Habibullah, in 1919, which saw full independence from the British who had previously controlled Afghan foreign policy. The end of the British stipend meant that Amanullah, the new king, had to rely on conscription to maintain his army.¹⁸⁶

Amanullah also sought great reform of Helmandi society—banning the sale of women to settle debts, for example—and the Alizai rose in rebellion in 1923.¹⁸⁷ Further rebellions, related to the scale of state intrusion into the polity (in this case compulsory education), broke out under Nadir and Zahir Shah, the subsequent monarchs, before they began to implement reforms at a slower pace and with appropriate care taken over the centre-periphery balance. Helmand then entered a forty-year golden era of peace.

The government, at first on their own, and later with increasing levels of American support, began to build canals in Helmand starting with the Nahr-e Bughra from Gereshk down to Marjeh. This canal allowed the reclaiming and settling of Nad-e Ali and Marjeh with non-Helmandi tribal and ethnic groups in 1954 and 1957 respectively.¹⁸⁸ The Americans saw the canal projects as a way of competing with the Soviets in Afghanistan, but for the Afghan government, it was a way of breaking up the power of large tribal groupings and settling nomads. The discord in aims resulted in acrimony and poorly designed and sited canals. Eventually, with massive amounts of US aid, the problems were overcome and over ten thousand families were settled across central Helmand. There were plans to develop a canal system in northern Helmand, but this never came to fruition.¹⁸⁹

In 1960, Helmand was made a province, with Gereshk as its capital. In 1964, the capital moved to Lashkar Gah and the number of districts was increased to something akin to today.¹⁹⁰ Each district was ranked according to the resources and services that it would receive from the central government. The central Barakzai-majority districts did much better than the northern Alizai districts: the Barakzai were being compensated for the loss of the provincial capital in the district carve-up. As the canal projects progressed, central Helmand became more developed with schools and hospitals, leaving northern Helmand further

¹⁸⁵ Adamec, Gazetteer vol. 2: 237.

¹⁸⁶ General Staff India, Military Report - Afghanistan: History, Topography, Ethnography, Resources, Armed Forces, Forts and Fortified Posts, Administration and Communications (Dehli, 1925): 381.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 143.

¹⁸⁸ Dupree, Afghanistan: 502.

¹⁸⁹ Nick Cullather, "Damming Afghanistan: Modernization in a Buffer State" The Journal of American History 89, no. 2 (2002): 527.

¹⁹⁰ Adamec, Gazetteer vol. 2: 1.

behind. Nad-e Ali, by now the largest district, and with thirty-seven different tribal and ethnic groups, was awarded a very small scale of resources compared to its size.¹⁹¹ The projects were extended south to Nawa and Garmsir.

The Kajaki dam, designed to regulate water flow and provide hydroelectricity to southern Afghanistan, had been built in 1953. This was of concern to Iran, as the water flow affected the ecology of its Sistani region. A treaty had been signed in 1939 between Afghanistan and Iran, but never ratified and Zahir Shah, in one of his last acts as king, signed another treaty on the water division of the Helmand. This was not ratified either and the water from the Helmand remains a major issue.¹⁹²

One of the reasons that the treaty was never implemented was the overthrow of Zahir Shah by his cousin, Daud, in 1973. He further increased the scale of immigration under the canal projects and mixed indigenous Helmandis with settlers, leading to land disputes that are still unresolved today. All of these events laid the backdrop to the April 1978 Communist Party's coup in Kabul, which is where the story begins in chapter two.

The previous sections have focused on the theoretical, anthropological and historical literatures to set the context for what follows. I now present my antithesis—the 'public' nature of the literature from 1978-2012—before I present my thesis—the importance of the interaction between the public and private spheres and the primacy of the private sphere—and definitions.

1.4 - Post-1978 Helmandi history: the public sphere

My antithesis is a critical review of the post-1978 historical/political studies/conflict studies scholarships on the Afghan (and Helmandi where available) conflict, demonstrating the degree to which the literature often focuses on the public sphere of the conflict rather than the private sphere which I will expose in this thesis. It can be seen throughout, however, that the conflict since 1978 has obeyed the anthropological context as set out in section 1.2.

There have been separate public spheres for each of the three recent periods. The first, during the communist period in Afghanistan (1978–92), was that of the cold war. The war, of which the Helmandi conflict was a subset, was understood in terms of an 'East-West

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 108.

¹⁹² 'Iran/Afghanistan: Still No Resolution For Century-Old Water Dispute' <http://www.payvand.com/news/05/sep/1061.html> (accessed 12 Nov 2012).

confrontation'.¹⁹³ This was the age of the glorious mujahidin, fighting their Soviet oppressors in a jihad. As the foreword to Sandy Gall's memoirs, written by Margaret Thatcher, begins, '...one of the most heroic resistance struggles known to history has been taking place...in the mountains and plains of Afghanistan'.¹⁹⁴ This is not atypical of western journalistic accounts of the era. Arthur Bonner, one of the very few journalists to travel to out-of-the-way Helmand, discussed the war in terms of the holy mujahidin fighting the atheist communists, even when investigating the incongruity of opium-growing among the Alizai religious figures of northern Helmand.¹⁹⁵ The public sphere of the religious nature of the anti-Soviet resistance was repeatedly emphasised by western journalists with, for example, Jon Anderson speaking of a 'peculiar fatalism of men for whom belief in God and paradise has replaced the fear of death'.¹⁹⁶ The Soviet side had a different vocabulary, but the public sphere still applied. The 'limited contingent' was doing its 'international duty' in supporting world-wide socialism.¹⁹⁷ The Afghans fighting them were labelled as 'counterrevolutionaries', or 'imperialist and Zionist agents'.¹⁹⁸ In soldier-slang, they were 'dukhi' (ghosts).¹⁹⁹

Writing later, scholars have the benefit over journalists or practitioners of intellectual distance, and this can enable them to analyse with greater clarity. Oliver Roy, one of the great scholars of the Soviet period, shows well the heterogenic nature of the mujahidin and explores the interactions between tribe, (mujahidin) party funding and charismatic leadership (he also published in 1985 when the conflict was in full swing).²⁰⁰ Antonio Giustozzi charted the government side of the conflict, and Barnett Rubin attempted a dualistic approach.²⁰¹ All produced impressive works, shedding much light on the degree of contemporaneous fragmentation extant in the Afghan communist government and mujahidin. However, their base assumption was that the Soviet-backed government in Afghanistan was a unitary institution, albeit one suffering from factionalisation, rather than merely a public label that was adopted by private groups and leaders in an ad hoc manner. Gilles Dorronsoro too wrote in the same vein and he further explored public lenses through which to understand fragmentation, be they ethnic, religious, or ideological.²⁰² I am greatly indebted to these four authors even though they did not write in detail about Helmand. Their overall analysis,

¹⁹³ Dorronsoro, *Revolution*: 5.

¹⁹⁴ Sandy Gall, *Afghanistan: Travels with the Mujahideen* (Sevenoaks, 1988): xiii.

¹⁹⁵ Arthur Bonner, *Among the Afghans* (Durham, 1987): 281.

¹⁹⁶ Jon Anderson, *Guerrillas* (London, 2006): 244.

¹⁹⁷ Artemy Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye* (Cambridge, 2011): 24.

¹⁹⁸ Gregory Feifer, *The Great Gamble* (New York, 2009): 17; Rodric Braithwaite, *Afgantsy* (London, 2011): 87 & 106.

¹⁹⁹ Artyom Borovik, *The Hidden War* (London, 1991): 19.

²⁰⁰ Oliver Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan* (Cambridge, 1985): 60-1 & 70.

²⁰¹ Antonio Giustozzi, *War, Politics and Society in Afghanistan, 1978-1992* (London, 2000); Barnett Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan* (New Haven, 1995).

²⁰² Dorronsoro, *Revolution*: 5-19.

however, of 'public' organisations (i.e. the mujahidin or the communist government) that suffer from exquisite fragmentation and overlapping recruitment bases was an excellent motivator to understand further the private nature of conflict in Helmand. Apart from Roy, their strength lies in the retrospective nature of their writing.

The Soviet Army left Afghanistan in 1989, and the Soviet-backed Najibullah government collapsed with the cessation of outside funding in 1992, leading to civil war. The cold war had ended and thus it became harder to frame the conflict in ideological, geopolitical terms. So began a period of Pakistani domination of Afghanistan and an alternative public sphere.²⁰³ The civil war, approximately running from 1992–6 in most of the country, was often depicted in Hobbesian, ethnic terms: 'it only remained to deplore the propensity of the Afghans to internecine struggle'.²⁰⁴ In retrospect, it seems that the civil war was a missed opportunity in terms of scholarship, in that it was a chance, freer of external, public dynamics, to understand the continuing conflict in its private form. And although scholars began to dissolve the 'falsely unifying rubrics [that] invent collective identities',²⁰⁵ they replaced them with a very Orientalist view of Afghan on Afghan violence, often focussing on ethnicity.²⁰⁶

The rise of the Taliban movement in Kandahar in 1994 resulted in yet another public sphere describing Afghanistan.²⁰⁷ William Maley captured the viewpoint of the new era when he reported that 'religious fundamentalism of a particularly virulent kind seemed to be on the march'.²⁰⁸ Writings about the Taliban often focused on their religious nature, extolling for example, the strength of their 'religious dogma'.²⁰⁹ Journalists were even more direct in their prose focussing on 'the weird society...television sets hung up like hanged men'.²¹⁰ The post-2001 public sphere—described above as the 'insurgency narrative'—is exceptionally pervasive, and accentuated by a lack of detailed, on-the-ground, scholarship.

Although there are other side-issues to this public sphere: corruption, the lack of legitimacy suffered by the Afghan government, Taliban softening of attitudes with regards to education, and so on. But they all use the unstated assumption that the Taliban are a movement, no

²⁰³ Peter Tomsen, *The Wars of Afghanistan* (New York, 2011): 322.

²⁰⁴ Dorronsoro, *Revolution*: 6.

²⁰⁵ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 1978): xxii.

²⁰⁶ Dorronsoro, *Revolution*: 6.

²⁰⁷ Defining the Taliban movement is exceptionally difficult, partly because they are a shifting mosaic of different interests and groups and partly because they are a label that actors and groups adopt in order to further their private interests. See sections 3.11-3.16, 4.9-4.20, the whole of chapters 5 and 6.

²⁰⁸ William Maley, ed. *Fundamentalism Reborn?* (Lahore, 1998): 2.

²⁰⁹ Kamal Matinuddin, *The Taliban Phenomenon* (Karachi, 1999): 35.

²¹⁰ John Simpson, *News From No Man's Land* (London, 2002): 300.

matter how fractured, so too the government, no matter how corrupt or rapacious.²¹¹ Moreover, serious scholars take as their starting point these assumptions. Antonio Giustozzi, still producing first-rate analysis on Afghanistan, writes for example, '[in the early 2000s] the Neo-Taliban maintained a strong cohesiveness'²¹² and of the 'penetration of the Taliban' into the population.²¹³ Ahmed Rashid, the respected Pakistani writer, discusses the military clashes between the 'Taliban' and American troops in 2003 as if they had equal levels of organisational cohesion.²¹⁴ Even scholars who have conducted extensive on-the-ground research, such as Alex Strick van Linschoten and Felix Kuehn, who lived in Kandahar whilst researching, argue so strongly in their otherwise brilliant work *An Enemy We Created* that the Taliban is a separate organisation to Al Qaeda, that it gives the Taliban cohesion and agency that some centralised western governments lack.²¹⁵

This public sphere and the assumptions of coherence given to actors are (perhaps by definition) echoed in the policy arena. Tony Blair's memoir paints a binary view of Afghanistan, pitting 'fanaticism' against 'modernisation'.²¹⁶ Some of this can be dismissed as rhetoric or conscious simplification, but it appears that western militaries, above all the US military, believe(d) in a simplistic good-versus-evil narrative.²¹⁷ General Jones, President Obama's National Security Advisor, described the conflict as, 'a clash of civilisations...a clash of religions...a clash of concepts of how to live'.²¹⁸ President Obama himself received intelligence briefings that stated that 'the *whole* Taliban insurgency is *designed* to outlast the coalition of US and international troops [my italics]' implying elements of cohesion, planning, purpose and agency.²¹⁹ The US commander of NATO troops in Afghanistan in 2009 wrote in his *Initial Assessment* to President Obama that the leadership of the Taliban 'conducts a formal campaign review each year' after which 'Mullah Omar announces his guidance and intent for the year'.²²⁰ Even Major-General Flynn, the erstwhile commander of NATO intelligence in Afghanistan, whilst lamenting the US intelligence focus on the Taliban at the expense of the wider country, still wrote of 'subvert[ing] the Taliban power structure' and of the 'distinctions between the Taliban and the rest of the Afghan population'.²²¹ The generals

²¹¹ Edward Girardet, *Killing the Cranes* (White River Junction, 2011): 348; David Loyn, *Butcher and Bolt* (London, 2008): 295-6.

²¹² Giustozzi, *Koran*: 82.

²¹³ Antonio Giustozzi, ed. *Decoding the New Taliban* (London, 2009): 213.

²¹⁴ Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos* (London, 2008): 245-7.

²¹⁵ Alex Strick van Linschoten and Felix Kuehn, *An Enemy we Created* (London, 2012): 289.

²¹⁶ Tony Blair, *A Journey* (London, 2010): 611.

²¹⁷ Rajiv Chandrasekaran, *Little America* (London, 2012): 248.

²¹⁸ Bob Woodward, *Obama's Wars* (London, 2010): 127.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 162.

²²⁰ Farrell and Giustozzi (forthcoming) quoting *COMISAF Initial Assessment*: 2-6.

²²¹ Matt Pottinger and Paul Batchelor Michael Flynn, *Fixing Intel: A Blueprint for Making Intelligence Relevant in Afghanistan* (2010): 14 & 23.

describe the Taliban as a cohesive, unitary whole. In summary, there is an exceptionally well defined public sphere describing the current conflict in Afghanistan.

1.5a - The thesis: the logic of violence in civil war

In the civil war literature, one theorist in particular stood out as having particular relevance to my experiences in the Helmandi context: Stathis Kalyvas, and especially his major study, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*. In his book, Kalyvas argues that the interaction between public and private is what explains the violence in civil wars. The fusion of the two, he puts it rather elegantly, is the 'essence rather than the noise'.²²² And his key observation, and basis for my thesis: private narratives are *central* rather than *peripheral* in explaining civil wars.²²³ Civil wars, Kalyvas concludes, are a mosaic of discrete mini-wars.²²⁴

Conflicts and violence 'on the ground' are more related to private cleavages rather than the public cleavages, even though private issues are often presented within the framework of the public sphere.²²⁵ Kalyvas concludes that the role of lower-level actors in shaping violence is often missing in the literature—they are treated as objects rather than subjects—and so he focusses on them in his data collection.²²⁶ The absence of lower level actors is very evident in the literature on the Afghan conflict (see section 1.4). Therefore, I make a similar move in this thesis. This turns the traditional view of war on its head.²²⁷ I propose that agency²²⁸ lies with these low-level leaders: it is they who negotiate between private groups and public actors, for example. This is reflected in my research design: these district- and provincial-level notables comprise the vast majority of my interviewees, and so give me the ability to explore that interaction both looking up (to the public sphere) and down (to the private sphere).

For Kalyvas, the key mechanisms shaping violence are denunciations and collaborations. These are driven by interpersonal cleavages: outsiders are mere tools for settling disputes.²²⁹ Put simply, a civil war generates lots of opportunities to kill personal enemies with indirect violence (perpetrated by a public actor). This cuts both ways though: private individuals will exploit public actors and their ideologies to settle their personal scores and gain resources, and at the same time public actors will exploit private individuals and their

²²² Kalyvas, *Logic*: 365.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 0.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 371.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 364.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 390.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

²²⁸ Agency here defined as the ability to be the primary influence on one's personal environment both upwards and downwards rather than being actors for others' schema.

²²⁹ Kalyvas, *Logic*: 5-6.

grievances in order to mobilise fighters and gather information.²³⁰ There is a critical point here: denunciations will only work if the outside, public actor is blinded to the private sphere by its opacity. Going beyond Kalyvas, this is the 'but' that I discussed earlier. The 'policeman' is not simply corrupt: he has chosen the appropriate public group to enable him to best protect his business interests. This manipulation of the 'public sphere' through denunciations, very important in understanding Helmand's conflict, is one mechanism of the interaction between public and private spheres (defined below). In addition to the role of denunciation and collaboration, identified by Kalyvas, the Helmand case suggests that further mechanisms are also at play in shaping violence, including militia creation, channelling of development funding, and the impact of elections on the distribution of power within formal government structures. Having outlined the importance and aptness of the public-private dichotomy, and critically, the interaction between the two, I now define the public and the private spheres and outline my theoretical framework around which my oral history data will be analysed.

1.5b - Definitions²³¹

The public sphere of conflict²³² is that which describes violence in terms of macro-dynamics as reflected in official, institutional narratives, political ideologies, grand, national-level ethnic politics and bureaucratic ideals. This sphere is often reflected in strategic studies and the dominant theoretical approach to international relations (i.e. realist theory).²³³ These academic literatures share one key aspect: they tend to assume unitary actors and elites and groups are fused and amalgamated. Elites control of units (states and organisations within them) tends to be unproblematised. Examples include the different mujahidin parties (organisations), the democracy offered by the current Afghan government (public narrative) and the Soviet-mujahidin clash (public cleavage). Strictly defined for this thesis, public organisations espouse and propagate an ideology or public narrative at a macro or non-local scale—this includes ethnicities fighting ethnic politics at a national level. Membership of public organisations is—apart from national-level ethnicities—derived from political context, supposedly voluntary and often transitory. Public cleavages stem from the clash of public narratives.

²³⁰ Ibid., 382.

²³¹ Developed from *ibid.*, 10-1.

²³² This is distinct from the definition of 'public sphere' as developed by Jürgen Habermas in his book The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere – An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society, 1991 ed. (Boston, 1962).

²³³ Thomas G. Mahnken, "Strategic Theory", in John Baylis et al. (eds.), Strategy in the Contemporary World, 3rd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010): 60-75; Stephen Walt, "Realism and Security," in Robert A. Denmark (ed.), The International Studies Encyclopedia (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010): 6076-6095.

Examples of public organisations include countries (Argentina),²³⁴ insurgent/rebel groups (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia—FARC),²³⁵ political parties (Sinn Féin)²³⁶ and (often government) security organisations (the Wehrmacht).²³⁷ Examples of public narratives range from political ideologies (communism)²³⁸ to reactions to events (a drive for freedom from an occupation).²³⁹ Examples of public cleavages in conflict include those between alliances (the Axis and the Allies),²⁴⁰ between countries (Pakistan and India),²⁴¹ between non-state organisations (Al Qaeda and the Anbar Awakening)²⁴² or a mixture of all three (France and Islamist rebels in Mali²⁴³ or the African Union and Al Shabaab in Somalia).²⁴⁴ These macro, public entities and labels are habitually how scholars have understood civil wars—private, or micro entities and labels are often overlooked.²⁴⁵

The private sphere of conflict is that which describes violence in terms of the micro-dynamics of personal relationships between leaders, between leaders and groups, or within groups. This sphere is often described in anthropology and micro-historical literature, novels, poems and journalism. These approaches also share one key aspect: they all privilege personal and intracommunity dynamics. Examples include a village head (actor), a clan (group), local police brutality (private narrative) and a blood feud (private cleavage). Strictly defined for this thesis, private groups have involuntary memberships of private actors, a degree of rootedness in community and exist at the micro scale e.g. people are born into tribes or clans (although note the caveats on page 9). This can also include minority ethnicities at a local scale. Private narratives stem from specific events (whether real or perceived) between or about private actors and groups—these can lead to private cleavages.

Examples of the elements existing in the private, micro sphere of conflict are also common in the literature (although different types of literature—see above), yet they are often anecdotal and un-explained, rather than explanatory and central, as the public, macro elements are

²³⁴ Lawrence Freedman, "The war of the Falkland Islands, 1982" *Foreign Affairs* (1982).

²³⁵ Alain Labrousse, "The FARC and the Taliban's Connection to Drugs" *Journal of Drug Issues* 35, no. 1 (2005).

²³⁶ Patrick Maume, "The Ancient constitution: Arthur Griffith and his intellectual legacy to Sinn Féin" *Irish Political Studies* 10, no. 1 (1995).

²³⁷ Edward Shils and Morris Janowitz, "Cohesion and disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II" *Public Opinion Quarterly* 12, no. 2 (1948).

²³⁸ Lucian Pye, *Guerrilla Communism in Malaya*, vol. 95 (Princeton, 1956).

²³⁹ Boaz Ganor, "Defining Terrorism: Is One Man's Terrorist another Man's Freedom Fighter?" *Police Practice and Research* 3, no. 4 (2002).

²⁴⁰ Field Marshall Lord Alanbrooke, *War Diaries 1939-1945* (Ewing, 2003).

²⁴¹ Šumit Ganguly, *Conflict unending: India-Pakistan tensions since 1947* (New York, 2001).

²⁴² John McCary, "The Anbar awakening: An alliance of incentives" *The Washington Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (2009).

²⁴³ 'France continues northern Mali airstrikes', *Al Jazeera* (23 Jan 2013).

²⁴⁴ Cedric Barnes and Harun Hassan, "The rise and fall of Mogadishu's Islamic Courts" *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 1, no. 2 (2007).

²⁴⁵ Kalyvas, *Logic*: 374.

often considered.²⁴⁶ (Named) actors are most often mentioned, particularly in journalism, and include examples of types as wide as humanity is long (militia leader, drug dealer, terrorist).²⁴⁷ Private groups, particularly genealogical ones such as tribes or clans, are less often mentioned, but are covered well in anthropological literature (tribes in Kenya).²⁴⁸ Inter-group or inter-actor narratives or cleavages are much more difficult to find in the literature, although authors may often describe tribal warfare' or 'blood feuds'.²⁴⁹ Whilst these micro-elements in the private sphere of conflict helped me understand the battles that I witnessed in Helmand, these clashes could almost always be interpreted in two ways. That is as conflict between the Taliban and the government (macro, public) and, *at the same time*, conflict between village A and village B. This underlines the importance of the interaction between the two levels, micro and macro, public and private: it is the key to unlocking the conflict and the violence.

Thus, following Kalyvas, I will examine the *interactions* between the two spheres. Take the example of two neighbouring village heads (private actors) that are having a land dispute (private cleavage). The first *affiliates* (interacts) with the Taliban jihad (public narrative/organisation) in order to receive Taliban funding and weaponry to support his position in the local dispute. The second *affiliates* (interacts) with the government (public narrative/organisation) to obtain funding for a village militia to protect the village from the 'Taliban' of his neighbour. Moreover, in the interaction outlined above, the private group and the public organisation overlay each other making research and analysis challenging. Types of interaction include manipulation, co-option and subscription to public actors and patronage, among others. *War on its Head* will explore the public and private spheres of conflict and the interactions between them.

Theoretically, an important distinction is that between ethnicities and tribes. It can be seen from the above definitions of public and private that ethnicities could fit into either. An ethnicity, ideally, is a group born of common descent that speaks the same language: different ethnicities speak different languages (e.g. Pushtun, Hazara, Uzbek). However, tribes are the smaller building blocks of common descent: many tribes make up an ethnicity, and so many tribes will speak the same language (e.g. Alizai, Barakzai, Noorzai). This distinction, between tribes and ethnicities, one private, one public, is slightly arbitrary and is

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 4-5.

²⁴⁷ e.g. 'Liberia's Charles Taylor appeals at The Hague', [BBC News](#) (22 Jan 2013).

²⁴⁸ Granville Orde-Browne, [The vanishing tribes of Kenya: a description of the manners & customs of the primitive & interesting tribes dwelling on the vast southern slopes of Mount Kenya, & their fast disappearing native methods of life](#) (Westport, 1970).

²⁴⁹ Napoleon Chagnon, "Life histories, blood revenge, and warfare in a tribal population" [Science](#) 239, no. 4843 (1988).

defined by scale and ideology—tribes do not fight national-level politics, yet ethnicities do. Practically-speaking however, for the scale of this study, this distinction is irrelevant. There are separate ethnicities in Helmand, mostly settlers from the canal projects (see later), yet they define themselves on a tribal level. For example, were I ask two people in Helmand (a Hazara and a Pushtun) what quam (tribe) they were, they would respond Hazara and Alizai (or Barakzai etc). That is, the Hazara are such a minority in Helmand as to be treated as just another tribe, and critically, Pashtun tribes will work with the Hazara, against other Pashtun tribes over a water dispute (this example explored in chapter 5)—at this level, it is a private cleavage rather than a public one. Further, on a local level, inter-ethnic dialogues are not about the ideologies that separate them (e.g. the Hazara in Helmand do not argue that there should be more Shia-oriented religious teaching in Helmandi schools), but about private issues like land and water. I include this fine distinction here to aid in the conclusions, where I will extrapolate my Helmandi-level analysis up to the national level where, of course, there are public, battling ethnicities.

	Public Sphere		Private Sphere	
Themes	Official, institutional narratives, political ideologies, grand, national-level ethnic politics (i.e. inter-community) and bureaucratic ideals.		Personal relationships between leaders, between leaders and groups, or within groups; privileges intra-community dynamics.	
Definitional characteristics	Organisations espouse and propagate an ideology or public narrative at macro or non-local scale (includes national ethnicities); membership is derived from political context, voluntary and often transitory.		Groups have involuntary memberships of individuals (private actors); groups have a degree of rootedness within the community <i>and</i> exist at a micro or local scale (can include local ethnic minorities).	
Literature habitually drawn from	Strategic studies and international relations literature.		Anthropology and micro-historical literature, novels, poems and journalism.	
Elements with Helmandi examples	Organisation	Taliban / Uzbeks of Afghanistan	Actor Group	Sher Mohammad Alizai / Helmandi Hazara
	Narrative	Democracy	Narrative	Police theft of opium
	Cleavage	Soviet-mujahidin	Cleavage	Feud over land

Figure 2: Table setting out the differences between the public and private spheres

Finally, I wish to define my usage of punctuation. Kalyvas identified a strong epistemic bias, especially in the sociological and histological traditions, in 'favour of the assumption that all (or most) participants in conflict are motivated by ideological concerns'.²⁵⁰ In the terms of this thesis, the bias privileges the public over the private: in the public sphere there is the assumption that private actors are motivated by ideology or the institution that they represent. (Thus, in the private sphere there is the assumption that, despite claims to the contrary, individuals will act only in their, or their own private group's, benefit). This bias is at the centre of my conceptual space. Therefore, on many occasions in this paper the reader will notice that a public organisation, narrative or cleavage occurs in inverted commas thus: 'government' or 'Taliban'. This is to indicate that, in my analysis, this aspect of the public sphere is being used by a private actor for private reasons. For example, the above description of the village headman who applies to the government for permission to raise a militia. He is in the 'government': not in any meaningful sense and only so that he can defend his village from the 'Taliban'.

1.5c - Thesis: interaction between the public and private spheres and the primacy of the private sphere

Both public and private spheres can be used to describe conflict in Helmand. The public sphere is that which describes the conflict in terms of macro-dynamics; the private, micro-dynamics. Habitually, the public sphere is dominant in explaining conflict dynamics, and the private sphere is treated as subsidiary. My thesis is that it is the interaction between the public and private spheres that shapes the conflict dynamics in Helmand. Furthermore, I posit that where the private sphere is opaque to outside, public organisations, it will have primacy in the interaction between public and private in shaping conflict dynamics.²⁵¹

1.5d - Testing the thesis

This is an oral history of the Helmandi conflict. Using the methods outlined in the next section, a historical narrative describing the conflict of the last thirty-four years in Helmand will be constructed. The thirty-four year period will be separated into eras defined by the dominant external influence. Within each era, events will be considered. Each event will be comprised of a series of elements (groups, actors, organisations etc.) which will be tested separately against the definitions of the public and private spheres set out in section 1.5b and figure 2. For example, when considering a particular battle, the ways in which the different sides portray themselves and how others portray them will be considered. This will

²⁵⁰ Kalyvas, *Logic*: 44.

²⁵¹ Developed from *ibid.*, 365.

allow categorisation of the composite elements involved in each event, in terms of private, personal elements or public, ideological elements.

At this stage, any possible interactions between the two spheres in creating and sustaining the conflict(s) will be identified. Critically, it will be necessary to assess whether the public organisations involved in those interactions were/are cognisant of the complexity inherent in the private sphere. The final stage in the analysis is to ascertain whether that information asymmetry has contributed to enabling elements of the private sphere to shape conflict dynamics. Throughout, the anthropological and historical literature, outlined above in sections 1.2 and 1.3, will be used contextually and as an aid to categorisation and analysis of the elements in my data, be they public, private, or both.

1.6a - Methods

This thesis is primarily based on interviews with Helmandi district- and provincial-level leaders conducted in Helmand, Kabul and London in Pushtu.²⁵² Using oral history techniques, I aim to tell the Helmandi stories of the last thirty-four years, thus testing the primacy of the private sphere in driving conflict dynamics. More broadly, the thesis is based upon nineteen months' of participant-observation in Helmand, both serving as a British Army officer and as a researcher. These primary source materials have been blended with historically restructured secondary sources, that is, the secondary sources have been reappraised through the lens of the primary source material.

Helmand was chosen as the basis for this study for several reasons. Through my previous military service in Helmand, I was able to conduct a pilot study showing the feasibility and benefits of conducting research in central Helmand. My extant contacts with local Helmandi notables, alongside deep knowledge from my previous work, and contacts within the British Army (to facilitate transport, for example: the logistics of conducting research in a warzone should not be underestimated) are what made this study possible. I recognise that these factors also present limitations to my work: these were mitigated as far as possible by conducting interviews among Helmandi diasporas in London and Kabul.

Central Helmand is a heterogeneous area which offers much richness to the researcher. It is deep within the Pushtun 'belt', and more than many ethnicities, outsiders project assumptions onto, and fail to understand, the Pushtun.²⁵³ Through Gereshk, Helmand occupies a strategic location on the route between the sub-continent and Persia: this

²⁵² I speak fluid, if not fluent, Pushtu.

²⁵³ Marsden, Fragments: 8-9.

generates resources that actors and groups wish to dominate. Central Helmand was also the site of Afghanistan's most major development project ever in the 1950s–70s, which created unprecedented social heterogeneity. This too shapes the conflict dynamics.

Lastly, Helmand has been the major focus of NATO military activity in recent years, with up to thirty thousand American and British troops deployed there during 2010–12. This has meant that I have been able to study closely the interaction between the public and private spheres. Whilst this is a study of the entire province, logistics dictated that central Helmand remained the detailed focus, and that the remaining districts of Helmand were not covered with as much specificity. However, my familiarity with central Helmand meant that I was able to get a good 'density' of data, thus facilitating detailed analysis.

1.6b - Oral history in an illiterate society

Helmand is a largely illiterate society.²⁵⁴ Even though the Pushtu language was first written down in the 15th century, exceptionally low literacy rates have meant that oral history has predominated for the Pushtun as a mechanism of data capture and storage.²⁵⁵ This too has sufficed for foreigners wishing to study them: oral studies of the Pushtun abound²⁵⁶ and oral histories, in particular, have many advantages over written ones. Written history, until recently, has tended to be a documentation of the struggle for power involving important men and events, reflecting the public sphere. The perspectives of the ordinary man and woman have remained unrecorded; this is particularly important for this thesis as 'internal' conflicts are fought within and amongst communities. Additionally, for much of the period under study, there has not been a government in Helmand; when there has been, it has often been replaced by its enemies, which does not aid continuity of record keeping. In brief, oral history fills in gaps, for which the Taliban and mujahidin periods in Helmand certainly qualify.²⁵⁷ That is not to say that there are not disadvantages to oral history as a concept: there are and they are largely related to the method of data collection, interviewing.

Interviews, conducted properly, allow interviewees to 'reflect and reason on a variety of subjects' allowing the researcher to gain 'a deeper insight into how they think and reflect'.²⁵⁸ They are, however, a subjective process and the responses will invariably be shaped by the social exchange between the interviewer and interviewee: an interview is literally an *inter*

²⁵⁴ Most estimates put Helmandi literacy at less than 8% for men and less than 1% for women (Stuart Gordon, Aid and Stabilization: Helmand Case Study (2010): 10).

²⁵⁵ Caroe, Pathans: xxiii-xxiv.

²⁵⁶ e.g. Anna Pont, Blind Chickens and Social Animals (Portland, 2001); Edwards, Before Taliban: .

²⁵⁷ Paul Thompson, The Voice of the Past: Oral History (Oxford, 2000): 2-7.

²⁵⁸ Steinar Kvale and Svend Brinkmann, Interviews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing (Thousand Oaks, 2008): 302.

view, a constructive process between two people. This will colour the oral history.²⁵⁹ It is not just what the respondents say that is important, the context within which they make their statements is essential too.²⁶⁰ Therefore, this unavoidable bias was used as the prism through which my interviews were conducted: that is, it was accepted that many of the interviewees attempted to manipulate me for their own, or their interest groups', betterment.

It is worth asking why the interviewees wished to speak with me and give me information, when it might put them in danger. For many, it was that I had known them for three years, and in some cases dealt with them extensively. They knew me, and, for many of them it was an interesting request to contribute to research about their home region. *They* were being requested to tell *me*, an outsider, the story of what has happened. Furthermore, interviews were interesting. I often spoke as much about the British, ISAF and myself as they did about themselves: it was a trade.

However, there was a darker trade as well. Interviewees were often attempting to use me, either to help gain lucrative ISAF contracts, or perhaps to spread disinformation into the 'western system'. This linked into my former identity where I worked as an advisor for the British commander in Helmand; my interviewees may have felt that I still had residual influence. In a Kalyvasian world, what better way to denounce your neighbor than to an unsuspecting academic?

To balance this unavoidable, yet not insubstantial, risk to my data validity several steps were taken. For each interviewee, a detailed biography was recorded (from them and from others) in order to ascertain their predicted viewpoints on particular issues, *as they might describe them to a former British Army officer* and taking into account what they might want from the interaction. I also recognise that there may have been a self-selection element within my interviewees, that is, they wanted to be interviewed by me to fulfil other goals other than helping my research. Wherever possible events were verified by a minimum of two independent oral sources, preferably three (hence providing triangulation),²⁶¹ except where indicated in the text. An iterative design allowed verification of facts and viewpoints in a continuous fashion.

This thesis uses a mixture of inductive and deductive research methods. Both have inherent weaknesses. For example, it is accepted that it is almost impossible for research of this type

²⁵⁹ Bjarte Folkestad, "Analysing Interview Data: Possibilities and Challenges" Eurosphere Working Paper Series, no. 13 (2008): 1-2.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁶¹ Bruce Berg, Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences (Boston, 2007): 5-8.

to be truly inductive,²⁶² that is, that the investigator has no idea what he or she might find when they begin the research. Yet a deductive approach of gathering data to 'prove' a theory in such a complex and little understood environment threatens to canalise thinking and restrict opportunities for understanding. Arguably, this is the root of any misunderstandings surrounding the Helmandi conflict. Therefore, a phenomenological approach was used that attempted to understand the dynamics on their own merits, drawing out natural units of meaning, stating them as simply as possible and trying to gain a sense of the whole *as seen by the interviewee*.²⁶³ Thus,

The phenomenological reduction is a conscious, effortful, opening of ourselves to the phenomenon as a phenomenon...we want not to see this event as an example of this or that theory that we have, we want to see it as a phenomenon in its own right, with its own meaning and structure.²⁶⁴

The phenomenological analysis process is about getting inside the interviewees/protagonists worldview; it is about understanding why they are saying what they are saying, and why they might be presenting it in that particular fashion. Phenomenology is not objective: it is about accepting all of the implicit biases in research collection and trying to use them to understand the interviewees' or protagonists' narratives.²⁶⁵ In-keeping with the marriage of inductive and deductive methodologies and phenomenology, I used an iterative, semi-structured/semi-standardised interview process.²⁶⁶ This allowed a predetermined chronology to be used as a handrail, but allowed the interviewees maximum scope to expand on what *they* felt as important within that chronology.²⁶⁷

There is an implicit balance in research of this sort that prompting interviewees with questions may have guided them as to the answers that they thought I wanted to hear, whereas insufficient questions would have reduced their focus on relevant topics. Therefore, there was no predetermined question set beyond asking what happened, who was involved, why it happened and attempting to identify the perceptions and misperceptions surrounding an event, and how those may have fed the event itself. As an iterative process, the chronology and question set expanded and improved such that some interviewees were re-interviewed as understanding developed: it is very hard to separate collection and analysis when interviewing.²⁶⁸ Distinctions were made in my analysis between first-hand and second-

²⁶² Folkestad, *Data*: 14.

²⁶³ Kvale and Brinkmann, *Interviews*: 205.

²⁶⁴ Ernest Keen, *A Primer in Phenomenological Psychology* (New York, 1975): 38.

²⁶⁵ Richard Hycner, "Some Guidelines for the Phenomenological Analysis of Interview Data" *Human Studies* 8, no. 3 (1985): 281.

²⁶⁶ Berg, *Methods*: 107.

²⁶⁷ Kvale and Brinkmann, *Interviews*: 27.

²⁶⁸ Folkestad, *Data*: 1.

hand knowledge as reported by the interviewees, as were reflections made by them about their own group, as compared to competing groups.

1.6c - Interviewee selection

The sample size was eighty-five anonymous interviews, of which seventy-one were conducted in Helmand, seven were conducted among the Helmandi diaspora in London and seven were conducted among Helmandis living in Kabul. A further eleven interviews were conducted with NATO officials to frame a small number of events.

For ethical reasons,²⁶⁹ namely that I am interviewing active participants in a civil war, the interviewees' identities are withheld and are represented by a three-digit code within the thesis. In a very few cases I even had to redact the interview code, because linking the interviewee description with the comment would make the interviewee's identity clear. Appendix 1 lists the anonymous interviewee descriptions. Assigning interviewee descriptions was slightly arbitrary, and should be seen as a guide rather than absolute categorisation. Everyone has multiple, overlapping identities, and in Helmand they are often strongly juxtaposed. I discussed with each interviewee the descriptions that they would use as their primary identity within this history: they are included here as an aid to reader understanding.

Interviewees were selected from my network of Helmandi contacts and from other notables that they were willing to introduce me to. This 'snowball sampling' was an especially useful technique when trying to study such a hidden or difficult-to-access population.²⁷⁰ They were chosen on the basis of having agency over their environment: they are those who negotiate between the public and private spheres. The majority were tribal leaders, jihadi commanders, religious leaders, landowners, government and security officials or businessmen. During my pilot study I identified that it was not feasible to interview people who were lower down the social hierarchy: more often than not they had no concept of the world outside their villages.

Interviewees were selected to give broad representation across tribal groups, jihadi parties, and positions with respect to the government (although government is a fluid concept in Helmand).²⁷¹ The iterative snowball sampling allowed adjustment for this. The minimum age

²⁶⁹ Ethics proposal submitted and approved by KCL Ethics Committee summer 2011; consent sheets explained to, and signed by, all interviewees; interviewees informed they could withdraw at any time; interview data kept securely.

²⁷⁰ Berg, *Methods*: 51.

²⁷¹ For example, of the three main tribes in central Helmand, I interviewed 15 Barakzai, 12 Noorzai and 10 Kharoti. This broadly reflects their population densities in central Helmand. Similarly for jihadi parties: see Appendix 1 for interviewee breakdowns.

was eighteen, and as the period from 1978 was focussed on, many of the interviewees were aged approximately fifty or over. Some worked exceptionally closely with the individuals attacking British and Afghan government forces including, in one case, a gentleman who facilitated the supply of bomb components and coordinated attacks on British patrols. These identity markers are withheld from the interview descriptions in Appendix 1.

Almost all of the interviewees were men, by nature of Helmandi society, and where women were interviewed their sex is not disclosed for anonymity. Interviewees were recognised as coming from a vulnerable population, that is, potentially put at risk from being interviewed by me. However, these notables often communicate with coalition forces and international civilians. There was no element of coercion or payment whatsoever (beyond refreshments). The approach used was based on the principle of not putting anyone in danger. No interviews were discarded, although some were more useful than others.

The interviews were carried out over two trips to Helmand; at the end of 2011 and the spring of 2012, as well as a trip to Kabul in the summer of 2012. The diasporic interviews were carried out in London around these visits. This deliberate peripatetic interview scheduling was to facilitate periods of reflection and refocusing between interviewing. Interviews in Helmand were conducted in secure ISAF or government locations, to enter which interviewees often had to pass some sort of security procedure. For that reason, the Kabul and London interview sets were added as control groups: these were carried out in the interviewees' homes.

Interviews conducted in London had a further distinguishing analytical perspective: in many cases these interviewees had split loyalties—both to Helmand and to Britain—leading to touching confusion over the words *us* and *we*. These aided me very much in separating perspectives. So too, the Kabul interviews: living freely in Kabul and being able to interview people on their own terms greatly helped my holistic understanding. These two different additional interview contexts, yet with the same target set of Helmandi notables, were deliberately chosen to provide contrasts to the Helmand-conducted interviews. For anonymity I do not identify to which context the interviewee belonged. The interviews were all conducted in Pushtu, during which notes were taken; these notes were written up immediately after the interview. Interviews lasted between half-an-hour and five hours.

Often interviewees (those that did not know me from before), would begin describing the conflict in very general public terms and at times the social conventions governing

conversations among the Pushtun make it difficult to ascertain 'hard facts'.²⁷² I sometimes found it necessary to inject some private, localised and neutral knowledge—say, for example, identifying someone's brother in their story—in order to guide them to a greater level of detail. This, combined with a level of directness and honesty that they did not often experience from foreigners (a Pushtu-speaking foreigner is rare enough as it is), and a level of frankness usually ensued. I cannot overstate how important my previous in-depth knowledge was: one has to ask the right questions to get the right answers.

Other issues endemic to oral history with ill-educated populations were rife: not knowing their own ages, having idiosyncratic estimates of relative versus actual time, and distinguishing between different types of 'foreigner', for example. All required slight alterations to interview technique. Some interviewees were excellent for chronological structure, some for eyewitness detail, some for reflective perspectives, and others yet for corroboration. This explains why some interviewees crop up more than others in the footnotes. There was also a natural disinclination to talk about the Taliban. I was a foreigner, and the foreigners were fighting the Taliban. Readers will notice the Taliban-era as slimmer on primary research than other periods. This was the reason why the interviews of Taliban commanders, discussed below, were so important.

By kind permission of Theo Farrell and Antonio Giustozzi I was given access to an interview set of fifty interviews conducted with Taliban commanders in Helmand and fifteen further interviews of Helmandi notables. I had some reservations over the use of these interviews as I had had no control over their commissioning or conduct. However, on balance, the interviews agree in style, tone and substance with my own interviews which, when combined with the rarity of interviews of active Taliban commanders, suggested that I utilise the data. Additionally, they offered a further 'control' group in that they were conducted by different interviewers.

Finally, I conducted a small number of on-the-record interviews with key Helmandi and western personalities, in order to understand their thoughts and actions at the time of important events. Full biographies of these on-the-record interviewees are included in Appendix 1.

²⁷² Linschoten and Kuehn, Enemy: 141.

1.6d - Analytical methodology

This thesis is about the private sphere of conflict. Therefore, my interviews and personal experience form its primary basis. Secondary sources, often representing the public sphere of the conflict, are used to explain, corroborate, chronologise and otherwise compare with that primary basis. However, in order to reframe secondary sources from the public viewpoint to the private one I rely heavily on the work of Robert Johnson, who used a process of 'historical reconstruction'.²⁷³

I combine Johnson's work with that of Kalyvas: the historical reconstruction that I use is to take those events described in the literature as peripheral and make them central. This brings the private sphere to the forefront of the analysis. This process allows me to utilise my oral testimony, generated from interviews, as the basis of my analysis, whilst using secondary sources as far as possible to reinforce that analysis. Unfortunately, some areas of my discourse rely entirely on secondary sources. This is avoided whenever possible.

Finally, I recognise that those events described by my interviewees that are further in the past are more likely to be described using the public sphere rather than the private: people tend to rationalise and romanticise their involvement in past conflicts.

1.7 - Caveats and limitations

This thesis might well be considered a further pilot study for future work. I seek to use the Helmandi 'ecosystem' as an example to challenge the narratives surrounding the entire Afghan conflict. This thesis can only be the first step in such a gargantuan task. Furthermore, the limitations of researching in an illiterate society at war stretch academic credibility to the limit. However, at present, there are no other approaches that generate this quantity and quality of data.

What has made this research fascinating and frustrating in equal measure is the fact that at times it has felt like being nothing more than catching snippets of rumours, passing on the winds of Helmandi gossip. However, in Afghan society rumours are an established currency of political debate, and scholars now deliberately factor them into their analyses.²⁷⁴ Information is still mainly spread by word of mouth in illiterate societies. This has only hastened with the introduction of mobile phones, beginning in 2003.²⁷⁵ Wherever possible, I

²⁷³ Johnson, *Afghan Way*: 2 & 30-1.

²⁷⁴ Antonio Giustozzi, "The Great Fears of Afghanistan: How Wild Rumours Shape Politics" *Ideas Today*, no. 4 (2010): 9-13.

²⁷⁵ There are 18.6m GSM subscribers in Afghanistan as of June 2012—'Statistics', <http://mcit.gov.af/en> (accessed 12 November 2012).

have tried to explore these rumours and have attempted to corroborate them either with other interviewees or with secondary sources.

Ultimately, while I have strived to assuage any possible charges of Orientalism it is impossible, whilst engaged in the human sciences, to 'ignore or disclaim [my] involvement' in Helmand.²⁷⁶ I first went there in 2008 as a British Army officer, which is as far as can be from neutral in the conflict. Furthermore, for many of the events in the 2008–12 section of the analysis I have relied upon my own direct participant-observation, albeit where I have later tracked the same events in interviews. In areas where it appears that the British or the Americans have misstepped I, too, must accept my share of the blame: in some instances I was involved in formulating or implementing some of those policies. I was not above the fray, although I have done my utmost to detach myself and remain objective in this analysis. The benefit of my previous position, however, is that I understand well the public sphere surrounding the conflict.

This is not a complete history. It could never be. This is a selection of stories and events that I have been exposed to, and that I argue illuminate the overall dynamics in Helmand. For some events there exists such a juxtaposition of explanations and stories that I have painted the major views of an event, and my assessment of how those perceptions have shaped events. Furthermore, with examples that I describe to be one way or the other, there will always be a counter-example. Thus, if I write, for example, that clan 'x' supported the 'Taliban', there will be, almost certainly, a sub-clan 'y' that did not support the 'Taliban' due to, for example a sub-clan feud that was unknown to me. The analysis that I offer here, whilst the most nuanced to date, is still simplified by Helmandi standards. One of my closest Helmandi confidants teased me for knowing 'just one per cent' of what went on in Helmand, despite knowing 'a lot'.

This simplification also creates other imperfections in this work: there are certain positions that I have taken throughout the thesis on a balance of evidence. Firstly, the overwhelming Helmandi feeling towards the British, or the Angrez, is antipathetic.²⁷⁷ Secondly, I argue it inconceivable that Pakistan is not currently supporting the Taliban, as part of achieving 'strategic depth' vis-à-vis India.²⁷⁸ Further, I conclude that there is comprehensive evidence that Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI: Pakistan's main intelligence agency) is supplying arms,

²⁷⁶ Said, *Orientalism*: 11.

²⁷⁷ See next section below for why.

²⁷⁸ Marvin Weinbaum, "Pakistan and Afghanistan: The Strategic Relationship" *Asian Survey* 31, no. 6 (1991): 498.

money and advice via the Taliban Quetta Shura.²⁷⁹ The US has been aware of this since at least February 2005.²⁸⁰ This is also the overwhelming Helmandi perception, including among Taliban commanders.²⁸¹

1.8 - Thesis outline

This chapter has presented the introduction, theoretical, historical and anthropological literature reviews, thesis and definitions, methodologies and caveats. Chapters two to six offer an analysis of the public and private spheres of consecutive eras of the Helmandi conflict. The public sphere is simple and straightforward. Indeed this is a major source of its appeal for western politicians, policymakers and publics. In contrast, the private sphere is immensely complex, as it explores the various characters, social relationships, local power-plays, shifting allegiances, and employment of violence for personal and community gain. In order to ensure the reader does not get lost as we explore the private sphere of the Helmandi conflict, I regularly provide summaries and signposts throughout each chapter.

Chapter two offers the story of the conflict during the period of maximum Soviet influence in Helmand, that is, 1978 to 1989, and traces the narrative through several angles. The thesis of public-private interaction is well supported; too there is evidence that when public organisations understand the private, inter-personal Helmandi world, they are better able to shape the conflict dynamics.

Chapter three covers the period of rising and dominant Pakistani influence, that is, 1989 to 2001. For the first half of the period, free of public, external influences, a Helmandi civil war rages. The story here presented matches the public Afghan-wide narratives in terms of style, but the detail is completely different: the public-private interactions in Helmand were markedly different from those elsewhere in the country. The Taliban-era represents an anomaly in the story: it appears that they had exceptional local, private knowledge that allowed them to dominate the public-private interactions and shape the Helmandi conflict (or maintain the absence thereof).

²⁷⁹ e.g. Matt Waldman, "The Sun in the Sky: The Relationship Between Pakistan's ISI and Afghan Insurgents" *Crisis States Research Centre Discussion Papers*, no. 18 (2010); a leaked ISAF report (The State of the Taliban 2012) discussed here: '[Taliban believe they will take over from US and NATO in Afghanistan – report](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/feb/01/taliban-afghanistan-leaked-report-pakistan)' <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/feb/01/taliban-afghanistan-leaked-report-pakistan>; assertions of US officials discussed here: '[ISI is directing the Taliban](http://www.rediff.com/news/report/isi-is-directing-taliban-in-afghanistan/20121022.htm)' <http://www.rediff.com/news/report/isi-is-directing-taliban-in-afghanistan/20121022.htm> and here: '[Admiral Mullen: Pakistani ISI sponsoring Haqqani attacks](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2011/09/admiral_mullen_pakis.php)' http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2011/09/admiral_mullen_pakis.php (all accessed 12 Nov 2012).

²⁸⁰ G118.

²⁸¹ Interviews 006, 013, 031, 037, 044, 047, 048, 050, 060, 063, 066, 067, 068, 084, 085, 086, 090, 096, 000, 201, 202, 203, 209, 213, 226, 237, 239, Hafizullah, SMA, ARJ, Habibullah, MMW.

Chapters four, five and six cover the era of dominant western influence: chapter four the period before the British deployment to Helmand in 2006, chapter five the era of British dominance in the province, that is, until mid-2009. Chapter 6 is thematic and discusses aspects of the counterinsurgency practiced by British and American forces in Helmand from 2009 to present. It is in these three chapters that I present the clearest evidence for the primacy of the private sphere in driving the conflict's dynamics when its dynamics are opaque to public organisations.

The final chapter—chapter seven—offers conclusions. There, I seek to discuss five issues. Firstly: I summarise the historical narrative presented in chapters two to seven. I then go on to discuss the implications of this research for both policymakers and scholars, including an assessment of whether the findings can be extrapolated up to the national and international levels. Finally, I offer what I think will happen in Helmand in the coming years.

Thereafter, in the Appendices, a glossary of terms, people, tribal diagrams, family trees and lists of Helmandi officials are appended, as well as an analysis of those Helmandis who have spent time in Guantanamo Bay prison camp, Cuba. Readers are advised to keep this to hand as the history of Helmand is a complex one!

Chapter 2: The Saur revolution until the Soviet withdrawal, 1978–1989

Jihad was not free

Alikozai businessman²⁸²
Gereshk

Everyone had a [Khad] file... [there was] so much
trickery between different mujahidin [groups and
leaders]

Hafizullah Khan
Hizb-e Islami Amir for Helmand

The overarching public narrative of the communist coup and subsequent Soviet intervention in Afghanistan is very strong. The coup ushered in an ideological government that was authoritarian in its approach to implementing reform: specifically land redistribution and improving literacy.²⁸³ The Soviet intervention was planned for six months and was considered enough time to stabilise the country and its armed forces and then leave.²⁸⁴ As viewed through the western prism of the cold war, the Soviets were atheist communists, who sought to subjugate Afghanistan as a client state. This 'intervention' caused (particularly) the United States to begin funding resistance to an 'occupation'. This injection of resources caused a reinforcement of the public sphere surrounding the war. In this, the Afghan resistance—the mujahidin—were holy fighters, striving to liberate their homeland from the oppressive Soviets.²⁸⁵

In addition to this public cleavage, there are a series of public organisations on either side. The Afghan communists were divided into two factions, the Khalqis and the Parchamis. Afghan communism was based on Marxism-Leninism, with the Khalqis being the more fervent of the two.²⁸⁶ The Afghan government's most efficient organ was the state security police, Khedmat Amniat Dulati (Khad). This was essentially an extension of the KGB, and acted across all departments of the state in a 'counter-revolutionary' role. Their main aim was to hold the state together. Most of the time, it was the main instrument of government policy.²⁸⁷

²⁸² 031.

²⁸³ Roy, *Islam*: 84.

²⁸⁴ Giustozzi, *W/P/S*: 67.

²⁸⁵ Gall, *Afghanistan: Travels with the Mujahideen*: xiii.

²⁸⁶ Rubin, *Fragmentation*: 84-5.

²⁸⁷ Dorransoro, *Revolution*: 177-8.

Ranged on the other side of the conflict were the ‘freedom-loving’ mujahidin, backed (mainly) by Pakistan, the US and Saudi Arabia. The mujahidin were organised into seven parties, with differing ideologies. I will here discuss four of them: Jamiat-e Islami (Jamiat), Hizb-e Islami (Hizb), Harakat-e Enqelab-e Islami (Harakat) and Mahaz-e Milli (Mahaz) because they feature most prominently in Helmand’s story. Hizb and Jamiat are closest in ideology, and there is disagreement between the two parties as to who came first. Both parties are Islamist in outlook and their ideologies could be described as similar to the Muslim Brotherhood (Rabbbani, Jamiat’s leader, was the first to translate Sayed Qutb’s work into Dari). They wanted a modern state (without a monarchy), based on Islamic principles.²⁸⁸ Harakat and Mahaz were the so-called traditionalist parties. Harakat wanted a return to Islamic law (sharia), yet did not see any incompatibility between the monarchy and Islam. They were mainly comprised of clerics. Mahaz were known as the Royalist party. They sought a return to the monarchy and were comprised of people connected to the old order.²⁸⁹

Over time, the perception grew that Hizb were more reactionary and Jamiat more moderate, in an analogy to the Khalq and Parcham factions in the government. Both these dichotomies tended towards national ethnic polarisation as the war went on: Khalq and Hizb towards the Pushtun, and Parcham and Jamiat towards the Tajiks.²⁹⁰ The Pakistani ISI should be considered a separate public organisation to the mujahidin parties.²⁹¹ It supported the parties to different degrees as suited its national policies towards Afghanistan. The ISI was able to do this as the US allowed them to distribute its aid: the US paid while the Pakistanis played.

2.1 - Revolution!

President Daud Khan was killed during a People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) coup in April 1978—a communist takeover. This was known as the Saur revolution. Because they dominated the army, the more ideologically extreme left-wing Khalq faction managed to seize power in 1978 and Noor Mohammad Taraki was proclaimed president. The twenty-one months of Khalqi rule were to drastically affect Helmandi society. Later, with the Soviet intervention at the end of 1979, the Parcham faction was to gain power.²⁹²

It is hard to say whether Khalqis deliberately planned to destabilise society by removing the power of the previous elite,²⁹³ but reading contemporaneous government newspapers gives

²⁸⁸ Edwards, *Before Taliban*: 237-8.

²⁸⁹ Roy, *Islam*: 114.

²⁹⁰ Edwards, *Before Taliban*: 243.

²⁹¹ Rubin, *Fragmentation*: 205 & 243-4.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 107.

²⁹³ Roy, *Islam*: 90.

the impression of an almost fervent desire to reform society as fast as possible.²⁹⁴ They were also cognisant that they might face resistance, and so, they moved as quickly as they could.²⁹⁵ Following the communist public narrative, the Khalqis wanted to increase the power of the proletariat (the farmers) versus that of the capital class (the landowners). This also had the added benefit of disempowering the previous government's power base, the Durrani landowners, or khans. But the public narrative of 'class struggle' made no sense to illiterate farmers.²⁹⁶

There were three important decrees: No. 6 referred to the regulation of rural mortgages and debt, and removed a key basis of the khans' power—by controlling credit khans were able to keep their tenant farmers in debt cycles. No. 7 imposed limitations on marriageable age and bride price, which changed marriage from a social institution to a transaction between two individuals. This criminalised a key Pushtun conflict resolution and power regulation mechanism: that of kinship groups swapping women to settle disputes. No. 8, probably the most damaging as it was easiest to enforce, decreed land redistribution whereby estates over thirty jereeps would be redistributed to peasants.²⁹⁷

2.2 - Land reform

Decree No. 8 was announced at the end of November 1978.²⁹⁸ It outlined the redistribution of land holdings over thirty jereeps²⁹⁹ to be given out in packages of six jereeps. This was not enough to support a family of ten.³⁰⁰ The land was to be distributed to the farmers who were previous sharecroppers, thus inverting the rural hierarchy.³⁰¹ Thereafter, it was to be given to landless people in the village, the district, the region and finally nationally. The arbitrary redistribution cut-off was to have critical resonance in Helmand: thirty jereeps had been the amount given to the 1950s settlers, hence they were unaffected by decree No. 8.³⁰² It is not clear that the Khalqi government was aware of the impact that this was to have in Helmand.

For example, it meant that the communists found support in the canal-zones, generating the fifth largest Provincial Communist Party in the country by 1980 (see map 4). Helmand was

²⁹⁴ 'Helmand and Samangan provinces' revolutionary shuras welcome the 6th decree!' Hewad (16 July 1978).

²⁹⁵ Roy, Islam: 84.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 87.

²⁹⁷ Rubin, Fragmentation: 115-9.

²⁹⁸ 006.

²⁹⁹ 15 acres.

³⁰⁰ 032.

³⁰¹ 084.

³⁰² Martin, Brief history: 31.

the only major area of recruitment in southern Afghanistan,³⁰³ probably because the landholders from the canal-zone escaped redistribution unless they had since accrued more land than they had been given originally.³⁰⁴ Conversely, those groups who had received land under Nadir Shah and Ahmad Shah (see section 1.3) were major targets due to the size of their landholdings—some of the largest estates in the country were found in the Helmand Valley.³⁰⁵ Often, land had been in families for two hundred and fifty years³⁰⁶ and thousands of families and acres were affected.³⁰⁷

The land reforms were poorly thought out and the public narrative made no sense to the Helmandis.³⁰⁸ As a Barakzai militia leader said to me, ‘the mother of the problems that we have now is the land redistributions under Taraki’.³⁰⁹ The reforms were based on an ideological model of a nuclear family that did not exist in Helmand, where extended families shared undivided inherited land. The reforms were also predicated on land area, but in Helmand land area was not the most important factor in determining harvest: access to irrigation water was. Thus, if land was subdivided in a way that meant that water had to be obtained from a neighbour then it could become valueless, and could even cause conflict (cousins often owned contiguous land inherited from a common grandfather). Communal land, a vital part of the community, was not recognised. It seems clear from this evidence that the ideologically-driven government did not understand, or ignored, the private sphere of land ownership in Helmand, allowing some to take advantage.

Thus, the redistributions were carried out in different ways. In Malgir, force was not always needed as there was the perception of government strength carried over from the pre-revolutionary period.³¹⁰ In other areas, the police were used, in others yet, the depaye militia were used. These were a legacy from the Zahir Shah-era:³¹¹ militias of varying size (about one hundred men in Nawa³¹² and three hundred men in Musa Qala)³¹³ that were under the control of the District Head Teacher, but working to the District Chief of Police and

³⁰³ Giustozzi, W/P/S: 255 & 289.

³⁰⁴ 023.

³⁰⁵ Beverley Male, Revolutionary Afghanistan: A Reappraisal (London, 1982): 69.

³⁰⁶ 060.

³⁰⁷ ‘7681 farming families are distributed free land in Helmand and Nimruz’, Hewad (10 Feb 1979); ‘6258 jereebis in Helmand redistributed to 600 families’, Hewad (21 Feb 1979).

³⁰⁸ 006, 058.

³⁰⁹ 018.

³¹⁰ 031.

³¹¹ 057.

³¹² 043.

³¹³ 048.

composed mainly of students. Quickly purging the militias, the Khalqi government used them extensively to achieve its revolutionary aims.³¹⁴

However, private actors often manipulated the public sphere of land redistribution. The process was under the control of the Revolutionary Defence Committee in Lashkar Gah, with requisite sub-committees in each district to which people could appeal.³¹⁵ However, the committee was always loaded at the expense of certain local groups over others: Khalqis and their families always did well out of the land distributions.³¹⁶ For example, in Nad-e Ali, the leader of the land committee was Abdul Hakim (Kakar, from Chah-e Mirza) and the secretary was Amanullah Khan (Laghmani, from Loy Bagh). They ensured that they distributed the land to their and their kin's advantage.³¹⁷ In other areas, groups of Khalqis spontaneously banded together and stole their neighbours' land, waiting for the theft to be ratified later by the Revolutionary Defence Committee.³¹⁸

2.3 - Anti-Islamic abuse

This was accompanied by a background of rapacious arrests by the government of anyone it deemed an opponent.³¹⁹ The government, viewing events through the prism of the earlier communist-Islamist violence in educational establishments, believed that anyone who resisted the government must be ikhwan (a member of, or associated with, the Muslim Brotherhood).³²⁰ This was a similar approach to that taken by the US in the immediate post-2001 era, in terms of arresting people to a public, ideological ('Taliban') blueprint.³²¹ This pushed people to become what they had been accused of. Not just those who opposed the government, but those who had the potential for opposition, were rounded up and sent to Lashkar Gah or Kandahar prison. This resulted in the arrest of tribal leaders, mullahs, sayeds, members of the old order and Parchamis: in short, anyone with influence. In one incident, one hundred Helmandi political prisoners were thrown out of a plane into the Arghandab reservoir.³²²

But there was a paradox. Even though the very poorest in Helmandi stood to gain from the land redistribution, they formed the manpower for the uprising. This was because the

³¹⁴ 043.

³¹⁵ '363 petitions given to the Farmers' Problems' Internal Committee in Gereshk District, Helmand', Hewad (17 Sep 1978).

³¹⁶ 031, 043.

³¹⁷ 017.

³¹⁸ 012.

³¹⁹ e.g. 015, 039, 023.

³²⁰ Edwards, Before Taliban: 127.

³²¹ See section 4.8.

³²² Mohammad Kakar, Afghanistan: The Soviet Invasion and the Afghan Response, 1979-1982 (London, 1995): 82.

government's public narratives were misrepresented by the rural mullahs and khans. The public literacy programme, for example, was considered a key part of the reforms.³²³ But the only people in the village who could read were the khan and the mullah and they considered it an assault on their means of power. They saw their interests eroded, and traditional Helmandi narratives of government interference were easily exploitable to generate popular mobilisation. Helmandis began to respond to what they saw as a godless, imposing and cruel government.³²⁴ As many were persuaded to see it by their land-owning leaders, land redistribution was state theft and it was their Islamic duty to oppose it.³²⁵ The public narrative of the anti-Islamic flavour of the government is the same complaint as that levelled by jihadi publications associated with the post-2001 Taliban organisation.³²⁶ For them, it is the same long struggle.

2.4 - Government collapse: local reassertion

The response to the Soviet intervention in 1979 was one of local resistance, driven by private factors.³²⁷ Originally, resistance groups rose up without the help of the mujahidin parties along community or tribal lines.³²⁸ The mechanism was that a private actor—a military entrepreneur³²⁹—would leverage the perception of a power vacuum created by weakened or non-existent government in a district to improve his own position. For this he needed two things: men to fight and weapons/supplies to equip them with. And later, with the rise of the mujahidin parties, the leader would personify the interaction between the two spheres, the public and the private, as supplies were more likely to be given out to successful commanders with many men, and men would be likely to follow a commander who was well-stocked with munitions. This interaction channels the private elements of men and local information from the group, on the one hand, with the public elements of funding and legitimacy bestowed by an organisation—a mujahidin party—on the other. But at first, it was a local, private usurpation of government power.

Within two months of the revolution, government officials were being assassinated in Lashkar Gah.³³⁰ In October 1978, the Baghran District Governor, Ekhlas (Barakzai, Khalqi, from Malgir) was killed by Rais Baghrani (Alizai/Khalozai) the Baghran government

³²³ Roy, *Islam*: 93.

³²⁴ 013, 049.

³²⁵ Edward Girardet, *Afghanistan: The Soviet War* (New York, 1985): 112-3.

³²⁶ 'Are the Taliban really burning schools?', *Sarak* (Sep 2008): 6.

³²⁷ e.g. 001, 007, 014.

³²⁸ 039, 064.

³²⁹ Antonio Giustozzi, "'Tribes' and Warlords in Southern Afghanistan, 1980-2005" *Crisis States Research Centre Working Paper Series* 1 no. 7 (2006): 5.

³³⁰ 'Shootings at annual graduation ceremony in Lashkar Gah high school', *Hewad* (11 June 1978).

agricultural cooperative leader³³¹—and a fellow ‘Khalqi’. That is, this was a naked grab for power, rather than an ideological uprising. The government, not sure of the situation, sent a replacement, Jan Gul (Barakzai, Khalqi, from Malgir) who was killed shortly after. Baghran has been under Baghrani’s control since.³³² In other northern districts, the government retreated into its administrative enclaves and bands of criminals began to take advantage of the vacuum. Local notables began to police their own communities. In Kajaki, Mahmud Khan (Taraki), a landowner, collected men to ‘defend the population’; Nasim Akhundzada (Alizai/Hassanzai) the son of a locally-famous cleric, did the same in Musa Qala.³³³ Shortly after, at the end of November 1978, land redistribution was announced.

In January 1979, Musa Qala fell. One night at 3am, the District Governor Zabit Aulleah (Noorzai, Khalqi, from Garmsir), went on patrol with three hundred depaye, presumably to supervise land redistributions the following day (land redistribution had begun that month). He was ambushed by Nasim. The depaye’s leader (also the District Head Teacher), Ghulam Dastgar Mahali, and one hundred of his men were killed. The remainder fled back to the District Centre, or ‘hukomat’.³³⁴ The next day, Nasim cut a deal with the Chief of Police, allowing him to escape. Nasim then attacked the hukomat and, killing one hundred and sixty people associated with the government, proclaimed himself District Governor.

Three days after that, the army was sent in from outside Helmand and retook the hukomat, installing an administrator from Nangahar, Sher Gul, as the Governor. After a month, the army was redeployed elsewhere, leaving behind police and the depaye. Within two months, Nasim had reoccupied the hukomat, executing thirty Hassanzai elders (that is, from his clan and the people who posed a challenge to his power) who had been working with the government. He buried them in the village square, over which he had a dining area set up for entertaining guests.³³⁵ His private quest for power interacted with the public narrative of resistance to communism.

By June, Now Zad, Washir and Sangin were under attack. Now Zad and Washir fell to coalitions of local commanders. Similarly, Sangin fell to Abdul Khaleq (Ishaqzai/Mistereekhel, from Qala-e Gaz), Atta Mohammad (Ishaqzai/Chowkazai, from Myanrodai)³³⁶ and Dad Mohammad (Alikozai, from Sarwan Qala). By mid-1979, the non-

³³¹ 006.

³³² 048.

³³³ 013. Akhundzada means ‘son of a cleric’ – Nasim’s father, Akhundzada Sahib Mubarak, was a famous cleric in Helmand (Oliver Roy, "Le Mouvement des Taleban en Afghanistan" [Afghanistan Info](#), no. 36 (1995): 5).

³³⁴ ‘Government’ (Dari).

³³⁵ 048. See Giustozzi, [W/P/S](#): 96 for confirmation of broad narrative.

³³⁶ 061.

canal zone areas had fallen from government control. Garmsir, Nad-e Ali and Nawa were to remain under government control until after the Soviet intervention at the end of the year.³³⁷ Lashkar Gah remained a 'bastion of the regime'.³³⁸ The higher education levels and lack of large-scale land redistribution in the canal-zone made them less susceptible to rebellion.

2.5 - Mujahidin patronage

The 'organised' resistance of the mujahidin parties only came later, once the Soviets had invaded. At the time that most of the northern districts were falling from government control, the mujahidin parties in Peshawar were still forming and reforming, fighting for influence and trying to attract funding.³³⁹ Local commanders reached out to Peshawar for membership, recognition and funding using different communication networks. The public narrative of Hizb-e Islami, hereafter referred to as Hizb, was as a party well known for recruiting among teachers and among young educated people.³⁴⁰ Their members often sought links through school or university colleagues to Hekmatyar and the supplies coming from Peshawar.

Harakat was almost exclusively a clerical party³⁴¹ and those that reached out to it often did so through previous religious teachers or through other mullahs that they had met at madrassas. Mahaz, led by Pir Gailani and widely seen as the Royalist party,³⁴² organised itself along connections either generated around the Royal government or through teacher-pupil relationships in Gailani's Sufi order. But originally the resistance was private and local; the adoption of public narratives through interacting with the mujahidin parties came later and was based on personal connections to the Peshawar parties.

These public-private interactions were related to refugee dynamics. Helmandi families, forced to move by the war and declining outputs of the canal and karez systems,³⁴³ adopted what is known as a split-migration strategy.³⁴⁴ This involved moving the bulk of the family to a refugee camp (usually Girdi Jangal in Pakistani Baluchistan), whilst maintaining workers (usually older men) to tend the land and keep it productive. The young men would, of course, be fighting: thus the family was able to maintain its obligations to the jihad. This meant the family tended to their assets, at the same time as keeping safe and reducing costs because they were being fed through refugee hand-outs. All of the mujahidin parties maintained offices in Girdi Jangal and people who had fled to the camps were quickly

³³⁷ e.g. 017, 048, 034.

³³⁸ 063. Medecins Sans Frontiers, Exploratory Mission in Helmand (Quetta, 1989): 7.

³³⁹ Edwards, Before Taliban: 235-276.

³⁴⁰ MMW.

³⁴¹ SMA.

³⁴² 018.

³⁴³ 044.

³⁴⁴ Kristian Harpviken, Social Networks and Migration in Wartime Afghanistan (Macmillan, 2009): 23.

recruited, armed and sent back.³⁴⁵ This interaction was later repeated with the post-2001 Taliban.

I will now give examples of the mobilisation of three key people. They are self-descriptions (or descriptions by close family members) and mostly echo the public narratives of the era. Self-descriptions, however, are often self-justifying. There is almost certainly some ex post facto justification occurring here. When we consider these personal stories alongside the government collapse discussed above, it is clear that there was an interaction between private actors and public organisations (the mujahidin parties) mediated by personal relationships.

Hafizullah Khan, from Bolan (see map 5), immediately left for Peshawar upon Taraki's acquisition of power. There, he met with Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the leader of Hizb, and started his training in Attock, in the Pakistani Punjab. As he put it, '[then] there was only Jamiat and Hizb to choose from'. He remembered the Islamic movement before this split had occurred from his days at the Lashkar Gah Lycee. In 1969, when he was sixteen, Ghulam Mahmud Niaze, a leader of the nascent Islamic movement in Afghanistan, had come to speak at the school and the 'non-Muslims' (i.e. communists) had tried to stop them speaking. The Islamists then fought the communists and were allowed to speak. Upon leaving school, Hafizullah studied Engineering at Kabul University shortly after Hekmatyar had been expelled and imprisoned for murder. There was still a residual 'Hekmatyar network', ensuring that when he went to Peshawar he was only looking for one man. Once he had been appointed Hizb Amir³⁴⁶ for Helmand by Hekmatyar in 1978, his job was to, as he put it, 'organise the war'. As mujahidin organisation developed this meant facilitating the interaction between private fighting groups and public organisation-supplied funding and weapons. He began to organise depots in Girdi Jangal and Baram Cha on the border between Helmand and Pakistan.³⁴⁷

Malem Mir Wali was two years younger than Hafizullah and shared very similar experiences. He also blamed many of the disturbances at the Lycee on the communists and described the atmosphere as very factionalised: 'the communists did not pray and had no respect for the teachers', he said. What was happening at the Lycee in Lashkar Gah during the 1970s was a microcosm of what was happening on a much larger scale at the universities in Kabul: 'you knew who the communists were and who the Muslims were'. After graduating from the

³⁴⁵ 032, 047.

³⁴⁶ 'Leader' (Dari).

³⁴⁷ Hafizullah.

Lycee in 1975, Mir Wali went to teacher training college in Kandahar, completing his studies eight months after the Taraki coup. Many of his classmates in Kandahar had links to Hizb and the training college was a hotbed of political activism. He spent 1979 completing his national service. Just before the Soviets invaded he returned home to Spin Masjid, to teach in the primary school. After six months of teaching, and once the Soviets began to permanently base themselves in Helmand, he began fighting with Hizb as Shaed Mansour's (Barakzai) deputy. When Mansour was eventually killed by the Soviets in 1984, Mir Wali took over.³⁴⁸

Nasim Akhundzada, mentioned above, affiliated with Harakat. He had known Nabi Mohammedi, the leader of Harakat, since well before the war when Nabi had owned land and taught in Helmand.³⁴⁹ As Sher Mohammad, Nasim's nephew said, 'once [Nabi] had started Harakat [in September 1978] it was obvious who Nasim would go with, all the mullahs were with Nabi': a very clear articulation of the public narrative. Once Nasim had begun to 'protect the population' he reached out to Nabi in Peshawar. When the weapons began to flow is not known, but what is clear is that, much like the Hizb mobilisation described above, there was an interaction between what was occurring in Musa Qala and the presence of a public organisation that was willing to provide legitimacy and funding.

These three stories of mobilisation tell us several things. Firstly, that people will often describe formative events in their lives prima facia through an ideological prism. However, when we pick apart their stories we can see a very clear public-interaction between the individual commanders and the mujahidin organisations. Moreover, it was the commanders who reached out to the mujahidin parties and not vice versa, which gives credence to the second part of my thesis: that the private sphere has primacy in driving conflict dynamics.

2.6 - Amin and the Soviet intervention

Hafizullah Amin (Kharoti) seized power in Kabul in September 1979. The takeover was an echo of the Taraki coup and there was little change to government policy seen in Helmand.³⁵⁰ As an ex-Khalqi said to me, 'Amin just altered the patronage network'.³⁵¹ Those who had been jailed under Taraki were released, and previous Taraki supporters were jailed or fled.³⁵² Land, the key mechanism of patronage in Helmand, was redistributed again. 'Trib[al] [membership] was very important' said a senior Kharoti tribal figure: they got their

³⁴⁸ MMW.

³⁴⁹ SMA.

³⁵⁰ 003, 022.

³⁵¹ 043.

³⁵² 016, 039.

confiscated land back by order of (the Kharoti) Amin.³⁵³ Others began to take their land back. In most cases the new owners of their land were their previous tenants; only those who had done something wrong (for example, they were among the Khalqis who had stolen it) were removed and killed, the remainder were allowed to stay, readopting tenant status. In one case described to me, the local Hizb commander cut a deal with the tribal leadership—the mujahidin would get their land back for them, but they had to pay. ‘Jihad was not free’.³⁵⁴ This is far from the public narrative of the *glorious* mujahidin.

Concurrently, (private) groups of resistance fighters began to seek interactions with public organisations and their narratives—the mujahidin parties. As a result, the population became able to indicate which party a commander was affiliated with,³⁵⁵ even though most commanders ‘wouldn’t have been able to say who Hekmatyar, Zahir Shah or the Muslim brotherhood were or what they stood for’.³⁵⁶ This cut both ways: ‘the [parties] who gave [them] weapons had no idea how they were being used’.³⁵⁷ This is a clear example of private actors exploiting the opacity of the private sphere to public organisations. Soon, the Soviet intervention would massively increase the amount of funding that mujahidin parties received: before the intervention they were ‘more or less dormant’ due to lack of funding.³⁵⁸ This increased the opportunities for exploitation. An interaction between the public and private spheres fed the violence in Helmand.

In December, with the situation spiralling, the Soviets intervened and enthroned the Parcham faction under Babrak Karmal. They planned for a temporary deployment to stabilise the situation, thus allowing them to leave.³⁵⁹ From the Soviet perspective, troops were not necessary in Helmand as ‘the government was really strong [there]’.³⁶⁰ They also considered Helmand (and particularly northern Helmand) a strategic backwater.³⁶¹ As one senior ex-communist police officer commented ‘before [he] came to Helmand, [he] thought it was just Gereshk’.³⁶² The key Soviet aim, and the only one that was prosecuted until the end, was to keep the route from Herat to Kandahar open.³⁶³ However, the installation of Karmal by the Soviets made him an instant puppet in the eyes of the Helmandis (even more so than Taraki and Amin had been considered, although there was no change in policy

³⁵³ 023, 032.

³⁵⁴ 031.

³⁵⁵ 063.

³⁵⁶ 048.

³⁵⁷ 018.

³⁵⁸ Roy, *Islam*: 121.

³⁵⁹ Sherard Cowper-Coles, *Cables from Kabul* (London, 2011): 55.

³⁶⁰ 006.

³⁶¹ 049. MSF, *Mission*: 38.

³⁶² 054.

³⁶³ The Orkand Corporation, *Afghanistan: The Southern Provinces* (1989): 164.

between any of the three leaders, as discerned from Helmand).³⁶⁴ Thus, the population evicted the government from the remainder of the countryside including Nad-e Ali, even getting to the point where they were able to fire upon Safean, a southern part of the urban area of Lashkar Gah.³⁶⁵

The situation became critical. In mid-1980, the Soviets deployed up to five hundred troops to Lashkar Gah. Bost airfield, hereafter referred to as the 'maidan', was developed as the Soviet headquarters in Helmand.³⁶⁶ Up to that point, only the pre-intervention mentoring structure of two advisors per police or army kandak (battalion) was in place.³⁶⁷ The immediate Soviet concern was to establish a defensive perimeter (a 'cumberband': see map 5) around Lashkar Gah, Gereshk and the connecting road through Chah-e Anjir. Secondary to that was the re-establishment of some of the hukomats from which the government had been evicted.³⁶⁸ This took until late 1983, and was some of the toughest fighting of the Soviet's Helmand deployment; for example, the Nad-e Ali hukumat was established and overrun several times.³⁶⁹

Eventually the mujahidin, as they had become labelled by that point, were pushed back and a series of posts were established through Nawa, Aynak, Bolan, Loy Bagh, Chah-e Anjir, Basharan and in the desert to the east of Lashkar Gah.³⁷⁰ A similar series of posts was established around Gereshk, running along the Abhashak Wadi, and through Abhazan and Deh Adam Khan (see map 5).³⁷¹ The Soviets then established a second headquarters with an artillery detachment on a small hill just to the south of Gereshk—the Helmandis now call the hill 'taapuh'.³⁷² Soviet troop numbers based in Helmand eventually rose to about one thousand³⁷³ or fifteen hundred³⁷⁴ by 1987.

So far, we have discussed the post-communist revolution actions of the government and the responses of the population. Whilst, by definition, the government's actions were driven by the public sphere, the population's response was shaped and driven by an interaction between the public and the private spheres. The ensuing conflict caused the Soviets to deploy troops to central Helmand. We will now explore what was happening in areas of

³⁶⁴ e.g. 003, 008.

³⁶⁵ 049.

³⁶⁶ 063, 084.

³⁶⁷ Habibullah, 048.

³⁶⁸ 049, 063.

³⁶⁹ 049.

³⁷⁰ 044.

³⁷¹ 040.

³⁷² 012. 'Artillery' (Dari).

³⁷³ Jabbar.

³⁷⁴ Habibullah, 061.

Helmand where Soviet troops did not base themselves, before looking at central Helmand, where there was a more extensive Soviet presence.

2.7 - Inter-‘mujahidin’ group conflict

Northern Helmand began to fight itself. Where coalitions of local groups had ejected the government in 1978 and 1979, they began to fall out during 1981. This was not helped by the fact that commanders who were geographically proximate often subscribed to different mujahidin parties because they were trying to gain leverage their in private cleavages: the interaction between the two spheres worsened any conflicts.³⁷⁵ Northern Helmand’s mini civil war is one of the dynamics from this era that completely divorces from the public cleavage of the mujahidin resisting the Soviets. They used Soviet and mujahidin party money to fight each other. Private cleavages drove the conflict in northern Helmand whilst public organisations supplied it.³⁷⁶

This dynamic was partly understood by Khad, the government security service, and exploited ruthlessly in Helmand as per its official, national policy.³⁷⁷ As Jabbar Qahraman, one of my on-the record interviewees (see Appendix 1), said to me, ‘the mujahidin in Helmand didn’t fight the government at all; they fought each other’. ‘Khad had links with all of [the mujahidin groups], we just sat back and watched them attack each other’ he said with a laugh. Not as much ISI-supplied mujahidin party money made it to Helmand as to other areas. They too considered it a backwater populated with the ‘Royal’ Durrani tribes that they were trying to disempower.³⁷⁸

Now Zad offers a key example of private cleavages between mujahidin groups. By mid-1980 Khad began to explore what was happening in Now Zad. The situation was complicated—there were three main tribal groupings and a host of smaller communities, each of which had multiple commanders. The Ishaqzai, probably the largest community, were led by Mullah Abdul Ahad and were affiliated with Harakat. Ahad soon subjugated himself to Nasim from Musa Qala, in order to guarantee supplies.³⁷⁹

The Noorzai were clustered around the two leaders of Haji Abdullah Jan and Israel Khan, both of whom had sought supplies from Hizb. Israel Khan was in a stronger position though: Mahmud Ashem, his patriarch, lived in Lashkar Gah, and was deliberately supportive of the

³⁷⁵ 039, 045.

³⁷⁶ 049.

³⁷⁷ e.g. 020, 045, 049, Jabbar.

³⁷⁸ Rubin, *Fragmentation*: 205 & 243-4.

³⁷⁹ 025, 028.

'government'. Tor Jan, his nephew, was also a tribal liaison officer in Khad. Israel was the family member in the 'mujahidin'. This affiliation with both government and mujahidin public organisations was later to prove useful when the mujahidin took over Lashkar Gah and Israel was a member of the attacking force—those 'communist' members of his family were saved.³⁸⁰ The deliberate splitting of (private) lineages across public organisations is a key piece of evidence in support of my thesis. It continues to the present day. See Appendix 4 for Mahmud Ashem's family tree.

The third largest community, the Barakzai, were led by Malem Yusof and Zabib Jalil, an ex-teacher and army officer respectively. They were both supplied by Hizb.³⁸¹ 'Hizb' and 'Harakat' in Now Zad soon began to fight, although now, the reason why is obscure. Some eyewitnesses say it was about 'money and drugs'.³⁸² Yet others, point to the killing of a 'Harakat' commander by 'Hizb', sparking revenge.³⁸³ Mir Wali believes they began to fight because of a failed internal 'Harakat' arrest that caused two 'Harakat' men to seek asylum with a 'Hizb' commander. The 'Hizb' commander then refused to give them up to 'Harakat' because of the importance of offering asylum to the Pushtun. Whatever the precise spark, 'Harakat' attacked 'Hizb',³⁸⁴ yet it appears from the evidence above that private cleavages instigated the conflict. Khad also had a key role, if not in instigating the conflict, then in massively supporting the 'Harakat' factions through Nasim Akhundzada.³⁸⁵ Khad's dealings with Nasim deviate so much from Harakat's and the mujahidin's public narratives that they are worth exploring in some detail.

Nasim, his brothers and nephew were later to dominate Helmand, continuing to the present day. A large part of their narrative is that they fought the Soviets forcing them to leave and that they then evicted the remnants of the communist government from Lashkar Gah.³⁸⁶ It echoes the glorious mujahidin narrative and is often presented thus in the literature.³⁸⁷ When I interviewed Sher Mohammad Akhundzada, Nasim's nephew, and asked him about the public-private interaction—whether his uncle had, as many others had, accepted supplies from Khad—he started laughing and stumbling over his words, asking me, 'Which Khad?' As we both knew, there was only one Khad.

³⁸⁰ 080.

³⁸¹ 025, 048, 056, 064.

³⁸² 028.

³⁸³ 025.

³⁸⁴ 025, 056.

³⁸⁵ e.g. 020, 045, 049, MMW.

³⁸⁶ SMA.

³⁸⁷ Giustozzi, Tribes: 9.

He looked me straight in the eye, and, without a trace of irony, said ‘We [were] the cleanest mujahidin in the country; it was *pure* jihad’. Whatever Sher Mohammad might protest, that Nasim Akhundzada accepted money and supplies from Khad to attack other mujahidin groups (particularly Hizb ones) is well known in Helmand. He was not the only commander to have done so by any means, but, he was the primary recipient of their aid.³⁸⁸ There is a clear interaction between public and private spheres here. Rasoul, Nasim’s brother, even later preached in northern Helmand’s mosques against Hizb: ‘Parcham and Khalq have become Muslims, but not Hizb’, he said.³⁸⁹

So why did the government support Nasim so much? In central Helmand, the main mujahidin party represented was ‘Hizb’, particularly in Nad-e Ali and around Gereshk, thus they represented the biggest threat to the government in Helmand. On a public, ideological and a national level, the government knew Hizb the best from pre-Saur revolution clashes in the universities. They were also scared of them as they were the most organised, literate and best funded element of the resistance.³⁹⁰ One knowledgeable and well-connected interviewee thinks that the Khad interest in Now Zad was piqued by the growth of ‘Hizb’ there in early 1980.³⁹¹

However, a policy of putting Hizb under pressure in northern Helmand, in order to provide relief for the government in central Helmand, betrays a misunderstanding by Khad of the degree of acephaly present in the mujahidin in Helmand. Khad were blinded by the opacity of northern Helmand. It shows that they were following the public narratives surrounding the mujahidin—particularly their ideological and unitary nature—rather than understanding that their formation, organisation and ideological affiliation was driven to a much greater extent by the private sphere. This was confirmed by a professional police officer who stated that ‘it was only during Najib’s time [1986 onwards] that Khad started to understand the differences in-between the different mujahidin groups [i.e. understand the private sphere]’.³⁹² Because Khad did not understand the private sphere surrounding different ‘mujahidin’ groups they were manipulated by actors like Nasim: the private sphere drove events.

This inter-commander war became wider and demonstrates well the interaction between the public and private spheres that drive conflict, as well as the primacy of the private sphere. For example, Abdul Rahman Khan (Alizai/Khalozai) was a major commander from Kajaki.

³⁸⁸ e.g. 020, 045, 047, 048, 049, 070, 074, 081, 084 and 061 who claims eyewitness-status to Khad documents showing Nasim as a Khad beneficiary.

³⁸⁹ 006.

³⁹⁰ 047.

³⁹¹ 048.

³⁹² 012.

He had had ‘problems’ with Nasim since before the Saur revolution, but he was also responsible for ‘Hizb’ in the north of Helmand and in charge of those ‘Hizb’ sub-commanders who were fighting Nasim’s Harakat-supplied commanders in Now Zad.³⁹³ As a khan he was much more likely to follow Mahaz’s public narrative, as opposed to Hizb’s, whose main constituency was teachers, engineers and other educated professionals,³⁹⁴ yet he switched from Mahaz to Hizb when Mahaz could not supply him adequately.³⁹⁵ When asked about the reasons for the Abdul Rahman Khan-Nasim discord, responses vary from money,³⁹⁶ accusations about one or the other of them being supported by Khad³⁹⁷ or giving information to Khad,³⁹⁸ territory,³⁹⁹ pre-Taraki issues⁴⁰⁰ or that Abdul Rahman Khan got dragged in to the fighting because his sub-commanders were fighting for their lives in Now Zad.⁴⁰¹ These reasons are all public-private interactions, mostly driven by private cleavages.

Rais Baghrani was the third big commander in northern Helmand, and came from the Khalozai, the same sub-tribe as Abdul Rahman Khan. Originally a Khalqi, he affiliated himself to Harakat.⁴⁰² Then, to escape Nasim’s growing dominance, he affiliated himself with Abdul Rahman Khan under Hizb patronage.⁴⁰³ Baghrani was later to ‘join’ Jamiat, the Taliban and finally the Karzai government.⁴⁰⁴ Each change in membership of public organisation was due to evolutions in the private sphere, particularly cleavages, which he needed to either exploit or not be destroyed by: the public sphere was/is irrelevant to him. Soon, Baghrani and Nasim also began to fight, potentially in response to the Nasim-Abdul Rahman Khan fighting. Khad were ever-present on the side-lines.⁴⁰⁵ These dynamics have implications reaching to the present day and are a key piece of evidence supporting my thesis. Different public spheres have come and gone, but Baghrani’s and Nasim’s families are still fighting, all the while interacting with whichever public organisation will help them in that private cleavage (as we shall see in sections 3.11, 4.2, 4.8 and 5.2).

Sangin followed a similar pattern.⁴⁰⁶ It had fallen to a private alliance of Abdul Khaleq, Dad Mohammad and Atta Mohammad in mid-1979 (all from the areas surrounding Sangin’s

³⁹³ 020, including quote.

³⁹⁴ Edwards, Before Taliban: 274-6.

³⁹⁵ 015.

³⁹⁶ 023.

³⁹⁷ 013.

³⁹⁸ 015.

³⁹⁹ 020.

⁴⁰⁰ 010.

⁴⁰¹ 048.

⁴⁰² ARJ.

⁴⁰³ 070. Orkand, Afghanistan: 203.

⁴⁰⁴ 020.

⁴⁰⁵ 048.

⁴⁰⁶ I am grateful to Kyle S for helping me elucidate these dynamics.

hukumat), who ejected the Governor, Engineer Qasim (Achakzai, Hyderabad, Khalqi).⁴⁰⁷ Rauf Khan (Ishaqzai/Mistereekhel)⁴⁰⁸ was a fourth commander from the north of Qala-e Gaz,⁴⁰⁹ and appears not to have been involved in the original overthrow in Sangin, yet rose to become the Mahaz Amir for Helmand due to his standing as the second most important leader in the Helmandi Ishaqzai.⁴¹⁰ Dad Mohammad affiliated himself to Mahaz despite being Alikozai. He was driven by a private cleavage with Atta Mohammad (Ishaqzai) over Sangin's bazaar.⁴¹¹

Thus, Dad Mohammad was soon to 'join' Jamiat for the remainder of the jihad, as Mahaz could not supply him properly.⁴¹² Atta Mohammad was 'with' Jamiat, although he had briefly 'been' Harakat at the very beginning, and was soon to re-affiliate himself with Harakat.⁴¹³ Abdul Khaleq, from the southern part of Qala-e Gaz, opted for Hizb,⁴¹⁴ probably because he was in competition with all of them and was the furthest removed from Sangin. His southern flank also abutted central Helmand, which was a Hizb stronghold. The plethora of side-switching and deal making in Sangin supports the idea that private cleavages were the primary driver in public organisation (~mujahidin party) selection (see map 6).

2.8 - Papaver Somniferum⁴¹⁵

Opium poppy is a traditional crop in Northern Helmand. During the course of the 1980s its cultivation spread province-wide.⁴¹⁶ It was vital: the drugs trade ensured survival due to the revenues it could generate thus buying a military edge in local disputes. Drugs money increased one's power and allowed greater territorial control, which in turn meant more control of the narcotics business. Although Nasim controlled the traditional opium growing areas, other mujahidin groups soon adopted the same strategy.⁴¹⁷ Some scholars⁴¹⁸ have argued that Nasim coerced individual farmers into poppy production. This seems unlikely given the attraction of poppy growing for farmers, in terms of increased and more stable

⁴⁰⁷ 048.

⁴⁰⁸ 061.

⁴⁰⁹ 020, 040.

⁴¹⁰ 048, 061.

⁴¹¹ 020, 030, 031.

⁴¹² 069.

⁴¹³ 020, 061, 064.

⁴¹⁴ 025, 061.

⁴¹⁵ 'Opium poppy' (Latin).

⁴¹⁶ Giustozzi, Tribes: 10. Although the extent of this spread, or even its starting point, is unknown, as UNODC figures only run from 1994 (Pers. Comm. David Mansfield, 2012).

⁴¹⁷ Orkand, Afghanistan:165.

⁴¹⁸ e.g. Alain Labrousse, "Les Drogues et les Conflicts en Afghanistan (1978-1995)" Afghanistan Info, no. 38 (1996): 16; Angelo Rasanayagam, Afghanistan: A Modern History (London, 2005): 136-7; Rubin, Fragmentation: 245.

revenue. He did, however, support opium production by offering credit to growers and facilitating trade.⁴¹⁹

A key factor in leading me to make this analysis is the sheer number of Helmandi farmers who claimed to me when I was a British officer that the Taliban forced them to grow poppy, even among communities where I knew the 'Taliban' to be nothing more than their own village defence forces or tribal militias. I came to the conclusion that they were merely appealing to what they thought my public narrative was, that is, 'Drugs are bad, Taliban are bad, they must be linked'. Of course, the implicit assumptions in my argument are that the Taliban and the mujahidin are similar, if not conceptually identical,⁴²⁰ and that the farmer is a rational economic actor.

What is clear though is that production was taxed by Nasim at ten per cent, and transportation was further taxed.⁴²¹ Rasoul, Nasim's older brother and a cleric, offered Islamic justification for the growing of opium. He manipulated public narratives for his own private gain: 'we must grow and sell opium to fight our holy war against the Soviet nonbelievers' and 'Islamic law bans the taking of opium, but there is no prohibition against growing it', said he.⁴²² Moreover, Nasim offered credit to farmers under the traditional⁴²³ salaam system, whereby he bought the crop at the time of sowing.⁴²⁴ The opium moved out along the same route that weapons came in, to the Girdi Jangal camp in Baluchistan, thence to nearby refineries owned by Hizb in Koh-e sultan.⁴²⁵ Nasim even had an office in Zahidan, Iran to handle onward movement.⁴²⁶

The poppy funding gave Nasim another edge in his struggles with rival mujahidin groups and soon the clashes became not only *financed by* drug profits, but *about* drug profits; control of agricultural land, transport routes and bridges became essential. The farmers grew the crop for economic reasons,⁴²⁷ but the commanders had to control the territory to tax them. (Nasim's fighters demanded in-kind payments of bread from farmers for 'protection' and so

⁴¹⁹ I am grateful to David Mansfield for the email discussion that solidified this understanding.

⁴²⁰ Repeated interviewees support this (e.g. 007, 017, 023). This is also how the 'Taliban' self-define. See 'From Helmand: Eyewitness situation', *Shariat* (March 2011): 23 for an article in a jihadi magazine where the words Taliban and mujahidin are used interchangeably.

⁴²¹ Dorransoro, *Revolution*: 135.

⁴²² 'Afghan Rebel's Victory Garden: Opium', *New York Times* (18 June 1986).

⁴²³ Pers. Comm. Mansfield, 2012. Some scholars imply that Nasim invented the Salam system, but it has been in use in Helmand for centuries.

⁴²⁴ Rubin, *Fragmentation*: 245.

⁴²⁵ Afghan Embassy, *News bulletin* (London, 13 Oct 1989): 3.

⁴²⁶ Rubin, *Fragmentation*: 263.

⁴²⁷ Pers. Comm. Mansfield, 2012.

farmers needed even more to maximise the revenue from their land).⁴²⁸ This dynamic continues today, where often poppy funds are not so much used to pay for anti-government fighting, but anti-government fighting is used to defend or gain elements of the narcotics business. By 1989 when the Soviets left, the ‘mujahidin’ in Helmand were considered largely self-financing.⁴²⁹

Nasim claimed to have set up hospitals and clinics in the areas that he controlled.⁴³⁰ Similarly, Nasim and other clerical leaders, such as Baghrani, expanded their madrasa networks to train military recruits for their mujahidin forces (Nasim’s were known as the ‘Sacrificers’)⁴³¹ and a clerical-run civil bureaucracy.⁴³² I interpret this as part of a quest for legitimacy in the eyes of the population that many Helmandi leaders exhibit once they get to a certain stature. No matter how they have accumulated their money or power, most leaders in Helmand begin to act like tribal leaders and distribute patronage to establish the beginnings of patron-client relationships. This provision of ‘political’ services to the population marks the transition to warlordism. Incidentally, Sher Mohammad, Nasim’s nephew, went to one of these madrasas in Zamindawar with Abdul Qayoum Zakir, a future leader in the Taliban movement and head of the Taliban Military Commission in 2012.⁴³³

2.9 - Nahr-e Saraj

Central Helmand was more stable in terms of large-scale inter-commander warfare, due to the presence of an enemy—the government and the Soviets. However, particularly in the canal-zones, there were numerous, smaller groups due to the social heterogeneity. Gereshk itself was held by the government, and a defensive line was established by the hydroelectric dam to the east (the band-e barq) guarded by one of the few remaining depaye militias.⁴³⁴ The area around the dam was/is socially heterogeneous with a Barakzai majority. This had been a key part of the previous monarchy’s power base in Helmand and there are many Mohammadzai villages. There are a smattering of Kakar villages, some Ishaqzai on the eastern fringes and seventy-five (mainly Ghilzai) families from the canal projects.⁴³⁵ This multiplicity of private interests was enough to diversify the public-private interactions of party membership, village by village.⁴³⁶ Hizb, Harakat, Mahaz, Etihad and Nejad were all

⁴²⁸ Eng. M. Rabi Amaj, *Helmand Projects Monitor and Supervision Report* (Quetta, 1991): 25.

⁴²⁹ Orkand, *Afghanistan*: 165.

⁴³⁰ Vanda Felbab-Brown, *Shooting Up: Counterinsurgency and the War on Drugs* (Washington, 2009): 118.

⁴³¹ Neamatollah Nojumi, *The Rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan* (New York, 2002): 123.

⁴³² Dorransoro, *Revolution*: 126.

⁴³³ SMA.

⁴³⁴ 040.

⁴³⁵ 012, 075.

⁴³⁶ 075.

mentioned as having villages in the area who sought supplies from them.⁴³⁷ There was small scale skirmishing throughout the jihad, but the presence of the government kept them focused.⁴³⁸ It matches very well the public sphere of the era. See map 7.

In Malgir, to the west of Gereshk, a slightly different situation prevailed. Malgir and the areas around Paind Kalay were overwhelmingly Barakzai. Those that were not were implants from the Taraki land redistributions, but these were often ejected once the government lost control.⁴³⁹ The Barakzai in that area have traditionally allied themselves into two power blocks of different clans. Led by Haji Khalifa Shirin Khan were the more powerful clans, the Akhundzadakhel, the Utmanzai, the Bayezai and the Sardarzai. These generally affiliated with Hizb. The second, weaker power block was led by Haji Abdul Agha and consisted of the Shamezai, Nekazai, Yedarzai and Masezai. These generally affiliated with Harakat.⁴⁴⁰ Both of the power block leaders were major landowners: Khalifa Shirin Khan owned one thousand six hundred jereeb.⁴⁴¹ Such large historical landowners were not 'normal' Hizb commanders (according to Hizb's public narrative). Thus, in Malgir, the pre-Taraki division was reflected in the choice of mujahidin party selection. The private cleavage drove the public-private interaction, in this case between two mujahidin organisations with different ideologies.

According to Mir Wali, who was later to dominate the area as the major Hizb commander, 'Harakat' groups began to form in Malgir in 1980 under Mahmud Wali. The 'Hizb' groups formed in 1981 under Shaed Mansor (Barakzai) and eventually became more powerful. There were also a smattering of Mahaz and Etihad groups, but these soon allied themselves with one of the two dominant factions.⁴⁴² There were no major clashes between the different groups reported to me, at least during the first few years of the communist government. This was similar to Babaji, further to the west and positioned on the border between Lashkar Gah, Nad-e Ali and Nahr-e Saraj districts, where the villages (all Barakzai) tended to get on, despite differing party membership—it was mostly Hizb affiliated, with some Etihad, Jamiat and Mahaz villages.⁴⁴³ In Babaji, the types of commanders fitted the public sphere better. For example, the Mahaz leader was Khwashdel Khan, a tribal leader.⁴⁴⁴ The Harakat groupings were under Mullah Hafizullah.⁴⁴⁵ It was probably proximity to the government strong-hold of Chah-e Anjir that kept the different groups allied.

⁴³⁷ 012, 040, 075.

⁴³⁸ 040.

⁴³⁹ 031.

⁴⁴⁰ 074.

⁴⁴¹ 800 acres.

⁴⁴² 052, 074.

⁴⁴³ 018.

⁴⁴⁴ 002.

⁴⁴⁵ 003.

2.10 - Nad-e Ali: a plethora of groups

Nad-e Ali was different yet again. The canal settlements had created a unique social laydown with different villages populated by different tribal and ethnic groups. In addition, there were also completely socially mixed villages. The most developed government infrastructure of any rural area in Helmand generated interaction between the government and the population, that is, between public and private. This led to a degree of Khad penetration, although it appears to have been on a much smaller scale than in northern Helmand. Yet overall, Nad-e Ali did not suffer from the major infighting that was present elsewhere, for several reasons. The presence of the government focussed effort and, most of the different groups in Nad-e Ali shared common cause due to arriving at the same time, whereas elsewhere in Helmand the settlers were mixed in with the indigenous Helmandis. Secondly, in Nad-e Ali—as per the Royal Government’s aims⁴⁴⁶—the social power blocks were relatively small, and so infighting could be quickly contained. The ‘Hizb’-‘Harakat’ fighting was not to reach Nad-e Ali for some years and by-and-large it remained peaceful until then. See map 8.

At the time of the Soviet intervention, the Kharoti were the largest community in Nad-e Ali.⁴⁴⁷ Like many communities, or lineages, they used a strategy of bridging the public mujahidin-government cleavage by deliberately placing people in key positions on both sides.⁴⁴⁸ In their thinking, the unit of currency that must survive was the community group. Thus, the Kharoti leader, Wakil Safar, became a Senator appointed by Karmal.⁴⁴⁹ Yet the village that he was from, Shin Kalay, and another closely related Kharoti village, Naqilabad, were utterly dominated by ‘Hizb’ groupings (Hekmatyar, the leader of Hizb, was also Kharoti).⁴⁵⁰ Ironically, it was the arrest of the respected Wakil Safar during the Taraki-era that had pushed the village to reach out to Hizb for supplies.⁴⁵¹ Shin Kalay provided multiple fighting groups led by commanders such as Dr Jailani and Baryalai, with each commander leading men from their lineages.⁴⁵² See Appendix 4 for Kharoti tribal diagram. Naqilabad was dominated by Pir Mohammad Sadat who was widely respected as an exceptionally brave commander and revered for fighting hand-to-hand against Soviet soldiers in irrigation ditches.⁴⁵³

⁴⁴⁶ Martin, *Brief history*: 23.

⁴⁴⁷ Richard Scott, "Reconstruction and Opium Poppy Cultivation in Central Helmand," in [Conference on Afghanistan Reconstruction](#) (University of Nebraska, 2008): 6.

⁴⁴⁸ 023.

⁴⁴⁹ 023, 050.

⁴⁵⁰ 016, 032.

⁴⁵¹ 023.

⁴⁵² 065.

⁴⁵³ 047.

The third major grouping of Kharoti in Nad-e Ali were those who had been settled by Noor Mohammad Khan (also a parliamentarian)⁴⁵⁴ around Khwashal Kalay and Noor Mohammad Khan Kalay. Previously kuchis (nomads), they were slightly looked down on by the other Kharoti, who had already been landowners before they came to Nad-e Ali.⁴⁵⁵ The Kharoti in Shin Kalay and Noor Mohammad Khan Kalay had been feuding at a low-level for years.⁴⁵⁶ Although Noor Mohammad's son Haji Jalalzai originally joined Hizb 'for lack of other parties',⁴⁵⁷ the villages soon broke with the rest of the Kharoti and affiliated with Harakat⁴⁵⁸ under Mullah Baz Mohammad (Taraki) from Marjeh.⁴⁵⁹ The switch in mujahidin party affiliation was driven by the low-level feud with Shin Kalay. This cleavage was to prove surprisingly stable during the jihad, however, with only minor skirmishing between the groups, usually over who could get supplies from different sections of the population.⁴⁶⁰

This stability was mainly due to the presence of a Kharoti shura across the two mujahidin parties represented within the Kharoti and covering those members of the tribe in the government, including Wakil Safar—i.e. Kharoti private interests were allied across the memberships of several different public organisations.⁴⁶¹ Disputes between different Kharoti mujahidin groupings would quickly be resolved before they escalated and the tribe was able to maintain a foot in all camps whilst sharing information between themselves.⁴⁶² When I questioned senior Kharoti leaders in early 2009 (as a serving British Army officer, in uniform) about those members of their tribe in the 'Taliban' that we knew to be fighting us, they would shrug and explain that they had lost control of the younger, more wayward members of the tribe. Their explanation was that the 'Kharoti' supported the government, but the tribe was fragmented because of the war. They argued that the differing public narratives (e.g. Taliban, government) were driving their private cleavages.

I further explored this issue with the same elders in 2011-12 (as a researcher). I suggested that (the private alliance of) a pan-tribal shura straddling government and non-government lines and sharing information was still in existence during the contemporary Taliban-government conflict. They laughed, looked sheepish, and agreed.⁴⁶³ It was fascinating to compare their open acknowledgement, even glee, at the deliberate splitting of families

⁴⁵⁴ 039.

⁴⁵⁵ 032.

⁴⁵⁶ 016, 050.

⁴⁵⁷ 015.

⁴⁵⁸ 007.

⁴⁵⁹ 015.

⁴⁶⁰ 023.

⁴⁶¹ 007, 015, 023.

⁴⁶² 007.

⁴⁶³ 007, 015, 023.

during the jihad, juxtaposed with their denials of a similar contemporary dynamic. The same private dynamic, but I, the questioner, was from different public sphere. This is a further important piece of evidence for my thesis that the private sphere has primacy in driving public-private interactions, when the outside actor does not fully understand the private sphere.

The second most populous community at that time was probably the Noorzai centred on Loy Bagh under the leadership of Shah Nazar Helmandwal. He was also asked by Karmal to be a parliamentarian despite his 'membership' of Mahaz.⁴⁶⁴ Within Shah Nazar's sub-tribe, the Gurg, his brother Haji Pida Mohammad was a 'clean skin' (i.e. affiliated to no-one), and his nephew, Abdul Ahad, was an 'Etihad' commander, although this was a deliberate decision for family safety, as opposed to the unplanned 'Hizb'-'Harakat' split in the Kharoti.⁴⁶⁵ Another sub-tribe of the Noorzai in Loy Bagh, the Aghezai, were also deliberately split: they were mostly in the 'government', indeed one of them, Khano, later grew to become the most influential militia leader in Helmand. Yet, Mullahs Habibullah and Karim, two influential members of the sub-tribe and Khano's relatives, were the 'Hizb' commanders for the area.⁴⁶⁶ See map 9.

The high degree of private cleavages in Loy Bagh, interacting with strong Hizb and government public penetration meant that Loy Bagh was frequently a battleground (more interactions meant more conflict).⁴⁶⁷ It was destroyed twice during government offensives and even doubled up as the hukumat when the real one was overrun.⁴⁶⁸ The deliberately split kinship groups were a gift for Khad. It enabled them to manipulate the private cleavages: sub-tribe against sub-tribe and cousin against cousin.⁴⁶⁹ As Khad were Parchami dominated, Hizb and Khalq were both competitors to them, albeit on different sides of the public 'government'-'mujahidin' divide.⁴⁷⁰ Of course, as shown by Kalyvas' denunciation theory, it worked both ways—it was not just Khad exploiting private cleavages, but members of the population attempting to manipulate Khad against their own private enemies.⁴⁷¹ This meant that Loy Bagh became an impossible place in which to live, and several people left Loy Bagh and went to Chah-e Mirza in order to prosecute their jihad there.⁴⁷² This, in turn, led to their neighbours trying to steal their land—something else that Khad spotted and took

⁴⁶⁴ 039.

⁴⁶⁵ 039.

⁴⁶⁶ 033, 071.

⁴⁶⁷ 033.

⁴⁶⁸ 016, 023, 067.

⁴⁶⁹ 033.

⁴⁷⁰ 008, 018.

⁴⁷¹ 039, 071, 080.

⁴⁷² 067, 071.

advantage of.⁴⁷³ As one senior Noorzai tribal leader described it, 'it was a civil war between families'.⁴⁷⁴ Loy Bagh was a 'front line' and whose territory you lived in dictated your public ideological leanings.⁴⁷⁵ Interestingly, in Loy Bagh, the public organisation of Khad understood well the private sphere in Loy Bagh,⁴⁷⁶ and this meant that neither sphere was able to determine to conflict dynamics: neither the 'government' nor the 'mujahidin' wanted to destroy Loy Bagh, yet that was what happened.

The last major group of Noorzai in Nad-e Ali were not settlers from the canal projects. Haji Lal Jan (Noorzai/Darzai, Harakat) led a group of Noorzai tribesmen from the village of Gundacha in Washir to Noorzo Kalay (so named after them), north of the Nahr-e Bughra just as government control began to slip in central Helmand. Water stress had forced them out of Washir.⁴⁷⁷ The area was known to him because his brother, Qabir Khan, had been fighting with Harakat in Nad-e Ali.⁴⁷⁸ They were cousins of Abdul Rahman Jan (Noorzai/Darzai), who was later to become much more prominent as the Helmand Chief of Police under President Karzai.⁴⁷⁹ Another group that came at that time was an Ishaqzai community led by Rahmattiar who settled to the south of Khwashal Kalay in Jangal. As a Hizb commander, Rahmattiar had cut a deal whereby the Hizb Amir Hafizullah would bless what was effectively land theft.⁴⁸⁰ Rahmattiar was to grow into the most powerful Hizb commander in the south of Nad-e Ali.⁴⁸¹

Despite the difference in background and provenance between Rahmattiar (Hizb, Ishaqzai, land thief) and Jamalzai (Harakat, Kharoti, settler) there was no infighting reported between the groups in the early stages of the jihad. Khwashal Kalay was shared on an amicable basis between Harakat and Hizb. Haji Mullah Paslow, leading the Popalzai community around Khwashal Kalay, was the third big commander in the area. Both Harakat commanders, Jamalzai and Paslow, got their supplies from Baz Mohammad in Marjeh.⁴⁸² The Hazaras, right on the southern tip of Nad-e Ali, were unified and fought with Wahdat (a Shia, Iranian-sponsored party) under Assadullah Karimi, the village teacher.⁴⁸³ Marjeh was similarly fractured with Hizb commanders including Obaedi (Daftani) and Muslimyar (Achakzai),

⁴⁷³ 023.

⁴⁷⁴ 039.

⁴⁷⁵ 033.

⁴⁷⁶ Pre-Saur revolution, Loy Bagh was a commuter village for government employees who worked in Lashkar Gah.

⁴⁷⁷ 016, 023, 072.

⁴⁷⁸ ARJ.

⁴⁷⁹ ARJ, 041.

⁴⁸⁰ 034.

⁴⁸¹ 023, 034.

⁴⁸² 067.

⁴⁸³ 038.

Mahaz commanders including Tor Jan (Alikozai), Etihad commanders including Matouf Khan and Yahya (Noorzai) and Jamiat commanders including Hakim Khan (Daftani), as well as the aforementioned Baz Mohammad who organised Harakat supplies in the area.⁴⁸⁴ The social heterogeneity created by the canal projects had bred a plethora of mujahidin groups.

2.11 - Nawa and Garmsir

Moving further south, Nawa enjoyed a unique situation which meant that fighting was kept at a low-level during the jihad. Apart from settler families, Nawa is dominated by the Popalzai and Barakzai tribes, both of whom enjoy good relations with each other in Helmand. At first, many groups tried to affiliate themselves with Mahaz, a natural party for these two 'Royal' tribes, however an absence of supplies meant that they both aligned with Jamiat.⁴⁸⁵ Jamiat in Nawa was led by Akhwaendi (Barakzai/Akhundzai), the party Amir for the province.⁴⁸⁶ But the most important part of Nawa's stability was the fact that Allah Noor (Barakzai/Nooradinzai/Gurgezai), a relative-by-marriage of Akhwaendi (Akhwaendi's sister married Allah Noor's brother), was the Khalqi militia leader in charge of the southern part of the cumberband that stretched through Nawa protecting the District Centre and Lashkar Gah.⁴⁸⁷

Allah Noor's brothers were in Jamiat, and, Akhwaendi's brothers were in the militia: 'a lot of women had been swapped between [their] two clans [over the years]'.⁴⁸⁸ Thus, there was no public cleavage between the 'government' and 'Jamiat' in Nawa, largely because they were composed of allied private groups! This also allowed both the government and the mujahidin to claim that they 'controlled' Nawa, but in reality it was controlled by allied private actors. This vignette is a useful piece of evidence in support of my thesis. Any fighting that occurred in the area was between Hafizullah Khan's 'Hizb' commanders and Akhwaendi's 'Jamiat' commanders, who were backed up by Allah Noor—the 'government'. This was mainly over who could control and tax the people in that part of the Barakzai belt⁴⁸⁹ and bears no resemblance to the public sphere of the conflict.

Finally, we turn to Garmsir. As the gateway with Pakistan, Garmsir occupies a strategic position as a major mujahidin supply route for weapons travelling into, and drugs travelling out of, Helmand. However, as elsewhere, the resistance in Garmsir started independently of political parties. Haji Aurang Khan (Noorzai) had been Garmsir's first political prisoner, and

⁴⁸⁴ 016, 032, 038.

⁴⁸⁵ 082.

⁴⁸⁶ 005.

⁴⁸⁷ 029.

⁴⁸⁸ 043.

⁴⁸⁹ 015, 043.

after twelve months in jail, was released and began to fight the government. In 1980, he 'joined' Harakat, using the village mullah's links to a Harakat mawlana named Zakiri (Hotak, from Kandahar) in the party's Quetta office. Aurang cooperated with mujahidin from other parties including Hazandar and Neamatullah Khan (both Alizai, Hizb)⁴⁹⁰ and Alam Gul (Kharoti, Nejad).⁴⁹¹

Even so, they were not able to push the government out of the hukumat. In mid-1980 Mudomer Khan (Noorzai), a Harakat commander, enlisted the support of Nasim Akhundzada from Musa Qala to come down and evict the government.⁴⁹² Nasim left behind in place a 'Harakat' administration, but soon there were problems. Aurang still allowed 'Hizb' to operate in the district and pass supplies as they had done before—after all, they were all mujahidin fighting the infidel communists—however Zakiri in the Harakat office complained. Aurang promptly left Harakat and became independent again. Sometime later (probably 1982), once the Soviets had re-established the District Centre, Aurang and his men re-joined the jihad with the Khales faction of Hizb.⁴⁹³

I have here summarised what was occurring in the different districts in Helmand in response to the Soviet intervention. This general discussion of the different districts reveals an intensely complicated private sphere of actors, groups, narratives and cleavages. Each of the areas had a slightly different mix of local factors—the presence of government in their area, the degree and type of social fragmentation based on tribal structures, length of time settled in the area, migration patterns, land ownership and so on—which resulted in a multiplicity of different public-private interactions.

In most areas, however, the private cleavages and actors were paramount, due to government ignorance of the complexity of the private sphere. The coping strategy employed by Helmandis over the last thirty-four years—membership of different public organisations by the same private lineage—demonstrates clearly how in these circumstances the private sphere is important in comparison to the public one. For every example, though, there is a counter-example. Some families did genuinely split along ideological lines at the beginning of the jihad, only to reconcile later, but these were very few.⁴⁹⁴ I will now discuss how the government attempted to control the situation.

⁴⁹⁰ 048.

⁴⁹¹ 015.

⁴⁹² 048.

⁴⁹³ 084.

⁴⁹⁴ 019, 084.

2.12 - Government infighting

Whilst the early rebel bands were seeking supplies from their respective mujahidin parties, the government and their Soviet backers were fighting to secure central Helmand. The cumberband came under the responsibility of the police,⁴⁹⁵ although the southern sections were held by Khalqi militias.⁴⁹⁶ Outside of the police cumberband the Afghan Army was deployed. Their brigade headquarters was based in Bolan⁴⁹⁷ with kandaks in Khan Eshin, Khwash Kawa, Garmsir and the desert to the south of the Arghandab River. Their main role was interdiction of mujahidin supply routes. Artillery was kept in Bolan, the maidan and to the south of Gereshk, and was regularly used to shell villages as punishment for harbouring 'mujahidin'.⁴⁹⁸ Aside from their advisors in the police, Soviet troops worked with the Afghan Army, although the numbers of Soviet troops were much smaller and would rise and fall dependent on what was happening across the south and west of Afghanistan.⁴⁹⁹ At most, the Soviets had a kandak in Lashkar Gah and a kandak of spetsnaz (special forces) working across the province with the Afghan Army. Any major operations were usually conducted by extra troops brought in from either Kandahar or Herat.⁵⁰⁰

In a reflection of the intra-'mujahidin' cleavages, there were major problems between the Khalqi and Parchami factions within the government.⁵⁰¹ Helmand was a major area for Khalqi recruitment, yet the national government was dominated by Parchamis. Kabul had to tread a careful line politically in Helmand, and chose to appoint Khalqis there, as a reflection of the local political landscape. For example, Zeyarmal, a Parchami Barakzai from Kandahar, was appointed Provincial Governor in 1984, but was swiftly removed when it came to be understood that only Khalqis could work in that position.⁵⁰² The police, who were drawn from the villages of central Helmand, tended to be Khalqi dominated. Khad was mostly Parchami, but did not trust the Helmandi Khalqis, leading to problems with information sharing and cooperation.⁵⁰³ Often their Soviet mentors took on the views of their mentees causing factionalism within the Soviet establishment as well.⁵⁰⁴ Of course, within these distinctions we have to take account of the degree to which people actually subscribed to the public narratives, as party membership was often a necessary part of career advancement.⁵⁰⁵

⁴⁹⁵ 049.

⁴⁹⁶ 005, 043.

⁴⁹⁷ 020.

⁴⁹⁸ 023, 032, 049, 084.

⁴⁹⁹ 049.

⁵⁰⁰ Jabbar, 063.

⁵⁰¹ 049, 076.

⁵⁰² 044.

⁵⁰³ 049.

⁵⁰⁴ 045. Borovik, Hidden: 248.

⁵⁰⁵ 049.

The Khalqi-Parchami relationship should be considered a complicating factor for the overall Soviet-Afghan government relationship within Helmand. Generally speaking the latter relationship was good, particularly between the Soviets and the Parchamis. Soviets were posted to Helmand for two years, and so were able to gain some familiarity with Helmand's private sphere. In addition, the Soviet intervention had been prefaced by a decades-long relationship between the Soviet Union and Afghanistan, meaning that many of the Helmandi communists had studied in the Soviet Union and spoke Russian. As such there was a degree of familiarity with each other's culture and they would often socialise together in Lashkar Gah. The Soviets also had a number of Pushtu-trained linguists, as well as native Tajiks (Farsi, Dari and Tajik are all derivations of the same language that allow mutual comprehension). Finally, many of the Afghan communists were already members of the PDPA before the Soviets intervened and so a person's ideology was better known—this increased general trust between the two camps.⁵⁰⁶ That said, many Khalqis were willing to accept the technical and material help that the Soviets gave them, but, as Habibullah, an ex-Khalqi District Governor in the Karzai-era said, 'it was ok to cooperate on military stuff, but the politics were all wrong between the groups'.

Finally, there was a mosaic of different militia groups. Allah Noor, from Nawa, was in the Grow Mudafen: the Revolutionary Defence Group.⁵⁰⁷ These militias had fairly low salaries and were not very strict on their recruitment ideologically-speaking.⁵⁰⁸ Comprised mainly of students in Helmand there were even ex-mujahidin present in their ranks. The main thing holding them together was their salaries.⁵⁰⁹ The band-e barq was held by another type of militia, a derivation of the Zahir Shah-era militias, the Depaye Khudai, which were essentially village defence forces⁵¹⁰ and were 'mainly mujahidin anyway'.⁵¹¹ There were other types of militia, including the more ideologically focussed, with PDPA membership a prerequisite to admission, such as the Depayan-e Enqelab.⁵¹² At their peak, there were probably around four-and-a-half thousand police and associated militias in Helmand.⁵¹³

2.13 - Heavy fighting and a massacre

Central Helmand was the focus of many government and Soviet operations to 'clear' the mujahidin and establish security posts and District Centres. Universally, my ex-mujahidin interviewees would focus on the cruelty of the Soviet and Afghan troops, and particularly on

⁵⁰⁶ 045, 048, 049.

⁵⁰⁷ 043.

⁵⁰⁸ Giustozzi, W/P/S: 48-9.

⁵⁰⁹ 049.

⁵¹⁰ 040.

⁵¹¹ 049.

⁵¹² 049. Giustozzi, W/P/S: 48-9.

⁵¹³ 006.

the ubiquitous use of airpower and artillery.⁵¹⁴ This was usually used in response to ‘mujahidin’ attacks, and included the use of anti-personnel bomblets and mines in villages.⁵¹⁵ In one instance, the village of Zhargoun Kalay in Nad-e Ali was completely destroyed from the air.⁵¹⁶ Events such as theft and rape were also reported as commonplace.⁵¹⁷ Worst of all, massacres of the civilian population occurred, the largest of which I document below.

Without access to Soviet sources, picking apart different government and Soviet operations is difficult from this chronological distance. Certainly, from the perspective of the population, they had a short-term military focus, with the aim being to kill as many mujahidin as possible and not to hold territory.⁵¹⁸ The reestablishment of the hukomats in central and southern Helmand required longer-term operations, but not longer than two or three months.⁵¹⁹ The Afghan Army and Soviet troops would then withdraw to their bases leaving the police to hold the hukomats, often resulting in a 50m by 50m defensive perimeter.⁵²⁰

In general, operations in central and southern Helmand would occur approximately once every month and would be of a small scale.⁵²¹ In comparison, the less-often operations in northern Helmand had no intention of establishing security posts.⁵²² These operations were conducted by units from Kandahar and Herat and sometimes involved thousands of troops.⁵²³ Ex-communist interviewees repeatedly emphasised the fact that in all these operations serious attempts were made by the Soviets to help the population with medical, agricultural and other support,⁵²⁴ in-line with their public narrative of *international duty*. However, these attempts were not understood or appreciated by the population against the backdrop of indiscriminate violence.⁵²⁵ It was these operations above all else, and the resultant damage to the irrigation systems, that drove people to move their families to Pakistan as refugees. Whether that damage was deliberate or non-deliberate is a question of perspective.⁵²⁶

By far the worst event perpetrated by government and Soviet troops in central Helmand is the massacre in Khwashal Kalay, Nad-e Ali, probably occurring on the second day of Eid al-

⁵¹⁴ e.g. 002, 015, 040.

⁵¹⁵ 032.

⁵¹⁶ 015, 016.

⁵¹⁷ e.g. 008, 013.

⁵¹⁸ 031.

⁵¹⁹ 006.

⁵²⁰ 012.

⁵²¹ 014.

⁵²² 056, 064.

⁵²³ 063.

⁵²⁴ 006, 018.

⁵²⁵ 015.

⁵²⁶ 044 and 064 gave opposite views, for instance.

Adha (10 October 1981).⁵²⁷ The reasons for the massacre vary—some say it was revenge for a Soviet colonel who was killed near Shin Kalay the day before,⁵²⁸ others, that the village of Khwashal Kalay had not provided its conscription quota,⁵²⁹ or merely that the village was a centre of resistance and needed to be punished.⁵³⁰

Government and Soviet troops went through Khwashal Kalay, searching for people, and lined up two hundred villagers.⁵³¹ The troops then proceeded to move along the line shooting each person in turn, with women being taken away for rape elsewhere in the village.⁵³² The troops then moved through the villages killing those who had escaped or avoided the line-up and even turned their weapons on the village's dogs, camels and donkeys. Eyewitnesses describe the smell as their most vivid remembrance: bodies were still being found two weeks later. That evening, people from the surrounding countryside crept into the village to bury the dead in the village's graveyard on the desert escarpment to the west. The villagers were buried four to a grave.⁵³³

The fact that a deliberate massacre of around two hundred people occurred was acknowledged by many interviewees, including a government one.⁵³⁴ The one eyewitness to the aftermath that I interviewed said that the massacre was committed by a Soviet unit called 'seyara sarakuwa' (my transcription from their enunciation), however I have been unable to translate the phrase, or find any more information regarding the unit. According to the same interviewee, the unit was involved in operations in Chah-e Mirza shortly afterwards and Amir Jalat Khan (Kakar), a Jamiat commander, was killed with eighty-five of his men. That was the end of Jamiat in Chah-e Mirza for the remainder of the jihad.⁵³⁵

Many of my interviewees were hard men, who had done and seen terrible things, yet they became misty eyed and faltering when discussing the Khwashal Kalay Eid massacre. This level of emotion was not displayed when discussing any other events during my interviewing. For that reason it was very hard to pick apart the public and private spheres with regard to the event. For example, I do not know the number or identity of any Helmandis involved in perpetrating the massacre. It appears, from the evidence, that this was an event best

⁵²⁷ 015.

⁵²⁸ 007.

⁵²⁹ 008.

⁵³⁰ 015.

⁵³¹ 007, 015, 017.

⁵³² 008.

⁵³³ 015, 032.

⁵³⁴ 049.

⁵³⁵ 015.

explained by the public sphere surrounding the war, particularly as it is hard to distinguish a motive for the event.

2.14 - Najibullah: a new policy

Karmal was not able to manage the situation nationally and was removed by the Soviets. In his place came Dr Najibullah (hereafter known as Najib), the previous head of Khad.⁵³⁶ The lack of progress, or momentum, nationally was reflected in Helmand. Although the cumberband was complete, there was a limit on what military operations could achieve, in terms of getting the central Helmandi population to support what they considered an occupation government: the government was perceived by the rural population as being 'godless' and a 'puppet government'.⁵³⁷ In return, many PDPA officials were utterly disdainful of 'tribalism' which they considered 'feudal and backwards'.⁵³⁸ These were issues that were unlikely to go away whilst Karmal was in power or the country was occupied by Soviet troops. The civil war still raged in northern Helmand.

This aside, normal life went on. Those government employees and businessmen that were not ideologically committed to communism, or responsible for cruelty or atrocities, and offered a service needed in the rural areas—e.g. doctors or engineers—were allowed to travel with a party of elders to where they could, for example, offer medical support or service the canal networks.⁵³⁹ Schooling and health services continued in the centres of Lashkar Gah, Gereshk and occasionally the southern and central District Centres, but these were precarious and sometimes evicted by mujahidin.⁵⁴⁰

Najib became General Secretary of the PDPA in May 1986. Shortly afterwards, he launched his policy of National Reconciliation. The population were fairly cynical to new pronouncements and with the change in rhetoric, people were not sure if it 'was just noise or whether it was an actual change...certainly in the beginning there was a lot of talk and not much action'.⁵⁴¹ However, as his rule developed many, even some mujahidin commanders, began to consider him a good leader, and much more conciliatory in approach after the ideologically-set views of the Karmal administration.⁵⁴² The National Reconciliation Programme was designed to bridge the public cleavages between the irreconcilable mujahidin and government viewpoints by softening hard-line government positions. Aspects

⁵³⁶ Feifer, Gamble: 189.

⁵³⁷ 023.

⁵³⁸ Orkand, Afghanistan: 78.

⁵³⁹ 044, 046.

⁵⁴⁰ 049.

⁵⁴¹ 049.

⁵⁴² 003.

included power-sharing with non-PDPA parties or individuals, amnesty for political prisoners, a new constitution modelled on that of 1964 and, later on, removing Marxism and replacing it with Islam and a market economy as guiding principles of the government and nation.⁵⁴³ This overarching public, ideological framework was designed to encapsulate a much more pragmatic policy on the ground in Helmand.

Policy in Helmand consisted of a three-prong strategy heavily dominated by Khad. Firstly, it evaluated its policy of support for mujahidin groups and decided privately to focus on supporting Nasim in his war to wipe out all the other mujahidin groups, particularly ‘Hizb’ groups. This was the hammer. Secondly, the anvil; Khad began to offer amnesty and arms to whole mujahidin bands, and the communities they were drawn from, if they were to come over to the government and form militias. These twin policies formed the main base of the government’s strategy to reduce government-mujahidin violence in the province and were complimented by the third prong: that of inviting mujahidin figures to take their place in the government.⁵⁴⁴

These policies were used as a way to break the stalemate of the Karmal years, and as a way of ensuring the government’s survival once the Soviets left.⁵⁴⁵ However, they should be seen as a rebalancing of power from the centre to the periphery (i.e. from state to tribe). In a patronage system such as exists in Helmand’s society the public, ideological manoeuvring had little effect without the threat of force or the benefits of cash and supplies. Thus, the provincial council, once reformed, was still seen as a fig leaf.⁵⁴⁶ However, according to government figures, Najib’s policies could be considered a success—between 1985 and 1987 the percentage of Helmand under ‘government control’ rose from 13.1% to 24%.⁵⁴⁷

Shah Nazar Khan, the leader of the Nad-e Ali Noorzai, from Loy Bagh and a Mahaz ‘member’, was appointed Provincial Governor in 1987.⁵⁴⁸ The negotiations leading to his appointment were carried about by Khad. But whilst Shah Nazar was a significant tribal leader, he was not a very important ‘mujahidin’ commander. Despite being the Provincial Governor, he was not necessarily in the ‘government’—he merely adopted the public government label to support his own private interests. The remainder of his family stayed affiliated with the same ‘mujahidin’ franchises detailed previously and his non-affiliated brother acted as a go-between.

⁵⁴³ Dorransoro, Revolution: 196-7.

⁵⁴⁴ 045, 080.

⁵⁴⁵ Rubin, Fragmentation: 146-8.

⁵⁴⁶ 046.

⁵⁴⁷ Giustozzi, W/P/S: 285.

⁵⁴⁸ 039, 070, 074.

Thus in 1989, during mujahidin infighting in Nad-e Ali the 'Etihad' part of the family came under pressure from Rahmattiar's 'Hizb' groups. Shah Nazar used his relatives in Khad to contact the 'Etihad' part of the family and offer weapons. This was still the case when it became clear that the weapons were being used to attack Habibullah (Noorzai, Garmsir) the Khalqi Chief of Police in Nad-e Ali who was under a constant state of siege from the mujahidin. At that point, Habibullah and his men were the only things that were enabling the 'government' to remain in Nad-e Ali.⁵⁴⁹ The family's private interests were much more important than Shah Nazar's affiliation with the government and it was at this point that public organisations began to break up in Helmand.

In summary, so far, we have discussed the revolution of 1978, the population's response to it, the Soviet intervention, and how that generated fierce resistance and private infighting in Helmand. Finally we have broadly discussed the changes that Najibullah brought in an attempt to calm the conflict. We now explore the result of those policies in detail and discuss the final stages of the Soviet presence in Helmand.

2.15 - Khad and Nasim

Khad began by inflaming the Nasim–Abdul Rahman Khan tensions in northern Helmand by increasing its support to Nasim at the expense of other commanders: that is, the public-private interactions shifted.⁵⁵⁰ Even though Nasim 'did one thing for Khad and ten for himself' (i.e. Nasim manipulated Khad),⁵⁵¹ the supplies had the desired effect, and by 1987 Abdul Rahman Khan had been forced out of Kajaki, to Malgir, where he based himself with Mir Wali.⁵⁵² At around the same time, Baidullah (Alizai/Khalozai), originally a 'Khalqi' District Governor of Kajaki but now a sub-commander of Abdul Rahman, defected back to the 'government' with his men and formed a militia in Gereshk. The fact that he was the first, not-insignificant commander to do so means that he is still remembered today. Later on he was to defect back to 'Hizb' in Nad-e Ali and was eventually killed by Nasim.⁵⁵³

At the same time, Rais Baghrani joined Jamiat because Nasim was successfully blocking Hizb supplies reaching him from Pakistan. Hundreds of people died in clashes between the two of them in the summer of 1988. His defection was a boon to Jamiat as it was another way of guaranteeing supplies to Ismail Khan in Herat, at the end of a very long supply

⁵⁴⁹ Habibullah, 039.

⁵⁵⁰ 049, 057, 070.

⁵⁵¹ 060.

⁵⁵² MMW, 013. Giustozzi, Tribes: 10.

⁵⁵³ 001, 048.

route.⁵⁵⁴ Slightly later, Rauf Khan (Ishaqzai, Mahaz) also defected to the government and formed a militia in Gereshk from his mujahidin band.⁵⁵⁵ These glorious 'mujahidin' groups, fighting for their liberty and for Islam, were simply bought off with government cash.

Nasim began to expand and attack other 'mujahidin' groups all over the province. Privately, Mir Wali was a particular target for harbouring Abdul Rahman Khan, and so the local Harakat groups in Malgir were reinforced by Nasim. This was the first time that the 'Hizb'- 'Harakat' war had come to Malgir and was exactly what the government wanted to happen (although Mir Wali had fought Nasim before in Now Zad as part of the previous 'Hizb'- 'Harakat' fighting).⁵⁵⁶ Those mujahidin groups not affiliated with Hizb or Harakat quickly chose.⁵⁵⁷ Nasim then persuaded Dad Mohammad in Sangin to ally with him: he did not leave Jamiat, but merely formed an alliance with Nasim.⁵⁵⁸ Little persuasion was needed if the extra supplies would help him fight Atta Mohammad, his closest rival.

The Dad Mohammad-Atta Mohammad private cleavage dictated the story of Sangin. However, the combination of two leaders with similar names, and switching affiliations to the same two parties, or splinters thereof, means that I am not at all clear on the dynamics in Sangin during the jihad, and the following should be treated with a degree of caution. Interviews, secondary sources and discussions with Sangin experts fail to yield clarity and I assume that this complexity in the private sphere contributes to the levels of public violence there in the modern era (see map 6).

Atta had previously betrayed Nasim leaving 'Harakat' to join 'Jamiat'. Rasoul, Nasim's brother, had then reportedly said 'I don't want to kill anyone except Atta; he is a devil'.⁵⁵⁹ Thus, the later Dad Mohammad-Nasim alliance benefited them both (as Atta and Dad were rivals). Atta Mohammad then later 'joined' what the locals called kuchnai (little) Harakat (whereas Nasim was in loy (big) Harakat), probably one of the splinter factions of Harakat led by Mansur or Malawi Moazen,⁵⁶⁰ presumably because he was able to secure better supplies to fight Dad Mohammad.⁵⁶¹ At that time, Dad Mohammad and Atta Mohammad each repeatedly took control of the bazaar and lost it again. During the course of this, Atta Mohammad affiliated with the public organisations of Harakat, Jamiat and then kuchnai Harakat. This whilst Dad Mohammad went Mahaz, Jamiat, and then formed an affiliation

⁵⁵⁴ Gilles Dorronsoro, "Helmand: Le Dernier Refuge des Khalqis" *Afghanistan Info*, no. 33 (1993): 11-3.

⁵⁵⁵ 012, 061.

⁵⁵⁶ MMW, 013.

⁵⁵⁷ 061.

⁵⁵⁸ 031, 069.

⁵⁵⁹ 020.

⁵⁶⁰ Edwards, *Before Taliban*: 268.

⁵⁶¹ 040.

with Harakat. Privately, they continued to fight each other for much of the time.⁵⁶² The complexity of shifting public-private interactions was epic, and reinforces well my thesis: the actors and groups in Sangin were willing to subscribe to any ideology in order to obtain weapons to help them in the private feuds.

Hafizullah Khan, the Hizb Amir for Helmand, later claimed to me that Atta affiliated himself with Hizb as well. This is unlikely as Atta Mohammad, as well as fighting Dad Mohammad to his north, was also fighting Abdul Khaleq (also Ishaqzai, Mistereekheli) to his south, who was with Hizb.⁵⁶³ Abdul Khaleq was eventually to die during this period in Qala-e Gaz, although whether due to government or intra-mujahidin action is not known.⁵⁶⁴ As this was occurring, the other half of the Mistereekheli under Rauf Khan were persuaded to join the government (he was under heavy pressure from Atta Mohammad at the time).⁵⁶⁵ Rauf then became the leader of one of the first tribal kandaks in Gereshk.⁵⁶⁶ This war over Sangin, and its profitable drugs bazaar, still has not been concluded at time of writing in 2012: the conflict is still being driven by the private sphere, although the public spheres have changed several times.

Outside of Sangin, the Khad-funded 'Hizb'-'Harakat' war continued apace and Nasim began to dominate northern Helmand. Baghrani was contained in Baghran; Now Zad and Washir came under Nasim's purview.⁵⁶⁷ Although there were attempts at mediation by Israel Khan (Noorzai, Etihad, from Now Zad) throughout the decade⁵⁶⁸ this was all-out war funded by Khad. Privately, Israel's family was split across 'Khad', 'Etihad' and 'Hizb' at the time, but it is not known what effect this had on negotiations, if any. Apparently, the Soviets (and one assumes Khad) only realised just before they left that Israel's family was so split—this according to my interviewee, a member of the clan, and a member of 'Khad'!⁵⁶⁹ The war was increasingly becoming about big commanders ('komandan' as the Helmandis borrowed the Soviet word) and where they could accrue resources in an utterly tangled web of public-private interactions.

It is worth at this point considering what this territorial control gave Nasim. He was certainly not the governor of northern Helmand, in the sense that a western observer would understand—he did not have direct control over all of the territory that he 'owned', for example. That territory also contained the networks of his vanquished foes, who had had to

⁵⁶² 017, 019, 069.

⁵⁶³ 007.

⁵⁶⁴ 040, 070.

⁵⁶⁵ 025.

⁵⁶⁶ 012, 020.

⁵⁶⁷ 031.

⁵⁶⁸ 048, 064.

⁵⁶⁹ 080.

accept Nasim's rule. The nature of tribal or militia warfare is that Nasim would have established himself as the dominant security actor in that space—the primus inter pares—and this would have given him some ability to levy 'Islamic' taxes on agricultural production, particularly the ever-expanding poppy fields. Some areas, like Baghran, he was never able to influence at all, and others, he could only influence by proxy.

Nasim developed his rule through a series of private alliances: inter-clan marriages. In this, he was seeking to be able to rely more on those commanders who controlled his sub-areas. The nature of patronage-based tribal militias is that there will be a shifting system of allegiances (public-private interactions), dependent upon what each individual commander thinks that he can gain by loyalty to his public patron. That Khad injected a lot of patronage into this system through Nasim allowed him to 'buy' more commanders, and 'acquire' more territory, which in turn allowed him to make more money from the poppy crop in a virtuous circle, however the nature of these interactions make them inherently unstable, as they are based on private relationships.⁵⁷⁰

2.16 - The militia programme

There was concern that the government would not be able to survive the Soviet drawdown.⁵⁷¹ And so the second part of the public strategy, starting in 1987,⁵⁷² concerned the increased formation of militias, which diminished the resistance's recruitment pool and increased government forces. The militias were employed to defend major population centres and government sites in Lashkar Gah and Gereshk, which were all that the post-Soviet government could realistically expect to hold. The Parchami-dominated Khad grew its 'mujahidin' kandaks, some of whom ended up in the army chain of command. The police grew their own 'Khalqi' militia kandaks.⁵⁷³ For the tribal leaders, having members of the tribe in different parts of the 'government' and the 'mujahidin' was a perfect enhancement of their position. It allowed them, as private actors, to interact with opposed public organisations. With a militia, they now had their own 'force', that they could move individual fighters into and out of, whilst maintaining government legitimacy, and access to healthcare (critical for wounded mujahidin). Conversely, Jabbar Qahraman, the largest militia leader in the South, used to offer the same services to wounded mujahidin in Kandahar.⁵⁷⁴

⁵⁷⁰ Gat, *War*: 176-83.

⁵⁷¹ Giustozzi, *W/P/S*: 157.

⁵⁷² *Ibid.*, 266.

⁵⁷³ 048.

⁵⁷⁴ Jabbar, 041.

Thus, recruitment by different ‘government’ organisations led to a patchwork of private militias under different chains of command that progressively emasculated the professional armed forces in Helmand.⁵⁷⁵ To start with, the militias were under professional control. Later, once Soviet forces had left, a shift occurred where militias began to outnumber and control the ‘professionals’. Eventually, the division in Gereshk was to come under Allah Noor’s (militia) control.⁵⁷⁶ At the time of the Soviet exit, February 1989, the militia situation was increasingly confused, with groups changing their chains of command, or ignoring it and doing as they wished.⁵⁷⁷ As a former professional army officer said disgustedly ‘the Najib militias were just *private* armies’.⁵⁷⁸

The ‘Khalqi’ police militias tended to be based around Lashkar Gah to reinforce the cumberband. Allah Noor, in Nawa and later Bolan, was the largest of these at that time, but other examples include Khano (from the Noorzai/Aghezai sub-tribe from Loy Bagh), Khudai Noor (Noorzai, from Garmsir) and Usem Khan (Barakzai) who guarded his hometown’s part of the cumberband in Basharan.⁵⁷⁹ Khano had taken advantage of the fact that his brother was closely linked to a senior Khalqi by launching a militia.⁵⁸⁰ He originally started with a kandak-sized militia and ended up becoming a major-general militia commander by the early 1990s. He later spawned an impressive Helmandi dynasty, including a son who studied as a ‘refugee’ in Ireland and was an Afghan MP in the 2005 session.⁵⁸¹

Militias under Khad’s control guarded what the central government considered critical strategic points. Thus, there was a Baluch militia under Mir Aza (who was actually Pakistani Baluch) to help guard the frontier with Pakistan⁵⁸² and there were militias in Deh Adam Khan to defend the band-e barq (hydroelectric dam).⁵⁸³ Engineer Matin (Noorzai) was given the most important job of all: defending the Khad headquarters and supply depots in Lashkar Gah and at the maidan.⁵⁸⁴

The militias that fell under Afghan Army commander clustered around Gereshk under the remit of the 93rd division. This was because the government, like countless before it, recognised the strategic importance of Gereshk. The division began with an establishment of

⁵⁷⁵ 003.

⁵⁷⁶ 012, 035.

⁵⁷⁷ 060.

⁵⁷⁸ 057.

⁵⁷⁹ 003.

⁵⁸⁰ Giustozzi, Tribes: 15.

⁵⁸¹ 033

⁵⁸² 080.

⁵⁸³ 025.

⁵⁸⁴ 021.

two thousand, but as the 'jihadi' kandaks grew this was expanded to seven thousand, dwarfing the professional forces in the province.⁵⁸⁵ But the government policy was working (for them): 'Mahaz', for instance, had lost Shah Nazar Helmandwal, Dad Mohammad and Rauf Khan, their Amir, and by 1987 they were finished in the province. The private groups and actors that had comprised 'Mahaz' were still in existence, but now interacting with new public organisations. As the Soviets left, the division was under the command of General Baba Tapa, a professional officer.⁵⁸⁶

Finally, sitting outside of all of those structures was the brigade of militias under the command of Jabbar, but answering directly to Najib, based in Maiwand and supposedly responsible for security across much of the south once the Soviets left.⁵⁸⁷ These conflicting chains of command were to lay the basis for much friction later and allowed the private sphere to dictate events.

2.17 - The Soviet swansong

Whilst the inter-'mujahidin' war was continuing, and Khad was gradually militiaising the province, conventional operations still continued. There was, for example, an extensive operation in Sangin launched by Soviet troops, Afghan troops and militias during March to May 1988. Large government operations were among the only times that the mujahidin worked together to a common goal and the Soviets were forced to reinforce themselves from Shindand airbase in Herat province.⁵⁸⁸ The operation spread from Sangin to Qala-e Gaz in April and then Sarwan Qala in May. On the first of June, the Soviets pulled out.⁵⁸⁹ From this chronological distance, it is hard to say what the long-term effects of operations like these were.

For example, in this case, some argue that the operation was to set up power lines⁵⁹⁰ (which the 'mujahidin' took down once the 'government' troops had gone). Others argue that it was designed to provide a distraction for withdrawal later that year, and to allow the new militias breathing space.⁵⁹¹ Whatever the reason, starting in February, six thousand regular troops and militias fought towards Kajaki; effectively, the central Helmandis were paid to fight the northern Helmandis, reinforcing the old north-south cleavage.⁵⁹²

⁵⁸⁵ 043.

⁵⁸⁶ 020.

⁵⁸⁷ 048, Jabbar.

⁵⁸⁸ AfghaNews, *Provincial News*, vol. 4 (London, May 1988): 2.

⁵⁸⁹ 'Helmand - April and May', *Afghan Jihad* (Apr-June 1988): 279-80.

⁵⁹⁰ Op Cit.

⁵⁹¹ Mark Urban, *War in Afghanistan* (New York, 1990): 240-1.

⁵⁹² Martin, *Brief history*: 39.

The conventional military operations, simply, did not change facts on the ground. When a mujahed was killed, his relatives would feel honour-bound to replace him with another male member of the family⁵⁹³ and so massive military sweeps were pointless. What broke the Karmal-era stalemate was the programme led by Khad that supported Nasim to force other mujahidin groups to join the government. An important example of this is the defection of Mir Wali to the government in 1989, squeezed in Malgir between 'Harakat' (Nasim) and Khad. He became a kandak commander, with responsibility for the Abhashak Wadi part of the cumberband.⁵⁹⁴

The 1988 withdrawal of Soviet and regular Afghan government forces from Helmand was in the first phase of the Soviet withdrawal plan,⁵⁹⁵ and was preceded by a retrenchment of Helmandi district-level government. First, in June 1988 the government withdrew from Khan Eshin.⁵⁹⁶ Garmsir was then abandoned in August.⁵⁹⁷ The central districts of Nad-e Ali and Nawa were part of the cumberband for Lashkar Gah and so were held. The last regular government force to leave Helmand was a Soviet spetznaz battalion who withdrew from Kajaki at the end of October 1988.⁵⁹⁸ The dam was immediately occupied by Nasim's men.⁵⁹⁹ By the end of October 1988, the government was only present within its central defensive line.⁶⁰⁰

2.18 - Conclusions

The Soviet-era has generally been perceived as dominated by the public sphere: that is, viewed through the prism of the cold war. Indeed, there are events that appear to be close to that overarching narrative—the Saur revolution and the descriptions of fighting between the mujahidin and the Soviets, including the Khwashal Kalay Eid massacre. However, this chapter has also revealed the importance of the interaction between the public and private spheres in shaping conflict. Moreover, this chapter shows that in the face of a public organisation's ignorance of the private sphere, the private sphere is more likely to shape the conflict dynamics. Firstly, Khad support for rival 'mujahidin' groups and those groups' manipulation of Khad resources to aid them in their local disputes. This was certainly true at the beginning of the decade in northern Helmand. In areas where the government had good knowledge of the private sphere, for example Loy Bagh, neither sphere was able to drive the

⁵⁹³ e.g. 018, 034, 040, 065.

⁵⁹⁴ 003, 031, 043, 074, MMW, Hafizullah.

⁵⁹⁵ Lester Grau, Breaking Contact Without Leaving Chaos: The Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan (Leavenworth, 2007): 10.

⁵⁹⁶ 'Khan Eshin', Afghan Jihad (Apr-June 1988): 107-8.

⁵⁹⁷ MSF, Mission:10.

⁵⁹⁸ Urban, War in Afghanistan: 245 & 248.

⁵⁹⁹ Orkand, Afghanistan:117.

⁶⁰⁰ Afghan Information Centre, Monthly Bulletin No 91 (Oct 1988).

interaction that shaped the conflict dynamics: Loy Bagh was destroyed. The machinations of Khad demonstrate that there were frequent public-private interactions, and it appears that individuals like Nasim managed to manipulate government policy for their own ends, although, as government knowledge improved, they were able to put pressure on Hizb in central Helmand thus easing the pressure.

Secondly, the common tendency for private actors to flip backwards and forwards between different parties and between the 'mujahidin' and the 'government'. Membership did not follow these public organisations' narratives at all: ideology was an unusual reason for party selection. Choice of mujahidin party was often driven by private, pre-revolutionary cleavages and commanders regularly switched parties based on on-going feuds. Finally, the deliberate practice of splitting communities (private groups) across different public organisations, in order to ensure lineage survival, shows that the private group was much more important than what, to them, were ideological abstractions in the public sphere. These dynamics were facilitated by a lack of knowledge by both the government and the mujahidin parties—the main public organisations—of the private sphere. In conclusion, the Soviet-era was portrayed as an East-West clash, but was in fact a conflict driven by public-private interactions. These conclusions will be expanded upon in Chapter seven.

Chapter 3: The Soviet withdrawal until the US intervention, 1989–2001

I was told it was all about Islam; I can see now
that they were lying; it was all about power

Ishaqzai ex-Mahaz commander⁶⁰¹

Talib: We want you to go [forward] under the
Qur'an; we want the Qur'an to be raised up high.
Khalifa Shirin Khan: We have [fought] the
Soviets for fifteen years; we have been doing
jihad; we are not kaffirs.

The Taliban's second meeting
(in) Gereshk, 1994

The Soviet withdrawal weakened international attention on Afghanistan. This resulted in a less polarised public cleavage than the Soviet-mujahidin clash. However, the collapse of the Afghan government led to civil war in Afghanistan which is usually explored through a focus on the internecine struggle for the capital. This battle for Kabul contains an eye-watering confusion of different (often ethnic) sides, deals, intrigues and betrayals.⁶⁰² Appalling depredations were exacted on the civilian population. Data describing the conflict dynamics occurring outside of Kabul, however, are almost entirely absent.⁶⁰³

The rise of the Taliban movement—a movement of religious clerics who promised to restore order—was seen by scholars as a direct reaction to the chaos of the civil war, even though it was acknowledged that they were a movement heavily supported by Pakistan. (Pakistan had switched its favourite client status from Hekmatyar and Hizb to Mullah Omar and the Taliban).⁶⁰⁴ The Taliban had a very strong public narrative that focussed on social order. Their ideology was closest to Harakat's—that is, they were traditionalist and focussed on their interpretation of Islam as being the source of all laws. The West were opposed to, and particularly irked about, the movement's treatment of women.⁶⁰⁵ Most famously, the Taliban formed an alliance with Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda in their war against Ahmad Shah Masoud and the Northern Alliance. This was to be their downfall. After bin Laden attacked the US on the 11 September 2001, the US drove the Taliban from government.

⁶⁰¹ 061.

⁶⁰² Dorransoro, *Revolution*: 6.

⁶⁰³ Although see, for e.g., Afghan Information Centre's Monthly Bulletins.

⁶⁰⁴ Victoria Schofield, *Afghan Frontier: Feuding and Fighting in Central Asia* (London, 2003): 336-9.

⁶⁰⁵ Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban* (London, 2000): 65.

3.1 - Finance

The Soviets left a vast amount of weaponry in the hands of the militias in Helmand. This included tanks and artillery and was to affect the balance of power in the province drastically, giving more power to the central Helmandi groups who controlled the weaponry.⁶⁰⁶ There, 'government' patronage was a key part of the economy. In a parallel development, the taxing of the growth, sale and transportation of opium had become the bedrock of the northern Helmandi economy: one source states that opium was taxed at approximately 5% and the average yield per jereeb was 16kg. The same source calculates that this netted, just from Musa Qala, over thirteen metric tonnes in opium taxes from the 1990 harvest (it was taken in kind; total amount was two hundred and sixty tonnes). This was mostly spent on the main expense for the various mujahidin administrations: supporting fighters.⁶⁰⁷ The post-Soviet era represents the almost complete breakdown of the public sphere.

Nasim, for example, was the biggest commander in the province. In recognition, he was appointed Deputy Defence Minister in the Afghan Interim Government based in Peshawar in February 1989.⁶⁰⁸ This public position, and the legitimacy it conferred, did not alter his behaviour and he still followed the twin aims of supporting the production of opium and attempting to destroy any opposing mujahidin groups. He was later to have his ministerial funding removed at US insistence because of his role in the drugs trade. That winter however, 1989/90, Nasim presented himself unannounced at the US embassy in Islamabad and tried to negotiate with the Ambassador by linking reductions in poppy growth with development aid. Although agreed (for \$2m), it was later cancelled as the US felt it could not be seen to be engaging 'drug dealers'.⁶⁰⁹

The drugs war continued and in September Yahya (Noorzai), a Hizb commander from Marjeh, tried to hold the bridge over the Helmand in Garmsir,⁶¹⁰ in order to tax the passing trade.⁶¹¹ Nasim attacked and wiped him out causing Yahya to flee to Pakistan having reportedly suffered four hundred casualties.⁶¹² It was later rumoured that he reinvented himself as a government militia commander in Lashkar Gah, but I have been unable to confirm this.⁶¹³ The public sphere here describes a 'Hizb'-'Harakat' war, but it was in truth a

⁶⁰⁶ 061.

⁶⁰⁷ Amaj, Projects:21.

⁶⁰⁸ Rubin, Fragmentation: 205.

⁶⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 263.

⁶¹⁰ There were four crossing points at that time over which a car could cross during Feb-Apr: Kajaki (under Nasim), Gereshk and Lashkar Gah (under the militias) and Garmsir (contested, then captured by Nasim)—MSF, Mission: 28.

⁶¹¹ Alain Labrousse, Afghanistan: Opium de guerre, Opium de paix (Paris, 2005): 119.

⁶¹² Afghan Information Centre, Monthly Bulletin No 102 (Peshawar, Sep 1989).

⁶¹³ 021.

private war between Nasim and anyone who opposed him. Commanders affiliated themselves with either the 'Hizb' or 'Harakat' alliances depending on which interaction would best preserve their individual political control (and hence profit) in a particular area. This is best shown by the fact that Nasim used to sell his drugs to Hekmatyar's 'Hizb' labs, which were stationed in Iran for protection.⁶¹⁴

Similarly, drugs funding did not immediately replace Khad funding or mujahidin party funding when the Soviets left. Khad still paid Nasim money, for example. Slowly, however, over the course of three years, drugs funding became relatively more important and the latter two sources of funding became relatively less, until 1992, when they disappeared altogether. The public sphere's organisations were progressively collapsing.

Gradually, the territory planted with poppy grew in size. For example, poppy was harvested on a large scale for the first time in 1991 in parts of 'lower Helmand'.⁶¹⁵ However, taking into account the loose, patronage-based methods of political control employed by Nasim (and all commanders) and the benefits that poppy cultivation would bring to the individual farmer,⁶¹⁶ I argue that this was not forced on farmers (see section 2.8). As an ex-Hizb commander told me with a grin, 'Rasoul [Nasim's brother] was never really able to force people to grow poppy [around Lashkar Gah]—he didn't really have that much control'.⁶¹⁷ Another interviewee in Gereshk, and less biased than a Hizb commander would have been when talking about Rasoul, pointed to the fact that farmers grew poppy to try and strengthen their economic situation, not because Rasoul ordered them to.⁶¹⁸

3.2 - Government weakness

The ailing government had completely retreated to the defensive cumberband that had been established in and around the central districts (see map 5). The situation was desperate. For example, twenty days after the Soviets left, a thirty-eight year old police captain from Garmsir, Habibullah (Noorzai, Khalqi), was sent to Nad-e Ali as the District Chief of Police. He described it as the most awful period in his life and visibly shuddered. He expanded, saying that he lost men 'every day, sometimes two, sometimes five, sometime more'. He controlled a 300m by 300m area of the hukomat, he said showing me, as I interviewed him, the very area he had lost so much blood defending. Habibullah said he was daily under siege by mujahidin commanders such as Dr Jailani (Kharoti, Hizb), Haji Barakzai (Kharoti,

⁶¹⁴ Joel Hafvenstein, *Opium Season* (Guilford, 2007): 130; Afghan Embassy, *News bulletin*: 3.

⁶¹⁵ Afghan Information Centre, *Monthly Bulletin No 123-4* (Peshawar, June-July 1991).

⁶¹⁶ e.g. credit, economic stability, currency, portable wealth, agricultural hedging etc.

⁶¹⁷ 022.

⁶¹⁸ 031.

Harakat; Haji Jamalzai's nephew), Rahmattiar (Ishaqzai, Hizb) and Abdul Ahad (Noorzai, Etihad).

Habibullah was forced to abandon the District Centre about a year after being posted there. He and the then District Governor Mahmud Razer (from Chah-e Anjir, Barakzai) had to leave in the middle of the night as they had run out of ammunition and food (supply convoys normally came across the desert from Lashkar Gah, but had been unable to get through). He was jailed for deserting his post, but in a move typical of the survivors in Helmand (of which Habibullah is a prime example) he was released a week later and made the company commander of the tolay (company) guarding the prison!

Publicly, this appeared a mujahidin-government fight. But a deeper private irony is that these characters, or their representatives, were later to become important elders sitting on the District Community Council (designed to provide a checking and advisory role on the District Governor) established in 2009, when Habibullah had returned to Nad-e Ali as District Governor. This somewhat hampered politics in the district. Apart from the Taliban-era, there were no centrally appointed, non-indigenous, non-'mujahidin' officials in Nad-e Ali between Habibullah leaving in 1990 as Chief of Police and returning in 2008 with the support of the British as District Governor.

However, one event was to drastically change security provision in Helmand, indeed in Afghanistan as a whole: General Tanai, a Khalqi, attempted to launch a coup with the help of Hizb in Kabul against President Najibullah (a Parchami) on 6 March 1990 (hereafter 'Najib'). As a result, Najib could no longer trust the Khalqis as partners in government, but was unable to completely alienate them. Thus, he began to change the balance of power between the militias and the professional security forces by reducing the amount of patronage the Khalqi Ministry of Interior had available to distribute. However, in Helmand, the security forces were historically Khalqi-orientated.⁶¹⁹ Two (Khalqi) interviewees identify this as the point at which stability in Helmand changed irrevocably for the worse.⁶²⁰ Many 'Khalqi' police commanders simply reinvented themselves as militia commanders.⁶²¹ Indeed, Habibullah, a well-known ideological Khalqi,⁶²² simply switched patronage networks by leaving the police and forming his own militia—the 904th kandak—

⁶¹⁹ Dorransoro, *Revolution*: 204-5.

⁶²⁰ 006, 049.

⁶²¹ e.g. 048, Habibullah.

⁶²² Told to me by many different people 2008-12, although he denied it to me, claiming that he was neutral in all conflicts!

which guarded the Bughra in-between Babaji and Gereshk.⁶²³ One ex-army officer described the army and police as being 'on paper' at the time.⁶²⁴

Militia commanders—individuals such as Khano, Allah Noor and Jabbar—became more powerful (see section 2.16). This was at the expense of professional policemen who were paid by the Khalqi dominated Ministry of Interior.⁶²⁵ Thus far this matches the public narratives of militiaisation. But what of Khano? His brother was a senior Khalqi and he was a 'Khalqi' militia commander. Yet Khano himself probably gained more than anyone out of the militiaisation in Helmand, which was designed to offset Khalqi domination of the security forces. Private actors manipulated the public narrative of militiaisation, due to the government ignorance of the identities of the private actors. When we also consider Habibullah's example, we must accept that the public narrative of the increasing militiaisation of the security forces had little meaning when, privately, police commanders were just becoming militia commanders. The security infrastructure was changing form, accelerating government collapse. And although they were not yet Chief of Police and the 93rd Division's Commander, Khano and Allah Noor, respectively, became the de facto decision makers in the security infrastructure after the coup.⁶²⁶

General Tanai was forced to flee to Pakistan after his failed coup d'état. Shortly afterwards, he came to Lashkar Gah, probably then the most concentrated powerbase of the Khalqis in the country,⁶²⁷ and led secret negotiations between Khano and Hafizullah Khan, the figureheads of the two central Helmandi power blocks.⁶²⁸ As Hafizullah put it to me, 'Tanai surrendered to Hizb...Khano gave us money and weapons'. The ex-Khalqis that I spoke to described it as a rapprochement.⁶²⁹

The outcome of the negotiations was that 'Hizb' commanders and the remnants of the 'Khalqi' Helmandi government would work together against the 'Parchami', Khad-backed 'Harakat' alliance that was threatening them.⁶³⁰ This was while the rest of the (national) government was being purged of Khalqis and fighting Hizb.⁶³¹ One assumes that either the central government was not aware of this accommodation, or was forced to accept it. A very strange situation was developing where the two halves of the 'government' were openly

⁶²³ All from Habibullah.

⁶²⁴ 008.

⁶²⁵ 043, 044.

⁶²⁶ 008, 033, 049.

⁶²⁷ Dorronsororo, Dernier.

⁶²⁸ 007, MMW.

⁶²⁹ 048.

⁶³⁰ 007, 044.

⁶³¹ Dorronsororo, Revolution: 205.

working with opposed ‘mujahidin’ groups: a new set of public and private interactions. Malem Mir Wali even tried to claim to me that he joined the government at this point, probably to increase the legitimacy of his move, but Hafizullah (and other interviewees⁶³²) dispute this saying, ‘I [Hafizullah] hated him for his [earlier] defection’ (see section 2.17).

So far, I have discussed the different funding bases of the various ‘mujahidin’ polities and looked at the changes occurring on the ‘government’ side. Now, I discuss the continuing Helmandi civil war, which by now had expanded from just northern Helmand to encompass the entire province.

3.3 - The death of Nasim

The impact of Tanai’s failed coup on conflict dynamics in Helmand was overshadowed by an event of even greater consequence. Nasim was assassinated near Peshawar on the 25 March 1990.⁶³³ Many scholars⁶³⁴ attribute his murder to Hizb who killed him due to the reductions in poppy production that he had ordered after his deal with the US embassy in Islamabad (his poppy went to Hizb refineries). This is the public sphere: drugs and mujahidin parties. The private sphere is much more confused.

Firstly, there is conflicting evidence as to whether Nasim ever reduced poppy growth in the areas that he controlled.⁶³⁵ Additionally, the US never kept its side of the bargain, and by the time that Nasim visited the embassy, poppy had already been planted for the 1989/90 season, and had not yet been harvested at the time he was killed (although the effectiveness of his ‘ban’ would have only just become verifiable as the plants reached harvesting stage). Finally, Nasim, inevitably and as was the custom, would have built up stocks of opium as a form of capital savings. More likely is honour: just before his death, he accused Hekmatyar, the leader of Hizb, of ‘betraying the jihad’ by affiliating himself with Tanai.⁶³⁶ The assassination was eventually traced by Harakat to a nephew of Abdul Rahman Khan, Nasim’s old Alizai enemy, who then confessed that Hekmatyar had planned the killing.⁶³⁷ Private cleavages probably explain the event better.

⁶³² 068, 074.

⁶³³ AfghaNews, *Provincial News*, vol. 11 (London, Apr 1995); Afghan Information Centre, *Monthly Bulletin No 109* (Peshawar, Apr 1990): 28. I cannot deduce from my interview-derived chronology when exactly the Tanai deal between Hafizullah and Khano occurred, particularly whether before or after Nasim was assassinated.

⁶³⁴ Labrousse, *Afghanistan*: 119; Rubin, *Fragmentation*: 263; Rasanayagam, *Afghanistan*: 137.

⁶³⁵ 13 Metric tons of opium taxed at 5% in 1990 harvest (Amaj, *Projects*:12); c.f. US government figures which suggest a decrease from 3100ha to 195ha before rising again to over 3000ha in 1991 (Pers. Comm. David Mansfield, 2012).

⁶³⁶ The Economist, *Country Reports - Afghanistan* (1990/Q3): 21.

⁶³⁷ Labrousse, *Afghanistan*: 119; Rubin, *Fragmentation*: 253.

The mujahidin press was effusive in its eulogies of Nasim. They fully described the public sphere of Nasim's life. The Afghan Information Centre's (AIC) *Monthly Bulletin*, set up by the highly esteemed Professor Majrooh⁶³⁸ in Peshawar, said that he controlled eighteen thousand men in the south-west of Afghanistan and was the only commander in the area not to have had his base captured by the Soviets. It was, according to the AIC, the biggest funeral ever for a commander. People 'all over the South' were sad to see him go.⁶³⁹ Even the Jamiat-sponsored *Afghan News* claimed that he had ten thousand men and was keen to stamp out poppy cultivation.⁶⁴⁰ Nobody mentioned his collusion with Khad or the murder of groups of elders. Nasim was immediately replaced by Rasoul, his older brother, at the head of their 'Harakat' patronage organisation.

Rasoul publicly launched a 'general war' against 'Hizb' in Helmand, but privately this was a series of attacks on people that Rasoul had previously fought and feuded with, or those who refused to submit to him.⁶⁴¹ First and foremost, Rasoul attacked the man he believed was responsible for this brother's murder: Abdul Rahman Khan, still in Malgir.⁶⁴² After that, Rasoul attacked anyone who was not allied with him, galvanising his sub-commanders to do the same, and the conflict was to continue until Rasoul established himself as the Provincial Governor in 1993.

But the 'government' and the 'mujahidin' were becoming less defined by the day. A massive battle in Deh Adam Khan then ensued between Allah Noor, Mir Wali and Rauf Khan (on the 'government' side), with Rasoul and Khan Mohammad (Barakzai, from Deh Adam Khan) on the 'Harakat'/non-government' side in August 1990.⁶⁴³ The Nejad groups in Deh Adam Khan also joined Rasoul's alliance.⁶⁴⁴ During this battle, an eyewitness stated that Najib personally intervened and sent a message through Khad in Gereshk that Rasoul should be supported against the 'Hizb'/'Khalq' remnants. Rasoul refused the offer of help. The 'Parchami' Khad were trying to bring down their own 'government' because they hated the 'Khalqis' so much. The unity of government was ceasing to exist.⁶⁴⁵

Fighting raged all over the province. Attacks were launched by Rasoul on Atta Mohammad in Sangin. Sher Mohammad (Ishaqzai, Harakat) from Shurakay, who was also the brother-in-law of the Khan Mohammad involved in the attack on Gereshk, attacked Abdul Khaleq

⁶³⁸ Also probably murdered by Hizb in 1988 (Edwards, *Before Taliban*: 285).

⁶³⁹ AIC, *Monthly 109*: 28.

⁶⁴⁰ AfghaNews, *Provincial News*, vol. 8 (London, Apr 1990).

⁶⁴¹ 003, 013, 020.

⁶⁴² AIC, *Monthly 109*: 28.

⁶⁴³ MMW.

⁶⁴⁴ 040.

⁶⁴⁵ 020.

(Ishaqzai, Hizb) in Qala-e Gaz. Malem Yusof was attacked in Now Zad.⁶⁴⁶ Abdul Rahman Jan (Noorzai, Jamiat, Marjeh) described a defensive alliance against Rasoul. This comprised himself, Mir Wali, Atta Mohammad, Mato Khan (another Etihad commander in Marjeh, related to Haji Lal Jan from Nad-e Ali) and Malem Yusof—they would all support each other when Rasoul came to their area.

Rasoul's attacks spread to Nad-e Ali. There, 'Etihad' groupings and the remnants of 'Mahaz' joined the alliance with Rasoul against the 'Hizb'/'Khalq' forces.⁶⁴⁷ This was driven by a feud between Rahmattiar (Hizb) and Abdul Ahad (Etihad).⁶⁴⁸ Generally in Nad-e Ali, however, fighting was kept at a low-level. As Harakat asserted its dominance over Nad-e Ali, the Kharoti 'Hizb' fighters fled to Pakistan and the Kharoti 'Harakat' fighters were unavailable for duty until they had left.⁶⁴⁹ The Kharoti pan-tribal shura across the public cleavages was still working.

However, other members of Hizb were not so lucky: Rahmattiar (Ishaqzai), from Jangal in the south of the district, was kidnapped by Rasoul and taken to Musa Qala where he was imprisoned for two years. Their front collapsed when Rasoul confiscated all of their weapons.⁶⁵⁰ Small groups stuck between the two opposing forces did not fare well; for example, Nejad split between the two opposing sides with some joining the 'Hizb'/'Khalq' patronage networks, some joining the 'Harakat' network and some going home. '[Nejad's] jihad was over'.⁶⁵¹ Over the whole of the province, the public factionalisation appeared to subside, as groups either opted for the 'Hizb'/'Khalq'- or the 'Harakat'/'Parcham'-led groupings. The complexity of side switching, however, as people either opted for or against Rasoul, rested on the private sphere as people sought to secure alliances that would protect themselves, the business interests and their villages. The public sphere's organisations had ceased to exist as unitary wholes: the government for instance, was split into and working with different sections of the population. In addition, to the weakness of public organisations, the increase in drug's funding meant that the elements in the private sphere did not need government or mujahidin party patronage to continue their private wars. The national government did continue to fund different parts of the provincial government, but it is not known how much information they had of Helmand's private sphere at this point.

⁶⁴⁶ 070.

⁶⁴⁷ 007.

⁶⁴⁸ 039.

⁶⁴⁹ 007, 015, 071.

⁶⁵⁰ 034.

⁶⁵¹ 051.

3.4 - The population's response

These shifting public-private interactions were interpreted uneasily by the people of Helmand. Different bits of the 'government' were supplying different bits of the 'mujahidin', although it is not clear how much knowledge each side had of the other at that time. Later on, when Khad were forced to flee the province, Hafizullah went to the Khad headquarters in Lashkar Gah and reviewed the documents. What he saw shocked him: 'the mujahidin were completely penetrated by Khad' he said, and 'almost everyone had a file' detailing 'so much trickery between different mujahidin [groups and leaders]'.

The fluidity with which two bitter public enemies, Hizb and Khalq, could align with each other left many to conclude that the spirit of the jihad had been hopelessly corrupted. As one former commander who was twenty-three at the Saur revolution told me bitterly, 'I was told it was about Islam; I can see now that they were lying; it was about power'.⁶⁵²

It was during this period that the Helmandi population sensed that the external, public resources—those from Najib's government and from the parties in Peshawar—were ending. These were being replaced with more organic, private sources of money, that is, drug-derived funding, or predation on the population. The external funding had forced, or at least appeared to force (vide the deliberate splitting of private groups across public cleavages), some ideological, public separation within private groups (i.e. tribes). However, once this funding was no longer available, or perceived to be not forever available, the groups and their leaders did not need to demonstrate allegiance to any particular public organisation or narrative and sought stability through other networks. The old public-private interactions dissolved. Private actors turned to tribal networks, much damaged since 1978, but still extant (of course some, like the Nad-e Ali Kharoti, had maintained this strength throughout the jihad). Tribal shuras were held, pledging 'unity after war', and 'cooperation and consolidation'.⁶⁵³

Thus, the different tribes asserted their leadership, for example, the Popalzai in the South formed a tribal council in Quetta in January 1991 with judicial and financial commissions. *No matter the background*, 'any tribesman can join'.⁶⁵⁴ Specifically in Helmand, and in addition to the Kharoti, the Noorzai in central Helmand began to broaden channels between members who had been on 'opposing' sides during the jihad.⁶⁵⁵ So too, the Barakzai,⁶⁵⁶ the

⁶⁵² 061.

⁶⁵³ Afghan Information Centre, [Monthly Bulletin No 113](#) (Peshawar, Aug 1990): 20.

⁶⁵⁴ Afghan Information Centre, [Monthly Bulletin No 118](#) (Peshawar, Jan 1991): 16.

⁶⁵⁵ 014, 016.

⁶⁵⁶ ARJ, MMW.

Noorzai and, in Garmsir, the Alizai.⁶⁵⁷ This represents the reassertion of Helmandi private groups and alliances in the face of dwindling outside, public interest and patronage. The dynamic was to repeat itself in Helmand at two other similar junctures, firstly, when the Taliban were forced out in 2002⁶⁵⁸ and, secondly, as ISAF were leaving Helmand in 2012.⁶⁵⁹ This episodic series of tribal shuras is one of the most important dynamics in this study, because it shows the reforming of private groups once public organisations dissolve.

3.5 - No more cash

Funding from Russia to Najib's government was cut off in August 1991, after the coup attempt in Moscow. The government could only support itself by printing money. The air force was grounded in January 1992 for lack of fuel. American funding to the mujahidin was similarly curtailed.⁶⁶⁰ Elsewhere in the country, the territory controlled by the government shrank and mass desertions ensued.⁶⁶¹ The 'Khalq'/'Hizb' grouping in Helmand meant that the government could hold onto its traditional area of influence—Gereshk, Lashkar Gah, Chah-e Anjir and the routes in-between—whilst the 'Harakat' grouping controlled the rest of the province. As Rasoul slowly expanded his area, many petty commanders began to switch to him, safe in the knowledge that once they did, they would still be able collect their own taxes and live in relative autonomy. Those commanders that were vanquished did not have this privilege extended to them.⁶⁶² Concerns of survival dictated their alliances with other private actors.

This lack of funding forced individual commanders to look for other sources of funding, in addition to opium funding. The most obvious source was looting from the population, perpetrated by all the 'government' commanders including Khano,⁶⁶³ Mir Wali,⁶⁶⁴ Hafizullah⁶⁶⁵ and Abdul Rahman Jan.⁶⁶⁶ Chaos ruled: one had to cross fifty or sixty 'posts' to get to Kandahar from Helmand, each controlled by a different commander, and each one charging the equivalent of half a day-labourer's wage for passage.⁶⁶⁷ It was 'impossible to move' for the combination of banditry and larger-scale battles between the commanders, for example when Dad Mohammad attacked Hafizullah in April 1991⁶⁶⁸ and Rasoul attacked

⁶⁵⁷ 048.

⁶⁵⁸ 015, 043.

⁶⁵⁹ e.g. 065, 081, 084.

⁶⁶⁰ Rubin, *Fragmentation*: 265.

⁶⁶¹ Giustozzi, *W/P/S*: 232-5.

⁶⁶² 031, 035. Amaj, *Projects*: 11 & 16.

⁶⁶³ 008.

⁶⁶⁴ 029.

⁶⁶⁵ 063.

⁶⁶⁶ 038, 044.

⁶⁶⁷ 018, 074.

⁶⁶⁸ Afghan Information Centre, *Monthly Bulletin No 121-2* (Peshawar, Apr-May 1991): 31.

Atta Mohammad in Now Zad (where neither of them were based) in July of the same year.⁶⁶⁹ The commanders were ranging across the province fighting other commanders where they found them and hundreds were killed and wounded in the fighting.⁶⁷⁰

I have no evidence that Rasoul's commanders were systematically looting at this time (as the 'government' commanders were). However, they only controlled the rural areas so there was less to loot. Certainly, travellers to northern Helmand in 1991 emphasise the fact that there was 'no robbing or stealing' and 'people were free to come and go'.⁶⁷¹ Rais Baghrani, the preeminent 'mujahed' in Baghran, for example, established anti-bandit checkpoints along roads.⁶⁷² The dichotomy between those commanders who were in the 'government' and those who were outside the 'government' has certainly affected how the population in Helmand feel about the concept of government—something that has worsened over time, particularly during the Karzai-era.

The period between the collapse of Najib's government until the coming of the Taliban was known as the 'mujahidin nights' or the 'topakiyan [gun men]-era' in the South. One gentleman, who had already fled from Now Zad to escape the fighting and settled in Deh Adam Khan, described how farmers would go to work in their fields with a Kalashnikov lain by their side, due to the unpredictability of the environment. 'One house would be one way [supporting one faction], and the next would be the other', he said.⁶⁷³ The public sphere and its organisations had completely collapsed.

In summary, I have described the slow death of the 'government' in Helmand, alongside the rapidly forming and reforming alliances among the different Helmandi private actors. I now move onto the various public-private interactions (with the new government) and private-private alliances that the 'communist' militia commanders made in an attempt to stay in power.

3.6 - Deal-making

When, in April 1992, Najib's government finally handed over to a 'mujahidin' coalition in Kabul most of the few remaining Helmandi police and army officers simply took their uniforms off and went home.⁶⁷⁴ Civil officials like Abdul Sangar, the District Governor of

⁶⁶⁹ Afghan Information Centre, Monthly Bulletin No 124-5 (Peshawar, July-Aug 1991): 53-4.

⁶⁷⁰ Afghan Information Centre, Monthly Bulletin No 130-1 (Peshawar, Jan-Feb 1992): 21.

⁶⁷¹ Amaj, Projects:12.

⁶⁷² AfghaNews, Provincial News, vol. 15 (Peshawar, Aug 1991): 2.

⁶⁷³ 025.

⁶⁷⁴ 012, 060, Jabbar.

Nahr-e Saraj, did the same.⁶⁷⁵ In Helmand, the Hafizullah-Khano secret agreement laid the foundations for the political formulations that were to follow. A meeting was called in Lashkar Gah by Gul Mahmad Khwashal (Noorzai, from Farah), who had been appointed Provincial Governor by Najib, replacing Shah Nazar Khan from Loy Bagh. Present were all the major powerbrokers in the Rasoul-opposed alliance: Khwashal, Mir Wali, Hafizullah Khan, Atta Mohammad, Sarwar Khan (Abdul Rahman Khan's nephew), Khano, Allah Noor, Rauf Khan, Jenat Gul (the professional army commander of the 93rd division) and Akhwaendi. Everyone promised to work together and fight Rasoul, Mir Wali said in his interview with me. However, according to Mir Wali, another plan was already in motion.

Khwashal began to drag his heels in the meeting saying that it would be impossible to defeat Rasoul. This was a delaying tactic because Khad had already made a deal with Rasoul that he would enter Lashkar Gah through one of their posts on the cumberband (Khwashal was publicly labelled a 'Khalqi', and Khad were 'Parchami' but it was irrelevant). Once Rasoul entered Lashkar Gah, things did not go as smoothly to plan and there was house-to-house fighting between 'Khad' and Rasoul's troops on the one hand and the 'Hizb'/'Khalq'/'Jamiat'/'Mahaz' commanders above-mentioned on the other. The fighting lasted all through the next day and the 'Khad'/Rasoul grouping were pushed back to the maidan, where the 'Khad' brigade was based.

With 'Khad' and Rasoul contained, Mir Wali describes having to rush back the following day to Gereshk which was under attack, before finally returning to Lashkar Gah and teaming up with Khano and Hafizullah Khan in Mukhtar. The next day (the 4th after the meeting), this Khano/Hafizullah grouping took the hospital and the old Khad headquarters before attacking the maidan. Matin, the 'Khad' brigade commander, escaped to Musa Qala with Rasoul's help.⁶⁷⁶ Lashkar Gah secured, Mir Wali again had to head to Gereshk (suitably refitted with Khad weaponry and ammunition) which was under attack by one of Rasoul's commanders, Engineer Ghani. They surrendered, and whilst Ghani was jailed, the Barakzai troops underneath him immediately switched sides and pledged allegiance to Mir Wali—possibly an outcome of the tribal rapprochement process outlined above.⁶⁷⁷

The ending of Khad patronage for Rasoul presented a problem and put him under pressure all over the province.⁶⁷⁸ Khano and Hafizullah led an operation, supported by Sar Katib

⁶⁷⁵ 001, 029.

⁶⁷⁶ 043, 048, 061.

⁶⁷⁷ Narrative taken from MMW except where indicated. Hafizullah. Overall details confirmed by Giustozzi, Tribes: 13; Dorransoro, Dernier: 13.

⁶⁷⁸ 084.

(Hizb) from Kandahar, to clear the province of 'Harakat' forces. Starting in Gereshk, they moved through Malgir, Babaji, Nad-e Ali, Nawa, Marjeh and finally Garmsir installing District Governors as they went.⁶⁷⁹ Nahr-e Saraj went to Khalifa Shirin Khan (Barakzai, Hizb), the Malgir land owner,⁶⁸⁰ Nad-e Ali to Khalifa Khwashkea (Noorzai, Jamiat, from Loy Bagh),⁶⁸¹ Nawa went to Mahmad Wali (Popalzai, Jamiat, Nawa)⁶⁸² and Garmsir to Abdullah Jan (Hizb, Barakzai).⁶⁸³ This took three days, and many of the 'Harakat' commanders fled to Pakistan. They then raided and looted Now Zad and Musa Qala, where they stayed for three days of pillaging. There was no intention of holding northern Helmand: it was a raid. Upon returning to Lashkar Gah, they announced the remaining 'government' posts.⁶⁸⁴

Hafizullah Khan was made 'Provincial Governor'.⁶⁸⁵ Khano was finally given the position of 'Chief of Police', to reflect the de facto position that he had held for the last two years.⁶⁸⁶ Allah Noor was promoted and made the 'commander of the 93rd Division'⁶⁸⁷ and Rauf Khan an independent 'brigade commander'.⁶⁸⁸ Akhwaendi was also part of the alliance.⁶⁸⁹ Due to the vast stocks of weaponry that they were able to arm themselves with from government armouries, this grouping proved stable enough stop Rasoul taking Lashkar Gah and Gereshk. Both Abdul Rahman and Mir Wali speak of being armed by the ex-government weapons, and one interviewee claimed that Mir Wali had inherited eleven hundred weapons from the government, cached them, and still has possession of them in 2012.⁶⁹⁰

Astonishingly Helmand, the location of so much fighting, and despite minimal government and Soviet interest, was to become the last hold-out of the communist 'government', personified by people like Khano and Allah Noor.⁶⁹¹ However, as the 'government' mainly comprised both 'Khalqi' and 'Hizb' commanders it was completely cut off from *the* government, which was at that time led by President Mujaddidi (leader of the Nejad party) and dominated by Parchamis and Jamiatis. The government in Kabul was far too worried about dealing with the local threat from Hizb even to think about Helmand, which existed in

⁶⁷⁹ 007.

⁶⁸⁰ 029.

⁶⁸¹ 023.

⁶⁸² 005.

⁶⁸³ 084.

⁶⁸⁴ 007, MMW.

⁶⁸⁵ 007, 018, MMW, Hafizullah. Dorransoro, Dernier: 11.

⁶⁸⁶ 007, 043, 048.

⁶⁸⁷ 031, 048.

⁶⁸⁸ 012.

⁶⁸⁹ Hafizullah, ARJ.

⁶⁹⁰ 061.

⁶⁹¹ Dorransoro, Dernier: 11.

limbo from the national public sphere.⁶⁹² Helmand was effectively independent (the national, public sphere had no links to it) and the story was completely driven by the private sphere.

3.7 - 'Hizb'/'communist' cooperation

Many, of course, tried to take advantage of this complete lack of government in Helmand and moved to occupy better land than they were already on. Several Noorzai commanders from Now Zad and Washir followed Haji Lal Jan in escaping water stress in Northern Helmand. Lal Jan had originally come to Nad-e Ali in the chaos surrounding the Taraki revolution. His brother, Haji Qabir Khan, settled on land around the Bolan junction alongside Mato Khan, another relative.⁶⁹³ Malem Sher Agha also settled nearby, in Zaburabad, stealing government (non-owned) land.⁶⁹⁴ Abdul Raziq (Noorzai, from Washir, a cousin of Qabir Khan) also came and took 'a hundred households' worth of land in what was previously the Bolan 'desert'.⁶⁹⁵



Figure 3: Rabbani-era land document.

⁶⁹² Dorransoro, *Revolution*: 239.

⁶⁹³ 023, 039, 041.

⁶⁹⁴ 038.

⁶⁹⁵ 041.

Other commanders were given land in recognition of loyal service during the jihad.⁶⁹⁶ All of these land gains were recognised a few months later by the Rabbani government, and crucially, are seen as completely legitimate today by the land-owners, but not by their longer-settled neighbours. In addition, the previous jihad-era land thefts were also officialised, for example Haji Lal Jan's⁶⁹⁷ and Rahmattiar's (see section 2.10).⁶⁹⁸ Official land documents were issued (itself a type of public-private interaction), meaning that these land thefts are still creating division and conflict today. See figure 3.

The more progressive elements of Lashkar Gah society began to rue the day that Hafizullah took over. He began by looting the bank and stealing the street lights for scrap.⁶⁹⁹ Despite initially promising cooperation with the teachers, the girls' school was closed, not to reopen until the Karzai government a decade later. There was some—secret—home schooling, however most of the (ex-) communists, hence the educated professional people, either fled or started making plans to leave.⁷⁰⁰ Shah Nazar Khan, the Noorzai ex-Provincial Governor, was assassinated in his home by persons unknown.⁷⁰¹

The killing bore all the hallmarks of a political assassination like that favoured by Hizb commanders, but when I questioned Hafizullah about it, he looked at the floor saying that he knew nothing about it, and mumbled something about it being a 'tribal thing'. I later spoke to a close relative of Shah Nazar's who I knew well,⁷⁰² who told me that the actual killer had already been (revenge) killed, but there were two other people involved who 'still need to be killed' and so he would not be able to talk to me about it until that work was done. He did, however, confirm that they were members of Hizb, but it was the actual individuals who were important, not the public narratives they subscribed to. The fact that I had that conversation twenty years after the event gives an indication of the innumerable intertwined and everlasting feuds that percolate through Helmandi society and demonstrates the strength of private cleavages there.

The government collapse also spawned a new interest in Helmand from the Iranian intelligence services. Shortly after the Najib government fell, a Sardar Baghwani reportedly held meetings with Allah Noor and Khano in Lashkar Gah.⁷⁰³ This was the first report of Iran's interest in Helmand since the negotiations over the Helmand water supply in 1973. A

⁶⁹⁶ 071.

⁶⁹⁷ 023.

⁶⁹⁸ 034, 038.

⁶⁹⁹ 063.

⁷⁰⁰ 044, 049, 083, Habibullah.

⁷⁰¹ 039, 049.

⁷⁰² Redacted.

⁷⁰³ 006, 084.

decade later, Baghwani was reportedly in Helmand distributing arms,⁷⁰⁴ and again in 2006, he supposedly came to meet with 'Taliban' in Marjeh and Now Zad.⁷⁰⁵ Iran has major strategic interests in Helmand, particularly the water that flows through the Kajaki dam.⁷⁰⁶

The fighting between Rasoul and the Lashkar Gah 'government' continued. In October, there were violent clashes between Hafizullah's men and Rasoul's, when Rasoul attempted to take the maidan.⁷⁰⁷ But even the threat of an external enemy failed to hold the government together in the long-term. Some say that the argument began over dividing the spoils,⁷⁰⁸ others, that it started when Gulbuddin, Assadullah Sherzad's (a cousin of Khano and later to become Helmand's Chief of Police during the Karzai-era) nephew, launched a rocket propelled grenade at Sar Katib, the Hizb commander from Kandahar who was reinforcing Hafizullah. This was in revenge for an earlier killing when 'Hizb' and 'Khalq' were enemies. This is a good example of private cleavages remaining extant over two separate consecutive public spheres.

Gulbuddin was killed and Assadullah Sherzad wounded in the ensuing mêlée.⁷⁰⁹ The battle lasted for eight hours in the centre of Lashkar Gah and 'lots of Sar Katib's men were killed...one roundabout had ten of their bodies on it'.⁷¹⁰ Contemporaneous secondary sources⁷¹¹ state that a difference in public narratives relating to girls' schooling caused the 'Hizb'/'Khalq' grouping to fracture, however this was not confirmed in my interviews and deemed unlikely by a neutral witness who was in Lashkar Gah at the time.⁷¹² The private cleavage above is more likely as a reason. Hafizullah had only been Provincial Governor for six months when he was ejected from Lashkar Gah. The 'Hizb' commanders then set up a base in Khwashk-e Nakud with their men:⁷¹³ the site of the battle of Maiwand against British-Indian forces one hundred and twelve years before.

3.8 - 'Jamiat'/'communist' cooperation

By this time Rabbani, the leader of Jamiat, had been appointed President in Kabul and it seemed prescient to have a 'Jamiat' face to the Helmandi 'government': they needed an interaction with a public organisation that could support them. Thus, the Helmandi

⁷⁰⁴ 'Iran accused of interfering in Afghan Affairs', *Dawn* (09 Jan 2002).

⁷⁰⁵ Tom Coghlan, "The Taliban in Helmand: An Oral History," in *Decoding the New Taliban: Insights from the Afghan Field*, ed. Antonio Giustozzi (London: Hurst, 2009): 147.

⁷⁰⁶ 'Hirmand River's water to flow into Iran again soon: Afghan source', *Payvand* (12 Dec 2002).

⁷⁰⁷ Michelle Centlivres-Demont, "Les Nouvelles d'Afghanistan" *Afghanistan Info*, no. 32 (1992): 12.

⁷⁰⁸ 060.

⁷⁰⁹ 007, ARJ.

⁷¹⁰ 060. Dorransoro, Dernier: 11-3; Giustozzi, Tribes: 12.

⁷¹¹ Dorransoro, Dernier: 12.

⁷¹² 044.

⁷¹³ 043, 057, 074, Hafizullah, MMW.

'government' morphed and Akhwaendi (Barakzai, Jamiat) was appointed Provincial Governor. The real power, however, was still held by Khano.⁷¹⁴ Akhwaendi was reportedly a very parochial, (metaphorically) small man who was only interested in supporting his community in Nawa rather than acting like a Provincial Governor.⁷¹⁵ Another interviewee described him as 'a dangerous man [who] always had a group of eighteen-year-old [kids] with him'.⁷¹⁶ Shortly after the switch in provincial governor, Khano attacked 'Hizb' posts in Babaji, Nad-e Ali and Marjeh and funding began to flow. This was both from Kabul, encouraged by personal interactions between Akhwaendi and Rabbani, and from Mazar-e Sharif, by interactions between Khano and Dostum.⁷¹⁷ These should not be classified as public-private interactions, because although there was a government in place in Kabul, it was far from institutional. It is very hard during this period to classify elements as purely public, because although they were national-level and macro, they acted in a very inter-personal, private way. This theme will be discussed further in this chapter's conclusions.

Akhwaendi's period in power appeared to represent a brief respite in the continual military action. This may have been because it was over the winter, and therefore not during the traditional fighting season. At the same time, it appears that Rasoul spent that winter building a broader alliance consisting of most of his former enemies from the previous decade: Atta Mohammad, Dad Mohammad, Mir Wali, Hafizullah Khan, Rais Baghrani, Obaedi and, crucially, Ismail Khan, known as the Amir of Herat.⁷¹⁸ The addition of Ismail Khan was a masterstroke as the presence of a heavyweight player held the alliance together. It is worth noting, however, that Ismail Khan was also part of the national 'government' led by Rabbani. One assumes that the national government was not aware that different parts of itself in the periphery were attacking each other, thus allowing the private cleavage—that between Rasoul and the central Helmandi commanders—to drive the conflict.

After the poppy harvest in 1993, the Ismail-led alliance staged in Delaram. Khano received word and immediately launched a pre-emptive attack on them inflicting some damage.⁷¹⁹ Whether this was the original plan, or whether the pre-emptive attack had changed their plan, Ismail's alliance then attacked Gereshk approaching from the east. Allah Noor conducted the defence of the cumberband in Deh Adam Khan in June. The battle lasted

⁷¹⁴ 046. Dorransoro, Dernier: 11-3.

⁷¹⁵ 047.

⁷¹⁶ Redacted.

⁷¹⁷ 007. Dostum was/is an ex-Khalqi militia commander in Mazar-e Sharif, then recently promoted to general by President Mujaddidi.

⁷¹⁸ 013, 033, 035, 043, MMW.

⁷¹⁹ 035.

twenty-two days and resulted in the fall of Gereshk to Ismail.⁷²⁰ Both sides had tanks and other heavy weapons that had been left by the Soviets.⁷²¹ And different private actors had their own public-private interactions: as one of the militia commanders said, 'Iran was helping Ismail and Pakistan was helping Rasoul...what chance did [the militias] have?' He neglected to mention that the militias and Ismail were being supported by the Rabbani government. Allah Noor et al fled to Lashkar Gah to try and work out what to do.⁷²²

3.9 - The flight of the 'communists'

During the week after the Deh Adam Khan battle, Rasoul went through Malgir, Babaji, Marjeh and Nad-e Ali, clearing them of the remnants of the 'government', leaving just Lashkar Gah and Chah-e Anjir in their hands.⁷²³ The story then becomes more confused. At some point during that week Abdul Rahman Jan switched sides with his men, allying himself with Rasoul (he had previously been with the 'government').⁷²⁴ He himself attributes this to his Jamiat links to Ismail Khan. The next decisive battle took place in Chah-e Anjir where Khano and Allah Noor were cornered, with Abdul Rahman on Rasoul's side.

Khano and Allah Noor both fled in the middle of the night, escaping to Mazar-e Sharif on a plane that Dostum supplied,⁷²⁵ and one interviewee commented that 'Rasoul had tried many times to take Lashkar Gah, but was only successful when Abdul Rahman joined him'.⁷²⁶ As Khano left, he turned over his heavy weapons to Abdul Rahman,⁷²⁷ an act that many attribute as decisive in Abdul Rahman's rise to power.⁷²⁸ A senior Noorzai tribal leader interpreted this as a 'tribal act',⁷²⁹ as he would, however there is perhaps another option identified by another interlocutor: that is, the role of an Iranian intelligence in brokering a deal between Khano, Ismail Khan and Abdul Rahman.⁷³⁰

The ground work laid by the previous tribal shuras paid dividends. As Rasoul entered Lashkar Gah, the members of the former administration were absorbed by their tribal kin. For example, Israel Khan, the 'Etihad' commander from Now Zad, entered Lashkar Gah with Rasoul and was able to guarantee the safety of those members of the clan who had worked

⁷²⁰ 025, 074.

⁷²¹ 013.

⁷²² 043.

⁷²³ 007.

⁷²⁴ 035.

⁷²⁵ 007, 016, 035, 043.

⁷²⁶ 014.

⁷²⁷ 014, 016, 038, 060.

⁷²⁸ e.g. 023, 033.

⁷²⁹ 084.

⁷³⁰ 006.

with the government.⁷³¹ The previously-held interactions with public organisations were ignored in the face of membership of private groups. In this, they were working with the grain of Helmandi society. No-one wanted to kill someone if they had a powerful family behind them: the obligations for revenge would be too strong. The public labels that people had adopted were not enough of a reason to kill them.

Abdul Rahman was appointed 'Deputy Provincial Chief of Police' under Rasoul who became 'Provincial Governor'.⁷³² The other jobs were divvied up at a meeting attended by Mir Wali in Lashkar Gah. As Mir Wali recounted, when Rasoul turned up to the meeting he pretended not to know who Mir Wali was, a deliberate and serious slight attempting to put the ex-'Hizb' commander at a disadvantage. Firstly, Baghrani was made 'commander of the 93rd Division' and Abdul Ahad, the Ishaqzai Harakat commander from Now Zad, was made the 'Chief of Police'. Atta Mohammad was made the 'District Governor' of Sangin.⁷³³ 'Hizb' got the scraps. Khalifa Shirin Khan and Abdullah Jan remained in Gereshk and Garmsir respectively, and Malem Yusof was either appointed or remained in Now Zad. Mir Wali was made the 'Provincial Head of Culture and Information', and Hafizullah was not given a post. 'Khad' went to Dad Mohammad from Sangin, in recognition of his long-term alliance with Rasoul.⁷³⁴

What is particularly interesting about this series of events are the public narratives offered afterwards by the Rabbani (Jamiat) government in Kabul. These contrast with the private sphere where Ismail Khan, a 'Jamiat' commander affiliated to the government, had deposed another 'Jamiat' commander, Akhwaendi, also recognised by, and affiliated to, the Rabbani government. This gave Rasoul (a 'Harakat' commander) the Provincial Governorship.

Afghan News, the Jamiat mouthpiece, proclaimed that the 'Herat to Kandahar road had been opened for use after government forces had smashed several groups of armed bandits along the road'. It went on to say that 'government administration had also been reactivated in Farah and Helmand'. 'All [of Ismail's alliance] decided to join together and liberate the province from the militia forces of the former regime' and listed the change in administration in Lashkar Gah as a 'defeat for [Hizb] as [they were] close to the militias'.⁷³⁵

The private sphere is very different: that the 'Hizb' forces in the area had actually been fighting on Rasoul's side; that the only defeat they suffered was in the division of post-battle

⁷³¹ 080.

⁷³² 035, 042.

⁷³³ 070.

⁷³⁴ Narrative by MMW, corroborated by 016, 074.

⁷³⁵ *AfghanNews*, Provincial News, vol. 9 (London, July 1993): 2.

spoils; that it had been a 'Jamiat' on 'Jamiat' fight. This shows the reality. The public sphere had no hope of influencing events in Helmand that it could not understand, and could merely follow them, accepting and recognising the private sphere's 'facts on the ground' as they occurred. This disparity between the public and private spheres and the primacy of the private sphere in describing the Ismail Khan-led takeover of Lashkar Gah is an important piece of evidence for this thesis.

Thus far, I have outlined the continuing civil war in Helmand and its spread to central Helmand as the 'government' slowly collapsed. Once the public sphere had completely collapsed, the two broad 'government' and 'non-government' groupings fluctuated backwards and forwards wildly, based on rapidly shifting private alliances driven by private cleavages. The story finished with attempts by the 'communist' militia leaders to remain in power. The Helmandi private sphere of cleavages, alliances and narratives did not at all match the national public sphere, as exemplified by what was happening in Kabul, although it is hard to classify the government as a purely public organisation during this era, because although it was national, it was not institutional. Now, we discuss Rasoul's governorship and the rise of the Taliban.

3.10 - Rasoul's calm

Rasoul's tenure was another period of greater stability for Helmand, mainly due to the lack of large-scale, military maneuverers across the province. This stability allowed families to return and by 1994, fifty per cent of refugees had returned.⁷³⁶ Rasoul was confident enough to offer to send military support to the Rabbani government in its war against Hizb for control of Kabul.⁷³⁷ Some of the District Governors were changed to reflect the new order so, for example, Mullah Said Gul (Alizai/Khalozai), a Baghrani sub-commander was appointed to Nad-e Ali.⁷³⁸

With the exceptional weakness of the public sphere, these positions had ceased to have meaning, and several people commented on the fact that 'officials' stopped having defined positions and that the only qualification for a 'government' position was a militia. This was the period of andiwali government (andiwali means friend in Dari): where nothing got done and friends of the appointee filled all of the 'posts' (that is, it was 'private' government).⁷³⁹ In essence, this was a fully patronage-based organisation and the culmination of the process originally set in motion by Najib's National Reconciliation (and militia) policy.

⁷³⁶ UN Drug Control Programme, Comparative Survey (Helmand Province) (Peshawar, 1995): ix.

⁷³⁷ Afghan Embassy, Press Release (London, 18 Jan 1994).

⁷³⁸ 007.

⁷³⁹ 007, 023, 071.

This was publicly an administration of mujahidin unity including 'Hizb', and those areas that were 'conquered' by Rasoul, for example Babaji, joined the 'government'.⁷⁴⁰ However, privately Rasoul coveted all the power for himself and a round of looting occurred with former 'Hizb' areas the targets. Thus, the street lights in Shin Kalay were stripped and taken to Musa Qala. Apparently, Haji Jamalzai, the Kharoti Harakat commander, allowed this to happen despite having influence with Rasoul. As far as he was concerned, '[my village] does not have streetlights, so why should Shin Kalay?'⁷⁴¹ Even more bizarrely, in the private sphere there were 'Hizb' figures in the 'government' (e.g. Mir Wali), which was funded by the central government, at the same time that the government was under grave threat from Hizb in the environs of Kabul. Helmand was utterly disconnected from the (weak) national public organisations.

Rasoul's tenure was short. He died of natural causes in Lashkar Gah on 6 September 1994 at the age of sixty and was immediately replaced by Ghaffour, his younger brother.⁷⁴² He was not as dictatorial or hard line as Rasoul, who had lost a lot of the support that Nasim had built up during the jihad.⁷⁴³ As ever, control was exerted by proxy and Ghaffour, like Rasoul, never had direct control over Gereshk (where Khalifa Shirin Khan was still District Governor and Baghrani Commander of the '93rd Division'). He did not have that much control in Nad-e Ali either.⁷⁴⁴ Even so, Ghaffour, like Rasoul before him, condoned the settlement of a large number of Alizai tribesmen on government land in the southern Bolan desert.⁷⁴⁵ Life went on much as before.

3.11 - The students

As Ghaffour was settling into his new job, a new movement of religious students was arising in Kandahar: the Taliban. The story—or myth—of their rise in Kandahar has been covered elsewhere and so will not be here,⁷⁴⁶ but their takeover of Helmand is worth recounting in some detail, as it demonstrates how they were to take over so much of Afghanistan in the coming months. It also gives credence to the theory that in the initial stages of their growth as a movement the main motivating factor for the Taliban was securing the trade route to Central Asia, through Gereshk, for Pakistani trucking mafias.⁷⁴⁷ most of their military activity focussed on clearing the route between Kandahar and Herat.⁷⁴⁸

⁷⁴⁰ 003, 012, 031.

⁷⁴¹ 050.

⁷⁴² AfghaNews, Provincial News, vol. 11 (London, Nov 1994): 2.

⁷⁴³ 013. AfghaNews, Provincial News, vol. 14 (London, July 1992): 2.

⁷⁴⁴ 022.

⁷⁴⁵ 021. PersExp, Helmand, 2010.

⁷⁴⁶ e.g. Rashid, Taliban: 23.

⁷⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 26-7.

⁷⁴⁸ 013, 068, MMW.

As the Taliban seized power in Kandahar, Ghaffour mediated between them and the soon-to-be ejected commanders who had been in charge there.⁷⁴⁹ There was however, no loyalty to Ghaffour and they approached Rais Baghrani, the commander of the '93rd Division' in Gereshk, and reached an agreement that he would affiliate himself with the Taliban, breaking his private alliance with Ghaffour. Six Talibs then organised an 'official' meeting with Khalifa Shirin Khan (the District Governor), Khan Mohammad (an ex-Harakat commander) and Baghrani (the '93rd divisional commander). As described by an eyewitness, they used the public narratives of the Taliban, imploring them to work with the new movement and be good Muslims saying, 'we want you to go [forward] under the Qur'an; we want the Qur'an to be raised up high'. Khalifa Shirin Khan was slightly incredulous: 'we have been fighting against the Soviets for fifteen years; we have been doing jihad; we are not kaffirs', he retorted. The meeting broke up.⁷⁵⁰

Nine days later, two cars came from Kandahar with ten Talibs. They proceeded to Baghrani's headquarters for lunch. Post-prandially, Baghrani and the Taliban set about removing the checkpoints on the main road between Gereshk and Kandahar that were manned by Mir Wali and other 'Hizb' commanders. This took two days and on the third day they launched an attack on Mir Wali's positions in Deh Mazang and Abhashak. The fighting lasted for eighteen hours, and finished at 8am the next day when Mir Wali escaped westwards to Nimruz.⁷⁵¹ Whilst this was occurring, Ghaffour was approached in Lashkar Gah by Taliban representatives.

The Talibs had been sent to negotiate the fall of Helmand and told Ghaffour that they wanted to cut a deal: the Taliban would remove Mir Wali and Atta Mohammad from Helmand and Ghaffour would be left to control the Alizai territory in the north of the province. They used private interests rather than public narratives to appeal to him. In return, he had to give up Lashkar Gah.⁷⁵² Ghaffour considered what had happened in Gereshk and realised that he had no choice—with Baghrani on their side, the Taliban would be undefeatable, even though they had not yet sent any serious forces to Helmand.⁷⁵³ Many interpreted this as a deal between Ghaffour and the Taliban,⁷⁵⁴ and Abdul Rahman probably summed up the best how most people felt about it, 'Ghaffour and [Baghrani] went over to the Taliban; they did it because they were all mullahs'. Actually, Baghrani had formed an interaction with the

⁷⁴⁹ Abdul Salam Zaeef, *My Life with the Taliban* (London, 2010): 63; Anthony Davis, "How the Taliban Became a Military Force," in *Fundamentalism Reborn? Afghanistan and the Taliban*, ed. W Maley (Lahore: Vanguard, 1998): 47-8.

⁷⁵⁰ 074.

⁷⁵¹ 013, 018, 074, MMW.

⁷⁵² 070. Davis, "Taliban": 51.

⁷⁵³ 013, 074.

⁷⁵⁴ e.g. 021, 031.

Taliban, a new public organisation supported by Pakistan, because he saw it as a way to dominate his private enemy: Ghaffour. Ghaffour fled to Musa Qala and Taliban forces occupied Lashkar Gah peacefully.⁷⁵⁵ The Taliban were clearly a new public organisation with a strong ideology, yet they also had very good knowledge of the private sphere—vide the secret negotiations with Baghrani and then the approach that they made to Ghaffour—which enabled them to shape the events in their favour. This is a new dynamic, and I treat it as key support for my thesis.

By this time the Taliban had moved forces in from outside Helmand and, with Baghrani, attacked Atta Mohammad and Dad Mohammad in Sangin who had, amazingly after the bitter fighting of the last fifteen years, allied in the face of the Taliban threat. Both were defeated and fled west, Dad Mohammad with five hundred of his fighters and Atta Mohammad alone: his fighters immediately went over to the Taliban.⁷⁵⁶ These forces then pressed on to Musa Qala and evicted Ghaffour from there and Kajaki in mid-January.⁷⁵⁷ It was here, that one of Ghaffour's nephews, Sher Mohammad, fought his first battles as the commander of a few men. Upon Ghaffour's death, he was to rise and take control of the dynasty, eventually becoming Provincial Governor during the Karzai-era.⁷⁵⁸

Ghaffour and his family were forced to flee through Baghran, where Baghrani made sure that they were attacked and plundered for their weapons, money, opium and women. This particular act and the dishonour associated with it still shape events today.⁷⁵⁹ At approximately the same time, the Taliban pushed to Marjeh, where Abdul Rahman had retreated from Lashkar Gah when Ghaffour left. They attempted to disarm him, provoking a furious response.⁷⁶⁰ Abdul Rahman was pushed out to Washir, where he linked up with Malem Yusof in Now Zad. Both were soon defeated by the Taliban.⁷⁶¹ In the months of December 1994 and January 1995, Helmand had fallen to the Taliban, who then proceeded to disarm as many of the jihadi commanders as they could.⁷⁶² This was, in large part, facilitated by their knowledge of the private sphere, which enabled them to form interactions with the correct private actors.

⁷⁵⁵ 074. Nojumi, Rise: 135.

⁷⁵⁶ 025, 070.

⁷⁵⁷ 010.

⁷⁵⁸ SMA.

⁷⁵⁹ 070.

⁷⁶⁰ 021.

⁷⁶¹ 012, ARJ.

⁷⁶² Hekmatyar, Secret Plans Open Faces: From the Withdrawal of Russians to the Fall of the Coalition Government: 156.

Ghaffour fled to Herat via Ghor, where he allied with Ismail Khan.⁷⁶³ Abdul Rahman and Mir Wali met them there.⁷⁶⁴ They all wanted to retake Helmand in order to regain their interests in the drugs trade, upon which their power was based. Thus, Ismail Khan and the Helmandis (and some Kandahari commanders) tried to reconquer Helmand in March and succeeded in occupying Gereshk, but were quickly beaten back by the Taliban, losing over two thousand men captured.⁷⁶⁵ Despite serious trust issues between the Herat-based commanders,⁷⁶⁶ a second assault was carried out in August and by the twenty-sixth of that month, Gereshk and Musa Qala were under their control.⁷⁶⁷

At this point, the ISI intervened in the Taliban's favour, rushing men and materiel to them, including one thousand five hundred new Toyota Hiluxes. The Pakistani army even gave artillery and helicopter support, probably for the first time.⁷⁶⁸ Within a month, the Taliban had recaptured Gereshk and Ismail Khan's force disintegrated. Ghaffour, Mir Wali and Abdul Rahman all fled to Iran.⁷⁶⁹ Ghaffour soon ended up in Quetta where he was eventually assassinated by the Taliban.⁷⁷⁰ Abdul Rahman fought briefly with the Northern Alliance against the Taliban, before ending up in Iran. Mir Wali spent much of the next six years fighting with the Northern Alliance against the Taliban in the north of the country. Neither Abdul Rahman nor Mir Wali were welcome in Pakistan as they had fought the Taliban: when they visited they were forced to leave by the ISI.⁷⁷¹

So far, I have presented the collapse of the 'government' and the chaotic changes of power once the public sphere had collapsed and before the Taliban took control of Helmand. During this takeover, I highlighted the importance of the knowledge of the private sphere that the Taliban—a public organisation—had of the private sphere. Using this they were able to convince Baghrani to switch sides in order to gain power over Ghaffour. Now I discuss in detail Taliban methods of rule.

3.12 - Taliban provincial-level control

The Taliban brought an entire set of political appointees with them, mainly from Uruzgan.⁷⁷² Their first Provincial Governor was Mullah Mahmud Karim (Noorzai, from Kandahar). Shortly

⁷⁶³ 018. William Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars* (New York, 2002): 51 & 61; The Economist, *Country Reports - Afghanistan Q1/1995* (London: 40.

⁷⁶⁴ ARJ, MMW.

⁷⁶⁵ Giustozzi, *Empires*: 256-7.

⁷⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 272.

⁷⁶⁷ ARJ.

⁷⁶⁸ Davis, "Taliban": 61.

⁷⁶⁹ MMW, ARJ. Giustozzi, *Empires*: 257.

⁷⁷⁰ SMA.

⁷⁷¹ ARJ.

⁷⁷² 013.

afterwards he was replaced by Abdul Bari (Alikozai, from Deh Rawoud) who remained governor for the remainder of Taliban rule.⁷⁷³ Generally Abdul Bari was seen as a fair governor, if disorganised and slightly corrupt.⁷⁷⁴ In many respects the critical position was the Governor for Gereshk, who also had responsibility for Sangin, Kajaki and Musa Qala: Mullah Mir Hamza (Noorzai, Deh Rawoud). Mir Hamza was highly respected by Mullah Omar and was referred to by him as 'Haji Khan'.⁷⁷⁵ Echoing history, such an important position—Gereshk was the back door to Kandahar—had to go to someone trustworthy. He was also respected by the local people as being serious and fair: he reflected the public Taliban narrative.⁷⁷⁶ Mir Hamza's deputy was Haji Mahmud Azem⁷⁷⁷ and the Mayor was Abdul Haq (both Noorzai, Uruzgan). Abdul Haq's job reportedly centred on collecting the road tolls⁷⁷⁸ upon which much of the Taliban treasury in Helmand rested.⁷⁷⁹ The District Governor was the commander of Taliban forces in the area.⁷⁸⁰

Beyond those key posts government administration appeared to be an afterthought. This is probably best summarised by an ex-Mahaz commander, who said, 'the Taliban came into Helmand stating that they didn't want to do government, and they didn't'.⁷⁸¹ When the Taliban commanded by Mullah Ibrahim (Laghmani, from Garmsir) had reached Nad-e Ali and finished fighting with Abdul Rahman, Ibrahim simply became District Governor. Characterized as intelligent and respected by the people, he was unfortunately replaced by Mullah Abdul Rahman (Noorzai, from Now Zad)⁷⁸² after about a year. Shortly after, he was in turn replaced by Mawlana Sahib (from Uruzgan). Mawlana Sahib remained the longest, but was characterized by one of the senior tribal leaders in the district as desperately corrupt when dealing with land issues and cruel, resorting to shooting people to maintain order.⁷⁸³

There followed four other District Governors, bringing the total to seven in seven years: Mullah Abdul Rahim (Ishaqzai, from Uruzgan), Mullah Sharwali (Daftani, from Nahr-e Saraj), Mullah Abdul Haq (Daftani, from Waziristan, Pakistan) and Mullah Saifullah (Alizai, from Uruzgan).⁷⁸⁴ This represented an astonishing personnel turnover. Apparently, Nad-e Ali was considered a 'rest and recuperation' posting for Taliban commanders from the fighting in the

⁷⁷³ 003, 018, 021.

⁷⁷⁴ 031.

⁷⁷⁵ 020, 070.

⁷⁷⁶ 012, 020.

⁷⁷⁷ 001.

⁷⁷⁸ 012.

⁷⁷⁹ 008.

⁷⁸⁰ 001, 012.

⁷⁸¹ 003.

⁷⁸² NB Not Abdul Rahman Jan, the jihadi commander from Marjeh, who had just been ejected by Ibrahim.

⁷⁸³ 023.

⁷⁸⁴ 007, 015, 023.

north of the country. The district was also seen as a position in which they could make money due to the fact that there were, by now, interminable land disputes in Nad-e Ali and the social heterogeneity meant that the need for an 'impartial' figure was greater than in areas where there was a unified tribal leadership. As one man who was fairly close to the Taliban administration told me, 'people had no choice but to allow the Taliban to solve [disputes] as they allowed no fighting...when they solved them they made money out of it!'⁷⁸⁵

The last central district of Nawa began the Taliban-era with an unknown District Governor, who was soon replaced by the Mullah Ibrahim from Nad-e Ali. He was again highly respected by the population. He seems to personify what we understand to be the public narrative surrounding the Taliban. One interviewee recalled that when Ibrahim's own brother killed someone, he made sure that justice was served and that the victim's family got the appropriate blood money. He did not abuse his power, and made sure that disputes over land and women were solved without the payment of bribes.⁷⁸⁶ Yet beyond the central districts, the Taliban instituted a form of indirect rule, by employing a District Governor from a supportive, sometimes minority, community in the district, although they were also selected for religious achievement. Thus in Garmsir, Mullah Naim was appointed from the Alizai, a minority community.⁷⁸⁷ In Now Zad, the Taliban District Governor was Dost Mohammad Akhund (Ishaqzai, Harakat) who was the brother-in-law of Abdul Ahad,⁷⁸⁸ the main Harakat commander for Now Zad during the jihad.

Every district had a shura (council), whose composition varied depending on the micro-political situation. The significance of the appointees is interesting and every district had a slightly different method of Taliban control. Over much of the province Harakat networks quickly became Talibanised.⁷⁸⁹ This conforms to the public narratives of the two movements. Harakat and Taliban structures were both clerical, and Mullah Omar had been a member of Harakat. Broadly speaking, both parties had the same type of people: mullahs and those who wanted a return to traditional village life. Yet whilst many of the Hizb or Jamiat networks were ignored or suppressed,⁷⁹⁰ in other areas commanders of those parties would rise in the Taliban movement. This depended on the local political balance: in some cases the suppression was due to the fact that their previous private enemies were now affiliated with the Taliban government.⁷⁹¹ This shows that the Taliban used detailed local political

⁷⁸⁵ 015.

⁷⁸⁶ 005.

⁷⁸⁷ 053.

⁷⁸⁸ 056.

⁷⁸⁹ 040, 068, 074.

⁷⁹⁰ e.g. 034.

⁷⁹¹ 074.

knowledge of the private sphere in order to dominate the interaction between public and private spheres.

3.13 - Taliban district-level control in central Helmand

The provincial-level figures and Mullah Mir Hamza were people who were close to Mullah Omar and could be trusted. In Gereshk, Mir Hamza reactivated Harakat networks to govern, thus relying on a minority of Barakzai from the smaller tribal coalition (see section 2.9) and other tribes.⁷⁹² Ex-Harakat commanders like Mullah Atta Mohammad (Barakzai, from Malgir) and Saddiq (Ishaqzai) became Taliban petty officials.⁷⁹³ Hizb affiliated commanders were excluded, thus Khalifa Shirin Khan, the mujahidin District Governor, stayed at home.⁷⁹⁴ The district shura consisted of 'influential' mullahs and elders from the district, but reflected the private 'Harakat' bias expressed above⁷⁹⁵ and had very little power anyway.⁷⁹⁶

Baghrani remained as commander of the division, before moving to Herat to fight Ismail Khan and then Kabul to fight the Northern Alliance,⁷⁹⁷ eventually becoming a 'Chief Mullah'.⁷⁹⁸ Many of his sub-commanders went on to become Taliban sub-commanders, taking the prenominal mullah, thus, Mullah Janan (Alizai/Khalozai/Arabzai), Mullah Rauf (Alizai/Khalozai/Mirazai), Mullah Zakir (Alizai/Khalozai/Arabzai)⁷⁹⁹ and Mullah Ahmad Shah (Alizai/Khalozai/Yahyazai) among others.⁸⁰⁰ All were to feature prominently in the next fifteen years of the Helmandi story.

Finally, young men came of age during the Taliban-era and joined the movement. One such man was Lal Mohammad from Torghai, south of Malgir, who joined at a young age. He was much later to become a militia commander for ISAF and the Karzai government and then change sides back to the 'Taliban' in 2012.⁸⁰¹ Much of this side-switching was driven by private cleavages with his neighbours. Ezmarai, the son of the head of intelligence for the Khalqi police, also became a petty commander in the *vice and virtue* organisation in Gereshk.⁸⁰² He was later to become the Chief of Police of Nahr-e Saraj in 2010 and was rumoured to run a brothel with the female prisoners. Mir Wali described Ezmarai as a

⁷⁹² 040, 074.

⁷⁹³ 074.

⁷⁹⁴ 075.

⁷⁹⁵ 001, 020.

⁷⁹⁶ 075.

⁷⁹⁷ 070, 075.

⁷⁹⁸ Zaeef, *Life*: 265.

⁷⁹⁹ The same Zakir who went to madrasa with Sher Mohammad.

⁸⁰⁰ 070. Zaeef, *Life*: 264 & 270.

⁸⁰¹ 019, 103.

⁸⁰² 001.

'money dog' and pointed out that he would go with whoever was in power: it appears it was no different with the Taliban.

The approach in Nad-e Ali was similar—empowering former Harakat commanders and working with minorities.⁸⁰³ Thus, Haji Mullah Paslow, the Popalzai Harakat commander, was an official in the government and his nephew, Akhtur Mohammad, was a judge.⁸⁰⁴ From the Noorzai clan in Loy Bagh that had split so successfully during the jihad, the Aghezai, Mullah Karim (who was actually Khano's nephew, and had been with Hizb, although whether the Taliban knew this or not is unknown) acted as a mullah for the movement. Another ex-Harakat commander, Zakiri (Noorzai), acted as a petty commander.⁸⁰⁵ Mullah Karim aside, the Hizb figures in the district were not represented in the Taliban administration. Some were persecuted: Rahmattiar (Ishaqzai, from Jangal) was repeatedly arrested and tortured. In one incident in January 2001, he was blamed for a disturbance that was actually created by Abdul Rahman (who had been running a low-level insurgency against Taliban rule in Marjeh) and thrown in prison in Kandahar. He was eventually freed by the Karzais at the end of the year (see section 4.1).⁸⁰⁶

In Nad-e Ali too, as in Nahr-e Saraj, young men came of age during the Taliban-era and joined the movement. One particular young man, Murtaza, was a young Kharoti tribesman from Shin Kalay.⁸⁰⁷ Shin Kalay was not well represented in the Taliban administration, mainly because they had been so closely aligned with the communists or Hizb, and the Taliban had lots of ex-Harakat people. Taliban knowledge of the private sphere dictated their interactions. Murtaza, however, came from the smallest of six Kharoti clans in Shin Kalay, the Shabakhel (see Kharoti tribal diagram in Appendix 4). This was either a reflection of the Taliban policy of empowering minorities, or, Murtaza saw it as a way of breaking out of his pre-proscribed role in life in one of the less powerful clans in the village.⁸⁰⁸ Before long, Murtaza was in command of a group fighting in the north of the country and was eventually arrested by the US and sent to Guantanamo.⁸⁰⁹

3.14 - Taliban district-level control outside central Helmand

The central districts were split politically between ex-Hizb and ex-Harakat patronage networks and the Taliban managed them by mostly supporting Harakat over Hizb networks.

⁸⁰³ 067.

⁸⁰⁴ 038, 067.

⁸⁰⁵ 039, 067.

⁸⁰⁶ 034.

⁸⁰⁷ 007.

⁸⁰⁸ 065.

⁸⁰⁹ 007.

They understood the private sphere well. Most other districts in Helmand were similarly divided, but the Taliban managed them in different ways. In Sangin, Atta Mohammad's men had switched sides to the Taliban and so they formed the immediate political constituency. Later famous, Akhtur Mohammad Osmani came from this Ishaqzai Chowkazai clan.⁸¹⁰ He eventually rose to become a treasurer to the Taliban and a close confidant of Mullah Omar (he was finally killed by ISAF in 2006).⁸¹¹ Mullah Abdul Ghaffour, also from a minority tribe in Sangin, the Popalzai, rose to become the Head of Communications at the Taliban Ministry of Defence.⁸¹² The same minority strategy was used in Garmsir, where Mullah Naim from the Alizai (approximately ten per cent of the district's population were Alizai) was chosen, despite the fact that the Garmsir Alizai largely sided with Hizb during the jihad.⁸¹³ This clearly shows that the Taliban understood and took into account the private sphere when controlling the population, and did not rely on their public, 'religious' narrative.

Now Zad, however, offers a striking example where almost the entire district was supportive of the Taliban administration and the district supplied some of the biggest commanders nationwide to fight for the Taliban. The public narratives of the conflict match that which was described to me as occurring in Now Zad. There, the Taliban engineered an interaction whereby Mullah Dost Mohammad Akhund (Harakat) was the District Governor representing the faction of the Ishaqzai that had fought under Abdul Ahad (Dost was Abdul's brother).⁸¹⁴ Mahmoud Yunous (Ishaqzai) was from the same community and rose to become the commander of Kandahar Airfield and Hafiz Yunous (Ishaqzai) became the Taliban Minister for Mines.⁸¹⁵

But, the other communities in Now Zad also had power. One of the largest Taliban field commanders in the country came from the Noorzai community who had sided with Hizb: Mullah Salam from Tizne village. He eventually rose to become the Herat military commander,⁸¹⁶ despite being despised by the residents of Herat and being seen as operating independently of control by the Taliban government in Kandahar.⁸¹⁷ The district had a lack of friction during the Taliban-era due to the alliance between the Ishaqzai and Noorzai communities. I asked a former Taliban Ishaqzai mullah how it came about (that is, how was it that what I understood to have happened in Now Zad matched the public narratives of the conflict). He attributed it to the large number of madrasas and religious

⁸¹⁰ 061, 069.

⁸¹¹ Taliban leader killed after RAF plane tracks phone', [The Times](#), (27 Dec 2006).

⁸¹² Zaeef, [Life](#): 278.

⁸¹³ 048.

⁸¹⁴ 068.

⁸¹⁵ 066.

⁸¹⁶ 029, 041, 063, SMA.

⁸¹⁷ Zaeef, [Life](#): 268.

students in Now Zad, although perhaps he is amplifying his own experience, and applying ideological narratives to his own actions: ‘when the Taliban came, all the students joined immediately’.⁸¹⁸

Thus, the Taliban had a variety of strategies for governing Helmand, each dependent on the social make-up of the area they were trying to administer. In many areas they chose to empower ex-Harakat networks. Those commanders who chose to affiliate themselves with Harakat during the jihad were more likely to find their views commensurate with the Taliban. But, ideological selection of public organisations in Helmandi politics was minimal, in that it was mainly a patronage game—*vide* those Hizb and Jamiat commanders that they empowered. The private sphere was important in driving their public-private interactions with private actors. Most interviewees agreed that the Taliban government was very similar to Rasoul or Ghaffour’s style and ideology of governing: strict, Islamic and *andiwali*.⁸¹⁹ Interestingly, unlike other periods covered in this thesis, they described it in terms of Taliban *co-option* of the population, rather than population *manipulation* of the Taliban.⁸²⁰ this was down to their local knowledge.

Those who had not joined the Taliban from an established jihadi power block did so for a variety of reasons, which created another layer in many communities’ politics. Some, like Murtaza (Kharoti), joined for private interests, because it was a way of increasing their standing in the community. Others, because they wanted to take advantage of Taliban patronage in paying for fighters where there was little other employment: Atta Mohammad’s men in Sangin, for example. Some speak of ideological public narratives as reasons for joining. The Taliban mullah from Now Zad discussed above makes a good example, although he may have been self-justifying. He recounted to me that the Taliban had visited his madrassa and described the situation in Gereshk and Kandahar. ‘Women are uncovered’ they said, ‘they are all warlords and not true jihadists [in Gereshk]’. But Kandahar was worse: the Taliban had gone to arrest a commander one evening and when they went into his room they found ‘his chaiboy masturbating him’. As the then soon-to-be Taliban mullah said to me, ‘the Taliban showed me how people were not living properly’. He joined immediately and saw extensive service leading Taliban troops in prayer on the front line.⁸²¹

Having discussed the Taliban methods of control, it can be seen that they took into account the private (political) sphere. These public-private interactions were discussed in terms of

⁸¹⁸ 066.

⁸¹⁹ 015, 023, 071, 083.

⁸²⁰ 021, 039.

⁸²¹ 066.

Taliban (public) co-option rather than population (private) manipulation. And although the Taliban did motivate some people through their public narratives, for many it was just the same as any other regime: how they treated you depended on who you were in Helmandi society. We conclude this chapter by considering what that control meant to Helmandis: the benefits, the drawbacks and the weaknesses of Taliban rule.

3.15 - Stability

Helmand was stable under the Taliban. And this was almost certainly due to the disarmament of militias and the bespoke political control generated by interactions with different private actors. These two factors were more important for stability than the public narrative of fairness that the Taliban administration exhibited towards its Helmandi citizens. My interviews show this to be patchy at best, with some administrators being the epitome of fairness,⁸²² others as corrupt as those who came before or afterwards⁸²³—it all depends upon the official spoken about and my interlocutor. But stability seemed to be the same across the districts. The main thing that many Helmandis recounted was keeping a low profile, which meant that the Taliban left you alone.⁸²⁴ ‘Like before, it was done in the name of religion, but it was all about power’, said one man who was a petty Talib.⁸²⁵ Even the very few communists who did not flee were safe, as long as they kept a low profile.⁸²⁶ The emphasis was on stability, probably because for the entire time that the Taliban controlled Helmand they were fighting bitter wars elsewhere in the country, first against Hekmatyar then later against Masoud and Dostum.

There was, however, one aspect of Taliban rule that did not pass unnoticed by the population: the domination by Pakistani intelligence of the upper levels of the decision making processes of the organisation. The ISI was the source of much of the funding for the Taliban, alongside road tolls and drugs.⁸²⁷ One shopkeeper, who kept a shop in Lashkar Gah during the Taliban-era, claimed he saw regular visits from the ISI. Allegedly, Hamid Gul, the former Director of ISI and at that point ‘retired’, was given a tour of Helmand by the Taliban.⁸²⁸ Generally speaking however, the numbers of full-time Talibs in Helmand was low, because manpower was needed elsewhere in the country.⁸²⁹ This led to the greatest weakness of the Taliban method of government—conscription.

⁸²² 005, 050.

⁸²³ 008, 023.

⁸²⁴ 013, 021, 075.

⁸²⁵ 071.

⁸²⁶ 012, 013, 060.

⁸²⁷ e.g. 013, 014, 019, 047, 080.

⁸²⁸ 046.

⁸²⁹ 001, 008.

Conscription was how the Taliban maintained and delivered manpower in a flexible way. The draft was a common experience for Helmandis. Everyone knew someone who had been conscripted and many of my interviewees had been conscripted themselves.⁸³⁰ The system of conscription was organised through the miraws (community water allocators) who were asked to draw up a list of males of the appropriate age. They were the natural choice as they knew everyone in the community. This was then passed to the local shura to issue the orders conscripting people. Individuals were ordered to report to Lashkar Gah, then they were taken by bus to Kandahar and then onwards to wherever they fought: mostly Kunduz, or Mazar-e Sharif, allowing us to date their conscription from 1997 onwards.⁸³¹

Many fled rather than face conscription and there were even 'uprisings' in 1998.⁸³² As conscription lasted for three months, most extended families had to give at least one person. In Shin Kalay around thirty-five were sent: one family sent two men, and although both returned, one had only three limbs.⁸³³ From the small village of Kakaran in the north of Nad-e Ali, ten men were conscripted. Naqilabad, a previous Hizb stronghold, suffered particularly badly having thirty men conscripted, of which only fifteen returned alive.⁸³⁴ Conscripts were not paid for their service—only clothing, food and ammunition were given—however, they were allowed to steal from the population in the areas where they fought in order to gather a salary.⁸³⁵ The only way out was to pay: around fifteen hundred dollars was the going rate for not doing your 'Islamic duty'.⁸³⁶

The Taliban really became infamous for their social policies, which seem extreme to outsiders, but in the context of seventeen previous years of war in Helmand, were welcome. This was another aspect of Taliban rule that all my interviewees commented on, probably because they thought that it chimed with what they thought was my understanding of the public narratives surrounding the Taliban movement. My interviewees also erred on the side of negative perceptions about the Taliban because at the time of interviewing the West was fighting a 'Taliban' insurgency in Helmand: clearly, they wanted me to know where they stood with respect to the Taliban. However, even though there was a divergence of opinion about whether the Taliban were too harsh in their implementations everyone, without fail, welcomed the absence of crime and the increase in stability.

⁸³⁰ 041, 067, 075.

⁸³¹ 014, 015, 023.

⁸³² Robert Crews and Amin Tarzi, eds., The Taliban and the Crisis of Afghanistan (Cambridge, MA, 2008): 262.

⁸³³ 015, 023.

⁸³⁴ 032.

⁸³⁵ 017.

⁸³⁶ 008, 046, 050.

But there was not a huge difference between the public Taliban narratives and the private Helmandi traditions. The Taliban were recruited from madrassas and refugee camps in Baluchistan, north-west Pakistan. These camps were mainly populated by people from the south of Afghanistan anyway.⁸³⁷ The province's government had also been run previously on a clerical system under the Akhundzadas, exactly that which the Taliban wished to 'impose'. The conservative values of the Taliban were similar to the conservative values of rural Helmand.⁸³⁸ This is an important point as it runs counter to the prevailing overarching public narratives about the Taliban: that they forced their rules on an unwilling population.

Upon getting to Gereshk, and before they had even begun to take over the rest of the province, the Taliban closed the barbers in the bazaar (to prevent people from cutting their hair thus allowing it to grow long and, according to them, more Islamic). They also immediately issued a dictate banning reshwat, or the soliciting of bribes. They also understood the Helmandi mentality and took over the few remaining brick built or concrete buildings: then, and now, a building not made of mud indicated the hukumat.⁸³⁹ As per the internationally-known public caricature, many commented on the fact that they used to check people's beard lengths with their fists⁸⁴⁰ and would not allow music.⁸⁴¹ But there was a private under-society: as a Karzai-era District Governor of Gereshk, who was rather fond of his viskey (which is what Helmandis call most alcohol) pointed out to me, Gereshk was then as it is now: 'you could still drink and get women, it was just hidden'.⁸⁴²

The rural areas were left to their own devices: in Babaji, people only saw the Taliban once a month when two Talibs would circulate on a motorbike to 'check that no-one had any televisions'.⁸⁴³ Even in somewhere like Shin Kalay in Nad-e Ali, which is close to the hukumat, the elders would often go a month without seeing a Talib: rural government was a very, very 'loose-touch'⁸⁴⁴ and based on spies—usually mullahs—and fear.⁸⁴⁵ This was ably helped by the copious amounts of distrust present in Helmandi society created by the corrupted jihad.⁸⁴⁶ In areas like Gereshk, the strictures were relaxed more, but this probably reflected the indigenous males' attitudes rather than those of the Taliban.⁸⁴⁷

⁸³⁷ Nojumi, Rise: 122.

⁸³⁸ 018, 027. Pont, Chickens: 58 & 97.

⁸³⁹ 025.

⁸⁴⁰ 021.

⁸⁴¹ 050.

⁸⁴² 001.

⁸⁴³ 013.

⁸⁴⁴ Pont, Chickens: 13.

⁸⁴⁵ 050.

⁸⁴⁶ 007.

⁸⁴⁷ Pont, Chickens: 45-7.

Where the Taliban were most appreciated was their stance on law and order. My data match the well-known public narratives of the Taliban-era. Hands were cut off for theft⁸⁴⁸ and beatings issued for minor infringements such as not praying.⁸⁴⁹ As a result, there was very little crime.⁸⁵⁰ This was only slightly stricter however than the rule of Rasoul or Ghaffour, where cigarette smoking was allegedly punished with torture.⁸⁵¹ Many spoke very favourably of it—or rather the lawful effects on society of it—especially in comparison to the Karzai-era that was to come.⁸⁵² As one of my closest contacts said to me, ‘people were scared, but at least their home was not a war-zone’;⁸⁵³ another commented on the fact that ‘you could go anywhere, *it was safe*’.⁸⁵⁴ The Taliban increased the stability that had been established by Rasoul. People accepted that life was more peaceful under the Taliban,⁸⁵⁵ and returned. Only thirteen per cent of refugees were still away by 1999.⁸⁵⁶ These descriptions very clearly match the well-known public narratives surrounding the Taliban government.

3.16 - Taliban weaknesses

Where the Taliban really failed was to provide anything like enough services. Zakat (Islamic tax) was collected, but was not spent on the poor as it was supposed to be. It was used to help the Taliban with their wars in the north.⁸⁵⁷ There were no schools or clinics built whatsoever,⁸⁵⁸ but up to five hundred madrasas were established province-wide teaching over one hundred thousand students.⁸⁵⁹ The residents of Nad-e Ali, however, used their connections to Mutmain (from Nad-e Ali), the Taliban Minister of Culture and Education in Kandahar, to argue for the inclusion of secular subjects, to which he agreed.⁸⁶⁰ Those services that did exist were provided by NGOs: for example the hospital in Lashkar Gah,⁸⁶¹ the first major repairs to the canal project since the 1970s, a gravelled Route 601 from Lashkar Gah⁸⁶² and several clinics province-wide.⁸⁶³ There was no building, however, in areas that had supported Ghaffour’s rule like Musa Qala.⁸⁶⁴

⁸⁴⁸ 021.

⁸⁴⁹ 075.

⁸⁵⁰ 013, 021.

⁸⁵¹ Dorransoro, Dernier: 12.

⁸⁵² 013.

⁸⁵³ 007.

⁸⁵⁴ 020.

⁸⁵⁵ Pont, Chickens: 48 & 95.

⁸⁵⁶ UNDP, Helmand Planning Group - Baseline Survey of Helmand Province (Peshawar, 1999): ii.

⁸⁵⁷ 008, 023, 075.

⁸⁵⁸ 013, 023.

⁸⁵⁹ Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief, Helmand Profile (Quetta, 1999): 12.

⁸⁶⁰ 058.

⁸⁶¹ ACBAR, Helmand Profile:7.

⁸⁶² Richard Scott, Letter to Counselor for Narcotics Affairs on Helmand, Islamabad, RE: Trip Report (10 Feb 98).

⁸⁶³ Pont, Chickens: 55.

⁸⁶⁴ UNDP, Baseline Survey:21-3.

Perhaps the public narrative that separated the Taliban from the population the most was that of poppy. When they took over in Helmand, the Taliban declared poppy growth illegal for the briefest of periods, before recognising the revenue implications and re-implementing the ten per cent Islamic tithe.⁸⁶⁵ Soon, Taliban commanders themselves were involved in the trade.⁸⁶⁶ Many became rich from the crop: one rumour circulating in 1999, told of nine thousand Helmandis who had gone to Mecca for Haj that year alone.⁸⁶⁷ This continued until the Taliban opium ban in 2000.⁸⁶⁸ Scholars disagree as to whether this was a ban to appease the United States and the International Community who were increasingly isolating the Taliban government⁸⁶⁹ or whether it was merely a Taliban ploy to increase the price of opium so that they could make a windfall profit on their stocks.⁸⁷⁰ The ban was completely effective though: the Taliban 'just beat people until they complied'.⁸⁷¹ Opinion was equally divided in my interviews⁸⁷² and I conclude that both were true.

For example, one elder recalls travelling to the West and being asked by Talibs as he left the country to make sure that people abroad saw his photos of the opium ban,⁸⁷³ yet others recall that before the ban the Taliban went around to every household collecting two mahn (approximately 9kg) of opium paste, as they did every year (worth approximately \$252 before the ban and \$4500, or even \$6300, after the ban).⁸⁷⁴ What made it clear to Helmandis that the Taliban were taking advantage of the ban was that once a major drought set in in Helmand during the year 2000,⁸⁷⁵ the Taliban did not seem to suffer at all and were still able to 'buy nice cars'.⁸⁷⁶ This came at a time when a quarter of Helmandi livestock was dying from lack of water.⁸⁷⁷

Towards the end of the 1990s, people were starting to feel less positively about the Taliban government. The war in the north of the country between the Taliban and the Northern Alliance was interminable. In response to the drought of 2000, the Taliban reduced the flow through the Kajaki dam in an attempt to help, but this caused tensions with the Iranians.⁸⁷⁸ The combined effects of the opium ban, the drought and conscription, created the

⁸⁶⁵ Nojumi, Rise: 136.

⁸⁶⁶ AfghaNews, Provincial News, vol. 11 (London Nov 1995): 7; Labrousse, Les Drogues et les Conflicts en Afghanistan (1978-1995): 19.

⁸⁶⁷ Labrousse, Afghanistan: 180.

⁸⁶⁸ Hafvenstein, Season: 214.

⁸⁶⁹ 'Taliban's ban on a poppy a success, US aides say', New York Times (20 May 2001).

⁸⁷⁰ David Macdonald, Drugs in Afghanistan (London, 2007): 83.

⁸⁷¹ 041.

⁸⁷² e.g. 003, 008, 041.

⁸⁷³ Redacted.

⁸⁷⁴ 017, 023. Figures from David Mansfield.

⁸⁷⁵ 'Southern Afghanistan: Drought much increased', Hewad (1 June 2000).

⁸⁷⁶ 015, 031.

⁸⁷⁷ Hassan Kamran and Sultan Ahmady, Drought Assessment in Southern Afghanistan (Quetta, 2000): 6.

⁸⁷⁸ 'Hirmand River's water to flow into Iran again, soon: Afghan source', Payvand (12 Dec 2002).

impression that the Taliban government was about to crumble. Against this backdrop the attacks of 11 September 2001 occurred in the United States.

3.17 - Conclusions

This period has two different dynamics to those that come before or after. During the 'civil war', there were no strong outside powers acting upon Helmand. Effectively, the public sphere weakened to the point of irrelevance and then completely disappeared during Hafizullah Khan's tenure as 'Provincial Governor'. Once the Rabbani government established itself, there were attempts at the government re-establishing itself—namely the Rasoul/Ismail Khan assault on Lashkar Gah. This however, appears to have been marred by a poor level of knowledge by the public organisation, leading to different bits of the government fighting each other. For much of this period, however, Helmand existed in its own, private bubble, with no true public sphere to speak of (even though the government was national, it was not ideological or institutional, for instance).

The Taliban period is conceptually the resumption of strong public, external control over Helmand. There is a clear public-private interaction. But this interaction is one of a public Taliban power co-opting private Helmandi actors, driven by excellent Taliban knowledge of the private sphere. This began before the Taliban even moved into Helmand with the secret negotiations with Baghrani and then Ghaffour. This knowledge enabled them to dominate the interaction between the public and private spheres and continued when the Taliban were setting up their political control of Helmand. Each area was considered separately and a decision was made whether to effect minority control, or to rely on a particular ex-mujahidin network. This knowledge extended to a fine level of detail, enabling them to choose the correct individuals from within communities—vide the selection of Murtaza from one of the smallest clans in Shin Kalay to be a Taliban commander. These conclusions will be expanded upon in chapter seven.

Chapter 4: The US intervention until the return of the Angrez, 2001–2006

Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.

George W Bush
20 September 2001

With one bullet [Sher Mohammad] did many hunts.

Taliban sub-commander
Kajaki

The events of 11 September 2001 prompted the US to attack Afghanistan and drive the Taliban from power. The Taliban were then replaced by the internationally-backed Interim Government of Hamid Karzai. The overarching public narratives of these years focus on the happiness of the Afghan population to be free of Taliban oppression. This general optimism was tempered with some emerging concerns that the US was relying on warlords too heavily, partly because its attention was diverted by the invasion of Iraq in 2003, and that these warlords were preying on the population. The end of this period is usually defined by a re-emergent Taliban movement that is seen by scholars as a reaction to the warlords' predation. They are discussed in the public sphere as a unitary actor that came across the border from Pakistan, to fight democracy and western influence in the name of Islam.⁸⁷⁹

4.1 - Taliban exit

During October 2001, the US began intermittently to bomb Helmand. Their primary target was the Daud-era military camp in Bolan, still used by Taliban military forces.⁸⁸⁰ Beyond this, there was some bombardment of the outpost on artillery hill near Gereshk, where the Taliban kept some vehicles, and of their headquarters in Gereshk.⁸⁸¹ The cotton gin (factory) was also bombed as it was one of the few buildings standing.⁸⁸² In response, the Taliban began to conscript men onto trucks in order to take them to Kandahar and the north, to defend against an expected assault on Taliban front lines.⁸⁸³ The population began to move away from the bombardment sites.⁸⁸⁴

Concurrently, Hamid Karzai, the head of the Popalzai tribe in Kandahar, held meetings with ex-mujahidin commanders in Quetta in order to build a coalition. Where support was pledged

⁸⁷⁹ Giustozzi, Koran: 1-8.

⁸⁸⁰ 003, 008, 014.

⁸⁸¹ 012.

⁸⁸² Richard Scott, Email to USAID : Helmand Follow Up XVII - 9 May 2006 - Poppies, Cash-for-Work and Cotton Again (2006).

⁸⁸³ 051, 066, G118, G628.

⁸⁸⁴ 015.

it was conditional on the US backing Karzai: foreign money was the ‘kingmaker’.⁸⁸⁵ There was then a hiatus in Helmand until mid-November, when Mazar-e Sharif, Herat, Kabul and Jalalabad fell in days to former mujahidin commanders that had been in control before the rise of the Taliban. They were backed by US special forces. Then, Karzai moved into Afghanistan with a band of followers, including Sher Mohammad Akhundzada, the son of Rasoul, the erstwhile Provincial Governor of Helmand. According to legend they crossed the border on a motorbike together and headed for Uruzgan province.⁸⁸⁶ Sher Mohammad and a small group then continued onto Kajaki and Musa Qala, where he began to organise fighters.⁸⁸⁷

Other Helmandi mujahidin commanders began to return independently. Hafizullah Khan left Pakistan and headed to Bolan.⁸⁸⁸ Abdul Rahman Jan mobilised in Iran (one assumes with Iranian support) and crossed Nimruz to capture Marjeh. As he recounts, Marjeh was taken from twenty Taliban fighters, one of whom was an Arab, and then lost to a Taliban counterattack from Lashkar Gah. Marjeh was captured and recaptured twice more, with a loss of eighty casualties on Abdul Rahman’s side. If true, this story represents the only reported on-the-ground fighting with the Taliban in Helmand. The general view is reflected thus: ‘the US pointed a finger and the Taliban government fell’.⁸⁸⁹ There was not any coalition special forces activity in Helmand at this early stage, unlike elsewhere in the country.⁸⁹⁰

By the end of November, it was becoming clear that the Taliban position in the south of Afghanistan was untenable. The non-Helmandi Taliban evacuated Lashkar Gah and Gereshk on 28 November 2001.⁸⁹¹ The Helmandi ‘Taliban’ went home, and some went to Girdi Jangal refugee camp in Pakistan.⁸⁹² As they left, they handed control of Lashkar Gah to Israel Khan, from Ashem Jan’s influential Now Zadi Noorzai family. He was immediately challenged by Hafizullah Khan from Bolan and there was a standoff over the Bolan Bridge. A shura of elders decided that Israel should temporarily remain ‘Provincial Governor’ and Hafizullah should become his ‘Chief of Police’.⁸⁹³ Negotiations for the control of Helmand then began between Israel Khan, Hafizullah, Abdul Rahman and Sher Mohammad.⁸⁹⁴ By

⁸⁸⁵ 043, 057.

⁸⁸⁶ SMA, G968.

⁸⁸⁷ SMA, 064, G968.

⁸⁸⁸ 021.

⁸⁸⁹ 075.

⁸⁹⁰ 003.

⁸⁹¹ ARJ.

⁸⁹² 053.

⁸⁹³ 003, 015, 064.

⁸⁹⁴ 021, 064.

mid-December the new order was defined: Sher Mohammad, who had Karzai's endorsement (and hence the US'), was announced Provincial Governor. He entered Lashkar Gah with a militia comprised mainly of ex-Taliban fighters (he had mobilised old Alizai Harakat networks, which were mainly Taliban-aligned).⁸⁹⁵ Sher Mohammad, in his version of the story, claims that he personally pushed the Taliban out of Lashkar Gah, as does Abdul Rahman.

Kandahar fell on 7 December 2001,⁸⁹⁶ with the Taliban surrender negotiated by Rais Baghrani.⁸⁹⁷ He had been fighting as a senior commander in Kabul and was asked by Mullah Omar, the Taliban leader, to negotiate with Karzai who was in the mountains surrounding Kandahar. Once negotiations were complete, Baghrani claims that Omar left Kandahar and that several days later, on the day that Kandahar fell, he went home to Baghran. Two of his commanders—Qayoum Zakir and Rauf Khadim—were not so lucky and were given over to the Americans in the North by Dostum and spent the next five years in Guantanamo Prison Camp in Cuba.⁸⁹⁸ Murtaza, the Kharoti commander from Shin Kalay, was also caught in the North and sent to Guantanamo to be released in March 2003.⁸⁹⁹ However, Gul Agha Shirzai and the US special forces suspected that Omar had escaped with, and was being protected by, Baghrani. Shirzai threatened to send four thousand men to Baghran to capture Omar, but Sher Mohammad offered to negotiate Omar's handover and the disarmament and public reconciliation of Baghrani. Baghrani has always maintained that Omar would never seek shelter with him as they were from different tribes, Alizai and Hotak, and the chance of betrayal would be too great.

4.2 - American arrival

On the 31 December 2001, US (and possibly British) special forces arrived in Lashkar Gah. They then moved to Baghran with Sher Mohammad to meet Baghrani and to attempt to search for Mullah Omar. Baghrani, confronted with his family enemy backed by the Coalition, and with little choice but to comply, handed over 'seventy to eighty heavy weapons, including artillery, and eight to ten anti-aircraft guns; more than one hundred light weapons, including AK-47 rifles and rocket-propelled grenades; and two hundred tons of ammunition' as a token of public reconciliation. An advisor to Shirzai joked that the weapons offered were paltry and collection of all the weapons Baghrani owned would take weeks.

⁸⁹⁵ ARJ, 064.

⁸⁹⁶ Jon Anderson, *The Lion's Grave* (New York, 2002): 128.

⁸⁹⁷ 'Surrendered Chieftain urges Taliban to accept Amnesty', *New York Times* (2 June 2005).

⁸⁹⁸ G008, G108.

⁸⁹⁹ G363.

By January 5th, reconciliation in both the public and private spheres had occurred: Baghrani, ‘the Talib’, had publicly reconciled with the ‘government’, and, privately Sher Mohammad reconciled with, and allowed, him to remain as a tribal leader in Baghran (the two families had been feuding for decades). These reconciliations were considered false by the US, who spent the next three years trying to capture or kill Baghrani. What drove the US is not clear. That is, whether they pursued Baghrani because he was ‘Taliban’, or whether Baghrani maintained links to the ‘Taliban’ as a way of hedging against US and Sher Mohammad’s aggression.⁹⁰⁰

As a result of Karzai backing Sher Mohammad with American funds and legitimacy, Hafizullah was removed as Chief of Police and Abdul Rahman was appointed in his place.⁹⁰¹ Abdul Rahman attributes this to the presence of the ex-Jamiat Panjshiris controlling the Ministry of Interior. Dad Mohammad (Alikozai), from Sangin, was appointed head of Helmand’s National Directorate of Security (the new Khad)⁹⁰²—a reflection of his client status to the Alikozai leader in Kandahar, Mullah Naqib, who was also part of the Karzai tribal coalition.⁹⁰³

Gereshk, for once, was not the primary focus of activity. An ex-Harakat commander from Deh Adam Khan, Khan Mohammad (see section 3.3), immediately seized control there, having slipped over the border from Pakistan in the dying days of the Taliban government.⁹⁰⁴ Malem Mir Wali arrived approximately two weeks later having, he claims, taken part in the Northern Alliance capture of Kabul. He had come via Peshawar, Quetta and Kandahar, and through the hands of Gul Agha Shirzai, the Kandahari Barakzai strongman who had the support of US special forces. At this point, the US armed Mir Wali and he established his patronage links to the fledgling US-backed Afghan government (although through a different route to Sher Mohammad). An important public-private interaction was born. Mir Wali was appointed commander of the re-established 93rd Division.⁹⁰⁵

Once Mir Wali arrived in Gereshk he called a meeting amongst (mainly) ex-Hizb commanders: Khalifa Shirin Khan, Abdul Raziq, Mirza Khan, Haji Kadus and Khan Mohammad were among those who attended.⁹⁰⁶ This is the first time that Haji Kadus enters

⁹⁰⁰ ‘Surrendered Chieftain urges Taliban to accept Amnesty’, [New York Times](#) (2 June 2005); ‘Omar no longer believed to be in Baghran area’, [Associated Press](#) (6 Jan 2002).

⁹⁰¹ 021, 064.

⁹⁰² 069.

⁹⁰³ 017.

⁹⁰⁴ 012, 075.

⁹⁰⁵ MMW.

⁹⁰⁶ 025.

the story and there is some confusion surrounding his origins. Many⁹⁰⁷ argue that he was a small time Hizb commander citing his closeness to Mir Wali. However, Kadus (Barakzai/Shamezai) actually came from the other 'Harakat' side of the tribal split in Malgir—that led by Haji Abdul Agha (Barakzai/Shamezai). See section 2.9. His father was a medium-level Khan and his family were 'all Harakat'.⁹⁰⁸ Mir Wali may have appointed him as his deputy in order to create a stable coalition: between the two of them they were to have a massive effect on Gereshk over the coming decade. It certainly had the desired effect of balancing Khan Mohammad's power—during the negotiations there was some posturing, and one of Khan Mohammad's commanders was shot in the leg, but Mir Wali was far more powerful and prevailed. Khan Mohammad was made Chief of (a much smaller) Police, as compared to Mir Wali's divisional command.⁹⁰⁹ This reflected the power balance between the ex-Harakat and ex-Hizb networks in Nahr-e Saraj: the public sphere reflected the private.

So far, we have discussed the collapse of the Taliban and the initial set up of the ex-mujahidin administration. Now, we turn to the population's response, how political control was re-established and the role of the US special forces.

4.3 - The population takes stock

The events of 2001 had taken everyone by surprise in Helmand. This is one reason why the old commanders, who had wrought so much destruction during their previous tenures, managed to regain control. They retained their old networks in place from the jihad and gained access to the tidal wave of US patronage (money and weapons) distributed by the CIA and special forces teams in the South: combining the two reactivated the networks, demonstrating the importance of the public-private interactions with the US. The fact that the resurgent commanders had been removed by the Taliban in 1994 actually lent them some credibility with the US, but all relied on ex-'Taliban' for their support—it was impossible not to in a society such as Helmand's that had been so thoroughly co-opted by Taliban networks.

As elsewhere in the country, the fall of the Taliban was greeted with a sense of relief and of opportunity. Now the international community was going to finally help rebuild Afghanistan.⁹¹⁰ As such, tribal leaders began to reassert themselves and reintegrate former 'Taliban' forces. This was the second in a series of tribal rapprochements that has occurred during the conflict—the previous one being in 1991/2. The most recent is occurring in 2012 as ISAF pull out of Helmand. These rapprochements should be seen as the strength of

⁹⁰⁷ e.g. 068, 079.

⁹⁰⁸ 074.

⁹⁰⁹ 012, 025.

⁹¹⁰ 063.

public organisations (and associated funding) diminishing and their morphing into private Helmandi tribal groups. In some cases this was an automatic function of the acquisition of power: vide Sher Mohammad arriving in Lashkar Gah with recently ex-‘Taliban’ fighters supporting him. In others it was a deliberate policy of convening shuras to work through the issues involved. Thus, Barakzai commanders and tribal elders convened under Khalifa Shirin Khan and Haji Mudir Agha (from Nawa) in early 2002 and agreed to move forward and work together.⁹¹¹

In some cases these shuras were not able to broach the differences. In Now Zad, for example, the Ishaqzai shura (there were also other tribes’ shuras in Now Zad) was unable to reintegrate those Ishaqzai tribesmen who had fought under Kakar commanders, due to an unresolvable feud. Those members of the tribe were expelled from Now Zad and forced to seek government employ for protection. An important Ishaqzai Taliban commander, Rahim, gave his weapons back to the tribe. He was later to re-join the Taliban becoming their Provincial Governor.⁹¹² In other areas with different social constructions, different communities worked together through inter-tribal shuras. In Nad-e Ali, immediately upon the Taliban’s leaving, a multi-tribal militia was formed under the shura to ensure security under Haji Jamalzai, the old Kharoti Harakat commander. Many of the men had connections to the previous administration, but in the atmosphere of 2002, anything was possible.⁹¹³ In a sense, when Helmandis talk of the broken expectations of the Karzai-era,⁹¹⁴ they are talking as much about the broken expectations of those early tribal shuras, and the spirit of cooperation that ensued, as they are the broken promises of the international community.⁹¹⁵

That said, like the previous mujahidin governments, those with positions of power (and access to patronage) needed to reward those who supported them. Thus, district-level positions reflected the areas of influence of the top-level powerbrokers appointed by President Karzai: Sher Mohammad, Mir Wali, Abdul Rahman and Dad Mohammad. This was to protect their powerbases. The commanders used patronage to mobilise men, upon which their ability to maintain power rested. It was an interaction between money and men, public and private. This was very similar conceptually to how mujahidin commanders sought and maintained power during the jihad and the way in which the mujahidin administrations were

⁹¹¹ 043.

⁹¹² 066. Michael Semple, Reconciliation in Afghanistan (Washington, 2009): 14.

⁹¹³ 016, 023, 071.

⁹¹⁴ e.g. 063.

⁹¹⁵ 015.

conducted between 1989 and 1994. Many Helmandis called it the *second mujahidin unity government*.⁹¹⁶

Khalifa Shirin Khan, close to Mir Wali, was appointed to Gereshk as District Governor and Meera Jan, an Abdul Rahman commander, to Nad-e Ali.⁹¹⁷ Gul Mohammad, Dad Mohammad's brother, was appointed District Governor of Sangin.⁹¹⁸ Likewise, northern Helmand was considered important to the powerbase of Sher Mohammad: his brother, Amir Mohammad Akhundzada was appointed Governor of Musa Qala.⁹¹⁹ But with cousins-in-law in place in Kajaki (Haji Sherafuddin) and Baghran (Abdul Raziq),⁹²⁰ Amir Mohammad effectively became the Governor of the old pre-1964 district of Zamindawar (this is what the Alizai still call northern Helmand).

In those areas out of the control of the 'big four' other, less connected people were appointed: Haji Abdullah Jan (Barakzai, Hizb) managed to regain his position in Garmsir⁹²¹ and Mohammad Nabi Khan, a Jamiat commander from Nawa, was appointed there.⁹²² Hafizullah, detested by Sher Mohammad,⁹²³ and surpassed in importance by Mir Wali,⁹²⁴ was not given any official positions.

4.4 - Mir Wali's militias

Mir Wali attained the luckiest position: as divisional commander he had a large number of patronage positions to offer, and, the 93rd Division largely became a 'Hizb' construct. For example, he appointed Rahmatullah and Pir Mohammad Sadat from Nad-e Ali as his sub-commanders.⁹²⁵ He also appointed Mir Ahmad and Mirza Khan from Malgir and Gereshk, respectively.⁹²⁶ Sarwar Khan (Alizai), Abdul Rahman Khan's nephew, was a regiment commander responsible for the ring road from Delaram to Gereshk—a major money making opportunity.⁹²⁷ Each commander inflated the number of men 'under command', and so would receive, for example, fifty salaries for thirty men.⁹²⁸ Further south in Babaji, Haji Gul Ehktiar and Sur Gul, his nephew, raised men and became sub-commanders, and then themselves had further sub-commanders, like Sayed Amir (Tsuranyi) and Lal Mohammad (Barakzai),

⁹¹⁶ e.g. 041, 053, 060.

⁹¹⁷ 015, 023, 031.

⁹¹⁸ UNHCR, District Profile of Sangin, (Dec 2002).

⁹¹⁹ UNHCR, District Profile of Musa Qala, (Dec 2002).

⁹²⁰ 009, 070.

⁹²¹ PersExp, Helmand, 2008-12.

⁹²² UNHCR, District Profile of Nawa, (Dec 2002).

⁹²³ SMA.

⁹²⁴ 034.

⁹²⁵ 032, 034.

⁹²⁶ 036, 068.

⁹²⁷ 034.

⁹²⁸ 032.

both from Torghai. Marriages were arranged to solidify links between different clans and different groups of armed men. Thus, Kuchnai Agha (Sayed, from Saidabad), a 93rd commander, married his brother to one of Mir Wali's daughters. Unfortunately, the relationship came to an end when Hekmat, Mir Wali's son, killed Kuchnai Agha in a dispute over a chaiboy.⁹²⁹

Travelling up the valley, Abdul Khaleq's⁹³⁰ sons, Qari Hazrat and Lala Jan, became the main Ishaqzai commanders.⁹³¹ These two men provide a good example of the link between security and drug production. Mamouk, another of Abdul Khaleq's sons and Haji Aka (in the same clan) are both large-scale smugglers.⁹³² Similar to the role played by Mir Wali, but at a lower level, Qari Hazrat and Lala Jan personified the public-private interaction through which armed power, government legitimacy, mobilised men and drug profits could be fused. In this, Mir Wali's links to Gul Agha Shirzai were to prove very useful: when the US wanted to establish themselves in Helmand, Mir Wali was the natural choice.⁹³³

This played into a wider dynamic, however. The Barakzai were the main competitors to President Karzai's Popalzai in Kandahar. By supporting Mir Wali, a fellow Barakzai, Shirzai was creating a counterbalance to Karzai's main ally in Helmand, Sher Mohammad.⁹³⁴ According to Sarah Chayes, the US was not aware of these power dynamics in the south, so intent were they on hunting down Al-Qaeda and Taliban remnants. They did not realise that in supporting Shirzai and Mir Wali, they were creating problems for Karzai's tribal balancing-act. This was because they saw Afghanistan according to the public sphere: in Taliban/non-Taliban terms.⁹³⁵ Thus, the first US special forces teams to reside in Helmand arrived in the summer of 2002 and began to set up what later became known as Camp Price. Critically for this thesis, the obscurity of the private sphere to the US special forces meant that the private actors (the warlords) were able to dominate the interaction between public and private and determine the course of the low-level conflict in Helmand.

According to Mir Wali, he tried to direct them to the old army encampment on Artillery Hill, but the Americans wanted a base near the city. Mir Wali detached a compliment of sixty men under Idris, Haji Kadus' brother, to guard the base for them, of course, in return for a fee.⁹³⁶ But much more important than the money was the impression to the rest of the population

⁹²⁹ 068, 103.

⁹³⁰ See section 2.4.

⁹³¹ 062, 068, 075.

⁹³² 062, 070.

⁹³³ Sarah Chayes, *The Punishment of Virtue* (New York, 2006): 274.

⁹³⁴ MMW, Hafizullah.

⁹³⁵ This is a central theme in Chayes' book.

⁹³⁶ 062, 079, MMW.

that he, Mir Wali, was working with the foreigners and that he, alone, controlled access to their base. This mistake was made all over the country and gave the impression that the various warlords affiliated with the US enjoyed impunity—which was often true. Initially the Americans operated on their own, but then lost two soldiers in Sangin during a reconnoitre in March 2003.⁹³⁷ Mir Wali offered a solution: ‘anywhere you go, take my men with you; they are familiar with the people, with the terrain; anyone you need will go with you’.⁹³⁸ The US began to operate with militias of Helmandis.

4.5 - Sher Mohammad and the ‘Taliban’

Sher Mohammad did not receive the same patronage opportunities that Mir Wali did. He did, however, control a large part of northern Helmand, without serious competition. This, in a traditional growing area, allowed him to dominate the opium trade and its profits. Mir Wali gained income from road tolls, US special forces, the Ministry of Defence and also drug growing areas under his control. Sher Mohammad gained from his position as Provincial Governor which allowed him later to extract money from development projects. Mainly, however, he gained his income from growing and taxing opium in areas that he controlled: he maintained a series of drug militias, run by ex-‘Harakat’ commanders—many of whom had also been ‘Taliban’ commanders.⁹³⁹

Commanders such as Mullah Manan (Alizai/Hassanzai) were vital to his operation in Musa Qala.⁹⁴⁰ Rahmatullah (Alizai/Hassanzai) was responsible for moving the drugs to Baram Cha on the Pakistani border⁹⁴¹ and Pir Mohammad (Alizai/Hassanzai) was his bodyguard commander.⁹⁴² Other commanders included Mahmud Akhundzada (Alizai) and Abdul Bari (Alizai/Hassanzai).⁹⁴³ Furthermore, Sher Mohammad maintained very close links with a major international drug smuggler, Haji Azizullah Alizai, later to be identified as a ‘Significant Foreign Narcotics Trafficker’ by the US President in June 2007⁹⁴⁴. They are allegedly cousins.⁹⁴⁵ In a further twist to the tale, it was later rumoured that the President Karzai’s brother, Ahmad Wali Karzai, was living in Haji Azizullah’s house in Kandahar.⁹⁴⁶

⁹³⁷ Personal Observation of the SF compound’s memorial, Camp Price, 2012.

⁹³⁸ MMW.

⁹³⁹ e.g. 013, 029.

⁹⁴⁰ 013, 070.

⁹⁴¹ 029.

⁹⁴² 063.

⁹⁴³ Hafizullah was kind enough to provide me with these names, as he pointed out with a wide smile that they all later joined the Taliban and fought the British in 2006!

⁹⁴⁴ Drugs Enforcement Agency, Drug Investigations lead to Treasury Designation of New Ansari Money Exchange (18 Feb 2011).

⁹⁴⁵ G942.

⁹⁴⁶ 016, 031.

Initially, Mir Wali and Sher Mohammad were the two major players in the province, with Abdul Rahman and Dad Mohammad occupying the second tier of power. Abdul Rahman was dealt a more difficult hand. His 'police department' was effectively a series of random local militias (e.g. the Haji Jamalzai militia in Nad-e Ali). The area that he controlled, mostly Nad-e Ali, Marjeh, Washir and Now Zad, was also significantly fractured, both tribally and by jihadi party affiliation. Abdul Rahman was very much a junior partner to Sher Mohammad. Whereas Mir Wali was out in Gereshk, Sher Mohammad was in Lashkar Gah, as was Abdul Rahman, and both men kept some of their militias there. This created some tension initially between Abdul Rahman and Sher Mohammad.⁹⁴⁷ Habibullah feels that this private cleavage was exacerbated by interactions with the public sphere: Sher Mohammad looked to Pakistan and Abdul Rahman to Iran for support.



Figure 4: Sher Mohammad in 2012.

⁹⁴⁷ International Crisis Group, [Afghanistan: The Problem of Pushtun Alienation \(Asia Report No 62\)](#) (2003): 18.

4.6 - The 'police' thieves

The 'police' was mostly built through family networks. See Appendix 4 for Noorzai tribal diagrams and family trees. Abdul Rahman's deputy was Ayub Khan, who was Israel Khan's brother.⁹⁴⁸ Israel, in turn, is related to Arif Noorzai.⁹⁴⁹ Arif Noorzai is one of the most powerful figures in the South—one of his sisters is married to Ahmad Wali Karzai (Hamid's brother) and another to Sher Mohammad. Thus, Ayub's appointment was purely as a result of his tribal standing: it conferred a degree of tribal legitimacy and strength on Abdul Rahman's organisation. The public organisation of the 'police' meant nothing if it was not backed up by a strong private actor.⁹⁵⁰

Like other big commanders Abdul Rahman (Noorzai/Darzai/Parozai) placed loyalists in key positions. He appointed Sarwar Jan (Noorzai/Darzai/Parozai), for example, Chief of Police in Now Zad, which was Abdul Rahman's tribal centre of gravity despite his (stolen) land being in Marjeh.⁹⁵¹ Hakim Khan (Daftani), an ex-Jamiat commander and a neighbour of Abdul Rahman, became the commander in Marjeh and then later in Nad-e Ali: it was an andiwali (friends) 'government'.

As soon as the 'police' reformed, the ex-communists who had fled began to return. In the case of the Noorzai ex-communists, this had been part of Israel's original negotiations in Lashkar Gah: the Noorzai should become fully reintegrated into the new government.⁹⁵² A number of ex-policemen returned such as Gulie Khan (Baluch), Ismail Khan (Hotak) and Habibullah (Noorzai).⁹⁵³ Whilst a positive step for the future development of the police (they were all well-trained, professional policemen), there were initially some private frictions between the jihadis and the communists.⁹⁵⁴

Gradually, Abdul Rahman started to shift his centre of gravity down to Nad-e Ali from Now Zad, by allowing members of his clan to settle on stolen government land. He eventually became responsible for the theft of twenty thousand jereeb⁹⁵⁵ of land, much of which would have been redistributed to others as part of patron-client relationships.⁹⁵⁶ This allowed him to increase his control: he became top of a larger patronage organisation, that controlled more

⁹⁴⁸ 016, 029.

⁹⁴⁹ 084.

⁹⁵⁰ 016.

⁹⁵¹ 016, 028, ARJ.

⁹⁵² 033, 080.

⁹⁵³ Habibullah, 080.

⁹⁵⁴ 042, 060.

⁹⁵⁵ 10,000 acres.

⁹⁵⁶ Coghlan, "Oral History": 126; Anand Gopal, *The Battle for Marjah*, Center for International Governance Innovation (2010).

land and drugs and that could mobilise more men than before. For the ‘police’ especially, this dynamic enabled them to control more routes in Helmand allowing them to dominate opium transport. The Helmandi ‘police’ came to be completely controlled by Abdul Rahman’s network and it was in this way that commanders who later became well-known were recruited, such as Haji Baran, Dil Jan, Mirdel and Mahboob Khan—all Noorzai, all cousins, and mostly from the same clan: the Parozai.⁹⁵⁷

As well as massively increasing his own landholdings in Marjeh (to be farmed by families from Now Zad), Abdul Rahman allowed relatives to divide up the area around the Bolan junction:⁹⁵⁸ north of the Lashkar Gah road was given to Mato Khan (who was related to Lal Jan by marriage), a Noorzai commander who had fought in Jamiat with Abdul Rahman. His nephew, Abdul Raziq, was given the south side of the road—he came with one hundred households.⁹⁵⁹ Qabir Khan, already mentioned as Haji Lal Jan’s brother, occupied the land a little further to the south, around Zaburabad.⁹⁶⁰ Lal Jan himself, a cousin of Abdul Rahman, resumed control of northern Nad-e Ali, selling land in the desert.⁹⁶¹ See Appendix 4.

Even so, the ‘police’ was not a cohesive organisation. A UN report at the end of 2002 identified five separate ‘police’ factions that did not answer to the District Chief in Nad-e Ali, Hakim Khan.⁹⁶² This was also one of the first observations that Habibullah made to me when I met him for the first time in December 2008. The incoherence of the ‘police’ was due to the nature of their funding, which was fragmented, bottom-up and from many individual actors in the drugs trade. There were even reports of individual ‘police’ commanders running their own heroin processing labs in Chah-e Mirza, Nad-e Ali.⁹⁶³ This compared to Sher Mohammad, who ran a much older, more established network, where much of the competition had been eliminated by his forefathers. Or to Mir Wali, who again ran a mainly Barakzai-, Hizb-dominated ‘organisation’ that was supported well by the government (unlike the ‘police’, the 93rd Division appeared to get paid regularly) and the special forces.⁹⁶⁴

However, every commander who had the power (~US patronage) stole land. Militia commanders divided up the area to the north of the Bughra canal. Thus, for example, Haji Kadus parcelled up the land to the west of the Abhashak wadi. Much of this land went to

⁹⁵⁷ 071, 084.

⁹⁵⁸ See Appendix 4 for family trees.

⁹⁵⁹ 041.

⁹⁶⁰ 023. See Appendix 4.

⁹⁶¹ 039.

⁹⁶² UNHCR, District Profile of Nad-e Ali (Dec 2002).

⁹⁶³ 017.

⁹⁶⁴ MMW. Rashid, Descent: 322.

refugees from water stress (lack of irrigation water) from northern Helmand.⁹⁶⁵ Sher Mohammad also allowed (mainly) Alizai families to settle in the Bolan desert from northern Helmand,⁹⁶⁶ as well as stealing land in Musa Qala.⁹⁶⁷ All the settlements created tension with the existing landowners though: the Bolan settlers with the Barakzai near the river, those north of the Bughra with the canal-zone settlers and those in Musa Qala with the Pirzai.

Finally, Dad Mohammad, the provincial head of the NDS, ran the smallest of the networks in the province. One brother was the District Governor of Sangin.⁹⁶⁸ Another, Daud, became the Chief of Police in Sangin. All ran private militias that guarded the family power base.⁹⁶⁹ In the case of Dad Mohammad's militias, some were sponsored and armed by US special forces from mid-2003 onwards, as was the case of Karim Khan, one of his sub-commanders.⁹⁷⁰ This was to prove beneficial to Dad Mohammad later on, when the special forces repeatedly intervened in his favour to help him retain his position as the provincial NDS head, even though the UN advised that he be removed for his abuses.⁹⁷¹ Astonishingly, and perhaps indicative of the lack of communication between different branches of the US effort and different rotations of officials in the country, the US continued to support Dad Mohammad even though they believed he was implicated in the deaths of US special forces soldiers in Sangin in March 2003.⁹⁷² These issues will be explored in more detail later on.

In summary, I have described the power networks of the big four commanders and the arrival of the US special forces in the province. Their positioning was entirely dictated by the private sphere: none of them behaved like a government, which is how the US treated them. I now cover in detail the manipulation of the US forces by Helmandi power brokers, in an astonishing triumph of the private sphere over a public organisation. This was caused by US ignorance of the private sphere.

4.7 - Mujahidin unity and the loya jirgas

The public titles and positions that were bestowed upon the old mujaheds did not mean anything in a western sense. Rather they were a mechanism of reflecting de facto power that facilitated access to government funding and legitimacy. From the perspective of Kabul, it was better to have the commanders inside the tent than out, but it was more than an

⁹⁶⁵ 025, 027.

⁹⁶⁶ 021, 041.

⁹⁶⁷ 217, 246.

⁹⁶⁸ UNHCR, Sangin (Dec 2002).

⁹⁶⁹ 069.

⁹⁷⁰ 057.

⁹⁷¹ Giustozzi, Koran: 60.

⁹⁷² G1117.

organisational carve-up of Helmand. It represented a geographic one as well, with the client militias of the main players continuing to act out their private alliances and cleavages. This carve-up, and the resulting inter-commander competition it enshrined, reflected the profit from the opium trade. In a study of money movements in 2005, Edwina Thompson found that the centres of (drug) finance in Helmand were Sangin (Dad Mohammad), Lashkar Gah (Abdul Rahman), Gereshk (Mir Wali), Musa Qala (Sher Mohammad) and Baram Cha (on the border with Pakistan and contested).⁹⁷³

This was the provincial backdrop for the emergency Loya Jirga (grand council) held in June 2002 in Kabul and the constitutional Loya Jirga in December 2003. There was some confusion surrounding the emergency Loya Jirga, with no candidates' list drawn up.⁹⁷⁴ Further, the list for the constitutional Loya Jirga was reportedly manipulated by Sher Mohammad to make sure that it contained very few Barakzai, and as many Alizai as possible.⁹⁷⁵ Hamid Karzai was elected President of the Interim Administration once Zahir Shah had anointed him at the emergency Jirga. He was popular, but it was felt that he could have done more to limit the role of the topak salaran (warlords). Whilst this comment was directed at Northern Alliance figures like General Fahim, it should be taken in the context of a province where four warlords were in charge. The Helmandis also felt that they were underrepresented in terms of delegates-per-district compared to areas in the north of the country, particularly Panjshir. The identification of Panjshir—later synonymous with the central government—as a source of contention and unfairness by Helmandis repeatedly surfaced in my interviews.⁹⁷⁶

At the start of the jirgas the Helmandi delegates felt free to talk, but as the process continued they felt less able to talk openly, particularly about national politics, in the presence of the northerners. At one point they stopped Wakil Safar, the Nad-e Ali Kharoti leader, from speaking as they feared for his safety. This underscored the climate of fear that pervades Afghan, and particularly Helmandi, society: the last twenty-three years of fighting, side-switching, betrayal and discordance between the public and private spheres had eroded trust. However, overall, the process was seen as an important first step: the delegates felt important and proud of their democratic role.

⁹⁷³ Edwina Thompson, *Trust is the Coin of the Realm* (Karachi, 2011): 230.

⁹⁷⁴ 'Loya Jirga sees wheeling-dealing and pressure from US', *e-ariana* (14 June 2002).

⁹⁷⁵ 047, 083.

⁹⁷⁶ e.g. 068, 082.

One delegate's comment, however, demonstrated a true understanding of how things were to develop over the next five years: 'the foreigners must like the topak salaran'.⁹⁷⁷ Helmandi fears about the role of the US were exacerbated as the US special forces detachment established itself near Gereshk. Helmandi lexicon underscores the importance of this and different eras have given the Pushtu dialect additions, for example, 'raaket' and 'komandan' were Soviet-era additions. One of the key additions in the 2000s has been 'specialporce', showing their ubiquity. Their public mission was to search for Al Qaeda and Taliban remnants—privately in Helmand, this meant a focus on Baghrani, even though publicly he had reconciled.⁹⁷⁸

4.8 - The specialporce & Guantanamo

The specialporce lost no time. They offered bribes to anyone who was able to bring in former members of the Taliban, or particularly, Al Qaeda. The US troops did not understand how fractured the society was in which they were operating: the cleavages and alliances of the private sphere. They also failed to understand how offering bribes would cause people to denounce anyone they were having a feud with, or even random innocent people, in order to collect the bribe.⁹⁷⁹ That is, that the multiple private cleavages in the society were much more important than the Taliban-government public cleavage. Once arrested, a prisoner would often end up in Guantanamo Bay Prison. For example, very early on in January 2003, Abdul Kadus, a seventeen-year-old orphan from Nad-e Ali, was arrested by Mir Wali's forces in what appears, from the Guantanamo documents, to be a 'sting' in order to gain the bounty offered. In an almost exact copy of the modus operandi, Mohammad Ismail, a sixteen-year-old, was arrested, also in Gereshk.⁹⁸⁰ They share consecutive Guantanamo inmate numbers, although the records are confused about their exact date of arrest.

At the end of January, Abdul Raziq was arrested in Lashkar Gah by the '3rd Commando, Afghan Military Forces'. The evidence for his initial arrest is unknown, but in Guantanamo he was accused of being a member of a forty-man terrorist 'unit' run by Baghrani (largely based on evidence from another detainee—Mohammad Hashim—that was probably extracted under torture).⁹⁸¹ Raziq was to die in Guantanamo nearly five years later of cancer.⁹⁸² This forty-man terrorist 'unit' became a spectre for the specialporce. Allegedly, it had helped Osama Bin Laden escape from Afghanistan and had assassinated the Afghan Vice

⁹⁷⁷ All taken from ACS, Focus Groups, except where shown by interview numbers.

⁹⁷⁸ 105. 'Surrendered Chieftain...', New York Times (2 June 2005).

⁹⁷⁹ 027, 063, 096.

⁹⁸⁰ G929.

⁹⁸¹ G850. For a detailed discussion of torture in Guantanamo see Andy Worthington, The Guantanamo Files (London, 2007).

⁹⁸² G942.

President, Abdul Qader, in July 2002. Its funding came from Al Qaeda.⁹⁸³ Many of the Helmandi detainees were accused of membership of this 'unit' yet, as far as I can tell, its origin lies in the Guantanamo interrogations of the Kandahari Mohammad Hashim.⁹⁸⁴ The only time I have seen mention of this 'unit' is in the Guantanamo files, where it is mentioned repeatedly and it appears to have been driving specialforce operations in early 2003. My interviewees never mentioned it (although I did not ask about it).

The arrests continued. In early February 2003, a Mohammad Nasim was arrested because he had a 'similar name' to Mullah Nasim, a Talib who had fled the North during the ousting of the Taliban.⁹⁸⁵ Soon after, on the 10 February 2003, the specialforce launched a major operation to Lajay village in Baghran in an attempt to arrest Baghrani. They were heavily ambushed. In response, the soldiers rounded up ten locals, some of whom were most likely involved in some way in the incident, but along with several who were not. Most were released during 2005–7.⁹⁸⁶ They failed to catch Baghrani, but this incident was the beginning of a series of attempts until 2005 by US special forces to capture him.⁹⁸⁷

The inter-commander war began to be reflected in the Guantanamo arrests. For example, Haji Bismillah was Sher Mohammad's Head of Transportation in Gereshk. He was responsible for collecting tolls and issuing permits: their families had intermarried and Bismillah's brother, Mohammad Wali, was Sher Mohammad's driver (he is currently one of the MPs for Helmand). It appears that he was arrested on a tip from Haji Kadus in Gereshk, who coveted the revenue-making position for himself. Bismillah was accused of being a member of 'Fedayeen Islam' (this is another 'group' that, used in this context, I have never heard of outside of the Guantanamo files) and working with Sher Mohammad and Baghrani against the United States, as well as being a member of the forty-man 'unit'. Eventually he was released in 2009 after taking Donald Rumsfeld, then US Secretary of Defense, to court.⁹⁸⁸ Mir Wali and Haji Kadus were brilliantly playing the US off against their rivals: the private was driving the public-private interaction.

The commanders had realised that the US forces did not understand Helmandi private sphere at all. They all took advantage by offering false reports to the US forces:⁹⁸⁹ a fatal interaction of US ignorance and Helmandi greed. Then, in March 2003, two US soldiers in

⁹⁸³ G942, G963.

⁹⁸⁴ G850.

⁹⁸⁵ G958.

⁹⁸⁶ G960, G961, G963-7, G969, G971-2.

⁹⁸⁷ 'Surrendered Chieftain...', *New York Times* (2 June 2005).

⁹⁸⁸ G968.

⁹⁸⁹ e.g. 068, 084.

Helmand were killed in Sangin.⁹⁹⁰ The specialforce was convinced that Sher Mohammad was responsible and asked permission from their senior command in Kabul to ‘take him out’, but this permission was denied. Their request had probably been the result of ‘information’ from Shirzai and Mir Wali, who were their main sources of intelligence.⁹⁹¹ Sher Mohammad’s ally Dad Mohammad gave the specialforce a Haji Jalil instead.⁹⁹²

Soon after the US forces realised that they were being played again and began to suspect that Dad Mohammad himself may have had something to do with the attack that led to the loss of their soldiers. Haji Jalil, for his part, always insisted in US interrogation that he was a victim of a feud. Mir Wali further exploited the situation when he offered more men to the US forces.⁹⁹³ This period demonstrates clearly a public-private interaction between a public organisation requiring intelligence and manpower, and private actors manipulating those public organisations to denounce private rivals. I treat the Guantanamo arrests and the manipulation of US special forces as key evidence for my thesis that the private sphere drives the conflict dynamics in Helmand in the presence of a public organisation ignorant of the private sphere. See Appendix 6 for selected Helmandi Guantanamo cases in context.

The US stopped sending people to Guantanamo from Helmand, but it had been a reputational disaster. In the worst case of abuse, an Abdul Wahid had been beaten to death in Camp Price (probably) by the Helmandi militias working with them.⁹⁹⁴ It directly countered the US public narrative of rebuilding Afghanistan. The hunting of people by the US special forces in some ways resembled the reign of terror instigated by the Khalqis in 1978, albeit smaller in scale.⁹⁹⁵ They compounded their earlier mistake by accepting Mir Wali’s offer of ‘loaned’ men, even though they were no longer abducting people for Guantanamo.

The militias were led (mainly) by commanders chosen by Mir Wali from the 93rd Division,⁹⁹⁶ although Dad Mohammad also supplied some commanders (which is astonishing when you consider the US realisations surrounding Haji Jalil, and demonstrates the incoherence surrounding the US deployment and mission). Commanders affiliated with the specialforce included Jan Mohammad (Barakzai), Daud (Kadus’ and Idris’ brother), Ghulam Rasoul (a

⁹⁹⁰ PersExp, Memorial SF Compound, Price, 2012.

⁹⁹¹ Chayes, Punishment: 272-4.

⁹⁹² G1117.

⁹⁹³ MMW.

⁹⁹⁴ Worthington, Guantanamo: 245. ‘US Detainees “murdered” during Interrogations’, Associated Press (25 Oct 2005). See also Appendix 6.

⁹⁹⁵ 068.

⁹⁹⁶ 061.

brother of MMW), Abdul Sattar and Raziq, two ex-Hizb commanders, and Karim Khan, one of Dad Mohammad's cousins.⁹⁹⁷

The specialforce's first step was to set up a firebase in Sangin, in the compound of a Haji Fatah Mohammad, a Chowkazai Ishaqzai smuggler, and permanently install militia there.⁹⁹⁸ Later, they took over responsibility for security in Gereshk—this led to the death of Idris at the hands of (the Chief of Police) Badr's men in a gun fight. Idris' death occurred as he tried to take control of Gereshk's bazaar: in effect, a US-backed militia attacking the police.⁹⁹⁹ Badr, linked to Ahmad Wali Karzai, was making so much money from smuggling drugs at that point that, no doubt, he was concerned about the effect on his transport network and had fought to keep Idris out of the bazaar.¹⁰⁰⁰ Mullah Daud, Idris' brother, took over as the US's 'man'.¹⁰⁰¹

4.9 - The Ishaqzai

The commandeering of Haji Fatah Mohammad's (Ishaqzai/Chowkazai) compound in Sangin marked a watershed in relations with the Ishaqzai, and patterns from the jihad-era began to re-emerge. Although the Ishaqzai Mistereekheli clan (Abdul Khaleq's old clan) were firmly within Mir Wali's patronage network, the more northerly clan, the Chowkazai (Atta Mohammad's clan) were not. Both clans were significantly involved in drugs: the Mistereekheli through Mamouk (a son of Abdul Khaleq)¹⁰⁰² and Haji Aka,¹⁰⁰³ and the Chowkazai through Fatah Mohammad.¹⁰⁰⁴ The fact that the Chowkazai did not have protection through any of the main four patronage networks, combined with their drugs wealth, made them an obvious choice for predation. The obvious excuse was the public narrative: that the clan harboured members of the Taliban government (which is true: Osmani, from Jushalay, and previously the head of the Kandahar Corps during the Taliban government,¹⁰⁰⁵ came from the Chowkazai).

It appears that the US forces unknowingly went along with this as they were being manipulated by Dad Mohammad's greed. Of course, when the Chowkazai clan rekindled their links to the regrowing Taliban movement in 2005, it would become pertinent to ask whether the aggressive stance of the specialforce and their Helmandi allies had pushed

⁹⁹⁷ 029, 057.

⁹⁹⁸ 047, 073.

⁹⁹⁹ 019, 079. 'Fierce Fighting and a Kidnapping in Afghanistan', [New York Times](#) (2 Nov 2003).

¹⁰⁰⁰ 001, 026.

¹⁰⁰¹ MMW.

¹⁰⁰² 062.

¹⁰⁰³ 070.

¹⁰⁰⁴ 069.

¹⁰⁰⁵ 034.

them to seek protection from the Taliban, or whether they had been ‘Taliban’ all along and the US had been correct in pursuing them. That is, did the private sphere or the public sphere drive the conflict? I think the fact that they were trying to protect their drugs wealth indicates the former. After all, many former ‘Taliban’ were working also with the ‘government’, and particularly with Sher Mohammad.¹⁰⁰⁶

Fatah Mohammad, the Sanginite drug dealer, retreated to Quetta once evicted from his compound and began to divert his not inconsiderable resources into the scattered Taliban movement. He was eventually to sponsor, and pay for the running costs of, the Gailani Hospital in Quetta, which is well known for treating ‘Taliban’ fighters injured in Helmand. This dynamic demonstrates the complicated nature of the relationship between drugs, the ‘Taliban’, the Taliban and the ISI. ISI officers regularly come backwards and forwards to the hospital, making sure it is ‘protected’, as well as paying a fee for each patient that is treated.

It also allows Fatah Mohammad, a drug smuggler, to play a ‘community’ role, thus helping his image with the populace, even though he is doing it to interact with the Taliban and support the ‘Taliban’ (who are his clan and aid his opium business) over the Afghan government/‘government’ and the West (who would predate on him).¹⁰⁰⁷ Of course, the private Alikozai-Ishaqzai group cleavage had its recent roots in the twenty-year cleavage over Sangin bazaar between the private actors Dad Mohammad and Atta Mohammad. The government-Taliban dynamic was merely a fresh public cleavage overlaying an old private dispute.

For most of 2003 the specialforce’s focus (in addition to Baghran) was Sangin, and they were based there for six months.¹⁰⁰⁸ Their enemies were almost all Ishaqzai—they spent months trying to capture Haji Naser and Haji Bashir (reportedly two Ishaqzai ‘Taliban’ commanders). They also spent time in Qala-e Gaz and Shurakay (both Ishaqzai areas), Mirmandaw (mixed Barakzai and Khugyani) and Hyderabad (Achakzai).¹⁰⁰⁹

Eventually, they began to work in Musa Qala, with Sher Mohammad’s people, and to his intelligence.¹⁰¹⁰ This cooperation was driven by US money—but the situation was confused. Haji Bismillah¹⁰¹¹ was still in Guantanamo being accused of working with Sher Mohammad against the US, yet the US specialforce that had arrested him (or probably the next

¹⁰⁰⁶ 000, 218, 219, 221, G942.

¹⁰⁰⁷ 047, 069, 073.

¹⁰⁰⁸ 073.

¹⁰⁰⁹ 062.

¹⁰¹⁰ 057, 062.

¹⁰¹¹ G968; eventually released in 2009.

roulement) was working with Sher Mohammad. It appears that there was just as little communication between US roulements as there was between troops on-the-ground and the Guantanamo interrogators. Sher Mohammad, of course, would have been aware of this, but manipulated the specialforce's ignorance to gain bounty money and pursue his own private enemies in Musa Qala. This behaviour was to be a significant driver of recruitment to the shattered Taliban movement.¹⁰¹² Tor Jan (Alizai/Pirzai), for example, a tailor, was beaten up by Sher Mohammad's men pushing him to seek support from the Taliban.¹⁰¹³

4.10 - Bounties & manipulation

Whilst these specialforce deployments continued, the members of the 93rd Division continued to collect bounties: up to \$2000 per ex-Taliban commander captured.¹⁰¹⁴ In Malgir, this led to arrests of people such as Khudaidad (Noorzai), Atta Mohammad (Barakzai), Shahzada (Baluch) and Mullah Janan (Barakzai)—all ex-Taliban commanders who had returned home after 2001 and were living under President Karzai's 2003 amnesty for Taliban foot soldiers.¹⁰¹⁵ It even caused competition between different elements of the 'security forces'. In one instance, Mir Wali's men were trying to apprehend a Mullah Saddiq (Ishaqzai, from Marjeh). A car chase ensued across Nad-e Ali, considered Abdul Rahman's territory. Unfortunately, Mir Wali's men crashed their car into a canal near Zaburabad. Abdul Rahman's 'police' arrived and arrested Mir Wali's men. This was a major problem: arresting Talibs was 'police business', they said. Mir Wali had to apologise to Abdul Rahman to get his men back.¹⁰¹⁶

The US-led militias acted almost entirely on intelligence that was generated from the people they worked with: Mir Wali and Dad Mohammad.¹⁰¹⁷ I explored the issue of faulty intelligence driven by feuds and vendettas repeatedly in 2011/2. The attitude of those involved is perhaps best summed up by one of the more prominent militia commanders, still working with the US special forces in 2012, when I asked him if there were still any feuds left over by the false targeting of the early days. 'All those sorts of problems are solved now', he said, laughing, 'they [the people we targeted] are all dead'. He then thought about this for a bit and clarified: 'maybe about ten per cent of those problems remain' he shrugged.¹⁰¹⁸ In general, my interviews with these Helmandi militia commanders (some had been working

¹⁰¹² 215, 217, 246.

¹⁰¹³ Semple, Reconciliation: 85.

¹⁰¹⁴ 068.

¹⁰¹⁵ 069.

¹⁰¹⁶ 068.

¹⁰¹⁷ 073.

¹⁰¹⁸ 062.

with the US for ten years by the time I interviewed them)¹⁰¹⁹ showed arrogant young Afghans who knew that they had US support in their activities'. Even Mir Wali, the arch denouncer, said he could not work out why the US was 'so stupid'.

It is not fair to say that all the work of the specialforce was bad, and it appears that the specialforce made efforts at traditional 'hearts and minds' activities which were commensurate with their public narrative. They set up regular temporary clinics and schools for locals.¹⁰²⁰ But these were still fraught with issues of cross-cultural communication, and often, 'the locals stole the money, the clinic wasn't built...they didn't want it anyway'.¹⁰²¹ The specialforce also made an effort to compensate the relatives of those that they had accidentally killed during military operations.¹⁰²² But the key issues remained: bounties, false intelligence, militias and denunciations. This combined fatally with US ignorance. As my oldest interviewee stated, 'people like money...money for information...doesn't work in Afghanistan. Afghans are happy to sell their own country. Everyone thinks: *what can I get out of this?* These are the foundations of the last thirty years'.¹⁰²³ Exploring this, I had a long conversation with a Helmandi militia commander¹⁰²⁴ where we discussed the US-led militias and whether they might have made the situation worse in Nahr-e Saraj.

'The Taliban are the enemy', he stated, 'but they are local people, it is house on house fighting; the source of this war is the thirty years of fighting that has created badai on badai [revenge on revenge]'. He had described the fighting as utterly local, yet we had previously discussed the Taliban as being a Pakistani construct, so I asked him to explain whether his enemy were locals or Pakistani-led Taliban, or both at the same time. That is, did they act according to the public sphere or the private sphere? Although illiterate, his answer described a public-private interaction perfectly. 'Both' he said, describing a view where they were completely synonymous, but worse, if they were his enemies and he worked for the government, then they are Taliban, and, *at the same time*, if they were Taliban, they are his enemies. This was a perfect logic circle: by his definition they were the same thing.

I then broadened the discussion to include the role of the US, that is, a public organisation on the other 'side' of the conflict. He did not accept that they (the Helmandi commanders of the militias) were using the US, *except to defend their houses* from the 'Taliban', which he saw as perfectly legitimate. He said that the US had helped them during the jihad and it was

¹⁰¹⁹ e.g. 062, 073, 079.

¹⁰²⁰ 057.

¹⁰²¹ 063.

¹⁰²² 057.

¹⁰²³ 063.

¹⁰²⁴ 079.

helping them again, conflating *his* private war with *the* public war. I then discussed a specific case and asked about Khudaidad, a Noorzai commander who had been arrested and put in Bagram prison by the US-backed militias in 2004/5. He was from a village called Noorzo Kalay just to the south-west of Gereshk. After spending around three or four years in Bagram he was released and returned to his community.¹⁰²⁵ Moving forward to the present day, and the 2012 special force deployment to the area, most of the problems with the 'Taliban insurgency' seemed to stem from or pass through that village.¹⁰²⁶ Once I mentioned Khudaidad's name to the commander, he looked at the floor and tried to change the subject.

He understood that I was asserting that they had manipulated the US because of a private feud. It is only because of detailed knowledge, that outside players do not normally have, that I was able to challenge him on it. Later, when I discussed Khudaidad and Noorzo Kalay with the US detachment in 2012, they were not aware of the issue. Speaking with elements of both the public and private spheres in this dispute showed clearly to me the manipulation of a public organisation by the private sphere, caused by the ignorance of the public organisation. I treat this case as an important example that offers strong support for my thesis.

Thus far, I have presented a detailed account of how Helmandi power brokers manipulated US special forces. I will now discuss the story of how the big four commanders, all part of the 'government', used their positions to fight each other for resources, as well as preying on the population. The private sphere dictated events; the public sphere was used to excuse them.

4.11 - Inter-commander conflict

It is not always thus. I think in the same way that the interventions of the British in the 1800s united the disparate tribes in Helmand, so too the post-2006 ISAF interventions have similarly pushed Abdul Rahman and Sher Mohammad together. But as we can see below, they were certainly not working together in the early 2000s. A Noorzai man I interviewed pointed out that once the British had arrived, Sher Mohammad began to use Abdul Rahman as a proxy to undermine the British and the Provincial Governors they supported.¹⁰²⁷ By the time that I interviewed them both in 2012, both made a big effort to impress upon me the strength of their alliance.

¹⁰²⁵ 026, 030.

¹⁰²⁶ PersExp liaising with US detachment in 2011/2.

¹⁰²⁷ 029.

I treat this partly as a tribal issue: Sher Mohammad and Mir Wali are the most prominent figures in the two largest tribes in Helmand, the Alizai and the Barakzai (which is the largest depends upon who you ask), and they use tribal networks for recruitment and legitimacy (they also act like tribal leaders by, for example, solving disputes).¹⁰²⁸ Abdul Rahman is the most prominent individual in the third largest tribe, the Noorzai. Thus, he holds the balance of power, and his allegiance dictates the overall power dynamics. Links to Karzai are key: Hafizullah Khan, the old Hizb amir, described Sher Mohammad as President Karzai's *boypriend* (he even used the English word, giggling as he said it), suggesting that he knew someone who had seen Sher Mohammad 'in' Karzai's room when they were living in Quetta in the late 1990s.

The tension between the commanders began well before 2001 and revisited itself upon Helmand immediately that they returned. Abdul Rahman was slightly incredulous when he described Sher Mohammad turning up in Lashkar Gah in December 2001 with a number of (ex-) 'Taliban' in tow. During 2002, this developed into a full-blown power struggle for control of Lashkar Gah, Nad-e Ali and drug routes. Nad-e Ali was eventually ceded to Abdul Rahman's control,¹⁰²⁹ but not before their competition almost developed into outright war. In October 2005, Rahmatullah, one of Sher Mohammad's militia commanders, was transporting a convoy of drugs across the desert to Baram Cha on the Pakistani border. Amanullah (Noorzai), one of Abdul Rahman's commanders and the 'policeman' in charge of the security of Lashkar Gah, intercepted the convoy and a gun battle ensued, during which he was killed.

When news of this event reached Lashkar Gah the militias of Sher Mohammad and Abdul Rahman began to clash and there were sporadic outbreaks of gunfire in the city. This caused the deaths of twenty-two of Abdul Rahman's men and an unknown number of Sher Mohammad's. Noorzai elders went to Sher Mohammad and complained that his commander had murdered Amanullah, and the incident began to take on wider implications. Abdul Rahman's tribal elder, Abdullah Jan, had led the Now Zadi Noorzai under the Hizb banner during the jihad (see section 2.7) and the shadow of the thirteen year 'Hizb'-'Harakat' confrontation (1980–93) began to loom.

President Karzai, worried, summoned Sher Mohammad and Abdul Rahman to Kabul and warned them that the posturing had to cease. From then on, relations between the two of them began to improve. Karzai may have brokered an alliance between them to the

¹⁰²⁸ PersExp, Kabul, 2012.

¹⁰²⁹ 015, 084.

exclusion of Mir Wali, who has been shut out of Presidential-level politics since.¹⁰³⁰ Most pertinent to this thesis are the public, media-issued narratives surrounding the original interception. In these, the 'police convoy' was ambushed by 'suspected Taliban', rather than the private narratives of the Governor's drug convoy being intercepted by the 'police', which was what actually drove the clash.¹⁰³¹

Mir Wali and Sher Mohammad had problems from the start, reflecting age old antipathies between the Barakzai and the Alizai and between 'Hizb' and 'Harakat'.¹⁰³² In addition to the manipulation of the US special forces, both Mir Wali and Sher Mohammad raided each other's client militias and opium stocks,¹⁰³³ whilst making sure to paint their actions within the public sphere provided by the international community, thus, attacks and violence would be perpetrated against the 'Taliban',¹⁰³⁴ whereas stealing each other's opium stocks would be phrased as 'drugs raids against smugglers'.¹⁰³⁵ When, finally, in June 2005, Sher Mohammad's office was raided by US-backed independent narcotics officers from the central government, nine tonnes of opium were found.¹⁰³⁶ Amusingly, this had been previously stolen from Mir Wali.¹⁰³⁷

Outright warfare, à la 1990s, was not possible due to the presence of the US, and so a pseudo-war ensued, that took advantage of the complex nature of the private sphere to mask the true meaning of events from (particularly international) public organisations. For example, there was competition between Abdul Rahman and Mir Wali for who provided lucrative 'security' on the national ring road. The original agreement was that Abdul Rahman's men would control the road from Gereshk going west and Mir Wali's would control from Gereshk going east. This fluctuated, with groups of 'Taliban' attacking the other person's checkpoints.¹⁰³⁸ In this proxy war, Khan Mohammad, the Chief of Police in Gereshk (2002/3) and an ex-Harakat commander, often acted for Sher Mohammad in Gereshk. This caused almost continual problems including open gun battles in the bazaar. Khan Mohammad was kept in his position by his patron, Sher Mohammad.¹⁰³⁹

¹⁰³⁰ MMW.

¹⁰³¹ 029, SMA, ARJ. 'Provincial security chief among 20 killed in Helmand clash', Pajhwok (11 Oct 2005).

¹⁰³² 006, MMW.

¹⁰³³ 013.

¹⁰³⁴ 'Dozens of insurgents killed, 60 rounded up in Helmand' Pajhwok (11 Sep 2005).

¹⁰³⁵ 'One cop killed, three wounded in clash with smugglers', Pajhwok (19 Sep 2005).

¹⁰³⁶ Jones, *The Rise of Afghanistan's Insurgency: State Failure and Jihad*: 14.

¹⁰³⁷ 001, 013.

¹⁰³⁸ 024, MMW, ARJ.

¹⁰³⁹ 012, 019, 075.

The war between the commanders was largely about drugs. Uncertain of the future, people had immediately planted in the interim between the Taliban and the Karzai government. As a result, in 2002 Nad-e Ali alone produced eight percent of the country's opium.¹⁰⁴⁰ As the lead nation for counter-narcotics, the British sent a team in the spring of 2002 to coordinate and finance an eradication effort. At Sher Mohammad's request, they did not leave the Bost Hotel (thus exacerbating their ignorance), and without verification, the process was horribly manipulated. Compensation was available, but directed to Sher Mohammad's allies. Other farmers, upon hearing of the compensation, assumed they were going to have their crops eradicated and stopped irrigating their fields, intending to rely on the compensation money. It never came and their crops died, leaving them destitute. In April, there were massive demonstrations in Lashkar Gah¹⁰⁴¹ as Sher Mohammad had used eradication to target his rivals' fields and compensate his friends.¹⁰⁴²

In a sense, the Karzai national government, and thus the international community, had little choice but to support the warlord polity: they were the de facto power holders. However, the interaction of unscrupulous Helmandi warlords and ignorant international support was very damaging to the concept of 'government' in Helmand. From the point of view of many of the disenfranchised in Helmand, it also reinforced a historical narrative that the Kabul government was distant, didn't understand them, and was not to be trusted.

4.12 - The Kharoti in Nad-e Ali

The commanders did not just attack each other; they also attacked many communities and people who were not within the patronage networks of the big four. This was in addition to the bounty-hunting dynamic set up by the special force: the 'government' became predatory and manipulated the government-Taliban public cleavage as an excuse. The commanders targeted individuals who were deemed to be easy prey and as the four commanders' militias grew in confidence entire communities began to be terrorised: this was most pertinent in Nad-e Ali, Sangin and Musa Qala. In Nad-e Ali, these dynamics started with a private cleavage between Kharoti ex-'Talib' Murtaza and Noorzai 'policeman' Haji Manan. This resulted in rupture between the Noorzai and Kharoti communities (or parts thereof) in Nad-e Ali. Publicly, this looked like the government-Taliban cleavage, however a personal feud interacted with external, public support for the protagonists.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Richard Scott, "Opium Poppy Cultivation in Central Helmand, Afghanistan: A Case Study in Bad Program Management" (paper presented at the 67th Annual Meeting of The Society for Applied Anthropology, Tampa, 2007), 10-11.

¹⁰⁴¹ Richard Scott, Cotton & Alternative Crops Pilot Project, 7 Apr - 20 May 02 (Lashkar Gah, 2002): 1, 5 & 18.

¹⁰⁴² Rashid, Descent: 326; Jonathan Goodhand and David Mansfield, "Durgs and (Dis)order: A Study of the Opium Trade, Political Settlements and State-Making in Afghanistan" Crisis States Research Centre Working Papers Series 2, no. 83 (2010): 20.

Murtaza was a government-era Talib who had been arrested in Kunduz during the overthrow of the Taliban government and had spent some time in Guantanamo, before being transferred to Afghan authority in March 2003.¹⁰⁴³ He was released shortly afterwards and returned home. Haji Manan was the nephew of Haji Lal Jan who had settled in Noorzai Kalay (see map 8) during the jihad and was acting as a commander in the nascent police in Nad-e Ali (in reality a non-uniform wearing militia). Studying the public and private spheres surrounding the relationship between Manan and Murtaza helps us to explore multiple public-private interactions.

The Kharoti narrative is strong. 'Every Kharoti who is a Talib is a Talib because of police brutality'.¹⁰⁴⁴ In my experience, this view is held throughout the community. Once Murtaza had been released from Guantanamo and returned to Shin Kalay, he began to be harassed by Haji Manan and his men. The fact that he had been in Guantanamo was used as justification for their harassment, although because he was a releasee he was apparently not subject to a bounty. This harassment became serious during Haji Twoyeb's (Noorzai) tenure as Nad-e Ali Chief of Police (mid-2004 to end of 2005) where the police became progressively Noorzai-dominated.¹⁰⁴⁵ Haji Manan used to raid Murtaza's opium stocks and bully his family, claiming all the while that he was a 'Talib' and against the 'police': this, at the time that Haji Manan ran a heroin factory in Zorabad.¹⁰⁴⁶ Manan finally arrested Murtaza, stole all of his opium, and he spent a year in Pul-e Charki prison in Kabul. He was released at some point in early 2006 and went home. Shortly after, Manan raided his house and in the ensuing fight killed two of Murtaza's brothers, Abdullah and Nek Mohammad.¹⁰⁴⁷ His nephew, Shaedzada, was arrested, but released after five months.¹⁰⁴⁸

Murtaza disappeared to Washir and began working to get other Kharoti to resist the government.¹⁰⁴⁹ As an Afghan politician said to me, 'Murtaza was a good guy; he was forced to join the Taliban'.¹⁰⁵⁰ One of those that Murtaza managed to recruit was Ibrahim, known by the nom de guerre Shakir. Shakir was twenty-two, then. He was known in his village for being a rabab player (a type of guitar).¹⁰⁵¹ Afghan intelligence painted him as a minor thief, who used to steal copper electrical wires.¹⁰⁵² In 2005 or so, Manan raided his family home

¹⁰⁴³ G363.

¹⁰⁴⁴ 007.

¹⁰⁴⁵ 065.

¹⁰⁴⁶ 017.

¹⁰⁴⁷ 007, 065.

¹⁰⁴⁸ 015.

¹⁰⁴⁹ 038, 098.

¹⁰⁵⁰ Redacted.

¹⁰⁵¹ 065.

¹⁰⁵² 038.

and stole their stocks of opium. Previously, Shakir had been arrested and beaten, before being locked in a tandoor [bread oven] for three days—all for being a ‘Talib’. This time, he arrested his older brother, Ismail, who was twenty-seven, and accused him of stealing. Ismail is still in jail in 2012.¹⁰⁵³ Once Ismail was arrested, Ibrahim had no choice: he was ‘majboor’, or forced, to fight the government as he had been dishonoured. He contacted Murtaza.¹⁰⁵⁴ Ibrahim’s father, Spin, despaired with the situation and moved the remainder of the family to Quetta for safety.¹⁰⁵⁵

The Noorzai perspective is very different. In my frequent interactions with Haji Manan in 2008/9, he described Shakir and Murtaza as Talibs (of course, as a British officer, I was also eliciting that public narrative from him). Upon reflection, his insinuations were similar to the narrative of the Helmandi militia commander discussed above. Abdul Rahman, the Provincial Chief of Police at the time, and Manan’s boss and relative-by-marriage, explained it to me thus: ‘their differences were about the fact that [Murtaza] was a friend of the Taliban and Manan was a friend of the government’. This is, of course, completely true, but rather paints the issue inside-out. According to Abdul Rahman, Murtaza had said to Manan, ‘you have brought foreigners, kaffirs; we are obliged to do jihad’. This was a perfect echo of the Taliban public narrative. Murtaza, he said, had tried to kill Manan, and even managed to kill one of his brothers with a road-side bomb.

When I first met District Governor Habibullah (Noorzai) in Nad-e Ali in 2008, he pointed at Shin Kalay and said they ‘are all Taliban’. Even though Habibullah was using the same public narrative as Manan, he was thinking of a quite different private cleavage: that of defending the hukumat from Shin Kalay-based mujahidin in 1991 (see section 3.2). In a further twist, Manan had been in a separate mujahidin group in 1990/1 (when Habibullah was in the government), yet in 2008 was allied with Habibullah ‘against’ Shin Kalay. I demurred, questioning the Governor, ‘[Shin Kalay are] all Taliban?’ ‘All of them’ he repeated.

Trying to understand the dynamics later, I came to understand that this series of events had almost become buried, particularly for the Kharoti leadership. A Senior Kharoti leader told me that the ‘Noorzai’-‘Kharoti’ problems (as he defined them, at that point Nad-e Ali was a ‘Taliban’-‘government’ battleground) had started because of Abdul Rahman and Tor Jan, his District Chief of Police in 2007/8 (also a relative-by-marriage).¹⁰⁵⁶ Another Kharoti leader

¹⁰⁵³ 038, 065.

¹⁰⁵⁴ 007, 065.

¹⁰⁵⁵ 050.

¹⁰⁵⁶ 023.

pointed out that it was during Tor Jan's time that the police picked up their reputation for brutality and it was this that drove the rejection of the government.¹⁰⁵⁷

Over the years, I came to know several Kharoti leaders well. In particular one, with whom I had dealt extensively in 2009, I knew well enough to have a frank conversation. We sat discussing Shakir over chai and dried Kandahari mulberries. By this point, Shakir had been killed by British forces, and he was a bit of an icon to the Kharoti community in Shin Kalay. The car in which he had died had been dragged to the desert outside Shin Kalay and had become a shrine. Before he died, he had operated against the British and Afghan government forces, at the same time as the Kharoti leadership was talking with British forces, claiming that he was a wayward child that they could not control. But he was very much supported by the tribal leadership in Shin Kalay: in one incident the British fed this Kharoti leader information in a way in which it could be judged whether it reached Shakir. It took about ninety seconds. The Kharoti leadership was playing the same game that it had played during the jihad: interacting with opposed public organisations for the safety and security of their private group.

Looking back with the elder to the time when the Kharoti and the Noorzai community narratives had begun to diverge, I described to him the efforts the British had made to try and kill or capture Shakir, and vice versa. He, by that point, had realised that the British knew that he had been closely communicating with Shakir and he grimaced, wondering whether I was blaming him for any harm that might have been visited upon British troops. I was not; I said I was trying to understand why Shakir was fighting. Without mentioning Shakir's suffering at the hands of Manan, he began to discuss the district-level power balance: the Noorzai controlled the police; they used to be much less populous in the district, and now, after their illegal immigration and land theft, they claimed to be the largest community, and so forth. For him, it was a community-level war, but then, he was a tribal leader.¹⁰⁵⁸

What is yet more interesting is that more neutral individuals agree that it was not a community war as such, but that there was just polarisation between the communities. A non-Kharoti Hizb commander, who had worked with the Kharoti during the jihad, said that Haji Manan 'would sell his brother for a lak [100,000 Afghanis; approximately US\$2000 in 2012]'. He didn't know who had killed Murtaza's brothers, but it wasn't Manan. 'They just

¹⁰⁵⁷ Redacted.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Redacted.

blame it on [Manan and Tor Jan]; that is their story', he said.¹⁰⁵⁹ A former Talib was even more dismissive: 'that was just a feud. Look. If I shoot you, then you have to shoot me, right?' Who shot first, I asked. 'I dunno' came the reply.¹⁰⁶⁰

Exploring this issue in detail shows that there are multiple elements that exist at different levels in different spheres. These include individual actors (Shakir, Manan, Habibullah, the tribal leader, a British officer), communities (Noorzai, Kharoti), ideological organisations (government, Taliban, ISAF, mujahidin) and so on. There also exist multiple interactions between these elements using different public narratives to their own private advantage. This complexity is why public organisations often revert to simplistic public cleavages to explain the stochastic private sphere. It is hard, in this example, to identify any public organisations' ignorance of the private sphere, until the British arrived, who saw this conflict in government-Taliban terms. That moment, and the increase in conflict that it heralded, is described in the next chapter.

Unfortunately, this was only one example among a plethora where government officials—charwakian—abused their public positions in the government, pushing the population away. The classic case of this in Helmand is that of the Ishaqzai in Sangin, although the Kakars in Garmsir also provide a powerful example.¹⁰⁶¹ Sher Mohammad, moreover, is accused of massive land thefts in Musa Qala¹⁰⁶² just as Abdul Rahman was in Marjeh.¹⁰⁶³ Attempts by tribal jirgas to mediate between the commanders and the population would often end in an agreement for compensation to be paid by, for example, Sher Mohammad. The judgement would then be ignored.¹⁰⁶⁴

So far, I have covered the fall of the Taliban government, the re-emergence of the ex-mujahidin commanders, the role and manipulation of the US special forces and the inter-commander war that continued in the early 2000s. The complexity of public-private interactions in Helmand was explored using specialforce militias and the Kharoti as models. I now turn to how development funding was hijacked and look at a detailed example of the dynamics in Gereshk.

¹⁰⁵⁹ 017.

¹⁰⁶⁰ 066.

¹⁰⁶¹ Coghlan, "[Oral History](#)": 120.

¹⁰⁶² 087, 215, 217, 230.

¹⁰⁶³ Gopal, "[The Battle for Marjah](#)".

¹⁰⁶⁴ Patrick Bishop, [3 PARA](#) (London, 2007): 153.

4.13 - Hijacked development

In addition to completely manipulating the special force to target their enemies, and manipulating eradication for the same reason, the Helmandi commanders also entirely hijacked development funding.¹⁰⁶⁵ The common thread was lack of *on-the-ground* understanding by public organisations. Apart from admirable efforts by the UNDP and Japan to sink wells and build schools irrespective of communities' political orientation,¹⁰⁶⁶ aid would generally be diverted to allied communities and withheld from non-allied (or 'Taliban') communities.¹⁰⁶⁷ The US Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT)¹⁰⁶⁸ was physically protected by Abdul Rahman's men, so it became impossible for non-allied communities to access the US decision makers or resources.¹⁰⁶⁹ More generally, the fact that the internationals worked through the provincial authorities, in the public sphere, meant that they were blinded to the private sphere.

The foreigners initiating development projects completely underestimated the level of complexity inherent in Helmandi society and that disparities in wealth, or the misapplication of development projects to favour one group over another, would create massive jealousy.¹⁰⁷⁰ As one gentleman said to me, 'jealousy is the biggest enemy of all [in Helmand]'.¹⁰⁷¹ From the point of view of the average Helmandi, they could not even conceive that the US was unable to understand the private political dynamics so obviously fundamental to Helmandi society: 'the foreigners must have an ulterior motive for being here'.¹⁰⁷²

In one of the worst cases of this, a small USAID-sponsored contractor team began to offer province-wide cash for works in 2004–5 to provide a financial buffer for upcoming opium eradication. The metric of success was how many man-labour days they could pay through the scheme, which they ran through the provincial governorship. This resulted in, for example, Alikozai militias protecting (Alikozai) farmers in Sangin, whilst Ishaqzai communities had their crops eradicated. There was no accounting for the private sphere or attempts to balance across private cleavages. Examples of this scheme's naivety abound and include: paying money for ditch clearance schemes that they could not observe or verify, stumbling into the old Barakzai-Alizai dispute and a massive over-focus on Nad-e Ali and

¹⁰⁶⁵ Gordon, *Aid and Stabilisation*:51-3.

¹⁰⁶⁶ PersExp, Helmand, 2008-10.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Rashid, *Descent*: 323.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Established in 2004, initially manned (150-300 men) by the Iowa National Guard and then the Texan National Guard (Hafvenstein, *Season*: 94 & 249).

¹⁰⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 207.

¹⁰⁷⁰ 039, 058.

¹⁰⁷¹ 050.

¹⁰⁷² PersExp, Helmand, 2008-12.

Marjeh, because they received much of their local advice from an old USAID engineer from the 1970s who clearly loved those areas of central Helmand.¹⁰⁷³

4.14 - The Gereshk merry-go-round

Studying the politics of Gereshk during 2002–5 offers a perfect microcosm of the provincial-level dynamics of the same period. In Gereshk, the most important position is that of the Chief of Police. As it has been for hundreds of years, he who controls the bridge over the River Helmand, controls Gereshk. As a private actor in Gereshk, ‘Police’ membership was the most useful interaction with the public sphere possible. A diverse array of lower-level commanders all attempted to become Chief of Police in order to facilitate their core business interests, which were almost always drugs: it was not that the Chief of Police was a drug dealer—it was that a drug dealer had become the Chief of Police.¹⁰⁷⁴

Khan Mohammad was the initial Chief after the US intervention.¹⁰⁷⁵ He was to last in post for around two years, until late 2003 when Ahmad Wali Karzai pushed to have Badr Khan (Popalzai, Uruzgan), an acolyte, put in position. This followed the historical pattern set by the Mohammadzai dynasty: the monarch (or president i.e. Hamid) rules Kabul, a brother rules Kandahar (i.e. Ahmad Wali) and a cousin (or acolyte i.e. Badr) is sent to Gereshk. Previously the dynamics had been about defending Kandahar from Herat; now the dynamics were about ensuring safe passage of drugs west to Iran.

Badr had literally to fight his way into position against Khan Mohammad, the old Chief of Police.¹⁰⁷⁶ Badr and Gereshk had a tumultuous year, suffering a mini-insurgency caused by Khan Mohammad. It was during that time that Idris was killed by Badr as Idris tried to take over control of the Bazaar with the help of US special forces (that is, US special forces and Idris’ militia tried to take over security in an area that was controlled by a presidentially appointed policeman). It is hard to see this happening if the US special forces understood what they were doing. Eventually, the situation became unsustainable and Abdul Rahman sent Amanullah, his Lashkar Gah Head of Security, as a stopgap to calm the opposing factions in Gereshk.

Amanullah’s role was only temporary and, Haji Kadus, Idris’ brother, was appointed the Chief of Police. One assumes that the special force, as Haji Kadus’ main patron, was involved in the lobbying for the unusual situation where the Deputy of the Army Division and

¹⁰⁷³ Detailed in Hafvenstein, Opium Season.

¹⁰⁷⁴ 076.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Sequence from 001, 012, 029 unless otherwise referenced.

¹⁰⁷⁶ 018, 036.

the Chief of Police were the same person, and their paymasters were the US special forces! It was a stable arrangement in the sense that Haji Kadus controlled the main sources of violence. The arrangement lasted until late 2004, when the 93rd Division was disbanded (see section 4.15). At about this time, Haji Kadus was sacked as Police Chief and went back to working for the US as a militia commander. He plundered the police armouries as he left.¹⁰⁷⁷

The US, however, retained their influence in the police by using Sergeant Abdul Raziq as a commander of their 'District Response Team', which was a counterterrorism team, and part of the 'police'. Although only a Sergeant (and an ex-Talib), because he had access to the resources of the special force, he became the de facto Chief of Police, even though there was a figurehead Chief in place. Actions like these made Helmandis wonder what the US was up to, because its public rhetoric of state building did not match its private actions.

Later it became clear to the US that Abdul Raziq had been abusing his position in order to smuggle vast quantities of opium and he was dropped. However, it was only in 2009 that he was put in jail through the internationally-mentored 'non-corruptible' narcotics justice chain.¹⁰⁷⁸ Khan Mohammad was arrested too a year before Abdul Raziq, but not before they had fought repeatedly as rival drugs networks, using the public-private interaction of 'police' membership as means of protecting their business interests.¹⁰⁷⁹ Even now that they are in jail, their networks are extant and controlled by relatives: Abdul Khaleq, Abdul Raziq's brother and Agha Mohammad, Khan Mohammad's eldest son, both continue the family businesses.¹⁰⁸⁰

This fantastical narrative provided the backdrop for a number of other stories, all centred on control of (mostly) the drugs trade. The Mayor's and District Governor's positions suffered similar abuse from individuals or networks trying to exploit them for graft. Additionally, the people in those positions had to be careful not to 'rock the boat' otherwise they risked becoming side-lined or worse. Said Dur Ali (Shia, from Abhazan), for instance, was the long-running mayor of Gereshk, not linked to any factions, and played a very careful balancing act. His son was kidnapped by the 'Taliban'. Khan Mohammad stepped in and very kindly offered to 'pay' the ransom for him, thus neutering him.¹⁰⁸¹ The manipulation of the public sphere continued apace.

¹⁰⁷⁷ 029.

¹⁰⁷⁸ 001, 036, 061.

¹⁰⁷⁹ 024, 025.

¹⁰⁸⁰ 027.

¹⁰⁸¹ 024.

As well as militia commanders affiliating with the ‘government security forces’ there were a number of private militias formed by ex-jihadi commanders. Mirza Khan Kakar was one such ex-Hizb commander.¹⁰⁸² He had been a sub-commander for Mir Wali during the jihad and, with Mir Wali’s blessing, settled his mujahidin group and their families in north-west Gereshk, where they appropriated land and established a village, Mirza Khan Kalay. He used to regularly clash with Khan Mohammad’s militia. In the early 2000s he had married into Mir Wali’s family greatly helping his private feud with Khan Mohammad.¹⁰⁸³ He then became the NDS case officer for Gereshk which helped even more.¹⁰⁸⁴ He was eventually arrested for drugs smuggling in 2011.

The final major dynamic in Gereshk was the role of the Highway Police, under a United States Protection and Investigations (USPI: a private security contractor) contract. This contract was paid for by USAID to guard the national ring road that had been built during 2003/4.¹⁰⁸⁵ Prior to September 2004, Mir Wali had been in charge of security on part of the road, but the new contract was nation-wide and Mir Wali had no choice but to vacate the checkpoints to this new force. A man called Masloom (Barakzai, ex-Khalqi, from Babaji) was the first commander, but once the posts were taken over they were immediately attacked by ‘Taliban’ causing the loss of several highway policemen. Masloom immediately accused Hekmatullah, Mir Wali’s son, of being behind the attacks.¹⁰⁸⁶

Others¹⁰⁸⁷ also point to Mir Wali being responsible in this classic manipulation of the public narratives surrounding the conflict. This was a demonstration of the Helmandi sentiment that, *if you are not going to include me in the security answer, I will become part of the security problem*. Mir Wali berated Sher Mohammad and President Karzai for failing to provide security with the USPI contract. When I asked Mir Wali later whose Taliban had attacked the checkpoints he, in a sarcastic tone of voice, said ‘My Taliban; who do you think?’ At some point a man called Ezmarai, who had been a delgai (platoon) commander under the Taliban took over the contract, making him exceptionally rich (even though he had to pay Mir Wali a ‘tax’),¹⁰⁸⁸ money that he later used to become Gereshk Chief of Police in 2010.¹⁰⁸⁹ Utterly unaccountable, the complaints against USPI were legion,¹⁰⁹⁰ including using

¹⁰⁸² 040.

¹⁰⁸³ 024, 040, 057.

¹⁰⁸⁴ 036.

¹⁰⁸⁵ Hafvenstein, Season: 68-70 & 76.

¹⁰⁸⁶ MMW.

¹⁰⁸⁷ 057. Hafvenstein, Season: 165 & 211.

¹⁰⁸⁸ 057.

¹⁰⁸⁹ 036.

¹⁰⁹⁰ e.g. ‘Drivers rail against Herat-Kabul highway officials’, Pajhwok (23 Oct 2005).

their control of routes to affect drug smuggling.¹⁰⁹¹ USPI was eventually closed down in September 2007.¹⁰⁹²

Thus far, I have discussed the ex-mujahidin polity in detail, and particularly its interactions with the US special forces. These are extensive examples of what was happening all over Helmand: the public sphere was being exploited by private actors to help them in their private cleavages. Here, in the final third of the chapter, I discuss in detail the collapse of the 'government' and the re-emergence of the 'Taliban'.

4.15 - The collapse

The combination of the inter-commander violent competition, the skewed counter-narcotics operations, the abuse of the population and the aggravating role played by the special force created a ripe atmosphere. This was exacerbated by the removal the big four commanders (and many other petty ones), under the UN administered Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Process (DDR), and by the resurgence of the Taliban movement, starting in late 2004. These consecutive processes combined and created a shift in public-private interactions. Commanders changed from working under the 'government' patronage network (channelled through the big four commanders) to working under a 'Taliban' patronage network.

Sher Mohammad manipulated the public DDR process:¹⁰⁹³ Mir Wali and the 93rd Division were the first to be disarmed, losing thirty-five pieces of heavy artillery (amongst other heavy weaponry) at the end of 2004.¹⁰⁹⁴ As with elsewhere in the country, however, Mir Wali handed in his oldest weapons and cached the rest, where they allegedly still remain.¹⁰⁹⁵ Similarly, Dad Mohammad only surrendered some machine guns.¹⁰⁹⁶ Khano, by this time a shopkeeper, was disarmed personally by Abdul Rahman in Lashkar Gah in April, in a harsh repudiation of the relationship that had begun thirteen years earlier when Abdul Rahman grew to prominence on the weapons that Khano had given him.¹⁰⁹⁷ This was about power and the fact that Khano was an independent 'commander' in Lashkar Gah that Abdul Rahman could not control.¹⁰⁹⁸ Furthermore, Khano still controlled a faction of the police, his relatives, who had managed to use their militia-era linkages to join in the post-2001 era.

¹⁰⁹¹ Crisis Group Asia, *Afghanistan: Getting Disarmament Back on Track - Briefing N°35* (2005): 7.

¹⁰⁹² 'The Gunmen of Kabul' <http://www.corpwatch.org/article.php?id=14863> (accessed 04 Apr 2011).

¹⁰⁹³ 036. Gordon, *Aid and Stabilisation*:21.

¹⁰⁹⁴ 'Disarmament being completed in Afghan Kandahar Province' Independent Radio Kelid (Kabul) *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts* (22 Oct 2004).

¹⁰⁹⁵ 020.

¹⁰⁹⁶ 'Six jihadi commanders surrender weapons', *Pajhwok* (22 June 2005).

¹⁰⁹⁷ Hafvenstein, *Season*: 243-4.

¹⁰⁹⁸ 060.

However, more important than the DDR process was the removal of the powerbrokers from their jobs. Mir Wali was removed from his position as he was disarmed—as divisional commander the two were, by definition, linked. Sher Mohammad, by contrast, remained in post until December 2005, when he was removed at the insistence of the British government, who were soon to deploy troops to Helmand as part of the NATO expansion into the south of Afghanistan.¹⁰⁹⁹ Karzai then appointed him Senator in Kabul. Abdul Rahman remained in post until the 10 June 2006 and, critically, none of his men were disarmed as they were part of the police.¹¹⁰⁰

Thus, the de facto powerbrokers in the province were replaced in their de jure provincial positions. The larger commanders entered the parliamentary elections. For example, Dad Mohammad and Mir Wali were elected, as was Wali Jan, Abdul Rahman's son. Baghrani ran, but was not elected, and Amir Mohammad Akhundzada, Sher Mohammad's brother, was disqualified because of his 'links' to unofficial armed militias. He then polled the greatest number of provincial votes through tribal support, leading to protests in Lashkar Gah!¹¹⁰¹ Hafizullah ran and would have become an MP, if not for the rules reserving a certain number of seats for women—two female teachers, Nasima Niaze and Naz Parwar, leapfrogged him in the voting results. This was fairly ironic as Hafizullah refuses to deal with western women at the PRT in Lashkar Gah—only men. The voter turnout was 37%, which was significantly lower than the presidential elections the year before.¹¹⁰²

Once the DDR process began, a separate campaign of assassination was launched to remove any vestiges of 'government' from Helmand. This was universally accepted by my interviewees to be directed, if not in many cases actually conducted by, the ISI, Pakistan's intelligence service, however in the media they were discussed as 'Taliban' operations emanating from across the border.¹¹⁰³ Whereas there had been assassination attempts on Sher Mohammad before in 2003¹¹⁰⁴ and 2004,¹¹⁰⁵ in the second half of 2005 a systematic campaign was waged against provincial notables including senior religious figures,¹¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁹⁹ 'Helmand gets new governor, deputy', Pajhwok (12 Dec 2005).

¹¹⁰⁰ ARJ.

¹¹⁰¹ 'Protesters demand seat for disqualified candidate', Pajhwok (30 Oct 2005).

¹¹⁰² Q33. PersExp, Helmand, 2010. Data from <http://afghanistanelectiondata.org/election/2005> (accessed 14 Nov 2012).

¹¹⁰³ e.g. 024, 026, 036, 037.

¹¹⁰⁴ 'Helmand Governor Injured in Assassination Attempt; Taliban Blamed', Mashhad (11 May 2003).

¹¹⁰⁵ 062.

¹¹⁰⁶ 'Religious scholar wounded in Helmand attack', Pajhwok (4 Apr 2005).

election candidates¹¹⁰⁷ and judges,¹¹⁰⁸ set against the on-going murder of policemen. Another attempt was also made on Sher Mohammad's life.¹¹⁰⁹

Subsequent to this, the schools in Helmand were targeted resulting in almost all being destroyed and the remainder closing down.¹¹¹⁰ There were one or two exceptions in Nad-e Ali. The issues of school burning, the 'Taliban' and Pakistani influence exerted on the 'Taliban' are important ones for the Helmandi population. Helmandis accept that most of the 'Taliban' fighters and commanders are Helmandi, and most would not burn schools in their own communities. They point to a more extreme branch within the Taliban that is either entirely Punjabi (Helmandis call all Pakistanis Punjabis), or closely mentored by the 'Punjabis' (the ISI).¹¹¹¹ This issue will be explored more closely the next section. Finally, the Taliban distributed 'night letters' to pressurize those that had not been assassinated. One such letter said, 'Anyone who gets money from the government or the US, whether he is clergy, grower, officer etc., the mujahidin of the Islamic state will not spare him and will be punished according to the sharia'.¹¹¹²

By the end of 2005, the province was approaching near anarchy and power began to flow back to the localities. Groups assumed responsibility for their own security, much the same as they had done when the state collapsed in 1978. This was encouraged by the same external influences leading the assassination campaigns, who suggested to groups that had lost out under the departing administration that by opposing the government, they could regain their rights. Essentially, the Taliban public narrative encapsulated well the multiplicity of private reasons that people had to be annoyed with the 'government'. The ensuing provincial power vacuum meant that by the end of 2005 the government in most Helmandi districts had dissolved.¹¹¹³

4.16 - The 'Taliban' franchise and the mahaz system

The Taliban resurgence in 2004/5 was primarily based on the reactivation of old Taliban networks from the previously ousted government. This was similar to the resurgence of the jihadi commanders in 2001, or even the dynamic of the 'civil war' period from 1989–94. That too was driven by the activation and reactivation of different commanders' networks based upon new or different patronage flows resulting from public-private interactions. 2004/5's

¹¹⁰⁷ 'Seventh aspirant killed as electioneering ends', [Pajhwok](#) (16 Sep 2005).

¹¹⁰⁸ 'Judge gunned down in Helmand', [Pajhwok](#) (20 Dec 2005).

¹¹⁰⁹ 'Helmand governor escapes life attempt', [Pajhwok](#) (11 July 2005).

¹¹¹⁰ 'Attendance in Helmand schools thin after attacks', [Pajhwok](#) (25 Dec 2005); 'Night letters scare Helmand teachers, residents', [Pajhwok](#) (3 Jan 2006).

¹¹¹¹ e.g. 047, 050, 053.

¹¹¹² 'Feature: Where government job is a life risk', [Pajhwok](#) (17 Mar 2006).

¹¹¹³ Giustozzi, [Koran](#): 60-1 & 103.

mobilisation also shared similarities with that of 1978 in that there were private cleavages (then created by the Khalqi predations, later driven by the warlords' predations) that formed interactions with public organisation (i.e. the mujahidin parties or the Taliban) that were able to restate these private cleavages in a public, ideological framework.

This public-private interaction was pursued along many levels. As well as providing a forum for training and organisation in Pakistan the exiled Taliban leadership sent emissaries forward to preach in mosques in Helmand.¹¹¹⁴ Often they would cite the predations of the big four by name.¹¹¹⁵ Once it became clear that Britain would be deploying troops as part of the extended ISAF mission, the Taliban activities reached fever pitch, and even Iran used its old links to invigorate resistance against the British: Sardar Baghwani was seen again in northern Helmand exhorting young men to rise up.¹¹¹⁶

Initially, the dispossessed ex-government Taliban formed links through their own personal networks to funding streams in Pakistan controlled by mahaz commanders (see below).¹¹¹⁷ This was very much like how the rebels in 1978/9 used personal links to contact the mujahidin parties.¹¹¹⁸ The main difference was that publicly the Taliban was a single organisation, although with a degree of acephaly. Taking the evidence here into account, it could be mistaken for several different jihadi parties held together in a loose alliance: exactly what the jihad was. Only later did the Taliban attempt to reassert control and encourage cohesiveness.

The main difference, discussed below, between the 1978 government collapse and the 2005 government collapse is that many of the 2005 pre-collapse 'government' players changed their public-private interactions (or switched sides), such that the post-collapse 'Taliban' contained people who had previously been antagonistic and even fighting each other. This did not occur in 1978. The 2004/5 divested 'government' commanders had taken the position that if they were not included in the security solution they would be part of the security problem. Security was a zero-sum game and commanders could not opt out of a position in the new patronage landscape. They had to have at least one interaction with a strong public organisation: they could not survive as a lone private actor. Either they were being patronised, and hence protected, or they were not, and they would be fair game for those with resources and protection. Confusingly for the British when they arrived in 2006, Mir Wali

¹¹¹⁴ 007, 074.

¹¹¹⁵ e.g. 204, 211, 213, 237.

¹¹¹⁶ 006, 104. Coghlan, "Oral History": 143.

¹¹¹⁷ 047.

¹¹¹⁸ e.g. 247 who contacted his father's friend and was introduced to Mansour.

and Sher Mohammad, the two greatest side-switchers to the 'Taliban', retained positions in the government as an MP and a Senator respectively. This meant each had two juxtaposed public-private interactions.

Individual commanders reformed affiliations through personal networks with mahaz commanders, which should be seen as analogous to the amirs that each jihadi party had in each province to represent them and organise supply.¹¹¹⁹ Conceptually, it was the same public-private interaction. In 2005, the most important mahaz commander in the south of Afghanistan was Mullah Dadullah (Kakar, from Uruzgan),¹¹²⁰ closely followed by Osmani (Ishaqzai/Chowkazai),¹¹²¹ from Sangin. There were others, like Mullah Baradar (Popalzai, Uruzgan),¹¹²² Akhtur Mohammad Mansour (Ishaqzai, from Band-e Timor)¹¹²³ or Mullah Naim (Barich, Garmsir—not to be confused with the Alizai Mullah Naim, also from Garmsir who was the Taliban District Governor for Garmsir).¹¹²⁴ All were Taliban government-era officials or founding members and had all fled to Pakistan in 2001.¹¹²⁵

Dadullah was an exceptionally charismatic commander, and known as the 'lame Englishman'. This was apparently because he had one leg and was so unbelievably devious.¹¹²⁶ Originally fighting in Kandahar, he moved to Helmand and fought under Nasim Akhundzada returning after one year, once Nasim was killed in March 1990. During the Taliban government, he had risen to command the so-called 'Helmandi Brigade'—shock troops—and had escaped capture in the north of the country in late 2001. By now he was the largest Taliban military leader in the south. In 2006, he was able to muster three hundred 'Taliban' to attack Sangin District Centre and the (mainly) US troops that were defending it.¹¹²⁷ Dadullah was quoted as saying that his 'most lovely activity was the jihad and fighting the heretics face-to-face'.¹¹²⁸

Enmities jarred the relationships between the four main mahaz commanders: Dadullah and Osmani did not get on,¹¹²⁹ and Baradar and Dadullah were also enemies.¹¹³⁰ In 2005 this, alongside the nature of Taliban public-private interactions discussed above, led to a much

¹¹¹⁹ Coghlan, "Oral History": 143.

¹¹²⁰ 072, 211, 233.

¹¹²¹ 017, 034, 063, 069.

¹¹²² 202, 215, 216.

¹¹²³ 088, 089, 235.

¹¹²⁴ UN Sanctions list, <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2012/sc10542.doc.htm> (accessed 14 Nov 2012).

¹¹²⁵ 201.

¹¹²⁶ Loyn, Butcher: 292.

¹¹²⁷ Rashid, Descent: 359.

¹¹²⁸ 'Al Samood Biography of Taliban Military Commander Mullah Dadullah', NEFA Foundation (July 2007).

¹¹²⁹ 017, 038, 105.

¹¹³⁰ 202.

fractured situation. A district might have several ‘Taliban’ groups in it, which had mobilised for different reasons, and were working to different mahaz commanders. See figure 5. Many of these groups were led by previously antagonistic commanders, who had been on either side of the government-nongovernment divide, or were drug smugglers protecting their crop, or both. In addition, many families looked at the rapidly changing situation and opted to send (at least some of) their sons to the Taliban to protect the family.¹¹³¹ Before 2006, the population were aware of who was fighting, but not which mahaz they belonged to, very much like the situation in 1978/9 when the rebel groups had not yet formed their public-private interactions with the mujahidin political parties.¹¹³² Adherence to the Taliban public narrative became easier, however, once the British arrived in mid-2006: the groups were more likely to coalesce in the face of *the* historical enemy.

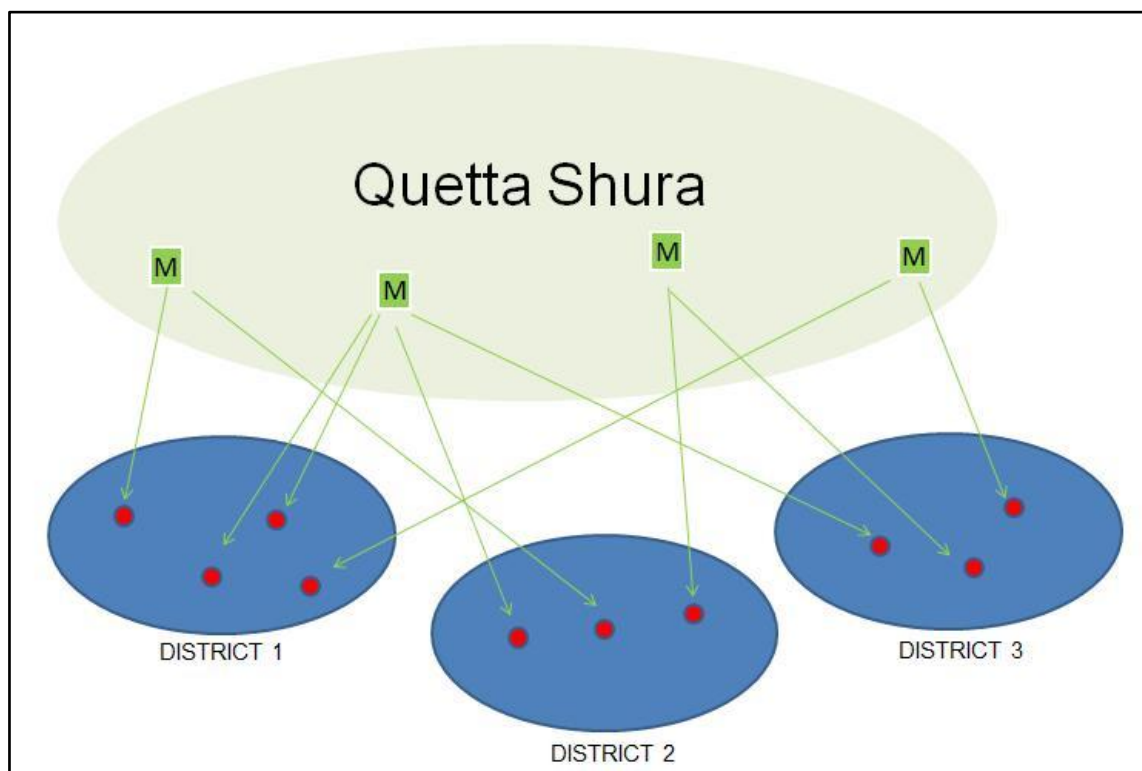


Figure 5: The Taliban mahaz system. Note that no one mahaz commander controls all the fighters in any one district.

4.17 - Nad-e Ali

Nad-e Ali began to see the earliest revivals of the old Taliban networks, but one of the latest manifestations of major military activity. This can mostly be explained through the continued activities of Abdul Rahman. Despite his commanders being among the worst for predation, they were still in government positions and so were able to suppress potential ‘Taliban’

¹¹³¹ 007, 050, 083.

¹¹³² 086, 088, 089.

military activity. Even when removed in mid-2006, Abdul Rahman had built up such a successful network of relatives in the police (for example Tor Jan and Sarwar Jan, the Chiefs of Police in Nad-e Ali and Now Zad, respectively)¹¹³³ that he was still able to exert massive influence. As Abdul Rahman put it, 'Nad-e Ali was ok because my people were in charge of security...they are the only ones who know who the Taliban are'. In a sense, he wasn't lying; he had just omitted to mention the fact that it was his men in the first place who had pushed other communities in Nad-e Ali to seek to affiliate with the Taliban.

The main problem in Nad-e Ali was the police preying on people, and this was mainly focussed on members of the previous Taliban government.¹¹³⁴ In 2003, these ex-Taliban members started organising.¹¹³⁵ The first step in the reactivation of their networks was to travel to Quetta and ask for help from the newly reformed Taliban central shura. Once a public-private interaction was initiated, a two-way flow would begin with Afghans living in Pakistan making the journey to Nad-e Ali and vice versa. Weapons were organised, brought over from Girdi Jangal camp, and cached. Very gentle military activities started in mid-2005, with some skirmishing attacks on government patrols as they moved around the periphery of Nad-e Ali (e.g. Saidabad).¹¹³⁶ The levels of military activity were kept low due to Abdul Rahman's grip on security in the district. Later on, in 2006, 'Punjabis' (the ISI) would be seen in Nad-e Ali, however the overall organisation was very much in the hands of the local 'Taliban' commanders,¹¹³⁷ and the Punjabis were working as advisors: every mahaz had their own set of advisors.¹¹³⁸

The most obvious example of a 'Taliban' commander is Murtaza, the Kharoti 'Guantanamo Talib'; however Akhtur Mohammad (Popalzai), a previous Taliban judge, was also among those who made the journey to Pakistan.¹¹³⁹ Sardar Mohammad (Ishaqzai, and a relative of Rahmattiar) was involved in smuggling, and kept his options open by offering support.¹¹⁴⁰ Similarly, the Noorzai Aghezai clan in Loy Bagh (Khano's clan and known for splitting itself across ideological divides during the jihad, see section 2.10), began to reach out using Mullah Karim. Later on, Karim's cousins were to become the Provincial Chief of Police and Nad-e Ali District Chief of Police—the faction that lost out when Khano was disarmed in

¹¹³³ 039.

¹¹³⁴ e.g. 213

¹¹³⁵ 065, 067, 201, 202.

¹¹³⁶ 065.

¹¹³⁷ 067.

¹¹³⁸ e.g. 201, 202.

¹¹³⁹ 038.

¹¹⁴⁰ 034, 067.

2005 managed to regain power in the police in 2008.¹¹⁴¹ The clan was successfully interacting with both public organisations again.

Other Noorzai groups suffered from unwanted splits. For example, Haji Lal Jan, a strong ex-Taliban commander, suffered from a split in his own family, and as a result was forced to leave Noorzo Kalay, his village, in 2005. Arab, his nephew by marriage, contested the leadership of Noorzo Kalay, despite being only thirty-years-old. But the divide is deeper than that. In the original migration from Washir in the early 1980s, Arab's family had come from Nakhooma Kalay, whereas Haji Lal Jan had come from Gundacha Kalay (both are in Washir) and the villages competed. Arab's interaction with the 'Taliban' was about sub-village private cleavages, and nothing to do with public ideology.¹¹⁴²

His uncles, Ghulam Saki and Mullah Habibullah, were both ex-members of the Taliban movement, linked to Dadullah's mahaz, and had arranged for Arab to go to Pakistan for training. He returned as 'commander' of Maat-e Que (his home area) and his base was in Washir under Abdul Salam (Noorzai commander of the Herat Corps during TB government; see section 3.14), where he raised a multi-tribal group of fighters. As someone from Noorzo Kalay put it to me, 'Arab was using the Taliban to improve his own position'.¹¹⁴³ I see the incidences of Taliban mobilisation discussed here, particularly that of Arab, as key evidence in support of my thesis that the public and private spheres interact to shape conflict dynamics.

The Taliban public narrative was affiliated to many private actors and narratives. Thus towards the end of 2005, in an attempt to corral the movement, the central command in Quetta appointed Taliban District Governors—for example, Mullah Mohammad Arif Akhund in Nad-e Ali¹¹⁴⁴—to coordinate civil issues. However, the mahaz commanders continued to 'act...like kings',¹¹⁴⁵ and it was to be some time before the Taliban managed to coordinate the 'Taliban' better.¹¹⁴⁶

4.18 - Nahr-e Saraj

Nahr-e Saraj suffered 'Taliban' instability much earlier than Nad-e Ali. In 2003/4, and replicating the pattern elsewhere in the province, the ex-Taliban came under pressure from predation by Mir Wali and his bounty-hunting commanders. As elsewhere, many of the

¹¹⁴¹ 067.

¹¹⁴² 067, 072.

¹¹⁴³ 072.

¹¹⁴⁴ 244.

¹¹⁴⁵ 201.

¹¹⁴⁶ e.g. 201, 202, 209.

commanders left Nahr-e Saraj and went to Pakistan seeking interactions with mahaz commanders that could provide them with training and weapons. Then, a two-way flow of personal and equipment began to flow from Pakistan. Military activities began in mid- to late-2005, although at first these were very low-key: two men on a motorbike carrying out an assassination, or a roadside bomb. However, in Nahr-e Saraj the new ‘Taliban’ were composed both of those who had supported the government previously and those who had not¹¹⁴⁷—i.e. those who had been in the 93rd Division and those who had been persecuted by the 93rd Division.

Mir Wali, and the 93rd Division, were DDR’d (another ‘word’ that has entered the Pushtu lexicon along with raaket and specialporce) in the autumn of 2004. This required a degree of coordination as parts of the Division were being maintained by the specialporce as militias. It appears by this point that the US detachment had begun to realise that it had been manipulated over various issues including the Guantanamo arrests. This caused the US to move from an interaction with one private actor—Mir Wali—to a lesser one: Haji Kadus. This meant that they were affiliating themselves with the smaller faction of the tribal split in Malgir. The interaction with Haji Kadus was to last for the next eight years, with the specialporce calling him ‘The Dous’. The ignorance of the IC in prosecuting the DDR program and of the US in switching support to Haji Kadus has shaped the conflict in Nahr-e Saraj to the present day (2012).¹¹⁴⁸

Once the Division’s weapons were handed over, Mir Wali’s house was raided by the specialporce, who confiscated his personal weapons. This was organised by Haji Kadus.¹¹⁴⁹ At the same time, the US purged its client militias to remove anyone who was loyal to Mir Wali or had any previous association with ‘Hizb’.¹¹⁵⁰ Mir Wali also reported to me that he found out at that time that Haji Kadus was planning to kill Hekmat, his eldest son. The US did not understand that Haji Kadus was launching a coup against Mir Wali. Kadus commanded their militias and his brother Daud guarded Camp Price, thus ensuring that only the people that the brothers wanted to meet the Americans got to meet the Americans.¹¹⁵¹

Many of those ‘Hizb’ elements, particularly the Ishaqzai, were put under pressure once the 93rd Division was DDR’d. For example, Qari Hazrat and Lala Jan, his brother, were 93rd commanders for the Mistereekhel clan of the Ishaqzai in Qala-e Gaz. Now that they no

¹¹⁴⁷ 062, 068.

¹¹⁴⁸ PersExp, Helmand, 2012.

¹¹⁴⁹ MMW.

¹¹⁵⁰ G968.

¹¹⁵¹ 011, 018.

longer had the protection of the 93rd patronage network, their drugs interests run by Mamouk, another brother, came under pressure from Dad Mohammad and his militias—much like the Ishaqzai Chowkazai clan's interests had been since 2001.¹¹⁵² Dad Mohammad was later removed from his post six months after Mir Wali and disarmed in June 2005, giving up his weapons just one week before the deadline required for participation in the national parliamentary elections.¹¹⁵³ His brother, Gul Mohammad, managed to remain in position as an official in Sangin until mid-2006 when he was killed.¹¹⁵⁴

Sher Mohammad was only removed in December 2005. Before he was removed he realised that the Mistereekheli drug interests were unprotected because of the DDR of the 93rd Division.¹¹⁵⁵ This uneven disarmament opened up some opportunities for a little extra predation and harassment.¹¹⁵⁶ Thus, whereas the two Ishaqzai clans—the Chowkazai and the Mistereekheli—had fought each other during the jihad (see section 2.7), they were now pushed onto the same side. Qari Hazrat (Mistereekheli) affiliated himself with the Taliban and became a significant commander with both Ishaqzai clans behind him. This exploited a leadership position's interaction between men and patronage, or public and private.¹¹⁵⁷ It is interesting to see how this looked from an Alikozai perspective: 'the Taliban, the smugglers and the Ishaqzai are all the same thing', a well-connected Alikozai scribe said to me.¹¹⁵⁸

The disbanding of the 93rd Division had also destroyed the tribal coalition created by Mir Wali—that between the two tribal groupings led by Khalifa Shirin Khan (the Akhundzadakhel, the Utmanzai, the Bayezai and the Sardarzai: the more powerful grouping previously affiliated with Hizb) and by Haji Abdul Agha (Shamezai, Nekazai, Yedarzai and Masezai: the less powerful grouping previously affiliated with Harakat). Mir Wali was Bayezai (stronger grouping/'Hizb') and Haji Kadus was Shamezai (weaker grouping/'Harakat').

Now that the 93rd had been disbanded, and as a result of Haji Kadus' coup against Mir Wali, those from the stronger grouping were affiliated with the Taliban: 'Taliban' commanders were 'Hizb' people such as Hazrat (Barakzai/Sardarzai) and Zapran (Barakzai/Bayezai).¹¹⁵⁹ The weaker grouping, however, contained the US militia commanders: the militia commanders were 'Harakat' people such as Jan Mohammad (Barakzai/Shamezai)—in fact Kadus, Daud

¹¹⁵² 017, 062.

¹¹⁵³ 'Six jihadi commanders surrender weapons', [Pajhwok](#) (22 Jun 2005).

¹¹⁵⁴ Leo Docherty, [Desert of Death](#) (London, 2007): 136-7.

¹¹⁵⁵ 075.

¹¹⁵⁶ 017.

¹¹⁵⁷ e.g. 037, 060, 061, 062

¹¹⁵⁸ 069.

¹¹⁵⁹ 062.

and Jan Mohammad all came from the same village, Khowganai in Charkandaz.¹¹⁶⁰ This was an age-old private cleavage that took on a government-Taliban label in the public sphere. The US ignorance of the implications of its interactions with certain private actors (Haji Kadus) meant that private actors and cleavages were able to drive the interaction between public and private and shape the conflict.

It is unfortunate for the Americans that they supported such a narrow faction, and pushed their enemies from the other part of the tribal coalition into forming an affiliation with the Taliban. Did Haji Kadus persecute those from the stronger grouping because they were affiliated with the Taliban, or did they affiliate with the Taliban because Haji Kadus was persecuting them? Ultimately, it was driven by private cleavages: the intra-Barakzai cleavage that was much older than, and nothing to do with, either the Taliban or Haji Kadus' persecution. Nonetheless, the situation accelerated and before long village elders were organising their own defence and asking either Haji Kadus, or the 'Taliban' for support.¹¹⁶¹ Haji Gul Ehktiar and Sur Gul, his nephew, were such examples of ex-Hizb commanders, who joined the 93rd patronage network, and after the disbandment of the division looked to ally with the 'Taliban' for protection.¹¹⁶²

In short, DDR was a disaster in Nahr-e Saraj and was entirely to the Taliban's benefit.¹¹⁶³ The 93rd Division split, with a small Barakzai rump remaining with the US special forces (affiliated to the government), but the vast majority of the Barakzai and other tribes' commanders affiliating with the Taliban.¹¹⁶⁴ These two alliances then continued to fight each other for the next few years. The US drove the militias under Haji Kadus to attack Qari Hazrat, then a member of the 'Taliban', often against Mir Wali's wishes (he was, by that time, the MP for Nahr-e Saraj).¹¹⁶⁵ Haji Kadus also exploited his family's Harakat links to open negotiations with Sher Mohammad. In case the US dropped him, he would need a powerful sponsor to best Mir Wali, who now hated him.¹¹⁶⁶ The Taliban organisation was a franchise, designed to protect other private interests.

Interviewees were agreed, 'everything that Qari Hazrat did was for Hizb, not Mullah Omar'.¹¹⁶⁷ Qari Hazrat interacted with several public and private groups at the same time: he 'had several bosses—Mullah Saddiq [the Taliban District Governor—see below], Mir Wali,

¹¹⁶⁰ 073.

¹¹⁶¹ 062.

¹¹⁶² 068.

¹¹⁶³ 062.

¹¹⁶⁴ 060, 223.

¹¹⁶⁵ 062.

¹¹⁶⁶ 074.

¹¹⁶⁷ 061.

his own tribal drug interests and Gulbuddin [the leader of Hizb]; but Mullah Omar [the Taliban leader] got blamed for everything that went on in Nahr-e Saraj'.¹¹⁶⁸ Even members of 'Hizb' agree: 'most of the [Nahr-e Saraj] Taliban are actually Hizb fighting for themselves, in the name of the Taliban'.¹¹⁶⁹ Jabbar Qahraman, an MP for Helmand, also agrees that ex-93rd people joined the 'Taliban' in 2005. He was later part of an abortive attempt in 2007 with Michael Semple, an EU diplomat at the time, to reintegrate them into the police (see section 5.7). Mir Wali, however, when questioned about the 'Taliban' in Nahr-e Saraj in fact being affiliated with 'Hizb', proved evasive over the issue. He turned my question back on me and spoke about the growth of the Afghan Local Police in 2011/2 (see section 6.10), and said that you must have local forces who know who the Taliban are in order to fight them.

It is pertinent to point out that 'Hizb' in Nahr-e Saraj, whilst previously a public organisation, now represent a solidarity group of ex-mujahidin: they could be considered a private group. They no longer, for instance, espouse an ideology, or exhibit institutional organisation; but the personal bonds between the fighters remain strong: ergo I define them in the private sphere in this instance. What is not clear, however, is whether the Taliban in Quetta were aware of this dynamic and were being manipulated, or whether they were aware of it and were manipulating it. In the terms of my thesis, there is a clear interaction, however I cannot assert with this event whether the ignorance of a public organisation is allowing the private sphere to dictate events (although it was the ignorance of the US and the IC that originally caused the alliances between the 'Hizb' groups and the Taliban).

The Quetta Shura Taliban knew DDR was occurring and took advantage by appointing a Taliban District Governor a month later. Initially this was Mullah Sadiq (Ishaqzai, ex-Harakat), who was described above being chased by Mir Wali's men, and then Sur Gul (Barakzai, ex-Hizb), who had been part of Mir Wali's 93rd Division. This suggests that at first they did not understand the 'Hizb'-Taliban dynamic outlined above, and when they came to understand they appointed Sur Gul to act as the point of interaction between them and the private 'Hizb' groups. Whether the Taliban understood the private sphere or not, the outcome was two previously antagonistic private groups (some 93rd Division actors and their enemies) becoming allied under the Taliban public narrative.¹¹⁷⁰

¹¹⁶⁸ 062. He was eventually killed in August 2010 by ISAF special operations forces (Toby Harnden, Dead Men Risen (London, 2011): 490).

¹¹⁶⁹ 068.

¹¹⁷⁰ 062, 068.

4.19 - Northern Helmand

Ultimately what happened in Nahr-e Saraj was linked to what was happening in Sangin, through the Ishaqzai community who straddle the border between the two districts. The Ishaqzai dynamic was such that Qari Hazrat provided the private on-the-ground leadership, with Osmani and Akhtur Mohammad Mansour helping provide the interaction with the Taliban Quetta Shura. Additional funding was provided by drug smugglers such as Mamouk and Fatah Mohammad.¹¹⁷¹ The Ishaqzai community was heavily predated upon by Dad Mohammad and Sher Mohammad, who were disarmed and removed much later than Mir Wali (who was 'protecting' them). This private cleavage and the associated interactions (Ishaqzai-Taliban; Sher Mohammad/Dad Mohammad-government) drove the conflict. This story eventually came to a nadir when thirty-two members of Dad Mohammad's family were ambushed and killed when they went to collect the murdered body of Gul Mohammad, the ex-Sangin District Governor in June 2006.¹¹⁷² The massacre has been described variously through the public and private spheres: a drugs hit, a Taliban hit and an Ishaqzai-Alikozai dispute. The evidence presented in this chapter suggests that it is all three.¹¹⁷³

Musa Qala followed a similar pattern to Nahr-e Saraj, where individual commanders affiliated themselves with the Taliban for protection. There were many people who had been persecuted by Sher Mohammad and his brother, Amir Mohammad, who was the 'District' Governor of the Alizai areas in the north of Helmand. Mullah Salam (Alizai/Pirzai), later to become famous for switching sides yet again, was an ex-Taliban commander who had been the District Governor of Kajaki during the Taliban government. His land was appropriated by Amir Mohammad, and Hassanzai (their sub-tribe) tenants were moved onto it. Mullah Matin was another Pirzai commander who began working with the Taliban to protect himself.¹¹⁷⁴ During 2005, the depredations became so extreme that a group of elders asked the Taliban for protection,¹¹⁷⁵ and there was a groundswell of people joining the 'Taliban' under people like Mullah Salam to protect themselves from Sher Mohammad's network.¹¹⁷⁶ Because Sher Mohammad had also affiliated himself with the US, there was the further motivating factor of a US firebase a short distance from Musa Qala, from which artillery was occasionally fired at the 'Taliban'.¹¹⁷⁷

¹¹⁷¹ 017.

¹¹⁷² 'MP's brother, six Taliban killed in Helmand', Pajhwok (18 Jun 2006); '32 killed in Taliban Ambush in South', Pajhwok (19 Jun 2006).

¹¹⁷³ Giustozzi, Decoding: 119-20.

¹¹⁷⁴ 010, 013, 093, 215.

¹¹⁷⁵ 087.

¹¹⁷⁶ 215, 217, 218.

¹¹⁷⁷ Kim Barker, The Taliban Shuffle (New York, 2011): 111.

4.20 - Sher Mohammad's game

Sher Mohammad was removed from the Provincial Governorship in December 2005. This was at the insistence of the British.¹¹⁷⁸ Sher Mohammad then ordered his commanders to begin fighting under the Taliban public umbrella. Many had come from the Taliban in the first place. This is considered common knowledge in Helmand,¹¹⁷⁹ and was even confirmed by the first UK taskforce commander, Brigadier Ed Butler. When I questioned Sher Mohammad about it, and in particular pointed out a *Telegraph* article¹¹⁸⁰ that referred to his purported admission of this, he categorically denied that he had ordered his men to the Taliban and touted his anti-Taliban credentials. I again raised the article in the *Telegraph* and asked if he had met Damien McElroy, the author. He had, but, 'that journalist lied and twisted it; he was Angrez [sic] wasn't he...I hate that journalist'. Taliban commanders, however, point out that by being 'Taliban' as well as 'government', Sher Mohammad was protecting drug interests.¹¹⁸¹ As one put it, 'with one bullet he did many hunts'.¹¹⁸²

Not only did Sher Mohammad order his men to work with the 'Taliban', he also provided massive financial support to their operations—some Taliban commanders even went as far to say that Sher Mohammad became a mahaz commander himself (this while being a Senator in Kabul).¹¹⁸³ Sher Mohammad's commanders who began to work for the 'Taliban', or under Taliban patronage, include Mullah Manan.¹¹⁸⁴ Rahmatullah, mentioned above in the incident where Abdul Rahman's commander Amanullah was killed, also moved to Baram Cha to work as a 'Talib-smuggler'.¹¹⁸⁵ Hafizullah provided me with the names of other commanders who entered the 'Taliban' franchise from Sher Mohammad's at that time: Abdul Bari (Alizai/Hassanzai) and Mahmud Akhundzada (Alizai), although coming from Hafizullah (Hizb), these names should be treated with a degree of caution. Overall though, it is clear that Sher Mohammad was interacting with both of the main public organisations in the conflict at the same time, much as Nasim his uncle had done during the jihad (see section 2.7). What is clear though, is that the ignorance of the British in insisting that Sher Mohammad was removed, caused him to work more with the public organisation that the British were opposed to—the Taliban. That is, the private sphere dictated events in the face of the ignorance of a public organisation.

¹¹⁷⁸ SMA.

¹¹⁷⁹ e.g. 000, 001, 013, 219, 241.

¹¹⁸⁰ 'Afghan Governor turned 3000 men over to the Taliban', [The Telegraph](#) (20 Nov 2009).

¹¹⁸¹ 221.

¹¹⁸² 219.

¹¹⁸³ 212, 221, 222, 223, 225, 228, 230, 231. This is such a critical point that I have listed all the interviews in which this was covered. NB these interviewees cover three separate interviewees, who did not have any contact with each other.

¹¹⁸⁴ 001, 013, 070.

¹¹⁸⁵ Hafizullah, 029.

The re-emergence of the Taliban in Helmand province is not difficult to explain. Warlord predations on ex-Taliban commanders causing them to form affiliations with the public organisation of the ISI-sponsored Taliban provided the background dynamics. The power vacuum created by the warlords' removal coupled with a destabilisation campaign orchestrated by the ISI played a close supporting role.¹¹⁸⁶ But the actual shift between the two public organisations, from majority government-control to majority Taliban-control, was caused by the commanders switching sides, and forming new public-private interactions: Mir Wali in 2005, Sher Mohammad at the end of 2005, and Abdul Rahman in 2008 (see section 5.10).

In the case of Sher Mohammad, this was done deliberately, probably motivated by his hatred of the British, both historically and for insisting that he be removed from his job. In the case of Mir Wali, his sub-commanders switched sides for their own protection. The evidence shows that Mir Wali allowed it to happen and took advantage of it. Interestingly, and as during the jihad, the super-local, private sphere was all-important, in the face of public ignorance. Later on, for example, in Malgir, US special forces worked with a previously 'Harakat' aligned coalition led by Haji Kadus against mainly 'Hizb' groups. But in Musa Qala the 'government', and the British when they arrived, fought the old 'Harakat' networks of Sher Mohammad. These private dynamics drove the fighting against the British when they arrived. The public narrative of Taliban jihad simply provided an ideological framework and funding.

Sher Mohammad was replaced by Mohammad Daud as Provincial Governor, an English-speaking technocrat from Helmand, but with no tribal base. He was deputised by Sher Mohammad's brother, Amir Mohammad, making it very hard to escape the influence of the previous governor.¹¹⁸⁷ Sher Mohammad absolutely detests the British for his removal and called them 'nah poh', which translates as 'stupid, unintelligible, slow-witted, unintelligent, uneducated and ill-informed'. 'They do not understand Helmandi politics at all', he told me, 'we are both on the same side'. He was not lying; he was just affiliated to several public organisations at the same time.

Once appointed, Daud led the 2006 eradication programme supported by the newly-deployed Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police. The crop in 2006 was twice that of 2005, and his intent was to eradicate the poppy that was grown on

¹¹⁸⁶ Wiki: 'HELMAND GOVERNOR ON TRIBAL WARFARE, SECURITY, NEED FOR ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE' (3 Sep 2006).

¹¹⁸⁷ Giustozzi, Tribes: 14. Wiki: 'HELMAND GOVERNOR SENT TO PARLIAMENT; REPLACED BY SENIOR NSC ADVISOR' (14 Dec 2005).

government land, by government officials. That this coincided with the British deployment was regrettable timing.¹¹⁸⁸ The ISI-sponsored Taliban were offering to fund resistance to the eradication forces using protection of the poppy crop as a public narrative to gain farmers' support.¹¹⁸⁹ The eradication, led by Amir Mohammad, began in Dishu and then moved into Khan Eshin and Garmsir.¹¹⁹⁰ It later moved into areas like Sangin, at that point in the throes of outright warfare between the ANA and the 'Taliban'.¹¹⁹¹

Overall, less than ten per cent of Helmand's forty thousand hectares of opium poppy was eradicated and the process was horribly corrupted by private interests. Central Helmand, the domain of Abdul Rahman, was left untouched, largely because his police were providing the protection for the eradication force. The same occurred in Musa Qala, Sher Mohammad's domain. Province-wide, poor farmers were targeted rather than richer landlords or those with connections to government and in Sangin, the eradication proved incendiary and allowed the 'Taliban' to (publicly) protect poor farmers from government eradication. Privately, this was in fact Ishaqzai tribesmen facing down an Alikozai-led eradication effort.¹¹⁹²

4.21 - Conclusions

This period offers the clearest, unqualified support for the thesis that conflict in Helmand is caused by a public-private interaction, and that the private sphere has primacy in shaping conflict dynamics when there is ignorance of the nature of the private sphere by public organisations.

This thesis of public-private interaction is reinforced when one considers recruitment to the 'Taliban': both micro-examples, like that of Haji Lal Jan and Arab, or Murtaza, and macro-examples like that of the disarmament of the 93rd Division. The evidence here presented about Mir Wali and his dealings with the special force, the militias that were raised from local men and led by the US, the four warlords' denunciations of each other to the US, and the Guantanamo arrests all point to a public organisation that did not understand the private sphere, and failed to control the public-private interaction that drives conflict. Particular cases—the study of money movements in Gereshk, the descriptions of his own local conflict by the US-led (Helmandi) militia commander and the removal of Sher Mohammad at British insistence—further demonstrate the interaction

¹¹⁸⁸ Wiki: 'HELMAND GOVERNOR PROMISED COOPERATION ON ERADICATION' (27 Jan 2006).

¹¹⁸⁹ Giustozzi, *Koran*: 87.

¹¹⁹⁰ Wiki: 'PRT/LASHKAR GAH - POPPY ERADICATION MOVING FORWARD; ATTACKS EXPECTED' (8 Mar 2006).

¹¹⁹¹ 069.

¹¹⁹² 069. Wiki: 'PRT/HELMAND - HELMAND ERADICATION WRAP UP' (3 May 2006).

between the two spheres and underline the importance of the private sphere in driving dynamics in the face of public ignorance. These conclusions will be considered further in chapter seven.

Chapter 5: The return of the Angrez until US re-engagement, 2006–2009

People rose up; some came with guns,
some with knives, some with sticks; we
went to defeat them.

Redacted

Why Helmand? The Angrez could
have gone to any province.

Helmandi Senator¹¹⁹³

As part of a NATO expansion around the country, the British deployed forces to Helmand in 2006 to support the government and offer reconstruction and development to the population. During this period, the overarching public narrative of the conflict focused on the fierce fighting between ISAF and Afghan government troops, and the resurgent Taliban—the ‘insurgency narrative’. The government forces, and the British, were seen to be protecting and advancing democracy, women’s rights and countering the growth of narcotics. The Taliban, still considered a unitary actor, were opposed to the government and the British and fought in the name of Islam.

5.1 - Why Helmand?

Publicly, the British mission, as part of the expanded NATO/ISAF mission, was to bring increased security and stability to the province and to check the narcotics trade.¹¹⁹⁴ As the lead nation in the coalition for counter-narcotics, it was felt appropriate by Tony Blair, then Prime Minister, that Britain deployed troops to Helmand.¹¹⁹⁵ However, the most important deciding factor in the selection of Helmand was alliance politics between the Canadians, the British and the Dutch: namely that the Canadians wanted Kandahar, and the Dutch Uruzgan.¹¹⁹⁶ The mission was intended to last for three years at a cost of £808m¹¹⁹⁷ and the British began to deploy in numbers in May 2006. The initial plan was to secure a ‘lozenge’ around Gereshk and Lashkar Gah and demonstrate their reconstruction efforts to the population.¹¹⁹⁸ US special forces were still to remain in the province under their counterterrorist Operation Enduring Freedom mission.

¹¹⁹³ 082.

¹¹⁹⁴ House of Commons Defence Select Committee, The UK Deployment to Afghanistan (London, 2006): 7.

¹¹⁹⁵ Michael Clarke, ed. The Afghan Papers (London, 2011): 16.

¹¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 21.

Unaware of these decisions and machinations, the Helmandis heard on the radio that the British were returning after one hundred and twenty-six years. What they heard seemed incongruous to what they knew of the British.¹¹⁹⁹ Even in the Afghan ‘government’, there was confusion. A Helmandi Senator asked me, ‘Why Helmand? The Angrez could have gone to any province’.¹²⁰⁰ On a more personal level, a senior (well-educated) provincial official remembers sitting on his grandfather’s knee as he was told stories about Maiwand where his grandfather had fought. ‘People rose up; some came with guns, some with knives, some with sticks; we went to defeat them’, he said.¹²⁰¹ He then recalled a meeting with British officers in early 2006. A young intelligence officer asked him what the Helmandis thought of the British in light of their shared history. The provincial official replied that the Helmandis hated them, and the Britisher went red, embarrassed. Not wishing to offend his guest, the official continued, ‘but that was then, and this is now...now you have come to help’. He later explained to me that because he was a government man, and that was the government policy, he followed it. Yet he was thinking ‘why are they *here?*’

The British troops focussed on three issues as they toured the province to explain their public narrative. Firstly, security; the incoming three thousand British troops and a further Afghan National Army (ANA) brigade would ensure security, including patrolling the border with Pakistan to stop Taliban and supplies coming into the province. Secondly, development; in contrast to the US who had directly implemented projects themselves, the British would be channelling development money through the provincial government in order to strengthen its mechanisms and its relationship with the population. Thirdly was counter-narcotics. This was an acute concern for Helmandis. As the British were touring the province, the 2006 eradication campaign was in full swing. The British line was a fudge: ‘no UK military personnel will be eradicating poppy; however, part of the UK mission is to support the [Afghan] government in its counter-narcotics efforts’.¹²⁰²

It is hard to judge now what the majority of Helmandis thought about the return of the British at the time. My interviewees discussed it in a universally bad light, focussing on revenge for Maiwand, and traditional British perfidy, however much has happened since 2006, and oral history is the ‘facts’ of the past retold through the lens of the present. Contemporaneous US diplomatic cables mention a good reception for the British as they arrived, and an atmosphere of hope that the British were going to help solve some of the very serious

¹¹⁹⁹ Martin, Brief history.

¹²⁰⁰ 082.

¹²⁰¹ Redacted.

¹²⁰² Wiki: ‘UK OFFICIALS DISCUSS TRANSITION WITH PROVINCIAL COUNCIL AND MULLAHS’ COUNCIL’ (24 Mar 2006).

problems in the province.¹²⁰³ 'It is true', the US diplomat wrote, 'that Afghans have a long memory for history, and a few Afghans even comment on the (unfortunate) British colonial history. In general, however, the great majority of Afghans understand and support the modern-day British role here'.¹²⁰⁴ It is, of course, impossible to know how astute the writer of those cables was or whether the Afghan words of welcome were hiding other thoughts. I tentatively suggest that there were differences between the public sphere of the intervention and what the Helmandis privately thought.

5.2 - Collapse

The British entered a situation spiralling out of control. Even before taking over responsibility from the Americans on May 1st, a British reconnaissance patrol was attacked in Now Zad in early April. Their attackers turned out to be 'policemen', and there was question as to whether the attack occurred because the 'police' thought that the British soldiers had arrived to confiscate their opium stocks.¹²⁰⁵ Patrolling began in Gereshk at the end of April and was met neutrally.¹²⁰⁶ Elsewhere in the province the situation continued to deteriorate: Baghran 'fell' to the 'Taliban' on April 29th.¹²⁰⁷ Concurrently, there was a large amount of other military activity. US special forces were still based in the province and highly active, although uncoordinated with the British.¹²⁰⁸ In mid-May, a large US-led operation was launched to put pressure on the Taliban (the public sphere described the Taliban as being a cohesive organisation) to ease the entry of the British and other coalition troops into the South. It had the reverse effect. Similar to a Soviet sweep operation, and replete with large amounts of airpower, it had the effect of massively 'stirring things up' in Helmand.¹²⁰⁹ To the Helmandis, the development promised in the British public narrative seemed oddly juxtaposed with the massive military operations that they could see occurring.¹²¹⁰

Seen from the public sphere, it appeared that northern Helmand was about to revert to Taliban control. Governor Daud told the British that the towns in northern Helmand were under attack by the Taliban. The British had to deploy there to stop the Taliban from capturing a District Centre and 'raising the Taliban's black flag'.¹²¹¹ In the private sphere though, the shadow of the previous Helmandi government loomed. For example, in Musa

¹²⁰³ Wiki: 'MOUSA QALA DISTRICT CHIEF AND ELDERS WELCOME UK DEPLOYMENT' (28 Mar 2006).

¹²⁰⁴ Wiki: 'FROM THE STARS AND STRIPES TO THE UNION JACK THE UK ASSUMES CONTROL OF LASKAR GAH PRT' (1 May 2006).

¹²⁰⁵ Bishop, 3 PARA: 149; Docherty, Desert: 65.

¹²⁰⁶ Stuart Tootal, Danger Close (London, 2009): 41.

¹²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹²⁰⁸ Hew Pike, From the Frontline (Barnsley, 2008): 173, 176.

¹²⁰⁹ Clarke, Papers: 19.

¹²¹⁰ 013. Resonates with PersExp Helmand, 2008-12.

¹²¹¹ James Fergusson, A Million Bullets (London, 2008): 159.

Qala the police were under the command of Abdul Wali Koka (Alizai/Hassanzai)¹²¹² and the District Governor was Mohammad Wali, whose brother was Bismillah, still in Guantanamo (see section 4.8)—both were heavily linked to Sher Mohammad, and their bad behaviour caused the spark of uprising for most of the ‘Taliban’.¹²¹³ They came under attack on May 18th. In response, British troops deployed to Musa Qala, with Amir Mohammad, the Deputy Governor, and his militia. After securing the town they headed north to Baghran. Amir Mohammad had told the British that the ‘Taliban’ had come from there.¹²¹⁴ This may have been ‘true’, but in reality he was targeting his old enemy, Rais Baghrani. The conflict was being shaped by their feud, a private cleavage, being overlaid with the abstract government-Taliban public cleavage. It appeared that the British did not know they were being manipulated.

A few days later Now Zad was to come under attack. Sarwar Jan (Noorzai), a relative of Abdul Rahman Jan, was the District Chief of Police, and represented the old warlords’ rapaciousness.¹²¹⁵ He was described as a ‘very, very cruel man’.¹²¹⁶ Now Zad was an important area for the Taliban due to the fact that major commanders like Abdul Salam (Noorzai) and Rahim (Ishaqzai), the Taliban Provincial Governor at the time, came from the district.¹²¹⁷ By May 22nd, a small number of British troops had deployed to the hukumat to reinforce the ‘police’.¹²¹⁸ At the beginning of July, locals began to leave Now Zad and the British began to be attacked there also.¹²¹⁹

In Sangin a similar pattern had prevailed. The District Chief of Police in Sangin was an ally of Sher Mohammad, Khan Mohammad (Barakzai, ex-Harakat).¹²²⁰ Gul Mohammad, Dad Mohammad’s brother, was the ex-District Governor,¹²²¹ but still an ‘official’ in Sangin.¹²²² In mid-June, he was murdered by the Ishaqzai ‘Taliban’ (see section 4.18).¹²²³ The family response exploited the public sphere. Dad Mohammad, at that point an MP, insisted that the remaining members of his family were rescued from the ‘Taliban’. Moreover, warning that it

¹²¹² Bishop, 3 PARA: 154.

¹²¹³ e.g. 217

¹²¹⁴ Bishop, 3 PARA: 52-3.

¹²¹⁵ Wiki: ‘POPPY ERADICATION MOVING FORWARD; ATTACKS EXPECTED’ (8 Mar 2006).

¹²¹⁶ 028.

¹²¹⁷ 066.

¹²¹⁸ Bishop, 3 PARA: 55.

¹²¹⁹ Fergusson, Bullets: 57.

¹²²⁰ Docherty, Desert: 119.

¹²²¹ 069.

¹²²² Docherty, Desert: 136.

¹²²³ Tootal, Danger: 84.

was about to be overrun by Taliban, President Karzai and Governor Daud insisted that the British deployed to the District Centre.¹²²⁴

Taking advantage, Khan Mohammad also insisted that he be extracted—the Sanginites had accused him of raping a little girl and were trying to kill him.¹²²⁵ Very reluctantly the British moved in on June 21st. They were not keen to be involved in what they understood to be a private feud.¹²²⁶ When they got there they held a shura with the locals who told them that they were not wanted and asked them to leave. The British spent the next few days building their defences, until, in response to a special forces operation to the south of the District Centre, they began to come under attack at the end of the month, allegedly by Ishaqzai tribesmen.¹²²⁷ Concurrently, an American convoy was ambushed to the south of Musa Qala District Centre, resulting in another large battle—the British also began to come under attack there.¹²²⁸

While the provincial government and the British were distracted in the north of the province, another group of militants from Pakistan crossed the border and captured the Garmsir hukumat on July 16th. According to the Afghan government and two interviewees, they raised the flag of the Jamiat-e Ulema, a Pakistani political party with close links to the Taliban. Pakistan refuted this and the Taliban claimed it as their victory. A deal was struck to allow the police to leave.¹²²⁹ It is not known what role Naim, the ex-Taliban Governor for Garmsir, played in this odd adjunct to what was occurring in the province. On July 18th government officials and police fled Nawa, which the Taliban also claimed as a victory.¹²³⁰ Both hukomats were swiftly taken back by the ANA with ISAF air support.¹²³¹ The District Centres experienced government collapse in the same order as they had in 1978 (see section 2.4). And as with the collapse of the communist administration, there was no major fighting in Gereshk, Nad-e Ali and Lashkar Gah that year.¹²³²

The insertion of British troops into Helmand had not gone as intended. Despite the removal of the biggest four rapacious commanders in 2004–6 (Abdul Rahman was finally removed on

¹²²⁴ Bishop, 3 PARA: 49.

¹²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 108.

¹²²⁶ Tootal, Danger: 84.

¹²²⁷ 069. Pike, Frontline: 194-9. The British base was in Haji Lal Jan, a local drug dealer's, compound. He funded successive attacks in these early days on the British because they had occupied his home.

¹²²⁸ Bishop, 3 PARA: 155.

¹²²⁹ 000, 060. 'Taliban capture Garmsir district', Pajhwok (17 July 2006).

¹²³⁰ 'Taliban capture another district in south', Pajhwok (18 July 2006).

¹²³¹ 'Defence ministry claims recapturing [sic] Garmsir from Taliban', Pajhwok (19 July 2006).

¹²³² 023. Tootal, Danger: 329.

5 June 2006),¹²³³ they still managed to maintain significant patronage networks of sub-commanders within the organisations and areas that they used to control. However, these networks had been weakened significantly by their removal. This meant that the groups and commanders that they used to predate upon, interacted with increased Taliban patronage, and took the opportunity to attack them.¹²³⁴ Overlaid was the British factor.

The British knew that they had come to Helmand to support the government and fight the Taliban, but did not have enough knowledge about Helmand's private sphere to understand exactly who the 'government' were and who the 'Taliban' were. For example, when they arrived in Sangin they were immediately told where the 'Taliban' were by the 'government', but luckily the local ANA commander warned the British platoon commander that they were being used to settle a private feud.¹²³⁵ In the eyes of the Ishaqzai in Sangin, the Pirzai and the Khalozai in Musa Qala and almost everyone in Now Zad the British had arrived and immediately started supporting the topak salaran (warlords).¹²³⁶

When they deployed to the north, the communities had no knowledge of why there were British soldiers arriving in their villages¹²³⁷ and the British had no idea as to who their friends or enemies were.¹²³⁸ These factors combined with no evidence of reconstruction¹²³⁹ and very heavy use of airpower to defend their isolated positions resulting in civilian casualties. For example, the British dropped 18,000lbs of explosive (say, twenty-five airstrikes) on Now Zad that summer and flattened the bazaar.¹²⁴⁰ Thus, from the perspective of the population, the British public narrative did not match their actions, particularly in terms of supporting the warlords' sub-commanders, with whom the population had private cleavages. By this point the Helmandis were twenty-eight years into their conflict and there was no patience for a historical enemy.

People began to leave northern Helmand for safer areas¹²⁴¹ and the 'police' (militiamen of the warlords) began to leave or switch sides—even though they were loathed by the population, they hated the British more, and the warlords could no longer pay them.¹²⁴² Governor Daud was to complain repeatedly that year about the private 'tribal wars' in the

¹²³³ ARJ.

¹²³⁴ 013, 069.

¹²³⁵ 069. Docherty, Desert: 138.

¹²³⁶ 032.

¹²³⁷ Docherty, Desert: 127.

¹²³⁸ 006. *Ibid.*, 160.

¹²³⁹ 013. *Ibid.*, 188; Pike, Frontline: 182.

¹²⁴⁰ 028. Fergusson, Bullets: 128. 'British commander rejects civilian casualties in Now Zad', Pajhwok (15 July 2006).

¹²⁴¹ 056.

¹²⁴² 006, SMA. Fergusson, Bullets: 68 & 71.

north of the province,¹²⁴³ but to the British the problem was interpreted through the public sphere and the Taliban-government cleavage. There were ominous signs, though, that ISAF were inciting the same general resistance that the Soviets had incited. For example, when a joint French-ANA patrol was attacked north of Sangin in May, they reported being ambushed along a 7km long stretch of road as ‘every man and woman [came] out of their compounds to fire at them’.¹²⁴⁴ In many cases, the local population assumed that ISAF were deploying in order to stop them growing poppy.¹²⁴⁵ See figure 6.



Figure 6: Children's graffiti in Lashkar Gah, 2008, depicting UK involvement in Helmand (note 'Chinook' helicopters).

5.3 - Quetta Shura

The situation in Helmand was brilliantly taken advantage of by the Taliban leadership in Pakistan (hereafter the 'Quetta Shura'). A Taliban spokesman stated that 'we are here to destroy the British. We will hunt and kill them. We will not let them go back to England and say that they have defeated the Afghans'.¹²⁴⁶ It was an evocative, capping, public narrative that explained how the northern Helmandi private cleavages were part of a wider more important struggle, in other words, how they interacted with the public sphere. This was exactly what the British

¹²⁴³ Wiki: 'HELMAND GOVERNOR ON TRIBAL WARFARE, SECURITY, NEED FOR ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE' (3 Sep 2006).

¹²⁴⁴ Tootal, *Danger*: 49.

¹²⁴⁵ Docherty, *Desert*: 145.

¹²⁴⁶ Bishop, *3 PARA*: 52-3.

failed to do with their public reconstruction and counter-narcotics narrative. Jihadi publications published in Pakistan extolled the same narrative and stated that ‘the British had not generated a hand span’s worth of security for the people at the same time that they brought the dirty slogans of democracy’.¹²⁴⁷

The past echoed strongly, particularly amongst the Alizai:¹²⁴⁸ ‘we gained our freedom one hundred and sixty years ago [sic] and we shall remain free...we do not accept the claim that they are here to rebuild our country...they have done nothing for us’,¹²⁴⁹ said one Taliban commander in Musa Qala. Much later on, I was at a shura of three hundred Alizai elders in Lashkar Gah, and I circulated at the back conversing: the anti-British exploits of Akhtur Khan and Abu Bakr Khan during the 1800s were remembered with a proud twinkle in their eyes.¹²⁵⁰ This was an example of a historical private narrative driving violence, yet interacting with and drawing funding from an extant public organisation, the Taliban in Quetta.

The fighting was becoming unsustainable for the British—they were not equipped to maintain isolated outposts under constant attack.¹²⁵¹ The population too wanted an end to the violence. The original uprising was attracting fighters from other areas, which was leading to more and more violence. As well as taking advantage of the situation the Quetta Shura had begun to send a stream of Pakistani Pushtun to northern Helmand to fight the British. Dadullah, the most important mahaz commander in the South, had gone to Waziristan in May 2006 and negotiated for militants to come to Helmand and fight NATO and the British.¹²⁵² Correspondingly, British sources describe the arrival of Pakistani fighters in northern Helmand towards the end of June and the beginning of July, particularly acting as mentoring teams.¹²⁵³ This was the much vaunted Taliban offensive in the summer of 2006 led by Dadullah.¹²⁵⁴ This stream of foreigners in 2006 was to become a flood in Garmsir in 2008.¹²⁵⁵

So far, I have described the British entry to the province and the reaction of the population. The violence can partly be explained by the Helmandi narrative of resistance to the Angrez, however many also fought the British because they affiliated themselves unwittingly with the

¹²⁴⁷ ‘Retreat in Musa Qala’, *Sarak* (Oct 2006): 10.

¹²⁴⁸ e.g. 217

¹²⁴⁹ Loyn, *Butcher*: 259.

¹²⁵⁰ See Martin, *Brief history*: 16-9.

¹²⁵¹ Fergusson, *Bullets*: 266.

¹²⁵² Syed Saleem Shahzad, *Inside Al-Qaeda and the Taliban* (London, 2011): 22-35.

¹²⁵³ Tootal, *Danger*: 144; Bishop, *3 PARA*: 157.

¹²⁵⁴ Shahzad, *Inside*: 21.

¹²⁵⁵ 047.

appalling ex-provincial government. Now, I discuss both the public and private spheres of the Musa Qala accords, showing how the public government-Taliban cleavage fails adequately to describe events. It was driven by an interaction and what is more, all the private actors were adept at manipulating public narratives to strengthen their private positions.

5.4 - The accords

Musa Qala elders, led by Haji Shah Agha, approached the British to negotiate a ceasefire. They publicly stated that this was because they were weary of seeing their district destroyed by fighting between the British and the Taliban.¹²⁵⁶ Their private aim was to finally eject the Sher Mohammad-linked Police Chief and District Governor.¹²⁵⁷ British forces and the Taliban would withdraw from the district and allow the elders to maintain security with a militia comprised of their 'sons'.¹²⁵⁸ In return, the Afghan government would offer development projects in the area. The elders particularly wanted a canal, like the US-sponsored canal projects that had been given to central Helmand. (Northern Helmand is desertifying and this is a recurrent demand of the northern Helmandis).¹²⁵⁹ The agreement was signed in September and the British pulled out in October, handing the hukumat over to the elders. The Afghan national flag would continue to fly,¹²⁶⁰ however the deal was not supported by the US who saw it as a retreat for ISAF and the international community. Governor Daud retorted that the British were a provocation that had now been removed.¹²⁶¹

Taliban media in Pakistan painted British actions as a retreat and noted the differences in the US and British positions. They also seized on British statements to the effect that 'if us leaving generates stability in an area, then we will do it elsewhere' and pointing out that this made it very clear who was generating instability in Helmand. According to the public Taliban narrative, the withdrawal of the British from Musa Qala was one step to 'freeing' their country.¹²⁶² The argument that it is the British and not the Taliban that generate instability in Helmand is a constant refrain among most Helmandis that I have spoken to, and the deal proved popular among elders in other northern districts. Ceasefires, with British troops remaining in place but not patrolling, were struck in Now Zad and Sangin.¹²⁶³

¹²⁵⁶ Fergusson, *Bullets*: 267.

¹²⁵⁷ Wiki: 'MUSA QALA ? AN INSIDER VIEW' (30 Nov 2006); Wiki: 'MUSA QALA AGREEMENT: OPPOSING INTERESTS AND OPPOSING VIEWS, BUT ONE WAY FORWARD' (27 Nov 2006).

¹²⁵⁸ Fergusson, *Bullets*: 268.

¹²⁵⁹ Wiki: 'MUSA QALA ? AN INSIDER VIEW' (30 Nov 2006).

¹²⁶⁰ Wiki: 'NORTH QUIET AFTER ISAF WITHDRAWAL' (7 Nov 2006).

¹²⁶¹ Wiki: 'GOVERNOR DEFENDS DEAL WITH MUSA QALA SHURA' (14 Nov 2006).

¹²⁶² 'Retreat in Musa Qala', *Sarak* (Oct 2006): 10.

¹²⁶³ Ewen Southby-Tailyour, *3 Commando Brigade* (London, 2008): 35 & 72; Wiki: 'GOVERNOR DEFENDS DEAL...' (14 Nov 2006).

Immediately, Sher Mohammad began to lobby against the deal, as he had lost influence through the removal of his officials. When I later interviewed him, he was vehement, accusing the British of handing the town over to the Taliban. Shortly after the deal, he had sent delegations to meet with the newly enlarged Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Lashkar Gah. One delegation included Koka, the erstwhile Musa Qala Chief of Police, who brazenly complained that the elders' shura was comprised of drug dealers and Taliban. He said that he hoped that ISAF could return, but of course, US troops, not British ones (he was speaking to a US officer and would have been aware that the US was not supportive of the British deal). On the same delegation was a female MP, who pointed out that now that the deal was in force girls could no longer go to school.¹²⁶⁴ She was using ISAF's public narratives of the war, even though girls have rarely gone to school in Musa Qala.

There was too much pressure on the deals and ultimately they collapsed leading to more fighting. Now Zad's took about three weeks, Musa Qala's collapsed in February and Sangin remained peaceful until March 2007.¹²⁶⁵ The collapse of the Musa Qala deal has been blamed on the Americans killing a 'Taliban' commander in/near the exclusion zone surrounding the hukomat. The 'Taliban' claimed he was within in the negotiated exclusion zone and the Americans that he was without. To understand who the 'Taliban' were at that stage is hard, but two interviewees point to the fact that Sher Mohammad's men were continually probing across the exclusion zone's boundary in attempts to scupper the deal.¹²⁶⁶ Once it collapsed however, Haji Shah Agha was murdered and Musa Qala went back to 'Taliban' control.¹²⁶⁷

In Now Zad, fighting resumed throughout 2006 and 2007. Once the deal in Sangin broke down in March, there was a large British operation in an attempt to 'clear it once and for all', seemingly reminiscent of the 1988 Soviet operation (see section 2.17). The town was reported as 'utterly devastated' after British troops attacked and then blew up compounds that they had been fired at from—somewhat different from the reconstruction mission that they had promised publicly.¹²⁶⁸

Through the period of the winter of 2006/7, central Helmand remained peaceful whilst the fighting continued in the north and the south of the province.¹²⁶⁹ The British did not have nearly enough troops to garrison the province, as with the Soviets before them. Both,

¹²⁶⁴ Wiki: 'MUSA QALA AGREEMENT: OPPOSING INTERESTS AND OPPOSING VIEWS...' (27 Nov 2006).

¹²⁶⁵ Southby-Tailyour, Commando: 35.

¹²⁶⁶ 013, 070.

¹²⁶⁷ Bishop, 3 PARA: 267.

¹²⁶⁸ Southby-Tailyour, Commando: 247 & 252.

¹²⁶⁹ Wiki: 'SEMI-ANNUAL HELMAND REVIEW' (1 Apr 2007).

however, conducted massive clear operations. The operations were not linked to any political objectives apart from killing ‘Taliban’,¹²⁷⁰ much like the Soviet operations. The main difference was that the Soviets did very strong political work through Khad, which was entirely absent during the early British period.¹²⁷¹

One such British operation occurred over the summer of 2007. Direct parallels were drawn between this operation and the experience of being in the area when a Soviet operation moved through.¹²⁷² The aim was to clear the ground between Gereshk and Sangin and to ‘push the Taliban north’,¹²⁷³ which demonstrated a poor lack of understanding about the nature of the ‘Taliban’.¹²⁷⁴ It did, however, follow the public sphere of the conflict very well. But, the critical part of misunderstanding an enemy force as cohesive is misunderstanding the effects that your operations will have on it. By now, the fighting was largely fuelled by resistance to the British more than anything else.¹²⁷⁵ For this, Helmandis use the terms ‘mukowmat’, which means ‘resistance’, but also ‘be-tasleemeduna’, which translates more poetically as ‘without submission’.

5.5 - Central Helmand calm

Lashkar Gah and Gereshk were still under central government control. 2007 was the period during which the special force was supporting police Sergeant Raziq, enabling him to be the de facto Chief of Police (the US were supporting him with so many resources that he was able to dictate to the Nahr-e Saraj Chief of Police—see section 4.14).¹²⁷⁶ The ring road was being guarded by the Highway Police under Ezmarai.¹²⁷⁷ To the south-west towards Nad-e Ali, Haji Kadus, Mir Wali’s old deputy, had reinvented himself as a ‘police’ commander of three hundred men after being asked by some Barakzai elders in Malgir to defend them.¹²⁷⁸ He established a series of check points running through the centre of Malgir all the way to Loy Mandah.¹²⁷⁹ Haji Kadus had appealed to Assadullah Wafa, the Provincial Governor, for funding against the Taliban (the public narrative), but privately he was protecting the Barakzai against mixed communities to the north, and those elements in the Barakzai

¹²⁷⁰ 107.

¹²⁷¹ 015.

¹²⁷² 032, 080.

¹²⁷³ Stephen Grey, *Operation Snakebite* (London, 2010): 62; James Cartwright, *Sniper in Helmand* (Barnsley, 2011): 64-5.

¹²⁷⁴ 107.

¹²⁷⁵ 013, 025, 038.

¹²⁷⁶ 029.

¹²⁷⁷ 036.

¹²⁷⁸ 018, 026, 057.

¹²⁷⁹ PersExp, Nahr-e Saraj, 2009-12.

community opposed to him (see section 4.18). The Governor gave him a stipend under a (now unknown) militia programme. This funding was supplemented by the special force.¹²⁸⁰

Nad-e Ali also remained secure. Although Abdul Rahman had been removed from the Provincial Chief of Police position in June 2006, his cousins Tor Jan and Haji Lal Jan remained in the police in Nad-e Ali (Chief and Deputy, respectively). They were funded largely through drug interests and kidnapping,¹²⁸¹ meaning that they were able to suppress whatever movements the 'Taliban' made, whilst at the same time sowing the seeds for future Taliban dominance. 'Police' control of the road network, through checkpoints, allowed control of drugs transportation through the area. Most people in Nad-e Ali, apart from those directly linked to him, agree that Tor Jan's tenure was marked by exceptional brutality and a widening of the targeting of predation to everyone in the community (see section 4.12).¹²⁸²

The practice of kidnapping individuals for ransom was of particular note. For example, Abdul Khaleq's (Mulakhel) father was taken to a prison in the desert and later freed for 600,000 kaldars (Pakistani rupees: about \$6300). Mohammad Fahim and his father Juma Gul (Daftani) were later kidnapped. Because they resisted 'arrest' their ransom was two and a half times as much (1.5m kaldars). After the Murtaza incidents (see section 4.12), the Kharoti had started patrolling their village at night for protection so the police did not target them. The kidnaps were conducted at night, by 'policemen' out of uniform and the practice reached such proportions that a shura was called by a Kharoti elder, Atta Mohammad, where he demanded that the kidnappings cease and threatened to take the complaints to the 'provincial government, to Kabul, to ISAF'.¹²⁸³

Later on, in August 2008, Tor Jan was killed by a suicide bomber sent from Pakistan, the first that Nad-e Ali had ever seen.¹²⁸⁴ It was described as 'a gift from the Taliban'.¹²⁸⁵ When I arrived in Nad-e Ali that December as a British Army officer, we had no information about this private sphere. We operated as per the public sphere: that the 'Taliban' had taken over the district.¹²⁸⁶

¹²⁸⁰ 062.

¹²⁸¹ 017, 065. PersExp in village, 2009.

¹²⁸² e.g. 015, 017, 023, 065.

¹²⁸³ 065.

¹²⁸⁴ 017.

¹²⁸⁵ 065.

¹²⁸⁶ e.g. 'UK forces take key Taliban bases', [BBC News](#) (4 Jan 2009).

5.6 - The three Mullah Salams

By December 2007, the Afghan government and the British had decided that Musa Qala had been under 'Taliban' control for too long and a joint operation was planned to retake the town. The Afghan public blamed the Angrez for its fall to the 'Taliban' in the first place.¹²⁸⁷ For the first time some political work, similar to Khad operations, was carried out by the British. They identified a Taliban commander called Mullah Salam (Alizai/Pirzai) who was ready to switch sides. There was also a concerted effort to selectively kill or capture 'Taliban' commanders using special forces' raids in order that the coordination of the defence of Musa Qala would be impaired.¹²⁸⁸ Afterwards, 'Mullah Salam' would then be made District Governor of Musa Qala. President Karzai saw the deal as a 'grand alliance' that would privately unite two of the three warring sub-tribes of the Alizai in northern Helmand and also bridge the government-Taliban public cleavage.¹²⁸⁹

The operation was completed successfully with Afghan government forces occupying the town and installing Mullah Salam, but it then emerged that not everything was quite as appeared in the public sphere. There was some confusion over which of the three Mullah Salams who came from northern Helmand was involved. One was the petty Alizai/Pirzai commander with thirty men, discussed here, from Shah Karez village. Another Salam was an Alizai/Khalozai ex-Rais Baghrani commander, and the brother of Zakir, who had gone to madrassa with Sher Mohammad and was in Guantanamo. The third Salam, a Noorzai, from Tizne village in Now Zad, had been the Taliban Corps Commander for Herat during the Taliban government.¹²⁹⁰

There is strong evidence that President Karzai thought that the Mullah Salam in question was the Alizai/Khalozai commander.¹²⁹¹ By an astonishing coincidence that is too strong to ignore, Zakir, his brother, had just been processed for release from Guantanamo. He and Rauf Khadim had maintained their cover stories and it appears that the American interrogators had no idea how senior they were, and so they were released on the same day.¹²⁹² Their transfer date was 12 December 2007—the same day that Afghan and ISAF forces occupied Musa Qala.¹²⁹³ It is not known if Karzai both knew of Zakir's imminent release and tied it up with the fact that, as far as he knew, his brother was attempting to

¹²⁸⁷ Wiki: 'SPECIAL MEDIA REACTION: AMIDST MUSA QALA FIGHTING, AFGHANS BLAME BRITISH TROOPS FOR ITS TAKEOVER BY TALIBAN' (10 Dec 2007).

¹²⁸⁸ 105.

¹²⁸⁹ Grey, Snakebite: 70.

¹²⁹⁰ SMA.

¹²⁹¹ 108. Grey, Snakebite: 318.

¹²⁹² G008, G108. Chandrasekaran, Little America: 288.

¹²⁹³ Grey, Snakebite: 275-6.

switch sides. Reportedly, Karzai was talking to a ‘Salam’ before the deal went through,¹²⁹⁴ but it is not clear whether he was talking to the petty commander Mullah Salam who was pretending to Zakir’s brother, or whether he spoke to Zakir’s brother, who played along because he thought that it might help his brother’s release. Karzai may not have linked these two events at all, or may not have known what he was doing, but the coincidence is still stark. The private sphere of events bears no resemblance to the public narrative of ‘Taliban’ reconciliation.¹²⁹⁵

What of Sher Mohammad’s role? When I asked him if Karzai had got the wrong Salam he smiled, surprised, and nodded, muttering ‘maybe, maybe’ under his breath. From his reaction, I was under no doubt that that was what had occurred, but that Sher Mohammad’s links to Zakir meant that he was not going to discuss it with me. Sher Mohammad had pushed Karzai to accept the deal: this was a perfect opportunity for him to remove the ‘Taliban’ administration in Musa Qala and have commander Koka, his man, reinstated.¹²⁹⁶ In a final twist to the tale, Zakir and Rauf were later released from Afghan detention—allegedly because Sher Mohammad and Baghrani, respectively, paid their release ‘fees’.¹²⁹⁷ Zakir had been strongly influenced by Guantanamo and said, ‘I have strong feelings of revenge in my heart...until this fire of revenge is quenched, the jihad will continue’.¹²⁹⁸

Mullah Salam, the petty Pirzai commander, was appointed District Governor. He quickly proved ineffective and spent much of his time feuding with the Hassanzai Koka.¹²⁹⁹ Their militias clashed regularly, and even though it was inappropriate for Salam to have a militia as District Governor, it became very difficult to remove him as he was such a high profile reconciled ‘Talib’.¹³⁰⁰ That he was actually the ‘wrong’ Mullah Salam was quickly forgotten amongst the western community, but not the Helmandis.¹³⁰¹

Judging by Sher Mohammad’s reaction to the Musa Qala accords, he lost power to the anti-Sher Mohammad Pirzai group. The retaking of Musa Qala in December 2007 led to the reinstatement of Koka (Hassanzai) and the reconciliation of Salam (Pirzai), both with their militias. Thus, the Pirzai-Hassanzai cleavage still reigned in Musa Qala, just that both sides had representatives on the ‘Taliban’ side and the ‘government’ side, with the British stuck in

¹²⁹⁴ Ibid., 122.

¹²⁹⁵ ‘A Life more Ordinary in Musa Qala’, [BBC News](#) (12 Mar 2010).

¹²⁹⁶ Grey, [Snakebite](#): 122 & 130.

¹²⁹⁷ 013, 105.

¹²⁹⁸ Chandrasekaran, [Little America](#): 289.

¹²⁹⁹ Wiki: ‘MUSA QALA POLITICAL UPDATE: MULLAH SALAM’S LEADERSHIP WAVERING’ (26 May 2008).

¹³⁰⁰ PersExp, Helmand, 2009.

¹³⁰¹ 004.

the middle. We know that there were clashes between Salam's militia and Koka's 'police',¹³⁰² but 'Taliban' commanders also point to clashes between groups controlled by different mahazes in Musa Qala¹³⁰³—this may be due to Hassanzai and Pirzai groups joining different mahaz commanders (affiliating with different public organisations) due to their own private cleavages. Thus, in this highly complex environment the government-government clashes, combined with the Taliban-Taliban clashes show that they private sphere was dominating the interaction that generated conflict.

To complicate matters further, Sher Mohammad is also considered a mahaz commander by some Taliban commanders, at the same time that he is a Senator in the Kabul government.¹³⁰⁴ He interacts with both sides of the public cleavage at the same time. One Alizai elder told me seriously that, 'he was not scared of [Mullah] Omar's Taliban, but he was very scared of Sher Mohammad's Taliban'.¹³⁰⁵ The echoes of the situation during the jihad with the Noorzai and Kharoti leaders in Nad-e Ali, who held senior positions in the 'government' at the same time as waging war on the 'government' though their family networks, are strong. Here, though, Sher Mohammad affiliated with both the Taliban and government actors in order to protect his private interests, that is, his drugs network.¹³⁰⁶

The dealings over Musa Qala had shown to many perceptive Helmandis that the British, the Americans and the Afghan government were not acting in concert, and there were divisions that could be exploited.¹³⁰⁷ The British, as *the* historical enemy, lost out to this dynamic and ended up becoming the 'whipping boy' for wider dynamics that were not their fault. This was to become patently obvious with the soon-to-come declaration by Karzai that the Irishman Michael Semple was persona non grata. Never mind that he was Irish, to Helmandis he was British. Even Jabbar Qahraman, an MP for Helmand and heavily involved with Semple in the events that led to his expulsion said, 'of course he was British'. Hafizullah Khan agrees.

In summary, I have discussed the arrival of the British in the province in 2006 and the response of the population and the Taliban. I then explored the events surrounding Musa Qala in 2006/7, illustrating the private sphere describing the conflict. I will now briefly explain the failed reintegration of some ex-93rd division fighters before discussing in detail how the Taliban in Quetta were organised.

¹³⁰² Wiki: '...MULLAH SALAM'S LEADERSHIP WAVERING' (26 May 2008).

¹³⁰³ e.g. 225, 231

¹³⁰⁴ e.g. 225, 230.

¹³⁰⁵ 013.

¹³⁰⁶ 221, 228.

¹³⁰⁷ 023, 039.

5.7 - Persona non grata

Semple was the Deputy to the European Union Special Representative to Afghanistan. He and Jabbar Qahraman, in concert with the British in Helmand, understood partly the private sphere in Nahr-e Saraj i.e. that many 'Taliban' there were ex-93rd Division 'Hizb' fighters and commanders. As Qahraman said, 'it was all about ex-mujahidin in Qala-e Gaz, Shurakay and Zumbelay...so I helped them out'. Starting with just two groups of fighters led by ex-93rd commanders, a scheme was designed whereby the fighters would train briefly at a desert camp. They would then begin joint patrolling with the police (who in many cases were also ex-93rd/ex-'Hizb' fighters). If these two groups were successful others would follow. The central government in Kabul was kept fully informed through liaison meetings with the NDS.

Unfortunately, Assadullah Wafa, Daud's replacement as Provincial Governor, found out about the deal at the last minute and told President Karzai that the British were cutting a deal with the Taliban—he was annoyed that he was not going to be able to take a cut from the large amounts of money involved.¹³⁰⁸ Semple was expelled and the deal was off. Karzai raged against the British, further encouraging their position as a recipient of 'rightful' blame.¹³⁰⁹ One of the longer-term more depressing aspects of the deal for the British was that the understanding of the overlap between 'Hizb' and the 'Taliban' in Nahr-e Saraj was forgotten and had to be rediscovered in 2010.¹³¹⁰ See sections 6.10.

5.8 - Taliban structures

The British intervention had been a godsend for the Taliban movement.¹³¹¹ The presence of foreigners, particularly the British, who engaged in judicious use of firepower reminiscent of the Soviet military, made funding and recruitment non-issues for them.¹³¹² The British deployment helped the Taliban with their public narrative. In the early days of 2006, like in 1978, the funding was local, provided for by religious donations from the population: zakat.¹³¹³ Almost all of the individual fighters came from the local villages and fought to defend their own homes.¹³¹⁴ Fighters were replaced by the community if they were wounded or killed.¹³¹⁵ An individual's position within the 'Taliban' was dependent on his position in Helmandi society, and so the best person to replace a commander or fighter would often be his brother, for example, rather than his second-in-command.

¹³⁰⁸ 102.

¹³⁰⁹ 081, Jabbar. 'Great Game or just misunderstanding?', [BBC News](#) (5 Jan 2008).

¹³¹⁰ PersExp, Nahr-e Saraj, 2010.

¹³¹¹ I have drawn heavily on Claudio Franco's and Antonio Giustozzi's forthcoming Afghan Analyst Network's paper 'Introducing the nezami system within the Taliban discourse' in this section.

¹³¹² Farrell and Giustozzi (forthcoming).

¹³¹³ 202, 204, 243.

¹³¹⁴ 204, 213.

¹³¹⁵ 224, 225, 230, 239.

The Taliban's rootedness in Helmandi society is something that ISAF have consistently failed to understand, or have deceived themselves over. ISAF understand the Taliban in institutional terms without understanding the interactions between public and private that sustain the public organisation. Mahaz commanders operate through a series of personal relationships with local elders and a certain commander's group would only be able to operate in the area with the permission of the local community.¹³¹⁶ Delgai (group/squad) commanders too, in 2006, were often local, although as time progressed, commanders began to rotate into different areas as the Quetta Shura attempted to gain control over the unwieldy resistance organisation(s).¹³¹⁷ The key position at this stage was the mahaz commander: as he was the channel through which outside funding flowed, he was the interaction between the public and private spheres. For example in Nad-e Ali, a joint decision was made in the early years between the district elders and the mahaz commanders not to attack the British. This, apparently, was reversed once the 'bad behaviour' of the British was observed.¹³¹⁸

The individual motivations to fight the British were legion and well-known: fighting foreigners,¹³¹⁹ defending the opium crop,¹³²⁰ history,¹³²¹ cultural insensitivity,¹³²² righting perceived slights,¹³²³ enjoyment and, particularly, revenge.¹³²⁴ Every man had private reasons for fighting, but in a society where the threshold to violence was low, many men were fighting. In many cases people were fighting because of private feuds or inter-community violence, often generated or exacerbated by the warlords. Taliban commanders specifically mention the fact that the British were affiliated with the communities or commanders who had been previously oppressing them.¹³²⁵ From the public British point of view they were not affiliated with anyone apart from the government, but it took time for them to realise just how partisan and non-cohesive the 'government' was in Helmand.

This was further worsened by the Afghan 'officials' that the British were working with. As I noted earlier, local 'officials' were manipulating the British, telling them that that village, those people, those fighters were '*all Taliban*'. British intelligence gathering was manipulated by

¹³¹⁶ 202.

¹³¹⁷ 201, 204, 209.

¹³¹⁸ 209.

¹³¹⁹ 204.

¹³²⁰ 201, 210

¹³²¹ 006.

¹³²² 235.

¹³²³ 237.

¹³²⁴ e.g. 218, 228, 231.

¹³²⁵ 215, 216.

false reporting, just as the Soviet's had been decades before: the society was just too opaque to be understood by outsiders.¹³²⁶

The Quetta Shura and the ISI encapsulated well the multiplicity of private motivations for fighting in a strong public narrative that resonated with the population.¹³²⁷ This narrative was personified by Dadullah, their strongest commander. When he came into an area his presence alone would increase the attacks against the government and the British.¹³²⁸ He also galvanised funding through his exploits and through links with Al-Qaeda.¹³²⁹ Such an icon of the resistance became a target for ISAF and he was killed in May 2007.¹³³⁰ His killing exposed dangerous fractures within the Quetta Shura Taliban—Dadullah, who was Kakar, had been in competition for fighters, commanders and funding with Osmani, who was Ishaqzai.

Rumours soon began to circulate that the intelligence that led to Dadullah's death was provided by an Ishaqzai tribesman. This followed on from Osmani's death, at the end of 2006, which was blamed on intelligence provided by the Kakars.¹³³¹ At the time, there were huge discussion within the ISAF community about whether to kill or capture Dadullah, or not—perhaps he could be useful as a negotiating intermediary. Ultimately, however, the fact that he was so iconic and had played a unique role in the cohering of multiple different uprisings, combined with his links to Al-Qaeda, and to the contemporaneous Iraqi resistance (mainly for road-side bomb technology), meant that he was killed.¹³³²

Whilst Dadullah was effective, the fractures that he provoked were problematic for the ISI—this was exemplified none more so than in the rumours surrounding Osmani's and Dadullah's deaths. Starting at around the time of Dadullah's death, the Quetta Shura attempted to centralise their funding structure to one patronage chain away from the previous mahaz system.¹³³³ Their aim was several-fold. Primarily, they wished to stop destructive infighting between the mahazes, but also further centralisation, through the control of funding, allowed the Quetta Shura and the ISI to be able to make a greater claim

¹³²⁶ PersExp, Helmand, 2009-12.

¹³²⁷ 'Musa Qala and the English', Sarak (Jan 2008): 32; 'First, do not accept the judgement of widowhood', Elham (July 2009): 2.

¹³²⁸ 105.

¹³²⁹ Shahzad, Inside: 22-35.

¹³³⁰ 'Al Samood Biography of Taliban Military Commander Mullah Dadullah', NEFA Foundation (July 2007).

¹³³¹ 038, 105.

¹³³² Discussion recounted by 105.

¹³³³ 201, 202, 203, 204, 232.

to be responsible for the resistance.¹³³⁴ They were attempting to subsume the complexities of the private sphere in their public narrative.

As the fighting grew in scale (as more British, and later American, troops deployed to Helmand) more resources were needed—more than zakat was able to provide—and this gave the Quetta Shura a chance to dictate its terms through patronage. As part of this centralisation drive,¹³³⁵ the Taliban reissued its code of conduct or Layeha in 2009 (the original was released in 2006, and consisted mainly of behavioural rules rather than structural ones).¹³³⁶ This was a reinforcement of its public narrative. The 2009 Layeha set out the existence of a central treasury and banned the creation of new mahazes or groups, instead placing the emphasis on a series of provincial and district-level nezami commissions (discussed in detail in section 6.5). Additionally, other non-military councils (religious, financial, political, cultural, educational and so on) were outlined.¹³³⁷ The Quetta Shura was trying to move over to a more institutional form of organisation as opposed to a patronage form,¹³³⁸ similar to that which the international community were trying to institute in the Afghan 'government'. The Taliban were actually trying to remould the 'Taliban' into what the public sphere described them as.

5.9 - The British reassessment

It became clear to the British at the end of 2007 and the beginning of 2008 that their tactics had to change. They began to attempt to operate in a different way, with less violence and a greater focus on the reconstruction that comprised their public narrative.¹³³⁹ However, the British realised that they could not generate enough troops to operate in this way—less reliance on force (particularly airpower), meant that greater numbers of troops were required (there were about eight thousand five hundred British troops in Helmand in mid-2008).¹³⁴⁰ To help, the US deployed over two thousand marines to Helmand. Many went to Garmsir to secure the District Centre. They also started mentoring the police in five districts across the province and patrolling the border with Pakistan.¹³⁴¹ Previously in 2007, the Danish had also taken over responsibility for Gereshk and Nahr-e Saraj with a further seven hundred and fifty

¹³³⁴ Naval Postgraduate School, Analyzing the Taliban Code of Conduct (Monterey, 2009): 2-5.

¹³³⁵ Franco and Giustozzi (forthcoming).

¹³³⁶ c.f. 'A new layeha for the Mujahideen [sic]', <http://www.signandsight.com/features/1071.html> (accessed 14 Nov 2012).

¹³³⁷ NPS, Layeha: 7, 15-9, 21 & 22.

¹³³⁸ Franco and Giustozzi (forthcoming).

¹³³⁹ Rudra Chaudhuri and Theo Farrell, "Campaign disconnect: operational progress and strategic obstacles in Afghanistan, 2009–2011" International Affairs 87, no. 2 (2011): 273.

¹³⁴⁰ Theo Farrell, "Improving in War: Military Adaptation and the British in Helmand, 2006-2009" Journal of Strategic Studies 33, no. 4 (2010): 23.

¹³⁴¹ Sam Kiley, Desperate Glory (London, 2009): 14; Chandrasekaran, Little America: 66.

soldiers.¹³⁴² Increases were eventually to see ISAF troop numbers go up ten-fold from the original deployment of three thousand.

In March 2008, Governor Wafa was removed and replaced with Gulabuddin Mangal. An ex-communist technocrat, Mangal was considered a great improvement over Wafa by ISAF,¹³⁴³ however many Helmandis focused negatively on his communist past.¹³⁴⁴ In one of his last acts as Governor, Assadullah Wafa appointed Habibullah District Governor of Nad-e Ali, recalling him from retirement in Garmsir. The last time an (ex-) communist had held any kind of government post in Nad-e Ali was, in fact, when Habibullah had been evicted by the mujahidin in the early 1990s, when he was District Chief of Police.¹³⁴⁵ The situation in Nad-e Ali in early 2008 was fractious, but nowhere near as bad as Habibullah's previous posting there (see section 3.2).

In the spring of 2008 central Helmand was still stable and that stability meant that ISAF concentrated on other areas in Helmand. Whether because of the American deployment to Garmsir or as a result of it, the district was flooded with 'Punjabis' and 'ISI'.¹³⁴⁶ One interviewee even recounts meeting an ISI colonel in Quetta, whom he knew from the jihad days: the colonel was ebullient as he had 'just been across the border...doing a little jihad'.¹³⁴⁷ British journalists in Garmsir also commented on the high proportion of foreigners fighting that summer.¹³⁴⁸ The British, however, were focussed on Kajaki, where they were trying to transport a third turbine to the dam so as to increase its output. This was considered important for of the reconstruction of southern Afghanistan by ISAF: a key part of their public narrative. The Alizai of northern Helmand, however, privately wanted an irrigation canal (see section 6.2).

Here, I have discussed the events of 2006/7 and the Taliban organisation surrounding those events. I then discussed British attempts to reform their approach in Helmand. I now discuss events in Nad-e Ali and Lashkar Gah, where Abdul Rahman switched sides, changing his public-private interaction, because his poppy fields (private interests) were eradicated. I then explore how private cleavages within Shin Kalay led to what appeared to be an overt, public 'Taliban' action.

¹³⁴² Peter Viggo Jakobsen and Peter Dahl Thruelsen, "Clear, Hold, Train: Denmark's Military Operations in Helmand 2006-2010." *Danish Foreign Policy Yearbook* (2011): 78-80.

¹³⁴³ Wiki: 'HELMAND PROVINCE: GOVERNOR MANGAL TAKES CHARGE' (26 May 2008).

¹³⁴⁴ 036, 047, 081.

¹³⁴⁵ Habibullah, 035, 064.

¹³⁴⁶ 047, 048, 050, 053.

¹³⁴⁷ 047.

¹³⁴⁸ Kiley, *Desperate Glory*: 32; Docherty, *Desert*: 104.

5.10 - Abdul Rahman Jan's poppy

Poppy eradication was still continuing in Helmand, as it had done almost every year since 2002. During the 2008 eradication season, Abdul Rahman's poppy was targeted because he was no longer in the 'government': it was estimated that he lost twenty per cent of his 'extensive' crop.¹³⁴⁹ As his poppy was eradicated Abdul Rahman contacted Rahim Ishaqzai, the Taliban Governor for Helmand and a fellow Now Zadi, and negotiated a deal whereby the 'policemen' guarding the checkpoints in Marjeh would become 'Taliban' and other Taliban would be allowed into Marjeh.¹³⁵⁰ His relatives still controlled the 'police' because he had done an excellent job of shaping the organisation to be supportive of his interests during his tenure. I consider the side-switching of Abdul Rahman described below as a key piece of evidence in support of my thesis.

It was a very similar position to that taken by Mir Wali and Sher Mohammad before him (see sections 4.18 and 4.20). However, the British understood it in terms of the public sphere: the police had abandoned their checkpoints to the Taliban.¹³⁵¹ Abdul Rahman supported this public sphere vociferously when I spoke to him later and stated, 'there was no deal; we were so few; they surrounded us...they were not local Taliban...they were...Punjabi, Arab, Chechen...they were not Helmandis'. Abdul Rahman consistently refutes the idea that most 'Taliban' are local and maintains that they are 'all foreigners and Al-Qaeda'. This adherence to the public sphere is partly because he was used to dealing with westerners before 2006, when westerners only understood the public sphere. Helmandis who currently deal with westerners have dropped that public narrative and now talk of local 'Taliban'. Thus, as the westerners have improved their understanding of the private sphere, the Helmandis have mirrored them, matching their understanding.

Gradually, over the summer of 2008, Marjeh became a no-go area for the government and for ISAF. By August, it was fully in the hands of the 'Taliban'.¹³⁵² Abdul Rahman maintained a dialogue in the public sphere with Mangal, the new Governor, throughout the events. He told him that he was worried because the 'Taliban' were growing in influence in Marjeh and there was nothing that he could do: Mangal should deploy more troops.¹³⁵³ Eventually, the ANA were sent to Nad-e Ali in mid-August to shore up its defences, as Marjeh had 'fallen' on the seventh of the month. This was based on the public sphere's understanding of who the

¹³⁴⁹ Wiki: 'READOUT OF NORTH ATLANTIC COUNCIL MEETING' (9 Apr 2008).

¹³⁵⁰ 013, 047, 060, 105, Habibullah.

¹³⁵¹ Ewen Southby-Tailyour, *Helmand Assault* (London, 2010): 37.

¹³⁵² Docherty, *Desert*: 127-30.

¹³⁵³ Kiley, *Desperate Glory*: 227-9.

'Taliban' were. Tor Jan however, who was the Chief of Police in Nad-e Ali, was a relative-by-marriage of Abdul Rahman—if they had wanted Nad-e Ali to 'fall', it would have as well.

The ANA, supported by British mentoring teams, deployed to the district school building that was to become their base for the next year. They were able to move up to seven kilometres from the District Centre. Very quickly the ANA suspected that the local police were 'Taliban' supporters, and in a sense, those that were closely linked to Abdul Rahman were. Shortly after, the hukumat was then attacked from the west, that is, from Shin Kalay, by 'Taliban', although this was probably the Kharoti militia that had been established to protect the village from the predations of the police.¹³⁵⁴ Dr Jailani, the old Hizb commander, gave up his clinic in-between the hukumat and Shin Kalay for the 'Taliban' to use as a meeting room and checkpoint.¹³⁵⁵

The private sphere was hyper-complex, involved several factions within the 'police', and multiple private cleavages and alliances.¹³⁵⁶ The first faction was that linked to Tor Jan, the Chief, and Abdul Rahman: they were linked to the 'police'-cum-'Taliban' in Marjeh. Another faction, linked to Haji Lal Jan, the Deputy Chief, were virulently anti-'Taliban' as they had been forced out of their village by Arab, a nephew of Lal Jan, who had joined the 'Taliban' to gain ascendancy in a sub-village private cleavage.¹³⁵⁷ This second faction had partly been the cause of the Kharoti tribal militia's founding, which was affiliated with the 'Taliban' (see section 4.12).¹³⁵⁸ Presumably, the 'Taliban' attacked the District Centre due to the presence of the ANA and the British—Murtaza the Kharoti commander, was quoted by Abdul Rahman as giving the Taliban public narrative and saying, 'you have brought foreigners, kaffirs; we are obliged to do jihad'—although it could have been because of the Manan-Murtaza feud (see section 4.12). To complete the circle, Abdul Rahman Jan and Haji Lal Jan were cousins-by-marriage.¹³⁵⁹

The public sphere's description of a government-Taliban cleavage did not match this extraordinary milieu. Once the British had deployed the situation was soon dominated by the fighting between the mainly-Kharoti 'Taliban', based in Shin Kalay, and the mainly-Noorzai 'police' based in the District Centre. This continued until December, by which time the British had reinforced their troops in Nad-e Ali, but were unable to leave the hukumat due to the resistance that their presence generated. The British were like a magnet to those locals who

¹³⁵⁴ 050. Docherty, *Desert*: 127-8.

¹³⁵⁵ 050.

¹³⁵⁶ Habibullah.

¹³⁵⁷ See section 4.17.

¹³⁵⁸ 007, 023, 050.

¹³⁵⁹ 039.

were linked to the Taliban, and represented the same allergic reaction that had occurred in 1980 with the Soviets, and 2006 with the British in northern Helmand.

For Habibullah, being trapped in the District Centre and surrounded on all sides by Taliban, or mujahidin as they called themselves, was nothing new.¹³⁶⁰ However, it was not the deteriorating situation that was the primary prompt for the British to do something about Nad Ali, but an audacious attack on Lashkar Gah occurring on the 11 October 2008. The attack targeted the Provincial Governor's compound. It began when the British received intelligence that one thousand 'Taliban' were planning to attack Lashkar Gah. This translated to three hundred 'Taliban' seen moving north through Nawa, along the right bank of the Helmand towards Bolan, opposite Lashkar Gah. These were intercepted with helicopters and around one hundred and fifty were killed. The 'Taliban' escaped back to Nad-e Ali. Having been repulsed, Lashkar Gah came under rocket attack four days later, but *from a police check point* in Bolan which was then destroyed with an airstrike. The 'Taliban' activity stopped.¹³⁶¹

The public sphere's descriptions of a Taliban attack on Lashkar Gah,¹³⁶² and the tracing of the militants back to Nad-e Ali, were the casus belli for the ramped up British intervention in the district. The British press was clear: this was a Taliban attack on Lashkar Gah.¹³⁶³ However, things were not as appeared and the private sphere was very different. The attacks had been organised and financed by Sher Mohammad and Abdul Rahman.¹³⁶⁴ Even Habibullah, a long-term Abdul Rahman ally admitted to me, 'that attack...was [Sher Mohammad] and [Abdul Rahman]...the aim was to create chaos and prove they were the only people who could lead the province'. I asked Abdul Rahman about who had organised the attack on Lashkar Gah and he began to guffaw before becoming serious. 'I was in Kabul', he said 'I don't know anything about it'. This is an interesting admission from someone who claims to be among the only people who can solve the security issues in Helmand as 'only we know who the Taliban are'. I asked if it could possibly be something to do with Sher Mohammad. 'Sher Mohammad has no links with the Taliban', he said, despite earlier pointing out that he had many, many links with the Taliban. 'It is Mangal propaganda' he added. When I challenged Sher Mohammad, he immediately said that 'it wasn't me...it was the Taliban...my police helped defeat it'.

¹³⁶⁰ Habibullah.

¹³⁶¹ 102, 109. Theo Farrell, Frans Osinga, and James A. Russell, eds., Military Adaptation in Afghanistan (Palo Alto, 2013): 5-11.

¹³⁶² Op Cit.

¹³⁶³ 'Taliban killed in Afghan battles', BBC News (12 Oct 2008).

¹³⁶⁴ Habibullah, 038, 048.

In the terms of this thesis, the ‘Taliban’ takeover of Nad-e Ali and Marjeh and the ‘Taliban’ attack on Lashkar Gah are key events. Both appeared to have very strong public sphere’s describing them. Yet the British, and Mangal the Provincial Governor, did not understand that Abdul Rahman Jan and Sher Mohammad were manipulating events for their own gain. These two events caused the British deployment to Nad-e Ali in December 2008, which hugely affected the shape of the conflict as it began the British focus on central Helmand at the expense of northern Helmand. Thus, opacity of the private sphere to outsiders allowed it to drive the interaction between public and private that shapes conflict.

5.11 - De Shin Kalay Maktab¹³⁶⁵

In an unrelated but concurrent incident, the school in Shin Kalay was pulled to the ground with a mechanical digger. Unlike the other schools in Nad-e Ali, the school had been built privately by a western charity run by a former villager who now lives in the US.¹³⁶⁶ When I arrived in Nad-e Ali shortly after, the clear public narrative was that the Taliban had done it. We were even shown around the ruined school by the elders who were lamenting Taliban cruelty. Habibullah said, ‘[the residents of Shin Kalay] are not up for education...they are all Talibs’, implying that they had pulled their own school down. In many respects he was right.

Other schools in the district had also been pulled down or heavily damaged by the Taliban in the preceding twelve months, excepting two. Firstly, the school in Saidabad which served the Shia Hazara community, because Iran’s support for insurgent groups in Helmand was predicated on the protection of Shia communities, and those Taliban groups that were involved in burning schools down were more likely to be directly foreign-sponsored (see section 5.8 for discussion of types of Taliban).¹³⁶⁷ Loy Bagh’s school also escaped destruction as Mullah Karim, a prominent Noorzai in Loy Bagh, was a key Taliban interlocutor in the district.¹³⁶⁸ However, the school in Shin Kalay represented a special case, and whilst probably not a metaphor for school burning, this story demonstrates the difficulties with public sphere of development in Helmand.

The school was built in 2004 by Green Village Schools (Shin Kalay means Green Village), a US charity run by Dr Mohammad Khan Kharoti.¹³⁶⁹ It had had twelve hundred pupils, one third of whom were girls. The school had been built on the land of Habib, Dr Kharoti’s brother, in the northern half of Shin Kalay. The next-door plot of land was owned by Daria

¹³⁶⁵ ‘Shin Kalay School’ (Pushtu).

¹³⁶⁶ ‘Newsletter’, Green Village Schools (Oct 2008).

¹³⁶⁷ 048, 050, 051, 058.

¹³⁶⁸ 051. See later for discussion about Mullah Karim.

¹³⁶⁹ 023, 047, 048, 050, 051, 058. <http://www.greenvillageschools.org/> (accessed 15 Nov 2012). Detailed attribution redacted for personal security reasons.

Khan, a distant relative of Dr Kharoti's. Daria was jealous of the prestige that the school brought to Dr Kharoti and Habib in the village and sought to have it destroyed, framing his actions in the public sphere. He was eventually killed in a battle near Khwashal Kalay with British forces in the spring of 2009.

When another person from the village was in Quetta in 2007, he heard that Daria had been there and spoken to the ISI saying, 'girls with big breasts are going to school in Shin Kalay and this is shameful'. Daria was using the Taliban's public narrative to manipulate the ISI. He had previously threatened the teachers with death if they continued teaching at the school, but this was brushed off—Daria's nieces and nephews go to the school and his mother tries to restrain him. According to an interviewee, Daria publicly stated that the school brought western influence and that this was something that should be stopped.

Later, in the summer of 2008, people came to the school and filmed it. The villagers said that they had been sent by the ISI. By this point the 'Taliban' were in control of the village, but it was a mixture of village 'Talibs' and Talibs who were working together against the government in a franchise-esque relationship.¹³⁷⁰ Two days before the school was destroyed, two Punjabi speaking gentlemen came and toured the school. They returned the next day with a much larger group of men, condemned the school as a 'Bush nest' (referring to the US President) and began to destroy what they could with their hands. The teachers fled for their own safety.

The next day, the group of 'Punjabis' returned with a bulldozer and began to destroy the school, looting what they wished over the next two days to take south with them. Unfortunately at the time, and probably due to the on-going events in Lashkar Gah, ISAF helicopters were overhead for some of the destruction of the school, but did not intervene, giving the impression to those villagers who would have wanted ISAF help that they did not care. That evening, once the Punjabis had gone, the villagers themselves further looted the school.

No-one knows definitively who the Punjabis were, or even whether Daria was involved. These are the suspicions and rumours of the villagers, when they are not too scared to talk about it due to the factions and trust-deficit extant in the village. People did not fight back because they were scared of being publicly labelled pro-government: 'no-one is united in the village at all; everyone has connections going in every direction'. However, all interviewees

¹³⁷⁰ 023, 050.

confirmed the private sphere dynamic that this was an act that was driven by jealousy and cleavages within the village, rather than an external, public 'Taliban' sponsored operation. As one interviewee said, '[Dr Kharoti] is a good man, but the [Kharoti of Shin Kalay] are such sons of bitches...he got no support from the community'. See figure 7.



Figure 7: Shin Kalay school in December 2008

The conclusion that many villagers have come to privately is that there is a faction within the village that went directly to the hardliners in the ISI. The ISI then sent a team over and commandeered Afghan government equipment in Marjeh to pull it down, even whilst the village was in the hands of the Kharoti 'Taliban'. That is, the ISI were manipulated by an internal village feud due to a lack of on-the-ground knowledge. Even the tribal leadership was not that bothered by the events: they were able to access education elsewhere for their children and, as is fairly common in Helmand, 'were not interested in the poor people's children learning to read as that would undermine [the tribal leaders'] position'.

After these events, an elder from the village who was amenable to the school rang a contact in the Taliban's Quetta leadership and asked why the Taliban had committed this crime. They denied knowing anything about it and pointed to their policy which was against school

destruction.¹³⁷¹ The leadership rang Malem, the Taliban Governor for Nad-e Ali. He confirmed that it had happened, but claimed not to know who had done it. That is, even the local representative of the Taliban organisation was ignorant of the events: this is what allowed the private, internal feud to drive the school destruction in a public-private interaction with the ISI. Malem was sacked by the leadership for allowing it to happen. In a final twist, twenty or thirty village teenagers began to work with the 'Taliban' groups within the village because they had nothing to do during the day with no school to go to. Some of these were killed when British and Afghan government forces took the village in December.

Events in Nad-e Ali—both Abdul Rahman's side-switching and the school in Shin Kalay—demonstrate the importance of the private sphere. In both cases the multiplicity different actors, groups and narratives that make up the 'Taliban' are exposed and this demonstrates well how 'government' and 'Taliban' are labels and nothing more. Moreover, a variety of private actors demonstrated the ability to manipulate different public organisations. In the next section, I am going to cover the increased British focus on central Helmand.

5.12 - The British in Nad-e Ali

The British-led operation in Nad-e Ali in December 2008 was the end of the British focus on northern Helmand and the start of a focus on central Helmand. The public sphere was clear: Nad-e Ali had fallen into the hands of the Taliban and the government, supported by ISAF, was going to get it back.¹³⁷² It comprised fifteen hundred soldiers, and led to the establishment of three British bases surrounding the district: in Trekh Nawar, to the west of Khwashal Kalay and in Maat-e Que. During operation the British attempted to sequentially attack and defeat the 'Taliban' in the villages of the District. Initially focussing on Shin Kalay, and 'egged on' by Habibullah the District Governor, the British troops faced initially stiff resistance from the mainly Kharoti defenders under commanders like Ibrahim and Murtaza.¹³⁷³

Very quickly it became clear that the British had the intention of assaulting the village this time, rather than the probing that they had often done before. The tribal elders in the village told their men to stand down to avoid further destruction, but not before they had suffered seventeen dead.¹³⁷⁴ The recruitment for the defence of the village was spread across the different clans (see Appendix 4). So too were the casualties: one from the Saleekhel, five from Shabakhel (Murtaza's clan), one from the Toreekhel (Wakil Safar's clan), for example.

¹³⁷¹ 'Are the Taliban really burning schools?', *Sarak* (Sep 2008): 6.

¹³⁷² 'Taliban bases fall after major offensive', *The Times* (4 Jan 2009).

¹³⁷³ 007, 209, 212, 222.

¹³⁷⁴ 038, 047, 048.

This casualty spread caused many of the clan heads to send sons to the ‘Taliban’, because of the nature of how fighting men are replaced by Helmandis. One elder closely involved with the resistance used a proverb to describe the recruitment: ‘from drops of rain comes a flood’, that is, everyone contributed what they could and the resistance was strong.¹³⁷⁵ Interestingly, the casualties from, and possibly the recruitment to, the ‘Taliban’ are concentrated in the poorer, less influential clans in Shin Kalay.¹³⁷⁶

When the British troops entered Shin Kalay they spoke with the villagers. The British adhered to the public narratives surrounding the conflict and looked to see where they could help. Part of this sphere was that they were there to support the Afghan government. This meant that they had entered the village with Noorzai police in tow, but the residents of Shin Kalay were appalled. They had been fighting to keep the police out. The British public narrative—that they stood for good governance, fairness and reconstruction—did not chime with the private Kharoti cleavage with the police who had just arrived with the British. Still, the villagers thanked the British for ‘liberating’ them from Taliban dominion, which had destroyed their school, even taking them to the site and giving them a tour (see figure 7). The British were later to find out, from Habibullah, that their colonel had been poured tea throughout the meeting by one of the Kharoti Taliban commanders.¹³⁷⁷

Several days later, the British assaulted Zhargoun Kalay. The intervening period allowed the ‘mujahidin-Taliban’ (an interviewee had a Freudian slip when describing this to me) to prepare the defences of the town along the same lines as during the Soviet-era. A shout went out to other communities across central Helmand that the Angrez were coming and the village needed help defending itself.¹³⁷⁸ Groups came from as far afield as Nawa and the fighting was chaotic with many commanders operating against the British. These included Mullah Haji Ibrahim Akhund, Malem, Mullah Abdullah Akhund, Haji Lala, Mullah Mohammad Khan, Mullah Ghulam Mohammad Akhund, Mullah Mohammad Haq Akhund, Qari Awal Khan, Mullah Toofan Akhund, Mullah Abdullah Akhund and Mulawi Farouq.¹³⁷⁹ ‘Taliban’ casualties were heavy. From just one group four fighters were killed and another two wounded. The British also felt forced to use artillery and drop a bomb on the village during the course of the battle, which resulted in civilian casualties including the death several members of a family.¹³⁸⁰ The British also took casualties that day.¹³⁸¹

¹³⁷⁵ 007.

¹³⁷⁶ 065.

¹³⁷⁷ PersExp, Shin Kalay, Dec 2008.

¹³⁷⁸ 007, 023, 237.

¹³⁷⁹ 222, 237, 245.

¹³⁸⁰ Southby-Tailyour, *Assault*: 136-9. PersExp, Zhargoun Kalay, Dec 2008.

¹³⁸¹ 237. ‘Soldier “showed great potential”’, *BBC News* (18 Dec 2008).

After two days of fighting the British entered the village with the Afghan police. The police quickly demonstrated why the population hated them. I personally witnessed the District Chief of Police Abdul Sattar and his chaiboy loading a fine looking dog onto the back of his truck with a group of sullen villagers looking on. Walking over, we gently asked the Chief about the dog and he answered that he had just found it and was going to keep it and take it back to his HQ. We nodded towards the villagers and suggested that perhaps this would not be appropriate. His response suggested that he simply could not understand what we were trying to explain to him; as far as he was concerned, he had just taken this village and he was entitled to what he wanted. The dog was given back to the villagers.

Concurrently to the battle for Zhargoun Kalay, the British moved an Estonian company up to Chah-e Anjir. In the public sphere, the Estonians were a valuable part of the NATO coalition in Afghanistan.¹³⁸² In the private sphere, the Estonians were Soviets. In fact, some of the Estonian soldiers had actually served in Helmand during the 1980s with the limited contingent.¹³⁸³ When the Estonians got to Chah-e Anjir, they found a small band of policemen under Rahmatullah, keeping the ‘Taliban’ (mainly Kharoti from Naqilabad) out of the town. ISAF were puzzled as to how the town could be kept in government hands with such a small group of policemen.

They were not aware, however, of the private groups that cut across the ‘government’-‘Taliban’ public cleavage. Rahmatullah was from the Noorzai/Aghezai clan from Loy Bagh—Khano’s clan. His paternal uncle was Abdul Sattar, the District Chief of Police, and Assadullah Sherzad, the new Provincial Chief of Police, was his cousin: a solidly ‘government’ family. However, Abdul Karim, the Aghezai ‘member’ of Hizb during the 1980s was now on the Taliban shura for the district. This meant he was able to manipulate the patterns of conflict in the district. The family wanted to maintain control of Chah-e Anjir because of the lucrative drugs market there.¹³⁸⁴ It was the old game.

After Zhargoun Kalay and Chah-e Anjir, the British moved quickly to Chah-e Mirza. There was no resistance and the British set up camp in a field opposite the mosque in Zorabad. Soon, Haji Manan, Haji Lal Jan’s nephew, presented himself to the British as the police commander for the area (the British had not shared the operational details with the police beforehand because they did not trust them). Manan had not been back to the area since the ‘Taliban’, led by Arab, his relative, had evicted him and Haji Lal Jan (see section 4.17).

¹³⁸² ‘NATO Secretary General praises Estonia’s commitment to Smart Defence’ (http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_83519.htm, accessed 15 Nov 2012).

¹³⁸³ PersExp serving with Estonian troops in Nad-e Ali, 2009.

¹³⁸⁴ 039, 051, 067, 071.

The British had absolutely no idea who he was, or any knowledge of the private sphere surrounding Manan and the persecution of the population in Nad-e Ali. From the public point of view, however, he was dressed smartly in his uniform, something of a rarity within the police.¹³⁸⁵

The British held a shura in the village. The villagers were openly and vociferously disgusted with Manan, something that is unusual in a society which places a high emphasis on not insulting people in public, and particularly people who are known to be cruel and vindictive. The elders stated they were keen to have ISAF ensuring security together with the ANA, but not the police. By now, the British were beginning to understand how the local population felt about the 'police', but they were trapped between the public and private spheres. The public sphere dictated that they had to work with the police in order to improve them, yet in the private sphere that provoked resistance from the locals. It wasn't just that there were some problems with the 'police' that were causing frictions with the local population—the 'police', or rather the individuals comprised therein, were the *raison d'être* for the population's resistance. It was proving very hard for the British to balance the public and private spheres of their mission.

The British were further confused the next day, when the elders reversed position and retracted their comments on Manan. They added that 'for cultural reasons' they would not be able to accept the British in the area, but they would be happy to have Manan ensuring the security of the village. They were attempting to manipulate the British by using the public narrative that was emerging at the time that ISAF troops were 'culturally insensitive'.¹³⁸⁶ The British ignored them and later found out that Haji Manan had privately spoken to the elders and told them that the British had arrived to eradicate next year's poppy crop, but that he could protect them.¹³⁸⁷ Finally, the elders approached the British discretely and tried to bribe them to leave. The British ignored them again and continued with their original plan of establishing a base on the canal crossing point at Maat-e Que.¹³⁸⁸

These private spheres are instructive of the British deployment to Helmand. For their part, the British had a very clear public narrative. They were there to support the *legitimate* Afghan Government defeat the Taliban insurgency that had taken over the district and was *oppressing* the population. However, in the private sphere, the original opposition to the government in Nad-e Ali had mostly been caused by 'police' brutality. The population was

¹³⁸⁵ PersExp, Chah-e Mirza, Dec 2008.

¹³⁸⁶ 'The deadly consequences of cultural insensitivity in Afghanistan', [Radio Free Europe](#) (15 Nov 2012).

¹³⁸⁷ 017.

¹³⁸⁸ PersExp, Nad-e Ali, 2008-9.

largely incredulous when the ‘police’ turned up on the heels of the British assaults, and enjoyed their support. It confirmed their worst fears, and confirmed what they knew from history about the Angrez. The population, in many cases, affiliated with the Taliban in order to protect themselves from the ‘government’.

For many in the population, the ‘Taliban’ were resisting British aggression. Many of my interviewees estimate that around ninety-five per cent of the fighters in the ‘Taliban’ in Nad-e Ali were local fighters¹³⁸⁹ and one gentleman, well acquainted with the fighting in Nad-e Ali, listed a ‘hatred of outsiders interfering’ coupled with ‘boredom...through unemployment’ as the primary recruitment motivations.¹³⁹⁰ The paradoxes were the same as that in Musa Qala in 2006—the ‘police’ are linked to the ‘Taliban’, but the population are also working with the ‘Taliban’ to keep the ‘police’ out. ‘Taliban’ and ‘police’ are just public labels for private actors. The public sphere does not adequately describe the conflict, which can only be explained when the private cleavages within the ‘police’, the ‘Taliban’ and the society are explored. Public organisations do not generally have this level of knowledge of the private sphere, and the British certainly did not in Nad-e Ali in 2008, resulting in their manipulation.

5.13 - A new approach

The beginning of 2009 ushered in a new approach from the British, pioneered in Nad-e Ali. A community council was formed that comprised notables from the district that would carry out some government functions such as basic justice, allocation of development money and security advice for the District Governor. The council was to be elected from a shortlist vetted by the NDS. The NDS, in consort with Habibullah, wanted to strike people off the list like Pir Mohammad Sadat (Kharoti, ex-Hizb, from Naqilabad), because he was ‘Taliban’. The British insisted that he should be included for exactly that reason: they wanted both the ‘government’ and the ‘Taliban’ public organisations represented. In the final deliberation, the council was considered by the population ‘a commanders’ council’, comprised of the mujahidin commanders who had survived the jihad and leveraged their position to become community leaders.¹³⁹¹ It fairly reflected the society in Nad-e Ali, even though there was extensive manipulation by Abdul Ahad from Loy Bagh to get more of his Noorzai supporters on the council.

The commanders were all commanders that had ejected Habibullah from Nad-e Ali in the early 1990s. These included Dr Jailani: he was appointed to the security sub-committee

¹³⁸⁹ 004, 006, 007, 021, 023, 038, 047.

¹³⁹⁰ 047.

¹³⁹¹ 015, 023.

despite having a son fighting with the Taliban against the British.¹³⁹² Others, such as Abdul Malik (Popalzai), were sent to the council as representation for powerful ex-Taliban figures, in this case, Haji Mullah Paslow, his uncle.¹³⁹³ There was, however, some representation from the old tribal leadership: Mirwais Khan (Kharoti) was Wakil Safar's son and Abdul Ahad was the nephew of Shah Nazar Khan, the murdered Najibullah-era Provincial Governor. Habibullah was allowed to nominate someone from the community as the twenty-fifth member and, in an as-yet unexplained move, appointed Abdul Karim from Loy Bagh, despite knowing that he was a local representative of the Taliban movement.¹³⁹⁴

The British gradually came to understand better the private sphere in Nad-e Ali. They persevered in the expectation that it would be better if community representatives and the 'Taliban' had a dialogue with the government. The British very strongly believed that there would have to be a political outcome to the conflict.¹³⁹⁵ The council also managed the interface between institutional and patronage government: the district administration would be organised along institutional lines and the shura would be a patronage mechanism, distributing development funding through the elders. Overall, many of the community leaders were confused about the purpose of the shura: the leaders would meet anyway, if they needed to. They went along though, because this way they were able to ensure their cut of development funding.¹³⁹⁶

The Nad-e Ali district shura represents an interesting turning point in the British approach to Helmand. Prima facie, they were extolling a more inclusive counterinsurgency-style approach, where political work would provide the framework within which development and military force would be used. This was what their public narrative had been since 2006, but it was really only during 2009 that the British began to match their actions to the public sphere. Thus, once an area had been cleared of insurgents, development work would begin and attempts would be made to improve the Afghan government to make it more responsive to the needs of the population.¹³⁹⁷

Conceptually, it was based on the ISAF public counterinsurgency narrative that the population was a mass that was stuck between the two competing 'offers' of the Afghan government and the Taliban. ISAF defined the 'government' and the 'Taliban' as separate,

¹³⁹² 023, 050.

¹³⁹³ 015.

¹³⁹⁴ 067.

¹³⁹⁵ PersExp, Nad-e Ali, 2009.

¹³⁹⁶ 015, 023, 039.

¹³⁹⁷ Theo Farrell and Stuart Gordon, "COIN Machine: The British Military in Afghanistan" *Orbis* 53, no. 4 (2009): 12.

albeit factionalised, organisations. This, in a sense, was implicit in ISAF's role: their mandate was to support the Afghan government, and so they defined the situation through the prism of their own existence, much like the Soviets had before them. ISAF hoped to win the population over by improving the Afghan government and building, for example, schools and clinics.¹³⁹⁸ Although this was an improvement on previous British understanding and behaviour, it still did not take into account enough the private sphere of conflict.

5.14 - British expansion

Once the British operation was over, most of the troops who had promised that they would not leave Nad-e Ali, left Nad-e Ali. A very small number of troops remained in the district. (Even though the Americans had started to increase their troop numbers in Helmand, the British were still stretched). Within weeks, the British were hemmed in in their bases. Shin Kalay became a no-go-zone for the government and the British. With fighting around the village once again, some of the tribal leadership negotiated with, or told, Ibrahim, the main Kharoti 'Taliban' commander at the time, to position his group to the south of the Kharoti tribal lands and fire on the British when they went south from the village towards the 'tribal boundary'. This meant that when the British used artillery or other heavy weapons it would not affect the Kharoti: the demarcation was marked by a canal lined by a road.¹³⁹⁹

Whilst the leadership was dealing with Ibrahim, they were also negotiating secretly with the British, who were trying to secure Kharoti tribal guarantees of security for a potential rebuilding of the destroyed school. The elders negotiated in good faith, asserting that they would not be able to protect the school as they were scared of the 'Taliban'. What they did not tell the British was the real reason—that with the private cleavages in the village there was no way that they could guarantee the school's safety. At the same time, the same elders were also negotiating with the NDS, passing information on booby traps set by other non-Kharoti Taliban groupings.¹⁴⁰⁰ There were multiple public-private interactions.

Ibrahim's activities convinced the British that they needed to expand to the south of Shin Kalay and retake Khwashal Kalay. It had previously been 'taken' in the operation in December. By now, the British were beginning to understand that the population and the 'Taliban' were not as far apart as they had previously considered. They were starting to get to grips with the private sphere. Not wishing to fight the population, British officers deliberately leaked the plan to select elders, safe in the knowledge that the 'Taliban', many

¹³⁹⁸ Andrew Wilder and Stuart Gordon, "Money can't buy America love" *Foreign Policy* (2009).

¹³⁹⁹ 023, 038.

¹⁴⁰⁰ 038. PersExp, Nad-e Ali, 2009.

of whom came from the communities that the elders represented, would hear about it. In the event, there was barely a shot fired, and the fighters withdrew to the south and set up another defensive line.

Meeting with the villagers afterwards, it was clear that there were two issues. The villagers were terrified that their poppy was about to be eradicated, and incensed that a US special forces raid had killed several members of a family the night before—an operation that the British troops had only been informed about minutes before it was due to occur and could not control.¹⁴⁰¹ The British were also told at the shura that Assadullah Karimi, the Hazara leader from Saidabad had been kidnapped by the ‘Taliban’. Publicly this looked like another government-Taliban fight, but it was later discovered to have been facilitated by Ishaqzai tribesmen from Jangal—they had manipulated the Taliban to settle some scores.¹⁴⁰²

The Hazara and the Ishaqzai/Popalzai had been in a long-running private feud in the south of Nad-e Ali over land and water rights. Since the arrival of the Ishaqzai community and more Popalzai families during the jihad, the Hazara had been forced to live in their ‘dirty’ water, affecting their yields. This was because they were downstream on the canal network. Although solved by a shura during the Rabbani government, the issue was a constant source of tension and would occasionally flare up, with raids and kidnapping. The Popalzai and the Ishaqzai in the south were closer to the Taliban than the Shia Hazara (Paslow, the Popalzai leader, was an official during the Taliban government). Eventually, Assadullah Karimi was released two months later on payment of a ransom to Abdul Bari, the Taliban District Governor, mediated by Qasim, an Alizai elder from Zhargoun Kalay.¹⁴⁰³

5.15 – The ‘retaking’ of Malgir

In Spin Masjid, Malgir and Babaji, the Haji Kadus militia had collapsed in mid-2008, because the provincial government had stopped paying their stipend. Kadus claimed that he had supported it himself for as long as possible until running out of money.¹⁴⁰⁴ The militia then splintered and some of the groups continued defending their own villages in Babaji. The ‘Taliban’ in this case came from the north of the tribal divide between Babaji and eastern Nad-e Ali district (see map 10). Previously, however, the Barakzai militia had over-taxed the (non-Barakzai) locals north of the divide. But they were less able to defend themselves without the Governor’s stipend, and so the Barakzai villages collected money to keep them supplied with ammunition. The line eventually collapsed when two of the militia

¹⁴⁰¹ PersExp, Nad-e Ali, 2009.

¹⁴⁰² 015.

¹⁴⁰³ 034, 038. I was originally informed of these dynamics by Anne SS.

¹⁴⁰⁴ 073.

commanders, Malem Anwar and Hamid Gul, fell victim to a private feud. Some of Anwar's men accidentally shot and wounded Hamid Gul's son. They were not able to maintain unity even in the face of the 'Taliban' threat and had to flee to Lashkar Gah.¹⁴⁰⁵

Once it became clear that the militia was beginning to crumble, Qari Hazrat, the Ishaqzai Taliban commander, originally in the 93rd Division, contacted Haji Kadus and they discussed how to divide up Malgir between them, with Qari Hazrat protecting the 'Hizb' communities. Publicly, however, Haji Kadus was still working with the special force who were actively trying to kill or capture Qari Hazrat. Mir Wali was stuck in the middle. He wanted the control, and negotiating potential, that Qari Hazrat could give him in the area, yet did not want Haji Kadus to gain anything.¹⁴⁰⁶ When I asked Mir Wali about this, he denied everything, including ever having met Qari Hazrat, which stretches the bounds of credulity. In the public sphere, the events in Spin Masjid, Malgir and Babaji looked like a Taliban takeover, similar to that which had occurred in Nad-e Ali.

Such a public sphere necessitated action from the British. Privately, they were worried that the influx of US troops to Helmand was diminishing their 'influence' in the province 'particularly with the Governor'.¹⁴⁰⁷ They were also worried about the reputation of the British military in light of the public narrative that the US was having to help them out again, which it was perceived that they had done recently in Basra, Iraq.¹⁴⁰⁸ Thus, they planned an operation to retake Malgir and publicly linked it to the forthcoming Afghan presidential elections. If they could secure more territory for the Afghan government, then more people would be able to vote, thus legitimising the election. In the event, just one hundred and fifty people voted from Spin Masjid, Malgir and Babaji.¹⁴⁰⁹ Here the British were driven by their own private sphere rather than the public sphere of the Helmandi conflict.

Before the operation commenced, the British conducted a private deal with Haji Kadus. They were unaware of his links to Qari Hazrat and arranged that Kadus would join the police, taking the rank of major, and would become responsible for the Parchow area close to Gereshk after the operation. He would, once again, be mentored by US special forces.¹⁴¹⁰ During the operation, for an unknown reason, but potentially linked to the British deal, the 'Taliban' groups controlled by the Sattar and Naim Barich mahazes did not fight. To some Taliban commanders this looked like deal had been struck between the British and the

¹⁴⁰⁵ 002, 014, 018.

¹⁴⁰⁶ 060, 061, 062, 073, 074, 075.

¹⁴⁰⁷ Harnden, Dead Men: 98.

¹⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 298.

¹⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 446.

¹⁴¹⁰ 062. Wiki: 'BUILDING A POLICE FORCES [sic] IN BABAJI, HELMAND PROVINCE' (27 Sep 2009).

Taliban: their mahaz commanders had ordered them not to fight. Sher Mohammad's mahaz, however—whether through ignorance of the deal or hatred of the British—continued to fight. This caused a rift between Sher Mohammad and the other mahaz commanders that had to be mediated by Zakir.¹⁴¹¹

During the operation, the furthest the British got west from Gereshk was Haji Gul Ehktiar Kalay. They established their base in Gul Ehktiar's house, because it was the most defensible building around, not aware that his nephew, Sur Gul, was a senior 'Taliban' commander.¹⁴¹² Sur Gul had even been arrested by the British in 2006, but had pretended his name was Asir, and was released to the NDS. Mir Wali then paid a bribe to secure his freedom. Operating in the public sphere, the British wished to be seen as fair and so began to pay Gul Ehktiar rent. The rent money had two consequences. Firstly, it inflated Gul Ehktiar's importance in the area. Secondly, some of the money soon found its way, through Sur Gul, back to the bombs that were blowing up British soldiers.¹⁴¹³ This issue was never resolved, despite British suspicions, and the British pulled out three years later. This private sphere highly confused the locals, to whom it was obvious, and they assumed that the British must be working with the 'Taliban'.¹⁴¹⁴

Concurrently to the Malgir operation, the Americans moved into Nawa in massive force. By the autumn of 2009, both the British and the Americans had ten thousand soldiers each in the province, with the British holding the centre and the north, less Now Zad, and the Americans in control of Garmsir, Nawa, Marjeh and Now Zad.¹⁴¹⁵ This increase in US troops created friction between the US and the British over modus operandi, and particularly over the geographical areas in which development money was spent.¹⁴¹⁶ This tension was picked up much earlier by the Helmandis, over issues such as the Musa Qala accords, but now that there were more US troops in the province the divisions became very easy to read.

The ISAF public narrative of unity was not believed by the Helmandis and they tried to take advantage of private cleavages. Helmandi leaders would often tell Americans that the British were this or that, and that the Americans were much better. The same leaders would then tell the British that it was terrible that the Americans had come and they would much prefer

¹⁴¹¹ 229, 230.

¹⁴¹² PersExp, Helmand, 2009.

¹⁴¹³ 016, 068.

¹⁴¹⁴ 085.

¹⁴¹⁵ PersExp, Helmand, 2009. Chandrasekaran, *Little America*: 208.

¹⁴¹⁶ To understand better these tensions see *Little America*, Chapter 11.

to carry on working with the British.¹⁴¹⁷ Unfortunately, many British and American officers fell for these ploys.

5.16 - Conclusions

During this period the public sphere, of supporting the Afghan government and bringing development to Helmand, fails to describe adequately the complexity of the private Helmandi sphere. The evidence presented here, particularly that surrounding Sher Mohammad's dealings with the Taliban and the government, Abdul Rahman's side switching and the multiplicity of hues of 'Taliban' in Nad-e Ali, and the events surround the destruction of Shin Kalay's school, all provide strong support for my thesis that the private sphere has primacy in describing what is driving conflict dynamics when public organisations involved in the conflict do not understand the private sphere. Interestingly, it was not just the British who did not understand the private sphere. Abdul Rahman Jan manipulated the Provincial Governor, Mangal, and individuals in Shin Kalay manipulated the ISI and the Taliban: all public organisations involved in the conflict failed to adequately understand the private sphere of events.

However, the British understanding of the private sphere gradually grew, and they tried to better align their actions (less firepower) with their own public narrative (reconstruction). Moreover, British commanders tried to use their newfound knowledge of the private sphere to achieve what they wanted without fighting. But this was with limited success: they were more often than not duped by both local 'officials' and Helmandi notables, although they were better able to shape the interaction between public and private. Part of their failure can be attributed to the fact that they were trapped between the public and private spheres. This is best exemplified by the fact that they had to work with the police in order to improve them, yet police brutality was a cause célèbre for the resistance. These conclusions will be explored further in chapter seven.

¹⁴¹⁷ Discussions with American colleagues, Helmand, 2009-10.

Chapter 6: US re-engagement until the present—‘Counterinsurgency’, 2009–2012

Most people who think about Helmand develop mental problems, because the politics are so strange and complicated.

Ex-jihadi commander, Nad-e Ali¹⁴¹⁸

Surely you could have solved this by now?

Attributed to President Karzai¹⁴¹⁹

The public sphere of this final period echoes that of the last chapter—a legitimate government, backed by western forces, fighting a Taliban insurgency. The key difference is that the British and Americans have reinvigorated their understanding and application of counterinsurgency theory, the precepts of which were based on the public sphere of the conflict. To an extent, and outlined in the last chapter, they also began to understand better the private sphere. To implement the new approach, ISAF troop numbers rose to about thirty thousand in mid-2010.

Unlike the previous chapters, this one is organised thematically. Using examples, I consider the public and private spheres of several aspects of the Helmandi counterinsurgency: ISAF operations, Afghan operations, special forces targeting, Taliban organisation, corruption, aspects of Helmandi politics and ISAF’s withdrawal from Helmand. These aspects cover loosely the three themes of security, development and politics (although there is crossover in some of the aspects). I examine any discordances and whether the public organisations understood well the private sphere of events. I conclude by exploring fully what I consider to be a key understanding in the private sphere. This is the narrative that the British are working with the Taliban to destroy Helmand. I treat this narrative as a manifestation of what may occur when public organisations fail to understand adequately the private sphere and define their behaviour according to the public sphere, when that public sphere has little relevance in the private sphere. It is the final triumph of the private sphere over the public.

6.1 - ISAF operations

By the beginning of 2010, the British were consolidating in central Helmand. Since the Nad-e Ali operation in 2008 (see section 5.12), they had slowly expanded the area under British and Afghan government control. Their public narrative of counterinsurgency dictated that they ‘needed’ to be living amongst the population in order to protect them. In-line with the

¹⁴¹⁸ 086.
¹⁴¹⁹ SCC.

same narrative, they also began to reduce their use of violence.¹⁴²⁰ Finally, they were marrying their actions with the rhetoric of the public sphere and were beginning to initiate development projects, open schools and refurbish clinics. This was welcomed by the population.¹⁴²¹

In February 2010, British, American and Afghan troops launched a large-scale operation to establish an Afghan government presence in Babaji, Naqilabad and Showal, for the British, and Marjeh for the Americans. This was predicated on the tenets of counterinsurgency, with the US general in command asserting that he would have 'government in a box' ready to deliver services in Marjeh.¹⁴²² In addition to a high rate of special forces raids targeting individual 'Taliban' commanders, the British deliberately leaked operational information to specific elders. At that time, the British understood the government and the Taliban as having separate 'offers' to which individuals and groups could subscribe. They used their improved understanding of the private sphere and appropriately contextualized the leaks for each community.¹⁴²³

Therefore, when dealing with the Kharoti of Naqilabad and Showal, communities that interacted more with the Taliban, the information was delivered in the form of a threat, whereby resistance would be met with violence. In communities that were seen to be closer to the government, for instance the Barakzai of Babaji, the information was delivered in the form of a series of meetings planning for post-operational development of the area. Either way, the result was the same: the 'Taliban' would know roughly when the British were coming and might choose not to fight. In the event this is what happened. The British were trying to manipulate the private sphere as they saw it. This later backfired when the leaks were interpreted as the British working with the Taliban (see section 6.12).¹⁴²⁴

In Babaji, the British aim was to re-establish bases along the same line as the Haji Kadus militia checkpoints (see map 10). They understood that the old militia checkpoints had managed to keep the 'Taliban' from attacking from the north, and thought that replacing and reinforcing them would be beneficial (see section 5.15). However, the private sphere in Babaji was of inter-community mistrust and violence between the Barakzai and non-Barakzai communities.¹⁴²⁵ The British had unwittingly affiliated themselves with the Barakzai communities in this inter-community conflict. They even used Barakzai men previously

¹⁴²⁰ Farrell and Gordon, COIN Machine: 12-3.

¹⁴²¹ e.g. 001, 015, 039.

¹⁴²² 'Afghan Offensive is New War Model', New York Times (12 Feb 2010).

¹⁴²³ PersExp, Helmand, 2010.

¹⁴²⁴ 244.

¹⁴²⁵ 014, 018.

associated with the militia as guides for their troops. This was an old mistake: the elders from the mixed tribal communities to the north of the militia were appalled that the British were affiliating themselves with the Barakzai community that they were fighting.¹⁴²⁶ One of the guides, in particular, was notoriously cruel.¹⁴²⁷ Yet, the British were not only attacked by the mixed communities to the north. Shortly after, and in resistance to the 'foreign occupation', the British were also being attacked by elements from the Barakzai communities:¹⁴²⁸ their ignorance of the private sphere had allowed the local feuds and narratives to drive the conflict.

6.2 - The Kajaki dam

In 2010 the Americans took over Sangin, Musa Qala and Kajaki to allow the British to consolidate in central Helmand. Towards the end of 2011, the US began to conduct operations to clear the road between Sangin and Kajaki. For them, the US\$266m contract to refurbish the dam was a lynchpin of their strategy in southern Afghanistan.¹⁴²⁹ In a sense the operation to restore the dam was emblematic of everything that ISAF did in Helmand. It exemplified the public sphere, in that it was visible development for the people delivered by the Afghan government in partnership with international forces. Internally to the coalition however, there was a turf war between USAID and the military about who could deliver more aid: the US were driven by their private cleavages just as much as the Helmandis.¹⁴³⁰

The private sphere was different for the Helmandis. The Alizai who lived around the dam would not benefit from that development (the residents of Kandahar would instead). Instead, many Alizai wanted an irrigation canal.¹⁴³¹ They also had no interest in foreign forces working in their area, as where the foreigners were the eradication would follow.¹⁴³² A well-connected, ex-Khad operative pointed out that almost everyone fighting in Kajaki against the Americans was a daakhelee Talib—a resistance fighter. When fighters were killed, local people would collect money for the family.¹⁴³³ The day after the Americans arrived in force Mullah Salam, Zakir's brother, was walking around the Kajaki bazaar talking to shopkeepers and collecting food offerings for his fighters.¹⁴³⁴ This private narrative of resistance formed an interaction with another element of the public sphere, namely, Iran.

¹⁴²⁶ 019.

¹⁴²⁷ PersExp, Helmand, 2010.

¹⁴²⁸ 112.

¹⁴²⁹ 'Watershed of Waste: Afghanistan's Kajaki Dam and USAID', *Global Post* (11 Oct 2011).

¹⁴³⁰ Chandrasekaran, *Little America*: 305.

¹⁴³¹ 004, 070.

¹⁴³² 011, 013.

¹⁴³³ 020.

¹⁴³⁴ 004.

Iran considers Kajaki a strategic interest and it seeks to influence the flow of the River Helmand through the dam. This is because water from the Helmand is ecologically essential for the Iranian Sistani region.¹⁴³⁵ However, according to the ISAF narrative, the development of the south of Afghanistan relies heavily on the Kajaki dam generating power for, especially, Kandahar. They seek to 'boost the supply of water and electric power to both provinces'.¹⁴³⁶ This, importantly, means that there will be less water available for Iran, potentially in contravention of the 1972/3 agreement between the two countries.¹⁴³⁷

Iran sees the halting of the reconstruction of the Kajaki dam as very important. For that reason they sponsor fighting groups to target any international or Afghan government presence.¹⁴³⁸ This also allows Iran to give the 'Great and Little Satans' (the US and Britain, respectively) a bloody nose,¹⁴³⁹ and maintaining proxy groups allows them increased freedom of action in a very uncertain future.¹⁴⁴⁰ It probably seemed paradoxical that the Americans were having to fight their way through the locals in order to spend \$266m on generating electricity for millions of Afghans, however, a legacy of 'not wanting government' interacting with Iranian support meant that the resistance was strong.

Almost as soon as the operation in Kajaki was over, the Americans began to pull out of Helmand. The US 'surge' of troops was being withdrawn after just two years. The speed of the drawdown was blistering, and by the end of the summer of 2012, there were only small numbers of US troops still based in northern Helmand. At the time of research, it was not certain whether the US would achieve its aims in Kajaki because of 'security concerns'.¹⁴⁴¹ The US relied heavily on its narrative of reconstructing the Kajaki dam, without understanding the private narratives surrounding poppy eradication, resistance and the desire for a canal in Zamindawar. Partly, for these reasons Iran was able to sponsor interactions with fighting groups to achieve its aims in Kajaki. These interactions, and the private sphere, shaped the conflict in Kajaki and may stop the US from achieving its aims.

¹⁴³⁵ Letter from Islamic Republic of Iran to United Nations, addressed to the Secretary-General: A/55/855-S/2001/273 (26 Mar 2001); J Etaat and I Varzesh, "Hyropolitic of Hirmand: Reasons, Results and Outcomes" *Human Geography Reseach Quarterly*, no. 80 (2012).

¹⁴³⁶ 'Corps of Engineers to improve access to water, power in southern Afghanistan', www.army.mil (25 June 2012).

¹⁴³⁷ 'Iran seeks its share of Hirmand [sic] water', *PressTV* (15 Apr 2011).

¹⁴³⁸ 020, 209, 218. Pers. Comm. Antonio Giustozzi and Claudio Franco, 2012.

¹⁴³⁹ 063.

¹⁴⁴⁰ 068.

¹⁴⁴¹ 'Watershed of Waste: Afghanistan's Kajaki Dam and USAID', *Global Post* (11 Oct 2011).

6.3 - Afghan operations

During 2010, the British and the Americans redoubled their attention on the army and police in Helmand. According to their public narrative, the only way to succeed in counterinsurgency was to train indigenous forces.¹⁴⁴² In early 2010, the British had established a provincial training centre for police recruits in an attempt to standardise the force and break the links to the patrimonial powerbrokers. Additionally, more of the British and American forces were diverted to mentoring and training, rather than conducting their own operations. Now, the only large-scale operations were those where the majority of the planning and effort was divested by the Afghan forces themselves.¹⁴⁴³

These operations would typically be into areas like Yakhchal, south of Gereshk, or in the desert to the west of Nad-e Ali. Both areas had high rates of poppy growth. This was done deliberately: these were communities that nobody in the government cared about and that did not have connections in the provincial capital or in Kabul.¹⁴⁴⁴ The Afghan government public narrative was that the desert was full of ‘Taliban’ and under an official Afghan government scheme, Governor Mangal received a cash bonus for his ‘administration’ that was tied to how much opium was eradicated in each growing season.¹⁴⁴⁵

The increased government control within the canal-zone had enabled eradication, and so many rich landowners in Nad-e Ali merely set up farms in the desert and farmed them using refugees from the north of Helmand.¹⁴⁴⁶ Some of the ‘desert’ community was formed of those people who had bought the land that was partitioned up by ‘government’ commanders, such as Haji Lal Jan, in the early 2000s. He allegedly still ‘taxes’ that community.¹⁴⁴⁷ All sank tubewells, and as no ecological survey has been conducted of the area, it is unknown what the long-term effects will be. Travelling over the area by helicopter in the summer of 2012, it was clear to me that large areas had been recently marked out for cultivation. I saw a very large-scale operation, with perfectly straight lines running for hundreds of metres.

Much of the eradication and the resulting operations were blamed by Helmandi poppy farmers on Mangal and the foreigners—the Americans, the British—for paying him to destroy their livelihoods.¹⁴⁴⁸ There was also tentative evidence of a tribal divide between those within the canal-zone and those without. Within, the settlers were majority non-Helmandi Ghilzai,

¹⁴⁴² British Army, Countering Insurgency:4-9.

¹⁴⁴³ PersExp, Helmand, 2010-12.

¹⁴⁴⁴ 035, 038.

¹⁴⁴⁵ PersExp, Helmand, 2011.

¹⁴⁴⁶ 007, 023.

¹⁴⁴⁷ 059.

¹⁴⁴⁸ David Mansfield, Between a Rock and a Hard Place (2012): 33.

whereas the desert dwellers were Helmandi Durrani, mostly from the north.¹⁴⁴⁹ This is currently unexplained, although may be due to acute water stress in northern Helmand, forcing migration south.¹⁴⁵⁰ One gentleman likened it to tribal war, where Mangal was attacking Durrani people and eradicating their poppy over Ghilzai people who were the majority inside the canal-zone of Nad-e Ali. It is the sharecropping Durrani in the desert who currently suffer the worst effects of eradication and conflict.¹⁴⁵¹

In reality, the ‘Taliban’ in the desert were farmers defending their poppy crop. This was admitted to me by senior district police officers one evening over a meal. During the day, two ‘Talibs’ had been brought in dead, killed in battle when they attacked the poppy eradication operation. I had inspected the bodies and noticed that, from the state of their hands, it appeared that they had been involved in agriculture for most of their lives. They were dressed in opium-stained clothes and were brought in with single shot, ancient rifles. One had been run over rather than shot. As we discussed the event that evening, the senior officers were unhappy. What can we do, they shrugged. The government [publicly] tells us these people are Taliban, but we can [privately] see that they are farmers, they lamented. It would have been rude, as a guest, to point out that treating them as Taliban was a self-fulfilling prophesy. But they knew anyway and were paid large amounts of money from Mangal’s eradication bonuses to subscribe to the public narrative; this was up to US\$1000/day according to receipts and cash that I witnessed.

6.4 - Capture or kill

The major piece of the ISAF strategy was individually killing or capturing Taliban commanders.¹⁴⁵² Pre-2009 in southern Afghanistan, ISAF had attempted to use special forces to capture or kill individual members of the Taliban. ISAF thought that killing or capturing specific people, coupled with a deep knowledge of their social networks and Taliban structure, would allow manipulation of the Taliban movement. The strategy was efficacious. For example, Rahim (Ishaqzai, Now Zad), the Taliban Provincial Governor for Helmand was convinced to give himself up after several of his colleagues were deliberately killed in quick succession in 2008.¹⁴⁵³ Because of the Iraq war, however, this programme was very poorly resourced.

¹⁴⁴⁹ Mansfield, All bets.

¹⁴⁵⁰ 004.

¹⁴⁵¹ 006.

¹⁴⁵² 105.

¹⁴⁵³ ‘Taliban leader surrenders’, The Sun (22 July 2008).

In 2009, two things changed. First, more special forces units and assets like satellite cover were deployed to Afghanistan as they were withdrawn from Iraq. Second, there was a redoubled focus on capturing or killing road-side bomb layers and ‘facilitators’ as these were causing most of the casualties to ISAF forces.¹⁴⁵⁴ This occurred concurrently to General McChrystal (who was ex-head of US Special Operations Forces) taking over command of ISAF troops in Afghanistan and heralding the refocus on counterinsurgency. Publicly, targeting was a key mechanism allowing the government and ISAF to better protect the people.¹⁴⁵⁵

Increased resources meant that Taliban leaders began to be more heavily targeted. The new system was designed on ‘tempo’ and ‘accessibility’ rather than the bespoke arrangement that existed previously. This meant striking ever-lower individuals in the ‘Taliban’ hierarchy, which had very little strategic effect on the Taliban movement as a whole. The increase in tempo meant that ISAF was unable to devote the resources to understanding how the movement worked holistically. The heavy focus on the road-side bomb threat was based on limiting casualty figures as much as possible, but the opportunity cost was that they were unable to manipulate the Taliban movement.¹⁴⁵⁶

The targeting strategy was based on the public sphere, that is, a Taliban movement that was inflicting cruelty on the Helmandi population. Privately though, these raids often killed ‘Taliban’ fighters who were no more than resistance figures for their communities.¹⁴⁵⁷ For example, Murtaza, the Kharoti commander from Shin Kalay, was arrested at the end of 2009. Shakir, his subordinate commander from Shin Kalay, was killed in a separate incident. They were both resistance figures and Kharoti villagers turned Shakir’s car into a shrine. This was situated close to a recently British-built bridge, and was draped with the green flags bestowed on a martyr’s grave.¹⁴⁵⁸

In another example, Akhtur Mohammad, the nephew of Haji Mullah Paslow, the leader of the Popalzai in Nad-e Ali was killed. The clan had previously sent Abdul Malik, another nephew, to the community council in order to maintain a channel to the government. ISAF were completely correct in that he was a ‘Talib’, however the killing of Akhtur Mohammad completely closed the door to working with that community.¹⁴⁵⁹ Operations to kill or capture ‘Taliban’ were often completely divorced from the private sphere that shapes the conflict in

¹⁴⁵⁴ 105.

¹⁴⁵⁵ Chaudhuri and Farrell, *Disconnect*: 272.

¹⁴⁵⁶ 105. *PersExp*, Helmand 2009-12.

¹⁴⁵⁷ e.g. 015, 034, 050. Linschoten and Kuehn, *Enemy*: 293 & 346.

¹⁴⁵⁸ 047, 051. *PersExp*, Helmand, 2010.

¹⁴⁵⁹ 015, 038.

Helmand. Capturing or killing 'Taliban', whilst ignoring/not knowing their position within the private sphere, meant that ISAF was not as able to shape the conflict as it thought it was. In reality, the raids caused reconfigurations between public-private interactions with both the Taliban and the government, which in turn shaped the conflict (for example, by pushing clans away from the government and towards the Taliban).

In Kabul, President Karzai continuously upbraided the US, insisting that the raids caused civilian casualties.¹⁴⁶⁰ A senior US general had privately to assure Karzai that 'categorically [they] had confidence in [their] intelligence and believed [they] knew who the enemy was'.¹⁴⁶¹ However, several times I was witness to the 'wrong' people being killed by raids in Helmand, almost always as a result of faulty intelligence, and people using ISAF to settle their feuds. Several times, Helmandis attempted to manipulate me to have their enemies killed. On one occasion, two American soldiers had been killed by a bomb. Shortly after, a Helmandi gentleman that I was in contact with began to explain to me that the components for that bomb had been stored in so-and-so's house. It turned out that the other man was a neighbour with whom he had a land dispute.¹⁴⁶²

So far, I have discussed aspects of ISAF and Afghan operations. These were predicated on the public narratives of counterinsurgency theory which stresses that the population must be protected from the insurgent. This public narrative was not how the Helmandis perceived ISAF and Afghan government operations. I will now discuss Taliban attempts to cohere their organisation.

6.5 - Taliban consolidation

The public narratives surrounding the Taliban are straightforward. They are a movement of Islamic fundamentalists who seek to oppress women, and fight democracy. Within this description, there are divisions between those Taliban who are ideologically committed or those who are merely fighting for money, or revenge. The Taliban is described as coherent and centralised.¹⁴⁶³ In terms of terminology, this is similar to how Helmandis describe the Taliban and we will begin by exploring these narratives.

Firstly: the aslee (real) Taliban. These are the group commanders and above—that is, those who have links to the Quetta Shura. They are sometimes also called akidawee (ideological)

¹⁴⁶⁰ 'Karzai lashes out at NATO over deaths', *New York Times* (16 Mar 2012).

¹⁴⁶¹ Wiki: 'CENTCOM COMMANDER PETRAEUS JAN 20 MEETING WITH PRESIDENT KARZAI' (23 Jan 2009).

¹⁴⁶² PersExp, Helmand 2009-12. I was lucky in this event: many other times I was manipulated without realising until it was too late.

¹⁴⁶³ See section 1.4.

Taliban, although these would be more properly considered a subset of the aslee Taliban, as not all of them will be fighting because of jihad obligations.¹⁴⁶⁴ The aslee Taliban are most closely linked to the ISI and they provide 'professional' skills such as bomb construction and facilitating the movements of suicide bombers. They also commit acts that local Taliban would not usually countenance, like burning schools.¹⁴⁶⁵

Daakhelee (internal Helmandi) Taliban comprise the vast majority of the 'movement'. Most estimates put their strength at ninety-five per cent of the manpower of the 'Taliban' and they are fighting variously for revenge, evicting foreigners, boredom, unemployment, feuds and other grievance factors.¹⁴⁶⁶ Onto this basic construct many others attach themselves and operate as 'Taliban', or are painted as 'Taliban' by the Afghan government and international forces. These can be farmers defending their poppy crop, criminals, smugglers, militias, or patronage-seeking fighters who used to work for the government, and so on. They often get conflated under the Mullah Omar Taliban banner; as an interviewee put it, 'they do the [crime] and Omar gets the blame'.¹⁴⁶⁷ This is the accepted Helmandi generic view of the Taliban.

The more nuanced view shows a struggle between internal and external, private and public, spheres for control of the 'movement'.¹⁴⁶⁸ The Taliban in 2006 was based on a mahaz system (see section 4.16). This is a patronage system that maintains figureheads in Quetta to source and distribute military supplies. These mahaz commanders will have a number of fighting groups. These, however, will not always be in the same area, and could be across the whole of southern Afghanistan (see figure 5, section 4.16).¹⁴⁶⁹

The most important element of the mahaz system is its personal links to particular commanders and areas. This is analogous to commanders in 1978/9 using links to those who could fund them. The standing of a commander depends on his standing in the society: vide Qari Hazrat who was Abdul Khaleq's, the famous Hizb commander's, son. This societal standing argument explains why replacements for killed fighters and commanders will be drawn from the same family, starting with the closest male relative. Publicly, this is called revenge, but the key reason why the Taliban movement seek out and offer jobs to close

¹⁴⁶⁴ 007, 047, 068.

¹⁴⁶⁵ 062, 066.

¹⁴⁶⁶ e.g. 007, 020, 034, 047.

¹⁴⁶⁷ 047.

¹⁴⁶⁸ I have drawn heavily on Claudio Franco's and Antonio Giustozzi's forthcoming Afghan Analyst Network's paper 'Introducing the nezami system within the Taliban discourse' in this section.

¹⁴⁶⁹ 047. Coghlan, "Oral History": 143.

relatives of killed fighters is this exceptionally close link between the Taliban at ground-level and the society. The Taliban are harnessing revenge as a motivator.¹⁴⁷⁰

In a similar way, some mahazes and commanders will have different relationships with the ISI. This too can be a source of friction, particularly the provision of foreign Pakistan fighters.¹⁴⁷¹ Pakistani fighters, previously identified in northern Helmand in 2006/7 and Garmsir during the summer of 2008, would previously be either given to, or arranged by, individual mahaz commanders to use as they saw fit. Since 2008, however, the numbers of Pakistani fighters has dropped massively.¹⁴⁷² In addition, each mahaz has its own ISI mentor and military trainers,¹⁴⁷³ but this should not be seen as Pakistani endorsement of the mahaz system, merely that they are accepting its existence and attempting to exert what leverage they can—some mahazes and groups have refused ISI mentoring.¹⁴⁷⁴

These multi-focal public-private interactions created a very confused system with several fighting groups operating in the same area but answering to different leaderships and funding. This can be considered analogous to the different jihadi parties operating in contiguous space during the 1980s. And just like the inter-mujahidin group fighting that occurred in the 1980s, this too occurs now with different Taliban commanders who belong to different mahazes.¹⁴⁷⁵ This infighting caused the Taliban central leadership to decide to enact a centralised nezami—meaning military or organised—system in 2008.¹⁴⁷⁶ This was eventually led by Zakir. Funding was diverted down this single chain in order to decrease factionalisation: the Taliban is a patronage organisation and they were attempting to enforce one patron. The nezami system (and Zakir) would choose which fighting groups received weapons and funding.¹⁴⁷⁷

The mahaz system should be seen as the (private) Helmandis reaching out for (public) patronage in order to help them fight their private enemies. By contrast, the nezami system should be seen as outsiders reaching in and trying to influence the situation using patronage. In the context of this thesis, this dynamic can be interpreted as whether the public organisation (nezami system) understands well enough the private sphere to shape

¹⁴⁷⁰ 018, 040, 220, 231.

¹⁴⁷¹ 047, 050, 201.

¹⁴⁷² 202.

¹⁴⁷³ 201.

¹⁴⁷⁴ 047.

¹⁴⁷⁵ e.g. 231, 239, 254.

¹⁴⁷⁶ 201, 202.

¹⁴⁷⁷ Franco and Giustozzi (forthcoming).

the interaction between the two. The two systems have been competing with each other for the past four years.¹⁴⁷⁸

The Quetta Shura Taliban plan for a centralised structure was laid out in their 2009 and 2010 Layehas. New mahazes were banned and a clear command hierarchy was articulated, with more detail given on the rules and responsibilities of the military commissions—the embodiment of the nezami system at district and provincial-levels.¹⁴⁷⁹ The nezami system is mainly funded by charitable donations from individuals in the Middle East.¹⁴⁸⁰ This is routed through ISI mentors that sit on the Quetta Shura.¹⁴⁸¹ Supply for this system is handled by the Pakistani military until it reaches the Pakistani border ‘overtly’.¹⁴⁸² From there it is moved by smugglers to the groups operating in Helmand. This is the same as the mahaz system except that the mahaz commanders will also have other sources of supply.¹⁴⁸³ Outside of Helmand and some other southern provinces, the implementation of the nezami system has been successful. Helmand, however, has managed to resist the system’s implementation.¹⁴⁸⁴

This is the result of two distinct factors. Firstly, Helmand generates vast sources of private income: through drugs, and ISAF supply contracts and development funding. The mahaz system, better integrated with society, is more able to use this income to maintain a degree of independence (vide the Ishaqzai or Kharoti interests and reasons for working with the Taliban). A key part of this dynamic is represented by those ‘government’ commanders who altered their public-private interactions and became ‘Taliban’ commanders.¹⁴⁸⁵ The best example is Sher Mohammad who plays a role in funding the ‘Taliban’.¹⁴⁸⁶ Several interviewees even went as far as to identify him as a mahaz commander.¹⁴⁸⁷ Secondly, Helmand’s social structure—the rutbavi (hierarchical) Pushtun tribal system—is highly commensurate with the mahaz system. The rutbavi system is based upon land ownership and the cycling of resources up and down a hierarchy to maintain social cohesion.¹⁴⁸⁸ This is mediated by key individuals, who usually pass on their position through family links: so too, the mahaz system.

¹⁴⁷⁸ Pers. Comm. Franco, 2012.

¹⁴⁷⁹ Kate Clark, *The Layha: Calling the Taliban to Account* (2011): 15-6.

¹⁴⁸⁰ 201, 202, 209. ‘Funds for Taliban largely come from abroad: Holbrooke’, *Dawn* (28 July 2010).

¹⁴⁸¹ See section 1.7.

¹⁴⁸² 047.

¹⁴⁸³ 047, 203.

¹⁴⁸⁴ Franco and Giustozzi (forthcoming).

¹⁴⁸⁵ e.g. 204, 233, 236

¹⁴⁸⁶ 013, 223, 225.

¹⁴⁸⁷ 209, 218, 222, 230.

¹⁴⁸⁸ Martin, *Brief history*: 13.

The resilience of the Helmandi mahaz system means that a strange hybrid system currently exists that is neither mahaz nor nezami (see figure 8).¹⁴⁸⁹ This hybrid situation creates a confused Taliban command system in Helmand. As the Quetta Taliban have attempted to centralise their supply, and hence the fighting, the mahaz commanders have attempted to co-opt that system. Conceptually, as the Taliban have tried to reinforce their public narratives with the nezami system the Helmandis have privately fought back with the mahaz system. This is similar to how individuals co-opt the Afghan government system in Helmand. Further, if an order comes down either the mahaz or nezami systems, it must be checked with the other system before it is carried out.¹⁴⁹⁰ This is exactly analogous to the nations in the ISAF coalition having to check their ISAF orders with their national chain of command. The situation is nowhere better illustrated than with Zakir.

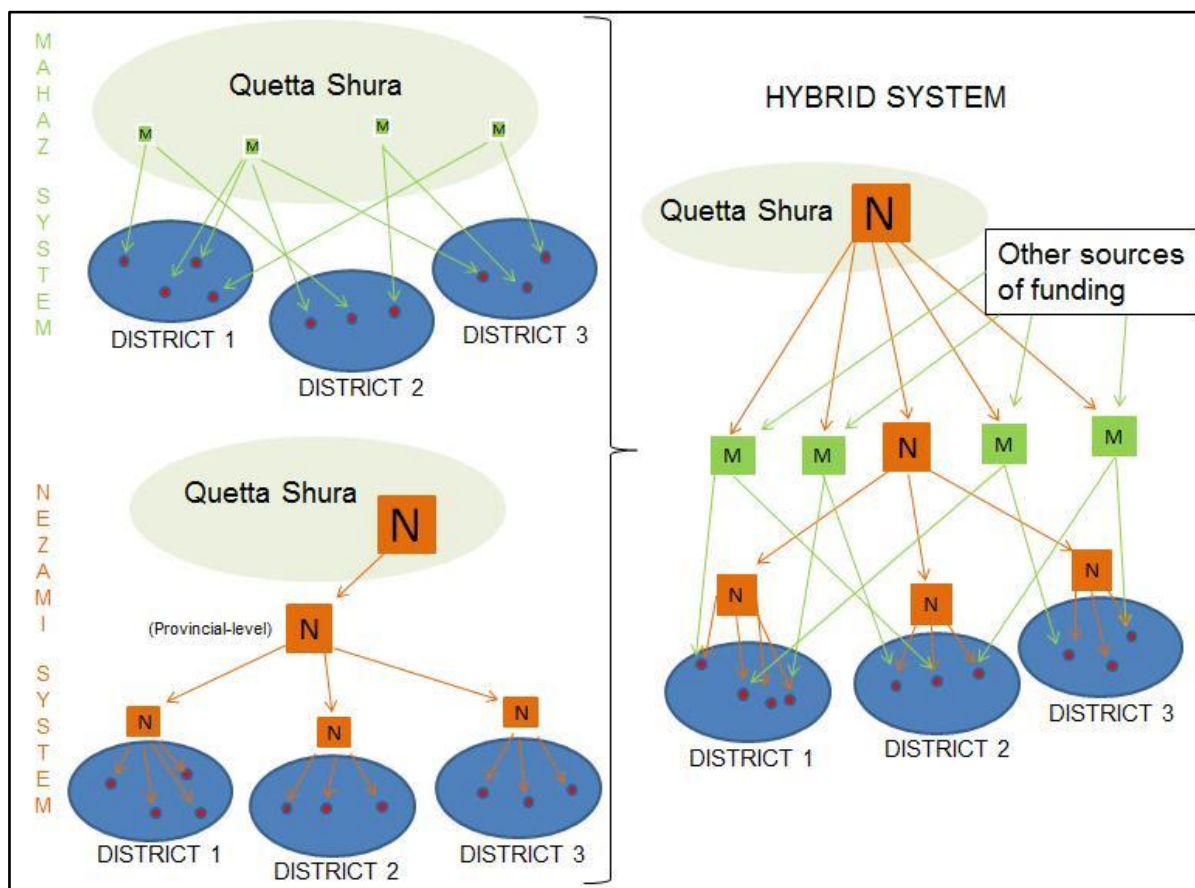


Figure 8: the hybrid mahaz-nezami system.¹⁴⁹¹ Note in the hybrid system some commanders receive only funding from nezami system, however most are 'dual-hatted'. Mahaz commanders receive money from the Quetta Shura nezami head (i.e. Zakir) as well as having independent sources of money. This means that commanders on the ground have to liaise up two chains of command before following orders.

¹⁴⁸⁹ Franco and Giustozzi (forthcoming).

¹⁴⁹⁰ 202, 234, 246.

¹⁴⁹¹ Drawn from Franco and Giustozzi (forthcoming).

Once Zakir was released from Guantanamo and the Afghan prison system in 2007/8,¹⁴⁹² he stepped into a Taliban that was beginning to implement the nezami system. Now, in 2012, he appears to occupy a position both as a mahaz commander and as the leader of the Taliban military commission, that is, the head of the nezami system.¹⁴⁹³ This is particularly the case where the Zakir mahaz is most prevalent: in Sangin,¹⁴⁹⁴ Musa Qala¹⁴⁹⁵ and Kajaki¹⁴⁹⁶ districts. In those districts, Mullah Salam,¹⁴⁹⁷ Zakir's brother, was both his mahaz commander and his nezami commander.¹⁴⁹⁸ Interviewees were often keen point out that they came under the Zakir mahaz system, rather than the (Zakir) nezami system: the 'Taliban' is an organisation based on personal relationships.¹⁴⁹⁹

In central Helmand the situation was different and highly complex. In Nad-e Ali and Marjeh, Naim was considered the most powerful mahaz commander.¹⁵⁰⁰ He was the Taliban Provincial Governor as well—a vestige of the pre-nezami governance system. Sher Mohammad was also seen as a mahaz commander,¹⁵⁰¹ alongside Motassimbillah Agha, Noor Ali, Mansour, Baradar, Zakir and Sattar.¹⁵⁰² This plethora of mahaz commanders should be seen as analogous to the multiplicity of jihadi parties during the 1980s in Nad-e Ali, which was in turn reflective of the social structure. To further complicate matters, the nezami commander in Nad-e Ali was Juma Khan, but he was also a member of Tayib Agha's mahaz.¹⁵⁰³ In Nahr-e Saraj, Sattar and Janan were seen as the most active mahaz commanders.¹⁵⁰⁴ Sher Mohammad was also seen as a mahaz commander there¹⁵⁰⁵ as well as Dadullah, Mansour, Baradar and Zakir.¹⁵⁰⁶ There were only one or two groups that come under the nezami system in Nahr-e Saraj,¹⁵⁰⁷ which is commensurate with the findings of the Gereshk model (see section 6.7). Here, the 'Taliban' groups chose to act as private groups: they could make more money privately out of the Gereshk dynamic than publicly from the nezami system.

¹⁴⁹² 105. Chandrasekaran, *Little America*: 289.

¹⁴⁹³ 215, 234, 246.

¹⁴⁹⁴ 204, 216, 234, 238.

¹⁴⁹⁵ 215, 217, 221, 246.

¹⁴⁹⁶ 239, 241, 242.

¹⁴⁹⁷ Until he died on the 3 June 2012 (SMA).

¹⁴⁹⁸ e.g. 215, 234, 242.

¹⁴⁹⁹ 212, 234.

¹⁵⁰⁰ 201, 202, 210, 212. Although many of the mahaz commanders are dead, their organisations still take their names.

¹⁵⁰¹ 209.

¹⁵⁰² 202, 211, 212, 243, 245.

¹⁵⁰³ 202, 213.

¹⁵⁰⁴ 223, 229, 230.

¹⁵⁰⁵ 223, 230.

¹⁵⁰⁶ 232, 250.

¹⁵⁰⁷ 232.

A conclusion from this complex situation is that the private sphere dictates where the particular mahazes have fighting groups. For example, Zakir's mahazes and overall control predominate in areas where there were American troops based until the summer of 2012. It was he who said that he had 'a strong feeling of revenge in his heart' after his experiences in Guantanamo.¹⁵⁰⁸ Likewise, Sher Mohammad's mahaz, despite his substantial links to northern Helmand, has groups in Nad-e Ali and Nahr-e Saraj, where the British are deployed. It was he who told me that 'the British are so stupid...when they go, we will still be here...I hate the British' after being removed as Provincial Governor at British insistence. Tentatively, because Zakir's men consistently point out that they follow him in his 'mahaz' capacity rather than his 'nezami' capacity (contrary to what the Taliban/ISI desire), it can be argued either that the Taliban Quetta Shura (and the ISI) do not have good enough knowledge of the private sphere to enact the nezami system of control, or that the private, mahaz system is too ingrained in 'Taliban' organisation in Helmand, or both.

During 2011, it appeared that elements of the Quetta Shura were attempting to pursue negotiations with the Americans. A result was the opening of a Taliban 'office' in the gulf state of Qatar.¹⁵⁰⁹ Tentative investigations show that the ISI were not aware of this. As a result, they diverted funding and support away from the Quetta Shura, towards another Taliban shura in Peshawar. The Taliban Peshawar shura has been long standing, but as a result of the Qatar negotiations has now established a leadership position over the Quetta Shura. The only big commander in the south still receiving money from Peshawar and Quetta is Zakir.¹⁵¹⁰ This is because Zakir is the head of the Taliban military commission; however the interviews cited above show that Zakir's commanders see themselves as part of his mahaz rather than his nezami system. There is a possibility that Zakir is using the Taliban funding to support his own private power interests in northern Helmand, and generate his own patronage organisation.

The Taliban is evolving (see figure 8). The Peshawar shura, staffed by young 'professional' (military) individuals who are not known to the international community, provides the interaction with the ISI and the foreign backers of the Taliban.¹⁵¹¹ The top of the nezami system is represented in Peshawar, and this links to Zakir in the Quetta Shura, who controls the nezami system for southern Afghanistan. The old mahaz commanders now have to come to Zakir for money, as head of the nezami system.¹⁵¹² However, on the ground, the

¹⁵⁰⁸ Chandrasekaran, *Little America*: 287.

¹⁵⁰⁹ 'Taliban Opening Qatar Office, and Maybe Door to Talks', *New York Times* (3 Jan 2012).

¹⁵¹⁰ Pers. Comm., Giustozzi and Franco, 2012.

¹⁵¹¹ Franco and Giustozzi (forthcoming).

¹⁵¹² e.g. 201, 202, 203, 211, 213, 224.

mahazes are still independently active, as well as fighting for Zakir. And at the top, because funding only travels down the nezami channel, everyone else is side-lined, including old Taliban government figures.¹⁵¹³ 'Quetta is just not providing as much money anymore'.¹⁵¹⁴ This lack of funding has contributed to decreasing violence in some areas of Helmand.¹⁵¹⁵

The ISI's redoubled focus on the Peshawar shura and the nezami structure has allowed Iran to strengthen its interactions with other mahaz commanders as they become disenfranchised by the ISI.¹⁵¹⁶ As one public-private interaction weakens, another public organisation steps in to fill the void. Just as Pakistan has strategic interests in Afghanistan, so too does Iran, thus Iran supports elements of the 'Taliban' as a way of achieving those interests.¹⁵¹⁷ In addition to the Kajaki dam dynamic outlined above, Iran also seeks to protect and aid Shia communities in Helmand. A good example of this is the protection of the (Shia) Hazara school in Saidabad.¹⁵¹⁸

Finally, some Taliban commanders point to a deal between Sher Mohammad and Iran to supply resistance groups in Kajaki that are attacking the Americans.¹⁵¹⁹ There are additional, tentative rumours that Sher Mohammad and his childhood friend Zakir¹⁵²⁰ have been discussing how to 'split Helmand' between them once the foreigners have left.¹⁵²¹ Thus, there is potentially a private deal between Zakir and Sher Mohammad that interfaces the two public-private interactions between Sher Mohammad and Iran, and Zakir and Pakistan. If true, it is this that will dictate the future of, particularly northern, Helmand rather than the Afghan government or ISAF.¹⁵²² It merits further investigation.

In summary, I have discussed the public and private spheres surrounding ISAF and Afghan operations and attempts by the Taliban to re-organise themselves. I will now discuss the public and private spheres of corruption in Helmand. A detailed study of corruption in Gereshk shows that 'political' violence is driven by the dynamics between private actors rather than public organisations, yet those same private actors abuse their membership of ignorant public organisations in order to further prosecute their private goals.

¹⁵¹³ 201, 202, 203.

¹⁵¹⁴ 209.

¹⁵¹⁵ Pers. Comm. Giustozzi, 2012.

¹⁵¹⁶ 201. Franco and Giustozzi (forthcoming).

¹⁵¹⁷ 'Afghanistan war logs: Iran's covert operations in Afghanistan', [The Guardian](#) (25 July 2010).

¹⁵¹⁸ 038, 058.

¹⁵¹⁹ 209, 218.

¹⁵²⁰ SMA.

¹⁵²¹ 013, 070.

¹⁵²² Franco and Giustozzi (forthcoming).

6.6 - Dollar, dollar, dollar

The most significant outcome of the increase in American attention in Helmand was an astronomical rise in development spending in the province.¹⁵²³ This, automatically, led to an increase in corruption, even though ‘corruption’, or patronage, or baksheesh (‘gift’), has been a large part of patronage societies like Helmand for a long time.¹⁵²⁴ According to the narratives of public organisations (i.e. ISAF), corruption is seen as an Afghan problem, mostly caused by the drugs trade,¹⁵²⁵ however, Helmandis blame ISAF and the international community: ‘the foreigners don’t know how to get things done; [and] the people who sort things out for them take all the money and put it in their pockets’.¹⁵²⁶

There was definitely a shift in ‘corruption’ over the period 2008–12. When I first arrived in Helmand in 2008, many elders had learnt very quickly that the claims process, where they could claim for damage from ISAF due to military operations, represented an easy way of making small amounts of money, say, five hundred dollars. Those very same elders, in conversation with me in 2012, all tried to press upon me how good their new construction company was, and implored me to use my contacts in the PRT to help them gain contracts. Another young man related how his family used to ring their relatives in Europe for money to help with weddings and other living costs; now their relatives in Europe were ringing them to gain contracts.¹⁵²⁷

Corruption is seen by Helmandis as starting in Kabul. It is driven by a vacuum effect, whereby more senior people in a patronage chain would demand payment from their subordinates in order to guarantee the tenure of said subordinates.¹⁵²⁸ The foreigners provided poorly targeted money at the bottom, it moved upwards until it reached someone whom the international community protected, or supported in their post in Kabul, thence it left the country to Dubai.¹⁵²⁹ As a very old man (by Helmandi standards) pointed out to me with a sigh, ‘before 2001, Afghans didn’t understand how the outside world worked; now they have all got bank accounts in Dubai’.¹⁵³⁰ Helmandis estimated that the bribes they had to pay in 2010/1 were thrice what they were under the Sher Mohammad government of 2002–5.¹⁵³¹

¹⁵²³ PersExp, Helmand, 2008-12.

¹⁵²⁴ Martin, Brief history: 36.

¹⁵²⁵ ‘Is Afghanistan a Narco-State?’, New York Times (27 July 2008).

¹⁵²⁶ 081.

¹⁵²⁷ 009.

¹⁵²⁸ 001, 008, 023, 025.

¹⁵²⁹ 009, 047, 081.

¹⁵³⁰ 063.

¹⁵³¹ 008, 039.

This growth in corruption was exacerbated by ISAF vastly overpaying for contracts due to not knowing the local costs. For example, in 2009, the British were paying six hundred and fifty dollars per dumper truck-load of gravel in Nad-e Ali. The contractor had scooped this out of the River Helmand and transported it some ten kilometres.¹⁵³² I estimate this cost thirty dollars. The top policeman in the province explained to me that many Helmandis viewed this lack of prudence as stupidity, and an invitation to pilfer more.¹⁵³³ In any case, the PRT had such a bad picture of the private sphere that projects often went to contractors from the wrong communities.¹⁵³⁴

Lastly, the district councils, established by ISAF, became significant foci of corruption. The public narrative of empowering Helmandis to decide their own development projects¹⁵³⁵ did not match how the Helmandis saw the councils privately. To them, the 'representative' elders stole from their own 'communities', or attacked other elders' projects with the 'Taliban' in order to dissuade them from taking on more projects.¹⁵³⁶ These dynamics fed jealousy in such a fractured society.¹⁵³⁷ The speed at which development money was spent meant that it was often not targeted at specific communities, or linked to particular political objectives, as it should be in a counterinsurgency.¹⁵³⁸ The public narrative of the development projects was that if enough of them were done, they would buy the loyalty of the Helmandis. In reality, and this has been explored well in the literature by Stuart Gordon, development spending created more of the instability that it was meant to reduce.¹⁵³⁹

For example, Mirwais Khan, son of Wakil Safar, stole the wheat seed meant for his community and sold it. For this, Mirwais then spent a year in jail.¹⁵⁴⁰ This gap in leadership allowed Haji Barakzai to move into a greater leadership position amongst the Kharoti.¹⁵⁴¹ In another example, Karim, one of the Nad-e Ali council members most closely linked with the Taliban, was also head of the development sub-committee. He used his positions to make money by manipulating security and refused to allow the road to be resurfaced between Loy Bagh and Lashkar Gah unless he received a cut. If not, he would get the 'Taliban' to destroy

¹⁵³² PersExp, Nad-e Ali, 2009.

¹⁵³³ 054.

¹⁵³⁴ Hafizullah.

¹⁵³⁵ 'NATO in Afghanistan: Helping and empowering the locals', NATO TV (24 July 2009).

¹⁵³⁶ 015, 016, 023, 039, 067.

¹⁵³⁷ 039, 050.

¹⁵³⁸ Stuart Gordon, "Exploring the Civil–Military Interface and its Impact on European Strategic and Operational Personalities" European Security 15, no. 3 (2006): 345-7.

¹⁵³⁹ Gordon, Aid and Stabilisation:37.

¹⁵⁴⁰ 050.

¹⁵⁴¹ PersExp, Nad-e Ali, 2010-1.

it.¹⁵⁴² This is clear evidence that private actors interacted with public organisations, and that this interaction shaped the conflict in Nad-e Ali.

6.7 - The Gereshk model

Gereshk is a perennial concern for President Karzai because it sits on the strategic Herat-Kandahar highway.¹⁵⁴³ This means that the city generates vast income, and so public organisations and private actors seek to control the city. In the ISAF-era, this has taken on further importance because it is the only route through which supplies can pass from Karachi, the main ISAF seaport, to Camp Bastion, the main ISAF logistics base in Helmand. Thus, since 2001, Gereshk has had a vast array of different officials, particularly chiefs of police, partly because the position allows private factional interests to legitimise their militias in public 'government' structures. This is sometimes exacerbated by ISAF's unwilling or unknowing connivance. I treat the following evidence as key support for my thesis.

The model shown in figure 9a shows the movement of money in Gereshk.¹⁵⁴⁴ It demonstrates the interaction between the public and private spheres: development funding, control of the security landscape and the purchase of 'government' positions. Stability, defined as an absence of factional violence, is generated by the uninterrupted flow of money through the model. This money flow is publicly defined as corruption. The model has three main money making activities (or inputs). These are drugs money, development money and the money from ISAF supply contracts. There are a number of other subsidiary inputs, for example, corruption of the wheat seed distribution. In the pre-ISAF era, drug money formed the bulk of inputs into the system as per the public sphere.¹⁵⁴⁵ However, in the post-surge era, with thirty thousand troops being supplied through Bastion, it can be argued that ISAF supply contracts form the majority of the monetary inputs to the system.¹⁵⁴⁶ It is exceptionally difficult to quantify these figures, however.¹⁵⁴⁷

¹⁵⁴² 067, 071.

¹⁵⁴³ 054.

¹⁵⁴⁴ The Gereshk model is based on a large number of author interviews – 001, 008, 009, 012, 020, 029, 030, 031, 054, 070, 079 - conversations, rumours, and participant-observations conducted in the autumn of 2011 in Nahr-e Saraj in order to understand 'corruption' in Gereshk. Money flow was modelled using i2 analyst notebook. This more informal approach, that is using conversations, observations and rumours, was required because of the sensitivity and (particularly) the currency of the issue. The model's concepts were verbally tested with 020, 031 and 070, who offered (already incorporated) comments. See figure 9b.

¹⁵⁴⁵ Martin, Brief history: 47-51.

¹⁵⁴⁶ 'How the US funds the Taliban', The Nation (11 Nov 2009). I also argue this based on my experiences staying occasionally in the Gereshk police station (2010-12): 'the big money in the ISAF trucking' was the enduring theme.

¹⁵⁴⁷ e.g. House of Commons Public Accounts Committee, The use of information to manage the defence logistics supply chain (18 July 2011): para 3; UNODC, Afghanistan Opium Survey (Oct 2011): 1.

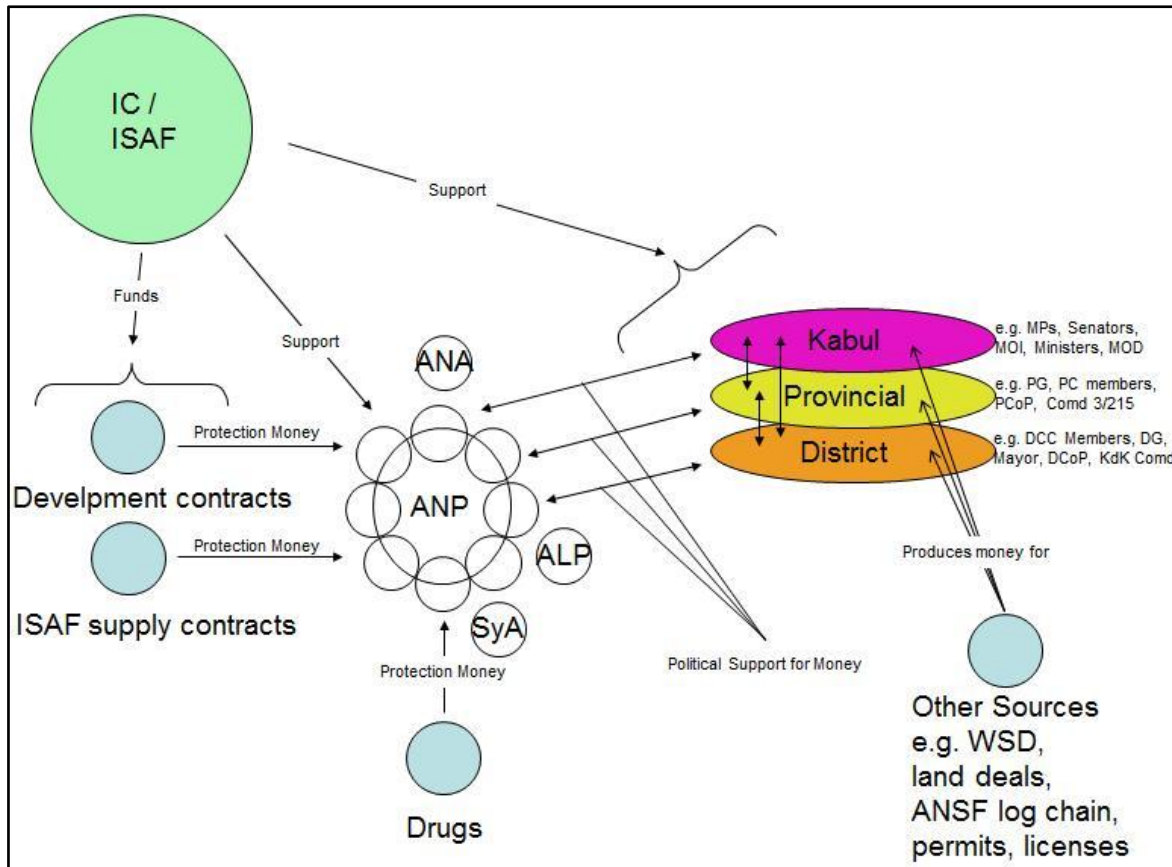


Figure 9a: The Gereshk model. Petal-shaped structure is half-in/half-out model of de jure/de facto militia positioning. Blue=money input; Purple, yellow, orange=political layers; Clear=security layer.

Conceptually arrayed above the income generating layer is a level of security actors. These are men like Haji Kadus, Khan Mohammad, or Ezmarai who control(led) major factions in the 'police'. Many, for example Haji Kadus, rose to power by leading US special forces-sponsored militias during the decade 2002–12 (see sections 4.8, 4.10 and 4.14). The relationship between de facto factional interests (private) and de jure security forces (public) can be considered like the petal-shaped structure within figure 9a. Private actors and groups will try and gain a position within the 'police' in order to further their own interests. This allows them to interact with the state and gain 'legitimacy' and funding. Often they will maintain a half-in/half-out policy, giving them maximum scope for action. Membership of the 'police' simply denotes a public label to enable other activities, rather than any form of ideological attachment to the public government narrative.

The private security actors gain income from the money making activities. The mechanism is usually a mafia-style operation ('mafia' is another word that has been adopted into Pushtu during the ISAF intervention). For example, the private actor approaches a contractor who is responsible for building a village school. They might inform him that it costs twenty thousand

dollars for the school to be protected from the 'Taliban'. In the case of Haji Kadus, he might tell the contractor that he must use a particular type of aggregate. This is because Kadus has 'retired' from the security business and now owns an aggregate mine two hundred metres north of Camp Price. The mine is protected by the same militia force that protects Camp Price: he is still skilled at signalling to the locals that he is linked to the foreigners.

The same dynamic occurs when ISAF supply convoys are delivered to Bastion by Afghan contractors.¹⁵⁴⁸ In this case, control of the 'police' checkpoint through which the convoys must pass is vital. For example, Abdul Sattar (Barakzai, ex-Hizb, ex-Kadus militia) who controlled the Abhashak checkpoint made ten thousand dollars a day from ISAF trucking (gross). When Shadi Khan took over as Chief of Police in 2011, his first visit was to Abdul Sattar in his checkpoint. This is the reverse of what one would expect from Helmandi decorum. ISAF later found out that Abdul Sattar was not even on the police payroll. For over two years, a deal had ensued where he would remain 'checkpoint commander', as he had been when he controlled it in the days of the special force and the Kadus militia. In return for a 'cut', the Chief of Police would maintain the public narrative to the British and Danish that Sattar was part of the 'police'. Sattar was eventually removed in 2012.¹⁵⁴⁹ This clearly shows public organisation ignorance allowing the private, inter-personal sphere to drive events.

The most telling aspect of the Gereshk model is the absence of the 'Taliban'. In many other areas private actors and groups opt to interact with the Taliban narrative (and funding) because that is what best enhances their interests. In Gereshk, however, there is so much money available that the best option is almost always some sort of private money-making activity similar to those outlined here. Because most are related to control of the road, it is usually more beneficial to interact with the government (who control the road). What 'Taliban' there were, were no different to other security actors, and in many cases were paid by big players in Gereshk to carry out attacks in order to manipulate public narratives and allow those actors to present themselves as a solution to security problems. Mir Wali is the most obvious example of this. The Taliban public narrative and 'groups' were just tools for hire.

Above the security layer is arrayed a 'political' layer. In the model this is split between the district-, provincial- or capital- (Kabul) levels. The role of the political layer is to receive money from the security layer (that extracted it from the income generators), and in return, provide political protection to them through politicking, appointments and acquittals. The relationship between Abdul Sattar and the Gereshk Chief of Police described above is one

¹⁵⁴⁸ 'How the US funds the Taliban', The Nation (11 Nov 2009).

¹⁵⁴⁹ PersExp, Helmand, 2010-12.

example. This money would then pass through the Provincial Chief of Police, through to the Minister of Interior, thence to Dubai.

Other examples include Mir Ahmad (Barakzai), on the Provincial Council, who supported many former Hizb figures and Mir Wali, an MP, who supported militia commander Mirza Khan (see section 4.14).¹⁵⁵⁰ Abdul Raziq, the jailed, drug-dealing US militia commander, was supported by his brother on the District Council.¹⁵⁵¹ This upwards chain of payments combined with the repeated outsourcing of development contracts through chains of sub-contractors. This resulted in situations where of the \$1m paid by ISAF to build a police station in Rahim Kalay (east of Deh Adam Khan) only \$100,000 was actually spent on the bricks, mortar and labour—the rest had gone on kickbacks and dilutions.¹⁵⁵²

As perceived by Helmandis, the role of ISAF is critical. Much of the money entering this model comes from ISAF projects and contracts in Nahr-e Saraj district. That money will travel upwards through the model until it reaches someone considered to be 'immune'. This immunity will often rest on interactions with the international community. The best example of this is President Karzai, who was widely seen to have committed electoral fraud in the 2009 presidential elections, yet who with international support remained president.¹⁵⁵³ *From the Helmandi perspective*, the dynamic of ISAF putting money in at the bottom and protecting the people who extract it at the top is money laundering: *ISAF is laundering its own money*. See figure 9b.

Moreover, in many cases ISAF officials know that an Afghan official is corrupt, and other Afghan officials know that ISAF know that he is corrupt. The reasoning of the 'internationals' is that it is better to keep an official whose foibles they are aware of, however to the Helmandis it is double standards. From their perspective, they know that ISAF knows about specific instances of corruption, yet chooses to do nothing about it.¹⁵⁵⁴ The 'open secret' in Helmand of ISAF being 'complicit' in corruption is very damaging to Helmandi perceptions of the government and ISAF.¹⁵⁵⁵ Furthermore, there is often denial amongst some ISAF officials about ISAF's own role in corruption. Their public narrative is that 'Afghan' corruption is caused mainly by the drugs trade.¹⁵⁵⁶ This shows that in addition to my thesis (that the

¹⁵⁵⁰ 029, 036.

¹⁵⁵¹ PersExp, Lashkar Gah, Nov 2011.

¹⁵⁵² 020, 029.

¹⁵⁵³ 'New evidence of widespread fraud in Afghanistan election uncovered', [The Guardian](#) (19 Sep 2009).

¹⁵⁵⁴ PersExp, Helmand, 2010-12.

¹⁵⁵⁵ e.g. 039, 059, 076.

¹⁵⁵⁶ e.g. 'Blooming Financial Support', [FOX News](#) (4 Sep 2009).

opacity of private sphere dynamics to public organisations allows the private sphere to shape conflict) wilful ignorance of those private dynamics can have the same effect.

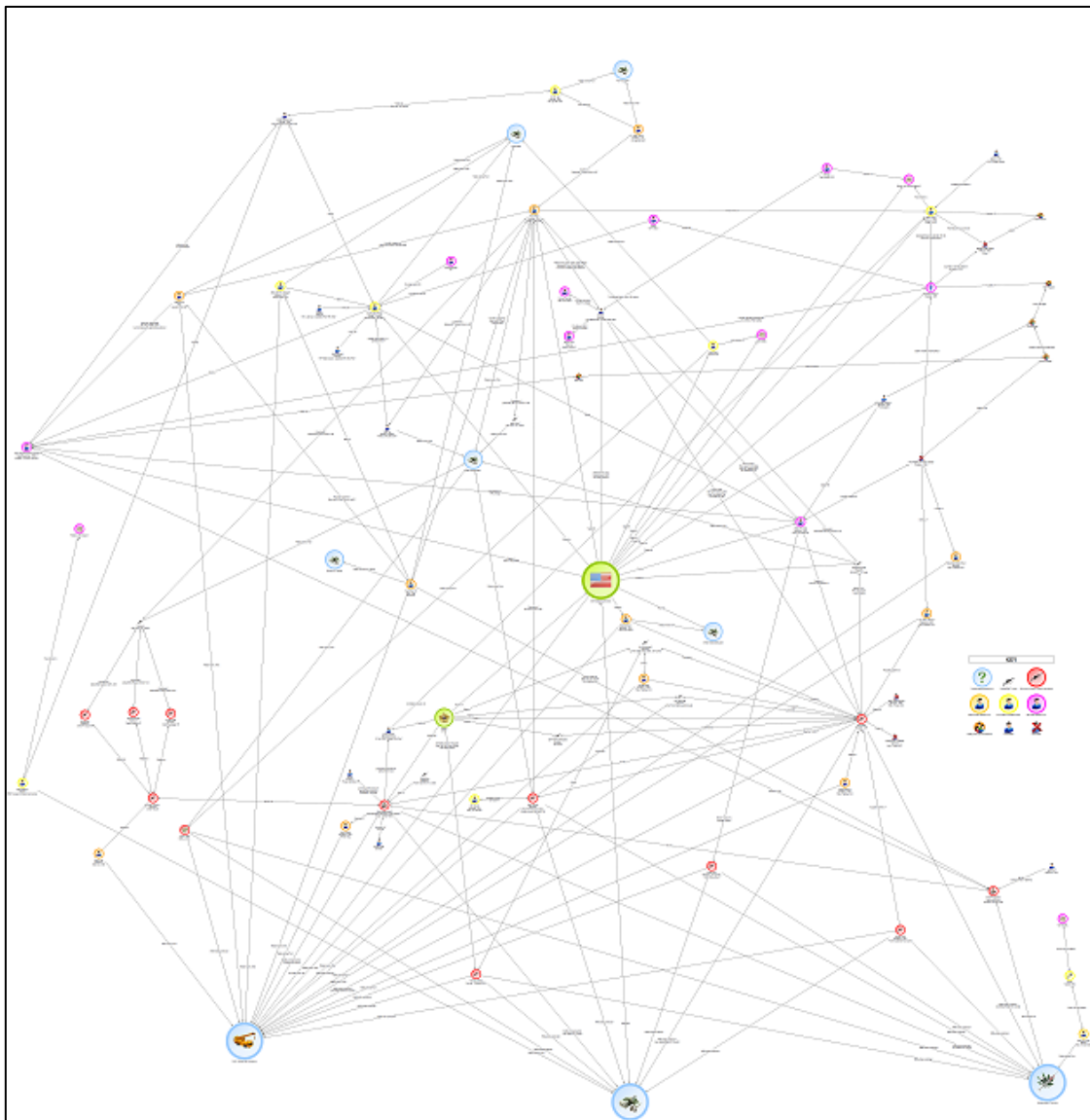


Figure 9b: The Gereshk model (i2 modelling). Blue=money input; Purple, yellow, orange=political layers; Red=security layer; Green=ISAF. Although impossible to read at this scale, I have included it to demonstrate the interconnectivity present between the layers and the central role of ISAF and the specialforce (shown as two green circles near centre). In addition, the bottom-left blue circle represents the monetary input from ISAF convoys. The number of lines leaving it shows how important it is as a source of money for the model.

So far, I have discussed both private and public spheres of money flow, or corruption in Helmand. In conclusion, the mismatch between the private Helmandi understanding of 'corruption' and the public ISAF sphere is stark: public narratives of corruption being caused by drugs money do not chime with how Helmandis see the issue. They see competing private actors interacting with and manipulating the public sphere: this drives the violence or

non-violence, rather than the government-Taliban cleavage. I am now going to discuss 'corruption' in relation to Governor Mangal.

6.8 - Governor Mangal

The greatest divorce between the public and private spheres in describing corruption occurs with Governor Mangal. Publicly, Mangal was a great technocrat, who was reforming institutional government in Helmand and bringing much needed development to Helmandis.¹⁵⁵⁷ Privately, the Helmandi stories surrounding land-theft, an age-old pastime of Helmandi governors, were rife.¹⁵⁵⁸ According to these stories, undeveloped land would either be stolen, or residents would be evicted from 'government' land. According to Helmandis, this corruption was because of, and not in spite of, his closeness to firstly, the British, and secondly, the Americans. Interviewees stated that Mangal used the public sphere of 'development projects' to evict people from their land.¹⁵⁵⁹

According to Helmandis, Mangal's senior staff were heavily involved.¹⁵⁶⁰ Most important in Lashkar Gah was Mohammad Daud.¹⁵⁶¹ As mayor, he oversaw land allocation in Lashkar Gah, particularly for shops, housing and projects commissioned by the PRT. In an example given to me, the land opposite the west gate of the PRT was divided and sold by Mangal and Daud for bribes.¹⁵⁶² A Helmandi MP complained that, 'Mangal has sold all of the land in Helmand...the whole of Lashkar Gah has been divided up for shops...each one costs a \$50,000 bribe to [Daud]...it was all a deal with Mangal'.¹⁵⁶³ Further to Daud, Mangal's deputy, Abdul Sattar Merzakhwal was heavily involved as a facilitator.¹⁵⁶⁴ The two other key people were Daud Ahmadi, his media advisor and Shamsi, his security advisor: these were his extra-Helmand and intra-Helmand deal makers respectively.¹⁵⁶⁵

Land theft was not the only way in which Mangal was considered corrupt by many Helmandis. The flood of development money was alleged to create opportunities for graft. For example, Mangal was said to have acted as a channel for ISAF compensation for the

¹⁵⁵⁷ Chandrasekaran, *Little America*: 81.

¹⁵⁵⁸ It would be beyond the scope of this work to provide legalistic standards of proof to the allegations that I detail here. However, the sheer volume of them, and the frequency with which they came up in my interviews and interactions, augur that they should be included: the allegations reflect a strong Helmandi perception. The other option: that this is an extraordinary and widespread campaign against him, I consider to be less likely. This is because of the wide political spread of interviewees who attest to his bad behaviour (including British and American officials). For balance, I asked Mangal if I could interview him in 2011, but he declined my offer. See also David Mansfield, *All Bets are off!* (forthcoming).

¹⁵⁵⁹ e.g. 006, 008, 023, 047, 054, 081, 082, 085.

¹⁵⁶⁰ 001, 013, 065.

¹⁵⁶¹ 069, 085.

¹⁵⁶² 001, 039.

¹⁵⁶³ 081.

¹⁵⁶⁴ 001.

¹⁵⁶⁵ 001, 013, 054.

Nawa road that went across private land, taking a cut.¹⁵⁶⁶ Another allegation centred on the land on which Camp Leatherneck, the US extension to Bastion, was built. The US allegedly gave him upwards of \$1m in order to compensate the tribal leaders, whose land the camp was built on. It was alleged to me that this money went straight into a bank account in Kuwait.¹⁵⁶⁷

Kabul became interested in Mangal's wealth and sent a parliamentary commission down to Helmand to investigate. Mangal reportedly paid the commission, \$200,000¹⁵⁶⁸ to produce a favourable report. Jabbar Qahraman, an MP for Helmand, explained that Mangal was very media-astute; indeed, he is lampooned as the 'media governor' by Helmandis. He told me that Mangal made sure that his relationship with the foreigners was excellent and used his money wisely to block negative publicity—in one instance, Jabbar said, the manager of a national television channel was paid \$40,000 to not show footage of a five hundred-man protest in Lashkar Gah. Eventually, the land accusations became too great and Daud and Merzakhwal were sacked after Mangal accused them repeatedly of being responsible for the land thefts.¹⁵⁶⁹ Daud Ahmadi and Shamsi remained in-post for several years more.

The public sphere contrasted that of the private Helmandi one. British, and later American, officials focussed on Mangal's technical abilities and his ability to operate in an 'institutional' way in comparison to some of his predecessors.¹⁵⁷⁰ For ISAF, 'service delivery' was seen as a key part of what the government of Afghanistan could offer the populace.¹⁵⁷¹ However, Wikileaks cables show that ISAF became aware of allegations surrounding Mangal in around October 2009, yet did nothing. The cable stated that: 'it would be surprising if this type of corruption occurred without Mangal's knowledge or perhaps even his complicity'.¹⁵⁷² Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles, at that time the UK Special Representative to Afghanistan and Pakistan, concurs: 'we did nothing [publicly] when we began to receive indications that Mangal wasn't as clean as we liked to believe'. 'We realised late', said Sir Sherard to me, 'and by then it was too late ... we were invested'.

¹⁵⁶⁶ 085, Jabbar.

¹⁵⁶⁷ ex-ISAF interpreter at press conference, Kabul, 31 May 2012.

¹⁵⁶⁸ 054, Jabbar. Although ARJ said it was \$3m.

¹⁵⁶⁹ Wiki: 'TENSIONS GROWING BETWEEN HELMAND GOVERNOR MANGAL AND HIS DEPUTY' (19 Apr 2009).

¹⁵⁷⁰ PersExp, Helmand, 2008-12. Wiki: 'HELMAND UPDATE: NEW GOVERNOR BRINGS IMPROVEMENTS, MARINES ENGAGE TALIBAN' (21 July 2008).

¹⁵⁷¹ Helmand Plan Annual Review 2010, Helmand PRT / RC(SW) / Regional Platform SW (2010): 2.

¹⁵⁷² Wiki: 'HELMAND UPDATE: FOOD ZONE ALLEGATIONS ARE BUILDING AGAINST GOVERNOR MANGAL' (27 Oct 2009).

Mangal was finally removed in September 2012.¹⁵⁷³ This was potentially linked to another series of protests in Kabul in May/June about Mangal's 'corruption'. At that time, there were also television talk show discussions,¹⁵⁷⁴ press conferences¹⁵⁷⁵ and newspaper articles.¹⁵⁷⁶ Although reflecting Helmandi narratives, these events were organised and financed by Sher Mohammad and Jabbar Qahraman. By this point, Mangal had allied himself with the 'Hizb' figures in the province as a bulwark against Sher Mohammad, and counted figures like Mir Wali and Hafizullah Khan as allies. This was clever political manoeuvring: Mangal even 'advised' ISAF not to target a close relative of Hafizullah who was responsible for moving 'Taliban' bomb components around central Helmand. This can be considered a reverse-denunciation: ISAF's ignorance in this case allowed Mangal's personal politicking to dictate which members of the Taliban lived and died. Perhaps Mangal's legacy was best summed up by a Helmandi senator: 'he seems to be better than the others have been...but Mangal is British'.¹⁵⁷⁷

6.9 - Politics

The ISAF inactivity over Mangal was partly due to his brilliant manipulation of the public sphere. From the beginning of his tenure, Mangal maintained the position that if he was removed, then Sher Mohammad would replace him.¹⁵⁷⁸ Particularly for the British, who had insisted on his removal, this would be an unacceptable loss of face. It would also damage their public narrative of working with the Afghan government against the Taliban whilst combatting narcotics: two things that Sher Mohammad was deeply involved in. The appointment of Sher Mohammad would force to the surface the issue of whether the public government-Taliban cleavage was the correct way to understand the Helmandi conflict. Mangal realised this very early on, and brilliantly played on it, manipulating the British and Americans, but particularly the British.¹⁵⁷⁹ ISAF were blinded by Mangal playing up his institutional side.

President Karzai played an important role between Sher Mohammad, Mangal and ISAF. He regretted removing Sher Mohammad in 2005¹⁵⁸⁰ and was incandescent with rage when Gordon Brown, the British Prime Minister, visited him and lobbied for Mangal forcefully, saying that he would pull British troops out of Afghanistan if Mangal was removed. 'Mangal is

¹⁵⁷³ 'President Hamid Karzai sacks Helmand governor in blow to British influence', [The Telegraph](#) (20 Sep 2012).

¹⁵⁷⁴ 'Todai Khbrai [lit. Hot Talk]', [Lemar TV](#) (2 June 2012).

¹⁵⁷⁵ PersExp, Kabul, 31 May 2012.

¹⁵⁷⁶ 'Protestors want Helmand, Logar governors fired', [Afghanistan Times](#) (24 May 2012).

¹⁵⁷⁷ 084.

¹⁵⁷⁸ Wiki: 'HELMAND GOVERNOR MANGAL UPBEAT, HOPEFUL IN MEETING WITH AMBASSADOR' (27

June 2009).

¹⁵⁷⁹ SCC.

¹⁵⁸⁰ 'Brown rejects criticism from Afghan leader', [Financial Times](#) (26 Jan 2008).

not your governor, he is ours', Brown reportedly said.¹⁵⁸¹ Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles also confirmed that Brown lobbied President Karzai several times but suggested that it was Karzai who repeatedly pointed out that Mangal was Britain's governor, rather than Brown.

This continued for several years with Mangal reporting to the British and Americans that he was desperately worried that Sher Mohammad would take over his position if he was sacked. The British were 'deeply concerned' that Sher Mohammad would come back to the province.¹⁵⁸² Karzai did keep Mangal in place, but detested the British, and the Americans, for the interference: he preferred Sher Mohammad in post, not least because as part of Karzai's southern tribal coalition he could deliver electoral votes.¹⁵⁸³ Karzai also detested Mangal for his closeness to the Americans and the British.¹⁵⁸⁴ For his part, Sher Mohammad repeatedly organised schemes and protests in an attempt to unseat Mangal. While these public politics continued, the foreigners missed the point that the Helmandis were making privately: 'Mangal is corrupt and he is stealing our land'.¹⁵⁸⁵

District-level politics were similarly complex. For example in Nad-e Ali, fresh elections for the district council were held in 2010 to take advantage of the new areas that were now under government control (see section 6.1). The disenfranchised communities living in the previous deserts surrounding Nad-e Ali in Bolan and the Bowri to the west were included in the electoral areas. This was a sensible move in terms of enfranchising the population, one of the aims of counterinsurgency. However, it incensed the population of 'central' Nad-e Ali who were 'legal' land holders with documents issued by Zahir Shah. They considered the desert dwellers as be-rasmiat (unofficial).

In the elections there were few changes in who was elected. The two most notable were that Helmandwal, the nephew of Shah Nazar Khan the erstwhile Provincial Governor, was removed from the Chair. He was replaced by Haji Barakzai (Kharoti), the nephew of Haji Jamalzai, the ex-Harakat commander from Noor Mohammad Khan Kalay. The space opened up by death of Wakil Safar, and the arrest of his son Mirwais Khan, meant that different power centres in the Kharoti were able to rise to the fore.

¹⁵⁸¹ 006 (claimed to have been told this by Karzai), SMA, ARJ; Wiki: 'BROWN URGES KARZAI TO KEEP HELMAND GOVERNOR; PRAISES UNSYG REP' (22 Aug 2008).

¹⁵⁸² Wiki: 'PLANNING FOR GOVERNANCE CHANGES IN HELMAND' (2 July 2009).

¹⁵⁸³ 'Karzai in his Labyrinth', *New York Times* (4 Aug 2009).

¹⁵⁸⁴ Wiki: 'HELMAND GOVERNOR SEES SOME PROGRESS BUT BLAMES PRESIDENT,S GOVERNING STYLE FOR PROVINCE,S OVERALL WOES [sic]' (26 Feb 2009).

¹⁵⁸⁵ 081.

The other change was that Pir Mohammad Sadat was voted out by his community in Naqilabad. This was ostensibly because, the community said to the British, he was too close to the ‘Taliban’. This manipulation of the public sphere was later shown to be untrue—he had tried to dominate the agricultural cooperative in the village over another candidate.¹⁵⁸⁶ Overall the elections were seen by Nad-e Ali’s population as a positive outcome. This was especially true of the fact that a Kharoti man was elected to a government position of power within the district.

So far in this chapter, I have broadly discussed several aspects of security control in the province. I then followed this with a discussion of Taliban organisation, corruption and Helmandi (government) politics. I now conclude this section of the chapter by discussing the public and private spheres of ISAF’s withdrawal from Helmand, still on-going at the time of writing. Lastly, I will consider the Helmandi narrative that the British are working with the Taliban.

6.10 - Withdrawal and more militias

In July 2010, twenty-six years after a similar Soviet announcement, ISAF announced that it would be withdrawing its forces by 2014.¹⁵⁸⁷ As with the Soviets, they based the public narratives of their withdrawal on reconciliation with the Taliban, the growth of militias and increasing the competence of the army and the police. The militia programme was predicated on groups of roughly thirty men protecting their own villages from outside insurgents. This reflected the public narrative that the Taliban were outsiders oppressing defenceless villagers. Yet, the ISAF public narrative was inconsistent. They sought to strengthen the Afghan ‘government’, yet giving guns and training to people outside the ‘government’ did exactly the opposite. However in the private sphere, because of the high percentage of local ‘Talibs’ the programme has succeeded in reintegrating lots of previous daakhelee ‘Taliban’ fighters.

The Afghan Local Police (ALP) programme was first established in Helmand by British forces in January 2011.¹⁵⁸⁸ The programme came after a long line of other militia programmes in Helmand.¹⁵⁸⁹ Under law, the ALPs were to report to the District Chief of Police. They were recruited from the local communities and ‘vetted’ by the elders and the NDS. They would only operate in their local area. After a year, ALP soldiers were

¹⁵⁸⁶ PersExp, Helmand, 2010. I am grateful to Anne SS for tracking these events at the time.

¹⁵⁸⁷ ‘Exclusive: Official – Troops out of Afghanistan by 2014’, *The Independent* (18 July 2010).

¹⁵⁸⁸ Human Rights Watch, *Just don’t call it a militia* (New York, 2011): 55.

¹⁵⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

encouraged to join the police, thus linking the communities to the police.¹⁵⁹⁰ Many¹⁵⁹¹ considered them analogous to the Najibullah militias (see section 2.16). However, ALPs are much smaller and more poorly armed. A more considered view is that they were very similar to the depaye militias under Zahir Shah (see section 2.2), in fact in one case, the same group of people who had joined the Soviet-era depaye in Deh Adam Khan, later became members of the ALP there.¹⁵⁹² Conceptually, the militias are a clear interaction between public (arms, weapons, funding, membership of the government) and private (men, local commanders and groups) spheres.

In the two main districts under British control (there were no ALPs in Lashkar Gah), ALP development was pursued differently, leading to different results and different problems. There were, however, two shared characteristics. Firstly, there was a lack of British 'due diligence' in investigating exactly who it was who was forming these militias that they were arming. Secondly, the British sought militias on individual sites within each district separately in the hope that they would contribute to micro-security gains. The British did not consider how to divide the limited ALP establishment across the district in order to pursue a holistic security effect, in concert with the established Afghan army and police presence.¹⁵⁹³ This meant that different groups of local elders (and different British officers) were competing for an ever decreasing establishment.

In Nad-e Ali, the community council was strongly opposed to ALPs.¹⁵⁹⁴ They all voiced the same reasons: that, in such a heterogeneous district, once one community received permission to raise an ALP, everyone would want one. Then, people would not be able to travel outside of their own villages and communities.¹⁵⁹⁵ Habibullah, the District Governor, could see that the programme formed a key part of the public sphere, and so overruled the private objections of the locals. He forced it through the district council by appealing to minority interests. For example, in Loy Bagh, an ALP commander from the minority Achakzai was empowered over the heads of the majority Noorzai: Habibullah had long had problems with Loy Bagh Noorzai figures such as Abdul Ahad Helmandwal and Mullahs Karim and Zakiri.¹⁵⁹⁶ He reportedly said, 'if you don't get the men to do it, I will get them from

¹⁵⁹⁰ PersExp, Helmand, 2011-2.

¹⁵⁹¹ 035, 039.

¹⁵⁹² Habibullah, 040, 057, 075.

¹⁵⁹³ PersExp, Helmand, 2011-2.

¹⁵⁹⁴ 017.

¹⁵⁹⁵ 023.

¹⁵⁹⁶ 011, 023.

somewhere else'. Habibullah eventually had to bring men from Musa Qala, where his brother was District Governor.¹⁵⁹⁷

As a senior Noorzai tribal leader said to me, '[they are] not with the support of the community'.¹⁵⁹⁸ Officially, this is a prerequisite for the establishment of an ALP site. In the south of the district, both the Hazaras and the Ishaqzai were allowed to establish their own ALP militias, thus arming both sides in the long running water dispute. The dispute's main protagonist on the Hazara side—Assadullah Karimi—was made the commander of the Hazara militia.¹⁵⁹⁹ In Loy Mandah, the family of the district education director dominated the ALP: he was able to get it established because his family had been previously targeted before by another local community and the ALP offered his best form of defence.¹⁶⁰⁰ In short, British ignorance of the private dynamics allowed these local politics to dominate the formation of the ALPs, rather than have their creation reinforce the Afghan government organisation.

Moreover, the ALP programme conceptually took the place of the reintegration programme. A large number of interviewees from across the social spectrum agreed that one of the main reasons that Nad-e Ali became more peaceful during 2011 was the roll out of the ALP programme. Many local 'Taliban' enrolled as militia fighters.¹⁶⁰¹ In addition, in those areas where there were still 'Taliban' active, deals were struck between the former insurgents and their now reintegrated brethren.¹⁶⁰² There was a great paradox in the British actions though. On the advice of Habibullah, the Kharoti were not allowed to participate in the programme. Thus, in line with the public sphere, the greatest historical 'supporters' of the Taliban in the district were not allowed an ALP. As Habibullah put it, again: 'they are all Taliban'.

Two prominent ex-Hizb Kharoti commanders explained wearily to me that they had seen this all before. The government didn't trust them, otherwise they would have an ALP; the police still thought of them as Talibs.¹⁶⁰³ Other communities joked that there was no point in having a Kharoti ALP and that the government might as well arm the Taliban.¹⁶⁰⁴ But these were the same people who pointed out to me privately that the other ALPs were all ex-'Taliban'. One

¹⁵⁹⁷ 017, 034.

¹⁵⁹⁸ 039.

¹⁵⁹⁹ 015, 017, 034.

¹⁶⁰⁰ 058.

¹⁶⁰¹ 007, 017, 033, 067.

¹⁶⁰² 103, 228.

¹⁶⁰³ 007, 032.

¹⁶⁰⁴ 017, 033.

Helmandi MP looked ruefully at the situation and wondered if it would spark the Kharoti to form their own militias for defence, much as they had done in 2007/8.¹⁶⁰⁵

The final result of the ALP programme in Nad-e Ali was that it allowed Abdul Rahman Jan an increase in control. Haji Lal Jan, his cousin, managed to present himself as the police officer in charge of the Nad-e Ali ALPs,¹⁶⁰⁶ and the District Chief of Police, Haji Omar Jan, was a key acolyte of his. Haji Omar Jan's brother controlled all the militias in Marjeh. As Abdul Rahman said, 'all the [militias] are my people; that is why there is security'. The ISAF public narrative of bringing good governance in the wake of the rapacious warlords was somewhat contradicted by the private sphere where those same warlords regained security control through the ALP programme.

The ALP militias were grown differently in Nahr-e Saraj district. Immediately the scheme was announced, the specialforce converted their militias into ALPs, accepting the new public labels. This meant that the previous militia commanders—Sarai Mama and Jan Mohammad—became the ALP commanders. Jan Mohammad also ran the militia which was guarding Camp Price and was the commander of the District Response Team, which was similar in concept to the original militias raised by the specialforce.¹⁶⁰⁷ Publicly they were part of the ALP programme; however the US continued to supplement their wages and supplies, but actually they were still considered specialforce militias.¹⁶⁰⁸ Jan Mohammad, for instance, used to visit the Chief of Police, as a subordinate commander should, but always turned up in US uniform to make an unsubtle point about who was in charge. 'Joining' the ALP was a rebranding exercise, like the many times before that the specialforce militias had been rebadged.¹⁶⁰⁹

Elsewhere, in Spin Masjid and Malgir, the militia commanders were largely ex-93rd division. Many of them were also (most recent) ex-Talibs, for example, Lal Mohammad, who was a relative-by-marriage of Sur Gul, the Taliban District Governor for Washir. Interestingly, the elders from the community only offered them as appropriate for militia leadership late in the process: originally they had said that there was no-one appropriate. According to the public narrative, it took time for their confidence to be raised sufficiently for them to risk supporting the ALP programme. Privately, the elders were managing a reintegration process using the ALP programme. For example, Lal Mohammad had, by this point, worked under Taliban,

¹⁶⁰⁵ 081.

¹⁶⁰⁶ 065.

¹⁶⁰⁷ 061, 077.

¹⁶⁰⁸ 012, 057.

¹⁶⁰⁹ PersExp, Helmand, 2011-2.

93rd Division, Taliban and ALP patronage networks, and some of this side changing was dictated by a land dispute with a Noorzai tribesman, Dad Gul.¹⁶¹⁰

The ALP programme was entirely to Mir Wali's benefit, as he bragged to me when I met with him. He equated the security that existed during the tenure of the 93rd Division with the security that had been generated by the ALP militias. The programme recycled some of the private actors' armed interests away from the 'Taliban' public organisation and temporarily towards the 'government' organisation: they changed their public-private interactions. Whilst beneficial for overall security, the provincial police hierarchy was solidly ex-communist by this time and they had problems exerting their control over the new militias that they were meant to command. From the point of view of the individual communities the public sphere may have changed, but the same private actors were still wielding guns in their villages (viz Lal Mohammad). It did not matter whether they were 'Taliban' or 'government'.¹⁶¹¹

The overall reaction to the ALP programme in Helmand was mixed. Many were concerned about the ability of the government to control the militias: 'the radio says that in Ghazni the [ALP] are going wild. So far in Nad-e Ali they are behaving, but that is because ISAF are here...we will see'.¹⁶¹² The injection of yet more weapons into the society was also not always viewed favourably.¹⁶¹³ Others stressed to me the importance of more training for the militias. This would make them more professional and accountable to the Afghan state.¹⁶¹⁴ Publicly, the ALP programme had contributed to an increase in overall security where they were deployed, by keeping 'Taliban' out of local communities. Privately, this was at the cost of paying many 'Talibs' not to fight.¹⁶¹⁵ The old warlords won the most out of the programme.¹⁶¹⁶ Many considered the ALP programme as an ISAF bet that Helmandis may yet have to pick up the consequences for.¹⁶¹⁷

Over the summer of 2012, the British began to look more closely at the ALP militias. They began a more intensive training and mentoring programme for them, in an attempt to bind them to the Afghan 'government' and minimise the potential of them 'going wild'. There had been chronic problems with Afghan government pay for the individual militias and, upon the realisation that they were paying their enemies not to attack them, the British made big

¹⁶¹⁰ 018, 068, 103.

¹⁶¹¹ 085.

¹⁶¹² 007.

¹⁶¹³ 017.

¹⁶¹⁴ 015, 081.

¹⁶¹⁵ 007, 023, 067, 073, 078.

¹⁶¹⁶ ARJ, MMW.

¹⁶¹⁷ e.g. 032, 054.

efforts to encourage the Afghan system to pay up.¹⁶¹⁸ Whether or not pay was the cause, some of the militias started to switch public-private interactions again, starting with Lal Mohammad in Torghai: he simply went back to working with Sur Gul taking two men, a PKM machine gun, five Kalashnikovs and two motorbikes.¹⁶¹⁹ Later on, another ALP militia 'defected' in Musa Qala.¹⁶²⁰ For this, and other, reasons training and recruitment of new ALPs was halted nationwide in September 2012.¹⁶²¹

6.11 - The three transitions

The growth of ALP militias and the increased attention given to army and police training was part of a framework of transition to Afghan control. Lashkar Gah, which had de facto been controlled by the Afghan security forces for years, was the first to officially 'transfer' in July 2011.¹⁶²² Most of Nad-e Ali had transferred by December of the same year. Most of Nahr-e Saraj is transferring lead security control in the autumn of 2012.¹⁶²³ Transition was a public sign that the British forces that had generated such resistance over the previous five years were finally leaving, but many Helmandis were not sure if they could believe it.¹⁶²⁴

Many were convinced that the 'real' reason for the British presence was different to the stated one and assumed that this would be another trick. If the British did leave, many assumed that the security forces (less the army) would splinter and dissolve back to their communities, pointing to the fact that ISAF patronage was the binding factor.¹⁶²⁵ Others were convinced that there would be further inter-group warfare as they competed for water and poppy.¹⁶²⁶ The most pessimistic suggested that the 'government would last an hour once the foreigners leave'.¹⁶²⁷

Alongside this primarily ISAF-driven process, the Afghan government was also carrying out its own parallel transition process by appointing local power brokers or their proxies into government positions (this is analogous to what the Soviet-era: see section 2.14). For example, over 2010-12 they appointed relatives of Sher Mohammad as District Chiefs of Police in Kajaki, Washir and Baghran (Faisullah, Mirdel and Hayat Khan respectively).¹⁶²⁸

¹⁶¹⁸ PersExp, Helmand, 2012.

¹⁶¹⁹ 103.

¹⁶²⁰ 'Eleven Afghan police defect to Taliban in Helmand province', *BBC News* (6 Aug 2012).

¹⁶²¹ 'Afghan police recruits' training halted after attacks on NATO', *BBC News* (2 Sep 2012).

¹⁶²² 'Lashkar Gah transition should send "powerful signal to insurgents"', *The Guardian* (19 July 2011).

¹⁶²³ PersExp, Helmand, 2011-2.

¹⁶²⁴ 068, 074.

¹⁶²⁵ 031, 032, 078.

¹⁶²⁶ 084.

¹⁶²⁷ 020.

¹⁶²⁸ SMA.

Koka still remained in Musa Qala.¹⁶²⁹ Sher Mohammad's brother, the erstwhile Deputy Provincial Governor, Amir Mohammad, was made Provincial Governor of Uruzgan, a neighbouring province.¹⁶³⁰ Interestingly, in a mirror, Abdul Rauf, a major Alizai Taliban commander, and originally Zakir's boss when both were in Rais Baghrani's 93rd Division in 1994, was appointed the Taliban Governor for the same province.¹⁶³¹ Further west, Mir Wali's son, Hekmatullah, was appointed Chief of Police in Sangin. This was probably a stopgap on his way to becoming the Gereshk Chief: a role that his father has lobbied hard for him for.¹⁶³² Mir Wali denied this when I met him, indicating the peeling paint in his house as a sign of his poverty: 'there was no way I could afford the bribes', he said.

The Helmandi population have considered these changes wrought by the public ISAF and government transitions. They are wary of the future, as the past has taught them to be. During 2012, the tribal leaderships in Helmand began to invite their members to a series of tribal shuras. These were a repeat of those shuras held in 1992 and 2002, when the communist and Taliban governments were overthrown. The format was similar. Members from both 'sides' of the public cleavage (in this case the 'Taliban' and the 'government') sat down together and reaffirmed the private sphere: that they were all Noorzai, or Barakzai, or Kharoti, or Alikozai, and that they should work together. In many cases this reached an impressive level of complexity, with the shuras opening offices in Lashkar Gah and Kabul, and producing manifestos with positions on such things as women's rights, relations with other tribes and, most importantly, positions on reconciling 'Talibs'. The shuras were a formalisation of a time-honoured process: individuals subsuming themselves within the mass of the tribe in an uncertain future. They represent the third 'transition' process.¹⁶³³

So far, I have discussed several themes of transition. These have been loosely organised around security, development and politics. I showed, as in the preceding chapters, that the private sphere of the conflict has primacy in explaining its dynamics, when the public organisations do not understand the private sphere's dynamics. I now go on to discuss the Helmandi narrative that the British were working with the Taliban to destroy Helmand. I do not consider this a theme as above, rather, a product of my thesis—it is a manifestation of what happens when public organisations in civil wars construct a public narrative without understanding, or taking into account, the private sphere.

¹⁶²⁹ 054.

¹⁶³⁰ 'Afghanistan's battle to re-integrate reformed Taliban fighters', [The Independent](#) (22 May 2012).

¹⁶³¹ SMA.

¹⁶³² 069. PersExp, Gereshk, 2012.

¹⁶³³ 007, 023, 039, 081, 084.

6.12 - The British are supplying the Taliban

Elsewhere in Afghanistan there are well established narratives about ISAF, and particularly the Americans, supplying the Taliban. Two main mechanisms are offered. Firstly: American sponsorship of the ISI which, in turn, supports the Taliban. Secondly, profligacy associated with the indigenous supply contracts that are used to supply ISAF bases.¹⁶³⁴ In Helmand, the rumours take on a different angle: that the British are supporting the Taliban and the US are fighting the Taliban. At its most extreme this leads to some claims of a American-British civil war being enacted in Helmand. I have found these views to be widely held, from Helmandi Senators,¹⁶³⁵ to educated tribal leaders who have often dealt with the British,¹⁶³⁶ to senior members of the Afghan police and army who are working with the British.¹⁶³⁷ The overwhelming majority of Helmandis that I asked strongly believe this to be true.¹⁶³⁸

One of the most profound moments of my research came when interviewing a member of the Helmandi diaspora in London. He explained to me that when he first heard the ‘rumours’ he considered them true. Furthermore, the rumour threatened to unseat his identity as a Helmandi refugee, who had been living happily, prosperously and legally in the UK for some years. He could not countenance one of his countries purposefully destroying the other, and set out to investigate the matter himself. He found no ‘evidence’ in Helmand that would lead him to believe that the British were *not* working with the Taliban. Only the internal UK debate conducted in the media, involving images such as the corteges moving through Royal Wootton Bassett, allayed his fears. The majority of Helmandis have no access to that debate.¹⁶³⁹

The belief gained currency in Helmand in mid-2009, the same time that the US began to increase their presence in the province. It partly replaced the earlier belief that the British had only come to Helmand for revenge, although the ideas co-exist to some degree.¹⁶⁴⁰ The core of the narrative is that the US fight the Taliban more aggressively than the British, *ergo*, they must be more ‘serious’ about the Taliban than the British.¹⁶⁴¹ This is reflected by Taliban commanders who comment on the fondness of British troops for talking rather than

¹⁶³⁴ ‘Afghan believe US is funding Taliban’, *The Guardian* (25 May 2010); ‘CIA pays for support in Pakistan: It has spent millions funding the ISI spy agency, despite fears of corruption. But some say it is worth it’, *LA Times* (15 Nov 2009); ‘How the US funds the Taliban’, *The Nation* (11 Nov 2009).

¹⁶³⁵ 082.

¹⁶³⁶ 023.

¹⁶³⁷ 006.

¹⁶³⁸ e.g. 001, 003, 004, 005, 006, 007, 011, 013, 014, 015, 020, 021, 023, 024, 027, 029, 034, 041, 051, 059, 065, 066, 068, 070, 071, 072, 074, 077, 082, 083, 085, Hafizullah.

¹⁶³⁹ Redacted.

¹⁶⁴⁰ 068, 070.

¹⁶⁴¹ 068, 069.

fighting.¹⁶⁴² The British would be able to rebut these accusations. To them, the conflict was an insurgency, and so politics rather than force should be at the forefront; when the US arrived they had vast resources concentrated in a small area and so were able to do much more; and, privately, the British would point to the ‘gung-ho’ attitude of American troops.¹⁶⁴³ In-line with the ISAF public narrative, the British were using ‘courageous restraint’ to protect the population.¹⁶⁴⁴

However, the basis of the rumour created by the arrival of the US troops was much further back in history. Here, I discuss the historical factors which I argue have led to the Helmandis interpreting the mismatched ISAF public and Helmandi private spheres as evidence for the British working with the Taliban. In the discussion below, when I use the word Taliban, I am referring to what the Helmandis would call aslee, or real, Taliban—that is, those members of the Taliban with close links to the Quetta Shura leadership involving funding and direction. For the Helmandis, it is considered obvious that the Quetta Shura Taliban are controlled and directed by the ISI.¹⁶⁴⁵

Primarily, this belief has as its basis a profound hatred of the Angrez. This is one of the commonest private Helmandi narratives. Jean Mackenzie, an intrepid American journalist who worked for the respected Institute for War and Peace Reporting training Helmandi journalists in Lashkar Gah from 2006–8 put it thus:

In Afghanistan, word of mouth is everything, and Helmandis appear to have a deep, visceral aversion toward the British that defies rational explanation. The constant and abiding rumors [sic] that the British are supporting the Taliban with funds and weapons stem, most likely, from this deep well of historical hatred.¹⁶⁴⁶

I, too, can attest to this from personal experience when I spent time in Kabul socialising with Helmandis that I know well. I felt deeply humbled when I experienced the strength of the antipathy reserved for the Angrez. Mackenzie is right, but it is only the foundation.

Helmandis currently hold the belief that the British never gave up colonial control of Pakistan after the partition of British India in 1947. To them, it was a charade, designed to mask British power in the region. ‘Why would they voluntarily give up power?’ they ask rhetorically. This is irrefutable proof that the British control the ISI and the ISI control the Taliban. I was

¹⁶⁴² e.g. 220, 221, 234, 235, 244.

¹⁶⁴³ Chandrasekaran, *Little America*: 208-11.

¹⁶⁴⁴ PersExp, Helmand, 2010-2.

¹⁶⁴⁵ See section 1.7.

¹⁶⁴⁶ Jean Mackenzie, *The Battle for Afghanistan: Militancy and Conflict in Helmand* (2010): 6.

not able to discern whether this belief was strongly held at the time of partition, or whether it has been unconsciously created or reinforced by recent events.

Moreover, the Pakistani Army is modelled on the British Army; 'in fact' the Pakistani state is little changed since the British left it. To Helmandis, it is also well-known that Britain gives aid to Pakistan, which frees up Pakistani state spending to be cycled to the Taliban, which comes back across the border in the form of lethal aid.¹⁶⁴⁷ In this, the Helmandis are factually correct. What is interesting that the US are not accused as much of similar perfidies in Helmand, as they are in the rest of Afghanistan, but I conclude this comes from Mackenzie's 'deep well of historical hatred'.

More recently, the Helmandis have been brutalised by thirty-four years of war, during which their own government paid them to kill each other on a large scale (see sections 2.7 and 2.15). This has led to a gradual breakdown of even the most basic trust, with one man describing pathetically to me that, 'I don't know who my friends are, and haven't for years'.¹⁶⁴⁸ *From the Helmandi perspective*, this was followed by a period where the US spoke with the highest of ideals about rebuilding Afghanistan, only to beat people to death in custody, send children to Guantanamo and allow some of the most despicable people in Helmandi society to rise to the top through their sponsorship and ignorance. Then came the British intervention where the rhetoric of development did not match the reality of violence.

Specifically, Helmandis point to the deal in Musa Qala between the British, the elders and the 'Taliban'. This was followed shortly after by the arrest of Michael Semple for talking to the Taliban and organising training camps for them.¹⁶⁴⁹ As Hafizullah Khan, a not uninformed individual put it, 'How could Semple work safely all over Helmand? And now he lives in Pakistan'. Soon the rumours were well established and had reached President Karzai. He claimed that unidentified foreign helicopters (reportedly British) had been transporting Taliban fighters from Helmand to the north of Afghanistan.

The 'helicopter' rumours were the first to reach the international press¹⁶⁵⁰ and I think marked a turning point. The reports were both reflective of underlying feelings, but also the genesis of further rumours. They were further exploited by the Iranians and the Pakistanis. The Iranians quoted 'unnamed' diplomats saying that British helicopters were involved. They also

¹⁶⁴⁷ 006, 047, 068, ARJ.

¹⁶⁴⁸ 007.

¹⁶⁴⁹ 093.

¹⁶⁵⁰ Andrew McGregor, "Karzai Claims Mystery Helicopters Ferrying Taliban to North Afghanistan" *Terrorism Monitor* 7, no. 33 (2010). 'Helicopter Rumour Refuses to Die', *IWPR* (2 Nov 2009).

alleged that the British had executed one of their Afghan interpreters who was knowledgeable about the operation.¹⁶⁵¹ The ISI played a much subtler game, telling the Taliban commanders they supplied that the money and weapons originally came from the British.¹⁶⁵²

Others realised that this was a profitable narrative that could deflect attention away from their own inadequacies. Mullah Salam, the reconciled District Governor of Musa Qala, stated that the British had been moving Taliban around Musa Qala in helicopters because they were seeking revenge for Maiwand and were interested in the mineral riches of the province.¹⁶⁵³ As Jabbar Qahraman (who doesn't believe the rumours) said, 'of course it is a lie...but it is a useful lie...even Karzai believes it!' The rumours were helped by the Helmandi perception that British rhetoric did not match the reality of their intervention in the province.

Events and dynamics that could be put down to British incompetence were attributed to Angrez perfidy. The Haji Gul Ehktiar story discussed in section 5.15 is illustrative. Only long after the British began paying rent to Gul Ehktiar did they realise that the money was finding its way into armaments that were killing its soldiers. During this time period, Sur Gul, Ehktiar's Talib nephew, had been bragging that he had got the money from the British!¹⁶⁵⁴

Everyone I spoke to has an (usually) eyewitness story. A twenty-something Noorzai tribesman in Nad-e Ali, who has some friends fighting the British, told me that he *himself* had seen British troops dropping an ISO container full of supplies in Marjeh. Later, a Talib friend of his had shown him a mobile phone video depicting a weapons cache full of 'British' weapons that had been given to the Taliban.¹⁶⁵⁵ In another example, there were a set of ISI 'Punjabi' operatives in Nad-e Ali conducting a resupply of some Taliban fighting groups in broad daylight. Whilst this was going on, there were British helicopters overhead, but nothing was done.¹⁶⁵⁶

Hafizullah Khan told me that 'a friend' had seen the British occupy a compound. Shortly after, they vacated it leaving it full of ammunition for the Taliban. A Helmandi senator insisted that he had seen the Taliban passing by British vehicles and didn't understand why they

¹⁶⁵¹ 'UK army "providing" Taliban with air transport', [Press TV](#) (17 Oct 2009).

¹⁶⁵² 047, 072, 085, Hafizullah.

¹⁶⁵³ Unknown, "FORMER TALIBAN COMMANDER ALLEGES UK SUPPORTS TALIBAN, REGRETS JOINING GOVERNMENT" [Terrorism Monitor](#) 8, no. 26 (2010).

¹⁶⁵⁴ 085.

¹⁶⁵⁵ 072. He showed me the video, but I could see nothing that linked it to the British.

¹⁶⁵⁶ 047.

didn't fire.¹⁶⁵⁷ An elder claimed that a Talib had shown him a video of British officers talking with Taliban commanders, offering them \$200,000 if they would not attack. The Talib then asked for \$3000 for the video; the elder tried to broker a deal with 'Channel 4' for them to buy the video but they refused saying it was 'too dangerous'.¹⁶⁵⁸ I have many more examples.

Of course, not everyone believes these stories.¹⁶⁵⁹ Jabbar Qahraman snorted when I asked him about it. Sher Mohammad, Mir Wali and Abdul Rahman all affirmed that it was ridiculous, which are interesting comments when contextualised in light of their 'Taliban' links. Their double-dealing has probably contributed to the Helmandi understanding of how people with lots of power act. Habibullah Khan, who has worked with British troops for the last four years, also thinks it is untrue. But they can all understand why the majority of Helmandis believe this narrative. 'It is like a white and a black man walking together' said Abdul Rahman, talking of the fact that both ISAF and Taliban supplies come through Pakistan.

These powerful Helmandis can understand how international and British actions could be misconstrued by the populace. But they are also more aware of the potential for incompetence of international forces. They do not suffer so much from the 'man on the moon' effect, whereby incredulity follows from the world's most powerful nations being unable to defeat a 'couple of Talibs'.¹⁶⁶⁰ Even President Karzai used to say to Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles, the British Ambassador, 'surely you could have solved this by now?'¹⁶⁶¹

What those individuals who do follow the narrative are doing is reinterpreting 'evidence' in light of their understanding of the strategic environment. This eventually snowballs as evidence is found, based on the original assumptions, which then becomes proof for the original assumption, and so on. For the many that do subscribe to the narrative it is strong: a man in Nawa recounted to me how the police in Babaji had driven some distance to hand their Taliban prisoners over to the Americans rather than to the British, who they felt would immediately free them.¹⁶⁶²

¹⁶⁵⁷ 082.

¹⁶⁵⁸ 000.

¹⁶⁵⁹ e.g. 005, SMA, Jabbar.

¹⁶⁶⁰ 004, 066, 068.

¹⁶⁶¹ SCC.

¹⁶⁶² 005.

6.13 - 'Of course they are working with the Taliban!'

Helmandis have a strong narrative behind why the British would support the Taliban at the same time that they are deploying troops to 'fight' said Taliban. An educated mullah who worked for the Taliban government was convinced that the British and the ISI wanted an 'Islamic civil war' in Afghanistan, so that Islam in Afghanistan was 'weak'. 'They think that if there is an alliance between groups in Afghanistan then there will be bombs in London'.¹⁶⁶³ A degree-educated Helmandi gentleman tried to explain to me very patiently that this stemmed from history and the desire of the British to avenge their previous defeats in Afghanistan, against the will of the US. This was leading to a civil war 'within NATO', with the British wanting NATO to break up. With Afghanistan weak, the British could re-establish their empire. I submitted that the British public were unlikely to stand for such deceit with the casualties and costs that it would entail. He responded that the British public were in on it and that they saw it as a reasonable cost of the war against NATO, if they could regain the empire.¹⁶⁶⁴

There are still parts of this narrative that take extra explanation. For example, why do the Afghan security forces continue to work with their British mentors? Two interviewees pointed to the fact that the war in Helmand was between roshan-fikran (progressives) and Taliban—if the roshan-fikran did not accept the help of the British then the Taliban would win. The police and army hated it, but had little choice.¹⁶⁶⁵ The strongest paradox is this. If, as I have argued extensively, the 'Taliban' are part of Helmandi society, rather than an external organisation trying to impose itself, then surely the population would know that the British were not supplying the Taliban (because the Taliban and the 'Taliban' are closely linked)?

It is hard to answer. Some 'Taliban' commanders even believe that there is a deal with British forces and are rather piqued when the British break 'the deal' and attack them.¹⁶⁶⁶ In an extreme case, a 'Talib' had been given a claims card (to allow him to claim money from the British for damage to his house). He believed, and boasted to his 'Talib' friends, that as the card allowed him to enter the British base and have conversations about money: he was being recruited by the British. Later on, his house was searched by very polite British troops, who failed to find his Kalashnikov. This reinforced his belief. He now believed that he was an agent: the British would soon be along to de-brief him. Shortly after, British special forces

¹⁶⁶³ 066.

¹⁶⁶⁴ 068.

¹⁶⁶⁵ 068, 072.

¹⁶⁶⁶ 230.

killed him, whilst he still believed that he was working for them. His group of fighters then interpreted their friend's death as a US strike, against a British asset.¹⁶⁶⁷

I am unable to fully explain the paradox that I identified above. I think that the difference comes down to one of perspective. To Helmandis, when they use the word Taliban, they mean aslee (real) Taliban—those with substantive links to the Quetta Shura and/or the ISI. For aslee Taliban, spreading the narrative that the British are supplying them is part of their job, because it marginalises their enemy and erodes the links between British and Afghan government forces. So, an aslee Talib who is in charge of a delgai will tell his local fighters that the British are working with them in the knowledge that this will get out into the society. This was made worse by the British telling elders about their military operations in order to reduce fighting, in the knowledge that it would get back to the Taliban.¹⁶⁶⁸

For their sake, individual 'Talibs' feel rather pleased with themselves that they are using 'British' weaponry and ammunition against British soldiers.¹⁶⁶⁹ It is a variation on the apocryphal Afghan saying: that they are going to use the Pakistanis [the Taliban] to get rid of the Americans, and then they are going to deal with the Pakistanis. Are they 'using' the British and Pakistan to fight the roshan-fikran, the Americans and the British themselves, before moving onto the Pakistanis? This issue, more than any other in this thesis, makes me think of what one of the interviewees most aptly stated: 'most people who think about Helmand develop mental problems, because the politics are so strange and complicated'.¹⁶⁷⁰

6.14 - Conclusions

This chapter has explored several themes surrounding the American and British counterinsurgency in Helmand during the period 2009–12. This was a counterinsurgency based on the elements of the public sphere. All of the themes here illustrated demonstrate the primacy of the private sphere in describing what is driving the conflict dynamics, in the face of the opacity of the private sphere to outside, public organisations. Key examples include the Gereshk model and its absence of 'Taliban' and the shifting public-private interactions with the roll-out of the ALP militia programme. The final section—covering the rumours that the British are working with the Taliban—describe what happens if public organisations do not understand the private sphere.

¹⁶⁶⁷ 047.

¹⁶⁶⁸ 244. PersExp, Helmand, 2009-10.

¹⁶⁶⁹ 047.

¹⁶⁷⁰ 086.

This central lens of understanding for the Helmandis—that the British and the Taliban were working together to destroy Helmand—was caused, I argue, by the adherence of public organisations to the public sphere in their narratives. This caused the Helmandis to seek to explain the elements of the public sphere through their worldview—dominated by the last thirty-four years of conflict, side-switching and ignorant public organisations—and one that emphasised the differences between the public and private spheres. That is, whilst the British might be saying that their motive for being in Helmand is to defeat the Taliban, they must have a private reason for being here as well (that is, to destroy Helmand or exacerbate an intra-Helmandi civil war). This theme will be explored further in the next chapter.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

Our main difficulty is with ourselves...no Afghan regime or political party will ever be very much different from the Afghan society to which they belong.

Zahir Shah¹⁶⁷¹

If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences.

William Thomas¹⁶⁷²

7.1 - Thesis and approach

This thesis has used phenomenological oral history techniques,¹⁶⁷³ historical reconstruction of secondary sources¹⁶⁷⁴ and anthropological literature on Afghanistan to construct a historical narrative of the last thirty-four years of conflict in Helmand province. This narrative was then tested against a theoretical framework based upon Stathis Kalyvas' work describing the different spheres of conflict. That is, both public and private spheres can be used to describe conflict in Helmand. The public sphere is that which describes the conflict in terms of macro-dynamics; the private, micro-dynamics. Habitually, the public sphere is dominant in explaining conflict dynamics, and the private sphere is treated as subsidiary. My thesis is that it is the interaction between the public and private spheres that shapes the conflict dynamics in Helmand. Furthermore, I posit that where the private sphere is opaque to outside, public organisations, it will have primacy in the interaction between public and private in shaping conflict dynamics.¹⁶⁷⁵

The final chapter of this thesis will summarise findings, offer conclusions both for policy makers (including extrapolation of findings to the Afghan national level) and for theorists, before finally discussing the future direction of conflict in Helmand province.

7.2 – Summary of findings

Chapters two to seven describe the conflict in Helmand province from April 1978, the Afghan communist coup, until the summer of 2012, when the primary research for this thesis was completed. That historical narrative will here be summarised with respect to the theoretical framework outlined above: does the historical narrative support the thesis?

¹⁶⁷¹ Quoted in Tomsen, *Wars*: 391.

¹⁶⁷² William Thomas and D Thomas, *The child in America: Behavior problems and programs* (New York, 1928): 571.

¹⁶⁷³ Keen, *A Primer in Phenomenological Psychology*: 38.

¹⁶⁷⁴ Johnson, *Afghan Way*: 2 & 30-1.

¹⁶⁷⁵ Developed from Kalyvas, *Logic*: 365.

Once the Khalqi communists had taken over control of the government in Kabul they instituted a massive program of ideological change in Afghanistan. Most critically for Helmand, this focussed on land reform and the arbitrary cut-off for redistribution was set (inadvertently) at the amount of land that the canal projects had given to each family settling during the 1950s to the 1970s. Thus, the population's rebellion was located in northern and southern Helmand, outside the canal zone, where land redistribution was carried out: this shows a clear interaction between an ideological government policy and local private elements of land control.

The northern and southern districts fell from government control during 1979 as government officials were assassinated or forced to leave by rebel groups of men who coalesced around local leaders—be they military, religious or tribal. This process was reflected nationally, and at the end of 1979, the Soviet Union intervened in Afghanistan to support the government in its attempts to secure the main cities and road network.¹⁶⁷⁶ It was this national-level intervention, not the land reforms, which caused the canal zone in Helmand to fall from government control. This, in turn, precipitated Soviet intervention to Lashkar Gah in an attempt to secure the city and the immediately surrounding countryside.

Concurrently, the rebel leaders began reaching out to the nascent mujahidin political parties based in Peshawar in a clear interaction between the public and private spheres: the rebel leaders personified this interaction and provided men and intelligence to the political parties. In return, they received funding and ideological legitimacy. This helped them label their war as a fight to free their homeland in the name of Islam: 'they were *not* fighting to usurp local political power' (local seats or chowkai, "chairs", as the Helmandis call them). This is a clear reflection of Kalyvas' interaction.¹⁶⁷⁷ Furthermore, the local rebel leaders (or *mujahidin commanders* as they had become) dictated the shape of the conflict to a much greater degree than the political parties: ultimately the local leaders controlled the information stream to the parties, and this allowed them to achieve their local aims, at the expense of the parties' aims. This can clearly be seen when one extrapolates that interaction through to the present day: many of the same leaders, families or clans are still interacting with the current public organisations (i.e. the Taliban or the government), yet the seven political parties (bar perhaps Hizb-e Islami-e Gulbuddin) no longer exist, and certainly did not achieve their aims on a national scale.

¹⁶⁷⁶ Braithwaite, *Afgantsy*: 84.

¹⁶⁷⁷ Kalyvas, *Logic*: 383.

Shortly after the Soviet deployment to Lashkar Gah, northern Helmand erupted in civil war. Ostensibly, this has been portrayed as a war between Hizb and Harakat.¹⁶⁷⁸ Certainly, those parties were supplying belligerents on-the-ground, as was Khad, the government security service. However, there is significant evidence that local feuds and machinations were also driving the conflict. It was both: it was an interaction between outside funding and local dynamics. Yet interestingly, there was a lack of understanding from both the mujahidin parties and Khad—Khad was only to gain a detailed understanding of different ‘mujahidin’ groups in the second half of the decade. This enabled the protagonists to fight for control of the local area: many of those leaders, or their sons, are still in control of those local areas.

Central Helmand experienced a different dynamic due to the presence of government and Soviet troops and installations. This proximity to the government kept the plethora of mujahidin groups allied to a greater extent. However, there was another dynamic also at play: local groups and families would be deliberately split across different public organisations (i.e. across the government and the mujahidin). In Nawa, for example, the ‘government’ militias and the Jamiat ‘mujahidin’ groups were extensively intermarried: there was no serious fighting between them during the conflict. Similarly, in Nad-e Ali, the Kharoti tribe were split across two mujahidin groups and elements of the government, all the while maintaining a shura for dialogue between the ‘opposed’ groups. The opacity of local dynamics to the government and the mujahidin parties in Peshawar made it very difficult for them to shape the conflict to their liking. In further support for the thesis, in areas where the inverse was true (i.e. the government had good knowledge of the situation), for example Loy Bagh, the private sphere was unable to shape the conflict to its will: Loy Bagh was destroyed by fighting.

The Soviet drawdown ushered in the weakening and eventual disappearance of the public sphere in Helmand. It was also during this period that actors in the private sphere became much more powerful through the opium trade. To facilitate their exit, the Soviets began to raise militias from the local population at the same time as massively increasing the funding available to Nasim Akhundzada, the Alizai warlord from Musa Qala. This had several consequences. Firstly, it put ‘Hizb’ groups in the province under pressure, and that forced many to join the government under the auspices of the militia program. However, Nasim also used the government funding to attack his many personal enemies. Nasim was then assassinated, probably by someone linked to Abdul Rahman Khan. Rasoul, his brother, immediately took over the dynasty and put Abdul Rahman under so much pressure that he

¹⁶⁷⁸ Giustozzi, Tribes: 9.

was forced to leave the province. In many respects, the government achieved its short term aims over this period as many of the mujahidin groups in central Helmand joined the government and established militias, or were wiped out by Nasim/Rasoul. This could only have been achieved with the government's increased knowledge of the cleavages within the 'mujahidin'.

When the Soviets left in 1989, the institutional power of the government (i.e. the public sphere) weakened further before completely disappearing in 1992 when the Najibullah government collapsed.¹⁶⁷⁹ This, by definition, allowed the private sphere to dominate. However, before completely collapsing, the government's main interaction with the private sphere in Helmand was through the militia program. This was drastically expanded in 1990 after the Tanai coup in March, alongside a commensurate reduction in size of the professional police. In Helmand, many of the police commanders simply left the police and became militia leaders, demonstrating the importance of the private sphere. This occurred at the same as 'Hizb' and 'Khalq' joined in a secret (ideological) alliance in Helmand: they became the 'government'. Yet on a national level, the Khalqis were purged from the government and Hizb were very much the opposition.¹⁶⁸⁰ The lack of unitary, institutional coherence at a national level in the government allowed an alternative set of alliances to flourish in Helmand: the national government was forced to accept these facts on-the-ground.

This dynamic only became more pronounced when the Najibullah government totally collapsed. At this point Helmand effectively became self-governed by local groups and leaders in a shifting mosaic of anti-Rasoul alliances. The collapse of the public sphere leads to a very important private sphere dynamic in Helmand: the cyclical, private sphere tribal shuras. Each tribe comes together, discusses a way forward, and facilitates reconciliation between those members who have previously been on 'opposite' sides during conflict (in this case, the jihad). It was the reassertion of the private sphere, in the face of the collapse of the public. However, peace was not to come: in-fighting between different mujahidin groups occurred, including between mujahidin and communist commanders who were together part of the Rabbani-led mujahidin 'government' (e.g. Khano, Akhwaendi and Ismail Khan). That is, the public, unitary nature of the government had completely broken down. Yet, one of the few things that the Rabbani government did in an institutional, bureaucratic way was to issue land documents, legitimising many land thefts of the previous decade: these documents (and the interaction that they represent) are still causing conflict now. Eventually, these anti-

¹⁶⁷⁹ Rubin, *Fragmentation*: 1.

¹⁶⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 160.

Rasoul alliances collapsed and Rasoul became 'Provincial Governor' for a brief sojourn, before dying and handing over to his brother, Ghaffour.

Shortly after, in 1994, the rise of the Taliban movement represented the reassertion of the public sphere in the Helmandi story. The Taliban were a public organisation with a strong ideology, based upon social order and Islam.¹⁶⁸¹ But, that ideology was combined with an excellent knowledge of local politics. For example, before coming to Helmand, they arranged secret meetings with Rais Baghrani (an element of Ghaffour's coalition 'government') in order to arrange his defection. Once implemented, and control of Gereshk ensued, Ghaffour was approached and offered autonomy in Musa Qala in return for vacating Lashkar Gah. He was then pushed out of Musa Qala. These tactics were repeated all over Helmand, until the major mujahidin commanders were either disarmed and subdued, or forced into exile.

Once established in power, the Taliban's knowledge of the private sphere allowed them to construct a subtle, intelligent political framework that kept Helmand relatively conflict-free for almost seven years. In some districts, for example Nahr-e Saraj, previous Harkat networks were empowered at the expense of Hizb ones, yet in other areas (Garmsir, for instance) Hizb commanders and networks (minority ones at that) were empowered to enable the control that was appropriate in that district. What is more, individuals were recruited into the Taliban even from those communities that were not well represented in the movement. For instance, Murtaza from the Kharoti in Shin Kalay was recruited. He came from one of the smallest of the six clans in the village thus allowing the Taliban a *loyal* member in a village that had been previously dominated by either Hizb or the communists. These dynamics demonstrate a clear interaction between the public and private spheres, but demonstrate that when a public organisation has good knowledge of the private sphere, it is able to manipulate the conflict dynamics (in this case, suppress them—a key tenet of Taliban policy).¹⁶⁸²

The collapse of the Taliban movement in the face of US bombing marked another twist in the Helmandi narrative and represents the assertion of a different public sphere based on a very different ideology. The new Karzai-led government was based upon (among other things) democracy, human rights and equality for women.¹⁶⁸³ The Helmandi tribes marked the change by re-enacting tribal shuras. As before, these focussed on reconciliation and the unity of the tribe (the private group) in the face of a massive change in the public sphere.

¹⁶⁸¹ Rashid, *Taliban*: 247-50.

¹⁶⁸² *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁶⁸³ Sandy Gall, *War against the Taliban* (London, 2012): 167.

The new government in Helmand, 'led' by Sher Mohammad Akhundzada, was in reality a loose coalition of local power-brokers, some of whom were antagonistic. Whilst the government in Kabul was (very) slowly institutionalising with international help,¹⁶⁸⁴ the government in Helmand was dominated by private individuals and interests. The four major powerbrokers who made up the government in Helmand—Sher Mohammad, Mir Wali, Abdul Rahman Jan and Dad Mohammad—all relied on their interaction with the government and the US, who in Helmand were represented by the US special forces. The special force, as they were known by the Helmandis, acted in a highly institutional way. In the terms of this thesis, they understood Helmand through the public sphere—that is, a conflict between the government and the remnants of Al Qaeda and the Taliban. This reliance on the public sphere was coupled with a very poor knowledge of the private political dynamics in Helmand. The special force was repeatedly manipulated by the four powerbrokers into attacking their local enemies (including each other), but each action was framed using the labels of the public sphere.

This was shown nowhere clearer than the evidence surrounding the arrest of several Helmandis and their rendition to Guantanamo Bay prison camp in Cuba. Many of these cases were driven by petty denunciations of personal enemies; in some cases people were even handed over to US special forces purely so the bounty offered could be collected. This is a direct echo of Kalyvas' focus on denunciations driving conflict.¹⁶⁸⁵ But there were further interactions between the public sphere (the US special forces) and the private (the Helmandi powerbrokers) in the form of the raising of local militias. These too were guided by local 'intelligence' and resulted in communities outside of the government patronage network being targeted and harassed—often with the US' unknowing support. The behaviour of the US special forces, driven by their high levels of ignorance of Helmandi society allowed the local powerbrokers to shape the conflict for the first decade of the new millennium and demonstrates clear support for this thesis.

Yet other elements of the international intervention were seriously manipulated by the private politics of Helmand. The Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) process, for instance, heavily targeted Mir Wali (at the instigation of Sher Mohammad). This process was yet further corrupted when Haji Kadus manipulated the US to gain their support—thus pushing the larger side of the tribal divide in Malgir over towards the Taliban. In sum, the DDR process was meant to strengthen the government by removing armed groups and

¹⁶⁸⁴ Giustozzi, *Koran*: 18.

¹⁶⁸⁵ Kalyvas, *Logic*: 5-6.

replacing them with a national army,¹⁶⁸⁶ but local actors, who needed the support of at least one public organisation, simply switched sides and 'joined' the Taliban. The Taliban resurgence was a clear public-private interaction. This dynamic was broadened when Sher Mohammad's commanders and men 'joined' the Taliban in 2006 and Abdul Rahman's in 2008. In reality, they were simply fighting the coalition under the excuse of the 'Taliban'. The private dynamics dictated the conflict: Sher Mohammad was fighting because he had been removed from the governorship and Abdul Rahman because his poppy had been eradicated. Labelling their men 'Taliban' does not explain their actions in terms of an ideological attachment to, say, the sharia law that was offered by the Taliban. It is also worthy of note that Sher Mohammad and Abdul Rahman did not only manipulate the foreigners; they also deceived the Afghan government as to their positioning and intentions.

The manipulation of public organisations who did not understand the private sphere continued with the arrival of the British in 2006. The private sphere of Helmandi politics was virtually unknown to the British when they arrived.¹⁶⁸⁷ Their deployment to the north of the province, in contradiction to their original plan,¹⁶⁸⁸ was at the insistence of President Karzai and Provincial Governor Daud, who were, in turn, gaining their information from local powerbrokers—it appears highly likely that the national-level government in Afghanistan was poorly informed and as a result, manipulated. A key example here is the accord signed in Musa Qala to allow for the withdrawal of British troops, and their replacement by a local security force. This local force was composed of anti-Sher Mohammad elements, thus he attempted to derail the deal. Eventually, the 'Taliban' took over and when the opportunity arose to accept the defection of a Taliban commander, Abdul Salam, both Karzai and the British were keen. Unfortunately, there was some confusion as to which Abdul Salam was attempting to defect, and certainly the British and most probably Karzai did not have the local knowledge required to dominate the interaction between public and private. This allowed local personal interests to dominate the deal, rather than it representing the switch from Taliban control to Afghan government control that was painted in the press.¹⁶⁸⁹

It was at this point that it started to become clear that Sher Mohammad was playing both sides. As well as being a presidentially-appointed Senator in Kabul, he was also heavily supporting the Taliban—leading some Taliban delgai commanders to paint him as a mahaz commander. Clearly the Taliban were aware that Sher Mohammad was a Senator, but was Karzai aware of the degree to which Sher Mohammad was supporting the 'Taliban' in

¹⁶⁸⁶ Giustozzi, *Koran*: 169.

¹⁶⁸⁷ *Operations in Afghanistan: Fourth Report of Session 2010-12:21-3.*

¹⁶⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁶⁸⁹ 'Allies move into town held by Taliban', *The Guardian* (11 Dec 2007).

Helmand? Either way, the thesis is proven: if he was not aware, that represents the private sphere's opacity allowing it to shape the conflict. On the other hand, if Karzai was aware of Sher Mohammad's perfidy, yet chose to ignore it because Sher Mohammad is part of Karzai's tribal coalition in the south, conceptually it is the same as if Karzai were not aware of it.

Slowly, elements of the public sphere began to understand Helmand. Perhaps the earliest attempt was made by Michael Semple, an Irishman, who was acting as a representative for the EU in Afghanistan. Working with MP Jabbar Qahraman and the British in Helmand, he understood that many of the 'Taliban' in Nahr-e Saraj were actually unemployed fighters from the disbanded 93rd division (as were many of the 'police'). A deal was constructed that would allow reintegration of those 'Taliban' into the 'police'—in reality reuniting them with their former colleagues. Unfortunately, another element of the private sphere—the Provincial Governor's greed—scuppered the deal. Depressingly, this knowledge of the dynamics in Nahr-e Saraj was forgotten and had to be rediscovered in 2010: even efficient 'first-world' institutions find it hard to retain knowledge of the private sphere (i.e. about people) when there are regular changes in their own personal.¹⁶⁹⁰

The British slowly began to switch their focus to central Helmand, starting with Nad-e Ali. After a military operation in December 2008 that was little-informed by the private sphere, they slowly began to understand the different private groups and actors in that district. This was reinforced by the District Community Council where both 'Taliban' communities and 'government' communities were brought together. The improved British knowledge allowed them to 'play' the private sphere to a degree, but their knowledge was never quite good enough. For example, the British adopted a practice of leaking information to certain elders so that it would get back to the 'Taliban'. This was so that they could move into an area; begin strengthening the Afghan government institutions and start developing the infrastructure and services. This was unfortunately interpreted by Helmandis as evidence that the UK were working with the Taliban. On other occasions, the British unwittingly allied themselves with one community against another.

The Taliban too have attempted to reform themselves. Starting in 2008/9 the organisation began to further institutionalise itself under its nezami—meaning military or organised—system. This failed to achieve its full aims, and the Helmandi Taliban has remained stuck in a hybrid between its two organisational systems (nezami and mahaz). This can be put down

¹⁶⁹⁰ Chayes, Punishment: 180.

to the strength of the Helmandi private sphere, which has been particularly reinforced by money from the opium trade. But, more importantly for this thesis, there is tentative evidence that even the ISI and the Taliban do not fully understand the private sphere of conflict in Afghanistan. This is supported by other evidence in the thesis: namely the destruction of Shin Kalay school discussed in chapter 5.

The British eventually began to reach the limit of what they could do with their limited force (even though it was eventually to rise to ten thousand troops in Helmand). This led a vast increase in the number of US troops in the province, mostly as part of the US 'surge'.¹⁶⁹¹ As with each new force that comes into the province, the new US forces understood the conflict in terms of the public sphere—that is, the government versus the Taliban. By this point, both US and British forces were following counterinsurgency doctrine that understands the population as a prize to be won by two competing ideologies.¹⁶⁹² However, as this thesis has extensively shown, the private sphere of interpersonal dynamics, rather than the public sphere of competing ideologies, shapes and drives conflict—particularly in the face of less than perfect knowledge of the private sphere by the public organisations involved. This is well exemplified by the US aim of renovating the Kajaki dam in order to demonstrate to the Afghan population that the Afghan government could provide for them. Unfortunately, local Alizai politics, concerns about poppy eradication, and longing for their own 'Zamindawar' canal, interacted with Iranian desires to keep the Helmand's waters flowing to the Iranian Sistan region, to drive resistance to the American plans.

Another major aspect of the 'counterinsurgency surge' was the targeting program—attempts to capture or kill 'Taliban' commanders.¹⁶⁹³ This was based on the concept of 'decapitating the Taliban on the battlefield by removing their commanders' who were 'terrorising' the Afghan population.¹⁶⁹⁴ However, US and British ignorance about the position of these Taliban commanders in the private sphere of Helmandi politics meant that they often drove communities away from the government or the coalition, or precluded any potential reconciliations or defections.

In 2010, the western allies announced that they would be leaving Afghanistan in 2014.¹⁶⁹⁵ Conceptually similar to the Soviet withdrawal, militias were organised across the country, including Helmand. These were established alongside a reintegration program and an

¹⁶⁹¹ Kiley, *Desperate Glory*: 14; Chandrasekaran, *Little America*: 66.

¹⁶⁹² British Army, *Countering Insurgency*; Army, "Field Manual 3-24: Counterinsurgency".

¹⁶⁹³ Linschoten and Kuehn, *Enemy*: 346.

¹⁶⁹⁴ 'NATO success against Taliban in Afghanistan 'may be exaggerated'', *The Guardian* (13 Oct 2011).

¹⁶⁹⁵ 'Exclusive: Official – Troops out of Afghanistan by 2014', *The Independent* (18 July 2010).

enhanced effort to train the Afghan police and army. The allies were wary of the Soviet experience of militias, and limited them in size and number: they were more akin to a village defence force. Conceptually however, they took the place of the reintegration program—many of the militia ‘troopers’ were actually former ‘Taliban’. This repeated formation of different militias in Helmand represents a key interaction between the public and the private spheres. All of these changes ushered in the third round of Helmandi tribal shuras, which were continuing at the time of research (summer 2012). The outcome of these, and whether they will be more successful than their previous incarnations in 1991/2 and 2002, is yet to be determined.

In conclusion, this thesis has analysed last thirty-four years of conflict in Helmand. Throughout, it has shown that the interaction between the public and private spheres has shaped the conflict dynamics. Further it has demonstrated that when the private sphere is opaque to the public sphere, or public organisations choose to ignore what they understand of the private sphere, the private sphere has primacy in dictating the interaction between public and private.

7.3a - Implications for policy

The main implication for policy makers contained here is to understand the private, interpersonal dynamics in any society in which they choose to intervene. Without this understanding, no amount of equipment or manpower will suffice: the intervention will fail to achieve its aims. Above all else, and to paraphrase Clausewitz, the *sine qua non* of fighting is to understand the war in which one is engaged.

The West operates in an institutional manner: that is one of its great strengths. The evidence presented here suggests that some of the most professional, institutional organisations in the West have lost their ability to operate in the interpersonal, private sphere, particularly in foreign countries. How to support those institutions, or more accurately the people within those institutions, to understand the private sphere of conflict in foreign countries is an exceptionally difficult challenge. That is, institutions are designed to de-personalise politics,¹⁶⁹⁶ but the ability to understand interpersonal dynamics is exactly what those institutions are now required to foster if they wish to be able to shape conflict dynamics in places like in Helmand.

¹⁶⁹⁶ Douglas North et al., Limited Access Orders in the Developing World: A New Approach to the Problems of Development, Policy Research Working Paper Series (New York, 2007): 21-4.

Beyond these conceptual issues there are also several practical difficulties. Language ability in esoteric, local languages has long been recognised as the key enabling function that allows external institutions to interact with the private sphere.¹⁶⁹⁷ The depth of this research, for example, rests more than anything else on the author's Pushtu language ability. That language ability, in turn, rested on extended periods in Afghanistan (twenty months spread over three and a half years). It seems reasonable that the best way around the problems of 'institutional memory' described by Sarah Chayes are to leave individuals in post for the longest periods of time possible.¹⁶⁹⁸ The most obvious example of this being successful is that of the British Indian Political Service's Officers, who would remain in-post for ten years, before their first period of extra-country leave, during which they were expected to find a wife. They would then return, with her, for a further ten years' service.¹⁶⁹⁹ The British Army, however, currently operates on six month tours. A balance probably needs to be struck between these two extremes.

In addition to the requirement for language skills, there is a need to make sure that the *right* people within those organisations learn the local languages: those who speak the local languages must be empowered to shape and influence understanding and policy. In the British Army, this requires a change to the career profiles of its professionals: officers and soldiers with language skills do not operate in high-level command appointments. To rephrase, those individuals who take the time to learn difficult languages are deemed to have taken too much time out of their career stream to promote to high levels of command. Policymakers who deem these recommendations too onerous should reconsider the evidence presented here that the Afghan government, the ISI and the post-2001 Taliban all had problems understanding the private sphere of conflict in Helmand leading to their inability to shape it.

Helmandi politics is highly stochastic and rests on multiple, fractured, inter-personal dynamics. Yet, there are several dynamics that wind their way through the narrative presented here. Section 1.2—Pushtun society at war—described the timeless quality of some of the dynamics inherent in Pashtun society, and the evidence presented in this thesis supports that analysis. Leaders and groups regularly aggregate and dissociate in a reflection of the processes of fusion and fission recognised by Louis Dupree.¹⁷⁰⁰ This dynamic is also reflected in the extensive and repetitive side-switching that occurs in Helmand: perhaps the

¹⁶⁹⁷ Charles Allen, Soldier Sahibs: The Men Who Made the North-West Frontier (London, 2001): 264.

¹⁶⁹⁸ Chayes, Punishment: 180.

¹⁶⁹⁹ Allen, Soldier Sahibs: 8.

¹⁷⁰⁰ Dupree, Afghanistan: 344.

most extreme example of this is Rais Baghrani, who has gone from ‘being’¹⁷⁰¹ Khalqi, Harakat, Hizb, Jamiat, non-affiliated, Taliban, Karzai and Karzai/Taliban at the same time. What is so strange is not that Helmandis forsake ideology as a way of organising themselves, but that outsiders persist in using ideology to categorise them in the face of its obvious limitations!

Moreover, the evidence presented here describing the same lineages locked into feuds over different public spheres—for example, Habibullah, the communist-now-democrat official and Dr Jailani, the Hizb-now-Talib leader—show the weakness of ideology and the strength of the private sphere. The private sphere is rooted in Helmandi society and has a much more timeless quality than the shifting, contextual public sphere. Finally, the cyclical tribal shuras—in 1992, 2002 and 2012—marking significant changes in the public, ideological environment are one of the most important dynamics within this thesis as they demonstrate with the utmost clarity that the extant public sphere will pass, and will be replaced with another one, but the private sphere will remain very similar. In sum, there are elements of Helmandi society that could have been studied in advance of any intervention, as a guide to what may have been likely to occur.

7.3b – Beyond Helmand: general findings

This thesis was deliberately focussed on Helmand. Indeed, it was only by focussing on one, relatively small area that the required depth of understanding about the private sphere of conflict could be generated. A key question remains as to whether the findings can be generalised to the Afghan national level, or even to conflicts elsewhere in the world.

The evidence presented here suggests that the basis for the Helmandi conflict is tripartite. Firstly, it is a significantly factionalised society (by tribe, jihadi affiliation(s), land ownership, settler-indigenous dynamics, desertification status, access to government patronage/protection, position with respect to the first Taliban movement, and so on). This is exacerbated by the presence of significant resources (i.e. opium) at ground level that are available to many or most of these factions. The third causal factor is repeated interference in this internal conflict by external, public actors (e.g. the Soviets, the Pakistanis and Westerners). I have termed this tripartite division the ‘groups—resources—external influence’ dynamic in previous published work: almost all acts of conflict in Helmand over the last thirty-four years can be traced to a combination of these three factors, or lenses.¹⁷⁰²

¹⁷⁰¹ In the Spanish sense of ‘estar’ rather than ‘ser’.

¹⁷⁰² Martin, Brief history: 7-8.

Although an un-scaled qualitative framework, this can be used as a 'rule of thumb' to assess whether the Afghan national conflict or other international conflicts will exhibit the characteristics identified in this thesis. The framework also has the advantage of having a basis in much of the civil war scholarship outlined in section 1.1d. This includes work on ancient hatreds and the importance of groups,¹⁷⁰³ Collier and Hoeffler's work on greed (resources) and grievance (group factionalisation)¹⁷⁰⁴ and their relationship to external intervention.¹⁷⁰⁵ Clearly however, the following extrapolations need to be theorised and tested robustly by future scholars.

Thus, for Afghanistan, it is widely recognised that at the national level there is significant factionalisation,¹⁷⁰⁶ as well as the presence of significant resources spread throughout the country¹⁷⁰⁷ and the repeated interventions of foreigners are well known.¹⁷⁰⁸ Therefore, it can be argued that whilst Helmand may represent an extreme case of the concepts and dynamics described here, extrapolation of these findings to the Afghan national level is valid. Similarly, at the international level, there are several examples that conform to the groups, resources, external influence dynamic: the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is the most obvious example. There, all three factors exist in abundance: a significantly tribally-fractured society,¹⁷⁰⁹ vast resources¹⁷¹⁰ and repeated interference from neighbouring countries.¹⁷¹¹ In fact, a recent study by Séverine Autesserre, *The Trouble with the Congo*, identifies very similar dynamics to those identified in this study.¹⁷¹² These generalisations need to be tested repeatedly to ensure their robustness: if shown not to be disproven, it is hoped that they act as a guide for states considering intervening in internal wars in other countries.

7.4 – Implications for theory

To the nations that comprise NATO, the Afghan campaign centres on countering an insurgency.¹⁷¹³ The evidence presented here strongly supports the conclusion that Afghanistan is still suffering from a highly local, multi-focal civil war. However, NATO

¹⁷⁰³ Gat, *War*: 50.

¹⁷⁰⁴ Collier and Hoeffler, *Greed and Grievance in Civil War*: 565-72.

¹⁷⁰⁵ Berdal, *Beyond Greed and Grievance*: 688.

¹⁷⁰⁶ Alexander Thier and Jarat Chopra, "The road ahead: political and institutional reconstruction in Afghanistan" *Third World Quarterly* 23, no. 5 (2002): 900.

¹⁷⁰⁷ 'US identifies vast mineral riches in Afghanistan', *NY Times* (13 June 2013).

¹⁷⁰⁸ Nabi Misdaq, *Afghanistan: political frailty and external interference* (Florence, 2006).

¹⁷⁰⁹ Herbert Weiss, "Voting for Change in the DRC" *Journal of Democracy* 18, no. 2 (2007).

¹⁷¹⁰ Nadira Lalji, "The resource curse revised: conflict and coltan in the Congo" *Harvard International Review* 29, no. 3 (2007).

¹⁷¹¹ Rebecca Bowman, "Lubanga, the DRC and the African Court: Lessons learned from the first International Criminal Court case" *African Human Rights Journal* 7(2007)

¹⁷¹² Séverine Autesserre, *The Trouble with the Congo: Local Violence and the Failure of International Peacebuilding* (New York, 2010).

¹⁷¹³ See introduction for description of 'insurgency narrative'.

counterinsurgency doctrine heavily emphasises the Mao-style insurgency, or classic insurgency—that is, the importance of ideology to insurgent groups in allowing them to take the offensive.¹⁷¹⁴ For example, the British Army definition of an insurgency is ‘an organised, violent subversion used to effect or prevent political control, as a challenge to established authority’.¹⁷¹⁵ The evidence presented here suggests that most of the ‘insurgents’ that fought the British and US armies in Helmand were not infused with revolutionary ideology; rather, they were defending their homes, or their interests (e.g. drugs, land), or simply aligning themselves with an outside public organisation in order to protect themselves from local feuds. Furthermore, both US and British counterinsurgency doctrines treat concepts of factionalisation as peripheral rather than central. Yet in Helmand, the opposite appears to be true. Factionalism is a defining feature of the conflict, on both the ‘government’ and the ‘non-government’ side. Ignorance of these issues, the importance of which was highlighted two and half thousand years ago, is shown by Sun Tzu who wrote, ‘if you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles’.¹⁷¹⁶

This thesis has offered significant primary data in support of Kalyvas’ argument that violence in civil wars is caused by an interaction between the public and private spheres.¹⁷¹⁷ Kalyvas, too, emphasises the importance of the local, and the private, because it is lacking from the literature on civil wars.¹⁷¹⁸ This data demonstrate clearly the vital nature of local knowledge in a civil war. Kalyvas clearly identifies a bias towards the importance of ideology in macro-historical accounts.¹⁷¹⁹ When one compares the vast body of literature of Afghanistan¹⁷²⁰ to the data presented here, it can be demonstrated that the same bias, exacerbated by western categorisation of the conflict discussed above, is occurring in our descriptions of this war. However here, one might offer an avenue for theoretical enquiry. How should future scholars categorise and investigate those individuals in public organisations who are acting according to (and motivated by) their own private interests, versus those who are acting (and motivated) in-line with the espoused ideology of that organisation? This idea is at the core of the findings presented here and merits further empirical investigation.

Moreover, Kalyvas focusses on denunciations as a main mechanism of interaction between the public and the private.¹⁷²¹ The data here presented shows that there are a significant number of varied interactions between the public and private spheres. This is a clear

¹⁷¹⁴ John Mackinlay, "Is UK Doctrine Relevant to Global Insurgency?" *The RUSI Journal* 152, no. 2 (2007): p35.

¹⁷¹⁵ British Army, *Countering Insurgency*: para 1-10.

¹⁷¹⁶ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War* (Minneapolis, 2006): 15.

¹⁷¹⁷ Kalyvas, *Logic*: 383.

¹⁷¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 390.

¹⁷¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁷²⁰ Discussed in chapter one.

¹⁷²¹ Kalyvas, *Logic*: 6.

extension of Kalyvas' work. Scholars must now identify and categorise different types of interaction and investigate how they shape conflict. How does, for example, the buying of votes in a flawed election impact on conflict as compared to the raising of local militias? Does bribery cause more violence than misdirected development funding? How much understanding of the private sphere do external interveners need in order to protect themselves from being manipulated? These are some of the questions that must be answered by future scholars.

Finally, it is pertinent to focus on the presence of what the West might term conspiracy and rumour. The narrative described in chapter 6—that of the British working with the Taliban to destroy Helmand—is vital to understanding Helmand perspectives on the conflict. It was argued that it is a key manifestation of a public narrative that does not match the private understanding of their conflict that the Helmandis have. Rumours have already been identified by scholars as important in Afghanistan:¹⁷²² understanding how rumours shape conflict, or reflect conflict, is a highly worthy avenue for future study. For future interveners, they must discern how to integrate rumours into their understanding and plans. Do they represent an 'early warning system' that the discordance between the public and the private is so great that the intervention is likely to fail? Do they demonstrate that the public organisation may not be having the effect on the conflict that they think they might be having? These questions offer a promising, if difficult, line of future study.

7.5 - The future of conflict in Helmand

Violence in some districts in Helmand, such as Nad Ali, has seen a massive drop over 2011 and 2012,¹⁷²³ even if overall levels of violence in the country are much higher than they were prior to the US surge.¹⁷²⁴ In many cases, and pointed out to me by my interviewees, this is a numbers game. In some areas of Nad-e Ali there was an ISAF base on every road junction—in other words, the vast increase in ISAF forces treated very well the symptoms of the conflict, but it is yet to be seen whether this will translate into a similar treatment of the causes. Another key factor was recruitment of former 'Taliban' into the ALP, but this will work only so long as the ALPs are paid. There were less supplies too coming from Quetta, because of the switch to routing funds through the Peshawar shura. But perhaps the most important reason for the current drop in violence is that ISAF are going: the Helmandis have achieved their aim in a triumph of the private sphere due to 'public' ignorance. They are now

¹⁷²² Giustozzi, *The Great Fears of Afghanistan: How Wild Rumours Shape Politics*.

¹⁷²³ PersExp, Helmand, 2011-2.

¹⁷²⁴ 'Analysis: The Taliban's "momentum" has not been broken', *The Long War Journal* (6 Sep 2012).

preparing for the next round, in what has so far proved to be a cyclical conflict of remarkable robustness.

As when the Najibullah government was collapsing and the Taliban government was ousted, the Helmandis are looking to their tribal leadership to provide stability into the next era. Outside, public actors tend to separate groups of Helmandis and leaders by using patronage power, although they often think that this implies ideological loyalty. Now that those outsiders are moving on, it is time for the Helmand polity to morph back into its natural units, just as before, and reinforce kinship groups. This will continue until the next public organisation or narrative is able to coalesce groups of Helmandis around an ideological, and more importantly a patronage, banner. Then, as before, Helmandis will split and send their sons to the different sides, often to fight each other. This is the only way to ensure that the lineage, and the land associated with it, remains intact.

Some outside observers—especially the Indian government—are worried that the Taliban will take over (or be given by ISAF and the Afghan government) areas like Helmand.¹⁷²⁵ They are only right to be worried if they mean by Taliban that Helmandis will begin once again to exert more control over their local areas. As shown here, the ‘Taliban’ are largely local, mainly motivated by fighting other Helmandis or resisting foreigners. Once the foreigners have left Helmand, many of those fighting them will go home, their work done. The underlying dynamics, however, will continue.

The majority of the issues that drive the conflict have been de-prioritised by ISAF and will continue to drive low-level conflict for years to come: what is required is long-sighted, low-level, comprehensive and fair dispute resolution. Beyond that, some issues whose roots lie in hundreds of years of complicated history—the Barakzai-Alizai power balance, for example—require yet further attention. Iran will continue to interfere in northern Helmand, as long as its concerns over the River Helmand’s water are ignored.

The theft of desert land and the creation of a two-tier community inside and outside the canal-zone is a new dichotomy that has been created by this revolution of the Helmandi conflict. The thousands of tubewells that have been sunk in the desert are most probably lowering the water table. Judging by the continued complaints of Alizai leaders, there are already tens of thousands of people in northern Helmand who do not have enough water to survive comfortably.

¹⁷²⁵ ‘Beyond US withdrawal: India’s Afghan options’, [Observer Research Foundation](#) (24 May 2012).

Overall ISAF sought to strengthen the government in Helmand. They believed they were strengthening it against the Taliban, with the population stuck in-between, but unfortunately they were buffering the government *against* the population. The big players or families who have run the province over the last thirty years, largely those who rose to prominence during the jihad, are still running the province. The choice that the Afghan government now has, as every Afghan government has had over the last two hundred and fifty years, is whether to co-opt them or take them on.

The ISAF intervention has shown that in the presence of another patronage network—the Taliban—they will just rearrange themselves on the ‘other’ side according to their local disputes. Now that ISAF is going, and the Afghan government is about to lose much of its combat power, co-option has already begun with, for example, the appointment of people such as Amir Mohammad Akhundzada as Governor of Uruzgan, or Hekmat, the son of Mir Wali to be Chief of Police in Sangin. A further, key question remains over what will happen with the Zakir-Sher Mohammad contacts, and whether this is a drive to assert their dominance over the south of Afghanistan. I see their negotiations as analogous to the ‘Parcham’/‘Harakat’ and the ‘Hizb’/‘Khalq’ alignments in the early 1990s. An indicator of their intent would be whether they have arranged marriages between their families. Many of my interviewees felt that Helmand was heading for the third round of mujahidin ‘unity’ government.

However, with the recent signing of strategic agreements with the western powers, India and China, it appears that the Afghan government will survive nationally once NATO withdraws most of its combat forces. Using the 1989–92 Najibullah government as a guide, as long as the funding remains the government will survive. But what will this look like in Helmand? A lot depends on the presidential election, currently scheduled for 2014. If the winner is another southern Pushtun, but from a different tribe to Karzai, then the tribal alliances currently in play in the south will shift, creating new dynamics. That aside, the Afghan government will have mostly the same interests in Helmand as before: Gereshk and Lashkar Gah must stay under government control, for trade and legitimacy, respectively. Outside those areas there will be different bespoke levels of control.

In areas like Nad-e Ali, Marjeh and Nawa that, because of the canal system, prefer some input from the government, there will be government control in the District Centres and along the main roads; however, the villages will govern themselves, as they always have done. If they require anything from the government, they will go to it in the District Centre (not for nothing is the District Centre literally known as the hukomat or ‘government’ in Helmand).

They do not want the government to come to them. As before, the main service that they require from government is fair, impartial dispute resolution. Northern Helmand, by contrast, will be de facto independent with local district governors and police chiefs. They will fly the flag of the Afghan government and will swear nominal loyalty to the Afghan government, but it will be meaningless.

These arrangements will last until the next injection of funds and ideology to Helmand causes the actors and groups to divide, once again, according to their private sphere: foreigners will come, and foreigners will go, but life will continue much as before.

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Appendix 1: Interviewee descriptions

1.1 On-the-record interviews

These interviews were conducted with six prominent figures in the Helmandi story and one key British individual. They were conducted in Helmand, London and Kabul and their purpose was to gain an understanding of how these key protagonists felt and thought at particular junctures in Helmandi history. Here follows a brief self-reported biography of the individuals in question. Where appropriate I have added comments.

Malem Mir Wali (Barakzai/Bayezai) — ‘MMW’

Mir Wali is fifty-eight from Malgir, Nahr-e Saraj. He went to primary school in Spin Masjid and then the ‘Lycee’ secondary in Lashkar Gah. He then went to teacher training college in Kandahar during which the Taraki revolution occurred. He completed a year of conscripted army service and then returned to Spin Masjid to teach at his old primary school. He taught for six months during which time the Soviets invaded. He began to fight under Shaed Mansour (Hizb). Shaed was martyred and he became commander, before rising to be in charge of Hizb in Malgir and the surrounds. In 1987 he accepted an offer from the Najib government and became a government militia commander. This was partly because he was under such pressure from Nasim Akhundzada. He stayed in the ‘government’ through the collapse of Hizb and then left when the ‘Hizb’/‘Khalq’ coalition fell apart in Lashkar Gah. He then worked with Rasoul, his erstwhile enemy, to defeat the Akhwaendi/Khano coalition and became Director of Culture and Information for Helmand. Was evicted by the Taliban in 1994 and spent the next seven years fighting them all over the country. In 2001, managed to become the commander of the 93rd Division, Afghan Military Forces in Gereshk, with significant US special forces’ patronage. The division was disarmed and Mir Wali became a member of parliament in 2005. He ran for re-election in 2010, was disqualified for fraud, and managed to retain his seat through the intervention of Karzai. Currently lives in Kabul.

Sher Mohammad Akhundzada (Alizai/Hassanzai) — ‘SMA’

Sher Mohammad is forty and from Nachai village, Kajaki. He spent his childhood in northern Helmand and attended a madrasah in Zamindawar. Other than that he is not that well educated (literate, but not very numerate). His first battle was against the Taliban when they took over Kajaki in 1994/5. He was twenty-two. After various attempts to regain Helmand, the family fled to Quetta, where they befriended Hamid Karzai. He was appointed Helmand’s Provincial Governor in 2001-5, when he was removed at British insistence before their deployment. His governorship was characterised by a turf war between the other major

commanders who made up the Helmandi government, and by predation on communities who had no way of defending themselves. Once removed by Karzai in 2005, he was appointed to the Senate in Kabul, where he has remained since. As well as being a senator he is a major supporter of the 'Taliban' in Helmand and he manipulates both government and Taliban actors to enhance his own drugs and power interests.

Abdul Rahman Jan (Noorzai/Darzai/Parozai) — 'ARJ'

Abdul Rahman is sixty. Born in Washir sub-district, he went to Shaepista school. When he was sixteen the family moved to Marjeh – they were one of the few families to move from within Helmand to the canal-zone. Upon completing school, he then served his conscription period during Daud's era in the police in Shah-e Now, Kabul. At the Saur revolution he was imprisoned for four months, was freed and immediately began working under Mullah Baz Mohammad in 'Harakat'. According to himself, when the 'Hizb'-'Harakat' war began, he was disgusted and joined Etihad. Others comment that he spent the jihad swapping one party for another because he was able to get better supplies or more money. Two years later, he switched to Jamiat. At the time he was a petty commander with about fifteen men. He fought in several different alliances with other groups in the 'government' against Rasoul before switching to be on Rasoul's side against the 'government'. As that 'government' collapsed, he managed to take over some of its heavy weapons (from Khano) and established himself as the Deputy Chief of Police for Helmand. He fled when the Taliban came and eventually settled in Iran, from where he came in 2001 to retake Marjeh. He then became the provincial Chief of Police. During this tenure he became (in)famous for fighting the other commanders in government and oppressing defenceless communities in Helmand. Removed in 2005, Captain-General Abdul Rahman (as he is now), lives in Kabul.

Hafizullah Khan (Barakzai/Omarkhanzai) — 'Hafizullah'

Hafizullah is sixty and from Bolan. He went to school in Lashkar Gah and thence to study engineering at Kabul University, where he heard about Hekmatyar. Once the Saur revolution occurred he immediately went to Peshawar and met Hekmatyar. After training he returned to Helmand as the Hizb-e Islami Amir. Most people comment that he did not fight much, but preferred to 'organise'. Once the communist state collapsed in 1992 Hafizullah went into partnership with Khano and became Provincial Governor. This soon collapsed and represents the highpoint in his 'career': he has never managed to attain a 'government' position since. He left Helmand during the Taliban period and was one of the first to re-occupy Lashkar Gah once the Taliban left at the end of 2001. He was soon evicted by Sher Mohammad and Abdul Rahman. He currently lives in Bolan.

Jabbar Qahraman (Noorzai/Daudzai) — ‘Jabbar’

Jabbar is fifty-two. He finished school in 1980 and joined Hizb-e Islami for a year. Then he ‘decided to join the government for the growth of Afghanistan...[he] could see that Pakistan just wanted to ruin Afghanistan’. He then went through army officer training and was sent to Maiwand as a platoon commander. He spent the entire war in Maiwand and was made a Qahraman, or hero, of Afghanistan in 1986 for having the highest amount of government control in a district in the whole of Afghanistan. Many say that this was because he cut deals with all of his mujahidin opponents, and supported them with government patronage. As the Soviets left, he was then made a Captain-General and given control of most of the south. A close ally of Najib, he then joined Hizb when the government collapsed. Shortly after he went to Russia and worked in a market as a stall holder. During the Karzai-era, he worked for UNAMA for four years, during which time he allegedly smuggled weapons into Afghanistan from Russia. He was then elected to parliament where he remains. He currently lives in Kabul.

Habibullah Khan (Noorzai/Ghorezai) — ‘Habibullah’

Habibullah is sixty-one and from Garmsir. He served in the army around the time of Daud’s revolution (1973) and then returned to Garmsir to become a teacher. He claims he never joined the PDPA, which others contest. Joining the police in 1988, he served as the Nawa District Deputy Chief of Police. He then served as a battalion second-in-command in Lashkar Gah and as the District Chief of Police for Khan Eshin. During this period he visited Russia several times for training. Once the Soviets left in 1988/9 he served as Chief of Police in Nad-e Ali, which he describes as the worst period in his life. They were under constant attack. He eventually was forced to abandon his post and reinvented himself as a militia commander. As the mujahidin progressively took control he fled to Pakistan, returning only once the Karzai government was in power. He immediately joined the police and served as Chief of Police in Garmsir and Gereshk, before retiring. Called out of retirement he was made District Governor in Nad-e Ali in 2008, a position that he still holds. He currently lives in Lashkar Gah.

Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles KCMG LVO (English) — ‘SCC’

Sherard is fifty-seven and was born in London. Educated in Classics at Oxford University, he was a career British diplomat. He speaks Arabic, Hebrew and French. He has served in Egypt, the United States, Hong Kong, France, Israel and Saudi Arabia. He then became UK ambassador to Afghanistan from May 2007 to April 2009 and served as UK Special Representative to Afghanistan and Pakistan from mid-2009 to mid-2010. He now works for BAE systems as International Business Development Director. He currently lives in London.

A1.2 Anonymous 'notable' interviews (conducted by me either in Helmand, Kabul or London)

001 District Governor Nahr-e Saraj, Karzai-era
002 Ex-Mahaz commander, Lashkar Gah
003 Barakzai ex-Mahaz commander, Lashkar Gah
004 Alizai Helmand government official, Karzai-era
005 Ex-Jamiat commander, Nawa
006 Chief of Police Helmand Province, Karzai-era
007 Kharoti ex-Hizb-e Islami commander, Nad-e Ali
008 Noorzai businessman, Nad-e Ali
009 Son of communist-era Helmand Khad Chief
010 ANP Lt Col, Helmand
011 Ex-Harakat commander
012 Chief of Police, Nahr-Saraj, Karzai-era
013 Alizai elder
014 Provincial council member, Karzai-era
015 Ex-Harakat commander, Nad-e Ali
016 Ex-Jamiat commander, Marjeh
017 Ex-Hizb-e Islami commander, Nad-e Ali
018 Barakzai ex-militia leader, Babaji
019 ANP major, Karzai-era
020 Member of Khad, communist era
021 Barakzai notable, Bolan
022 Barakzai ex-Hizb-e Islami commander, Lashkar Gah
023 Kharoti tribal leader
024 Ex-communist police officer, Nahr-e Saraj
025 Sayed from Now Zad
026 Jailor, Helmand
027 Barakzai tribesman, Nahr-e Saraj
028 Alizai shopkeeper from Now Zad
029 Noorzai ex-Khalqi, Nahr-e Saraj
030 Chief of Police, Nahr-Saraj, Karzai-era
031 Alikozai businessman, Gereshk
032 Kharoti ex-Hizb-e Islami commander
033 Noorzai tribesman
034 Ishaqzai village chief
035 Kharoti ex-Khalqi official
036 Chief of Police, Nahr-e Saraj, Karzai-era
037 NDS officer, Helmand
038 NDS officer, Helmand
039 Senior Noorzai tribal leader
040 ALP commander, Nahr-e Saraj
041 Noorzai ex-Etihad commander, central Helmand
042 Chief of Police, Nad-e Ali, Karzai era
043 Ex-Khalqi militia commander
044 Head of HAVA, communist-era
045 Parchami cadre
046 Achakzai shopkeeper, Lashkar Gah
047 NGO worker
048 Ex-Khalqi police commander
049 Ex-Khalqi police commander
050 Kharoti elder, Nad-e Ali
051 Nejad fighter, Nad-e Ali
052 Mahaz fighter, Nahr-e Saraj

053	Baluch elder, Garmsir
054	Provincial Chief of Police, Karzai-era
055	Barakzai village elder, Nahr-e Saraj
056	Ex-Mahaz commander, Now Zad
057	Ex-professional army officer in 93 rd Division
058	Schoolteacher, Nad-e Ali
059	Landowner, Marjeh
060	Hotak elder, Garmsir
061	Ishaqzai ex-Mahaz commander
062	Prominent USSOF militia leader, Nahr-e Saraj
063	Former engineer on the canal projects. Spoke good English
064	Ex-Etihad commander
065	Kharoti professional, Nad-e Ali
066	Former Taliban mullah (1996–2001 government)
067	ALP commander, Nad-e Ali
068	Ex-Hizb-e Islami commander, Nahr-e Saraj
069	Alikozai scribe, Sangin
070	Alizai ex-Harakat commander
071	Ex-Harakat commander, Nad-e Ali
072	Noorzai tribesman, Nad-e Ali
073	Former USSOF militia leader, Nahr-e Saraj
074	Scion of important Barakzai family
075	Barakzai mullah, Nahr-e Saraj
076	Chief of Police of Helmand, Karzai-era
077	Junior ANP officer, Helmand
078	ANA officer with five years' experience in Helmand
079	USSOF militia commander, Nahr-e Saraj
080	Member of Khad, communist-era
081	Helmandi MP
082	Helmandi senator
083	Helmandi MP
084	Senior Noorzai tribal leader
085	Barakzai landowner, Nahr-e Saraj

A1.3 Anonymous 'notable' interviews (conducted by Afghan researchers in Helmand)

086	Ex-jihadi commander (Nad-e Ali)
087	Alizai/Khalozai elder (Musa Qala)
088	Achakzai elder (Nahr-e Saraj)
089	Popalzai elder (Now Zad)
090	Elder (Now Zad)
091	Educated person (Garmsir)
092	Elder (Sangin)
093	Alizai elder (Musa Qala)
094	Elder (Nad-e Ali)
095	Alikozai elder (Sangin)
096	Hassanzai elder (Musa Qala)
097	Hassanzai elder (Musa Qala)
098	Suleimankhel elder (Nad-e Ali)
099	Madrassa teacher (Sangin)
000	Noorzai elder (Nahr-e Saraj)

A1.4 Anonymous ISAF interviews (conducted by me in Helmand or London)

101	ISAF civilian advisor
102	ISAF intelligence officer
103	ISAF officer
104	ISAF civilian advisor
105	ISAF intelligence officer
106	ISAF officer
107	ISAF infantry officer
108	ISAF intelligence officer
109	ISAF ISTAR officer
110	ISAF battlegroup officer
111	ISAF officer
112	ISAF intelligence officer

A1.5 Anonymous 'Taliban' (TB) interviews (conducted by Afghan researchers in Helmand)

201	TB commander in Nad-e Ali
202	TB commander in Nad-e Ali
203	TB commander in Marjeh
204	Alikozai TB commander in Sangin
205	TB fighter in Garmsir
206	TB council member
207	Mil trainer of TB in Garmsir
208	TB fighter in Garmsir
209	Alizai TB commander in Nad-e Ali
210	Barakzai TB fighter/facilitator in Marjeh
211	Ishaqzai TB commander in Marjeh
212	Barakzai TB commander in Marjeh
213	TB commander in Marjeh
214	TB commander in Sangin
215	Alizai TB commander in Musa Qala
216	TB commander in Sangin
217	Alizai TB commander in Musa Qala
218	Alizai TB commander in Kajaki
219	Noorzai TB sub-commander in Kajaki
220	Ishaqzai TB commander in Now Zad
221	Alizai TB commander in Musa Qala
222	Kharoti TB commander in Nad-e Ali
223	Alikozai TB commander in Nahr-e Saraj
224	Noorzai TB commander in Musa Qala
225	Alizai TB commander in Musa Qala
226	Ishaqzai TB commander in Sangin
227	Barakzai TB commander in Sangin
228	Kharoti TB commander in Nad-e Ali
229	Barakzai TB commander in Nahr-e Saraj
230	Noorzai TB commander in Nahr-e Saraj
231	Alizai TB commander in Now Zad
232	Alizai TB commander in Nahr-e Saraj
233	Alizai TB commander in Garmsir
234	Popalzai TB commander in Sangin
235	Popalzai TB commander in Now Zad
236	Ishaqzai TB commander in Garmsir
237	TB commander in Marjeh
238	Barakzai TB commander in Sangin
239	Alizai TB commander in Kajaki
240	Alizai TB commander in Garmsir
241	Alizai TB commander in Kajaki
242	TB commander in Kajaki
243	Noorzai TB commander in Marjeh
244	TB commander in Nad-e Ali
245	Ishaqzai TB commander in Marjeh
246	Alizai TB commander in Musa Qala
247	Ishaqzai TB commander in Now Zad
248	Popalzai TB commander in Now Zad
249	Noorzai TB commander in Nahr-e Saraj
250	Barakzai TB commander in Nahr-e Saraj

Appendix 2: Glossary of terms and people

93rd Division Afghan army division based in Gereshk during the Soviet period and headquartered on Artillery Hill. This then became a mujahidin organisation with the collapse of the government. The term fell into disuse during the Taliban-era. The division was revived under the Karzai-era, with the same designation, and part of the Afghan Militia Forces, before being disbanded again under DDR. See Appendix 5 for commanders.

Abdul Agha (Haji) Head of the slightly smaller Barakzai clan confederation in Malgir. This confederation consisted of the Shamezai, Nekazai, Yedarzai and Masezai. They were generally allied with Harakat during the jihad, the Taliban during the Taliban government, but then the government in the Karzai-era.

Abdul Ahad (Mullah) Leader of the Ishaqzai in Now Zad during the jihad. They were allied with Harakat and then the Taliban. Helmand's Chief of Police under Rasoul (1993-4).

Abdul Ahad Helmandwal Noorzai/Gurg. From Loy Bagh. Is Shah Nazar Helmandwal's nephew. Fought under Etihad's label during the jihad, but the family was split across the government/mujahidin divide. First leader of Nad-e Ali District Council in 2009. See Appendix 4 for family tree.

Abdul Khaleq Leader of Ishaqzai/Mistereekhel. From Qala-e Gaz. Was killed during the jihad, but his sons Qari Hazrat, Lala Jan and Mamouk led the clan, fought ISAF and smuggled opium.

Abdul Qayoum Zakir Alizai/Khalozai/Arabzai. Rais Baghrani sub-commander when Baghrani was 93rd Division commander. Joined Taliban with Baghrani, rose up the ranks. Eventually captured by Americans and spent six years in Guantanamo (G008). At time of writing is head of the Taliban nezami system for the south of Afghanistan. See Appendix 6.

Abdul Rahman Jan Noorzai/Darzai/Parozai. Petty commander during the jihad. Originally in Harakat, he then worked under Jamiat, and possibly Hizb along the way. Born in Now Zad from a non-prestigious blood line; gained prominence through cutting a deal with Khano when he surrendered, accepting his heavy weapons. Helmand Deputy Chief of Police under Rasoul/Abdul Ahad. Chief of Police from 2001-5, where he was rumoured to have stolen up to 20,000 jereeb of land in Marjeh. Not to be confused with Abdul Rahman Khan (Alizai). See Appendix 1.

Abdul Rahman Khan Alizai/Khalozai. Originally from Kajaki. Began allied to Mahaz then switched to Hizb for more funding. Forced out of Kajaki in 1987 by Nasim Akhundzada, and then from Malgir by Nasim's brother, Rasoul. Eventually settled in exile in Norway, where he was still living in 2012. Not to be confused with Abdul Rahman Jan (Noorzai).

Abdul Raziq Barakzai. Hizb commander during jihad. Was then a commander in the 93rd Division and became a militia commander. When the division was DDR'd managed to enter the police and, with American patronage, became the head of the District Response

Team (a US SF 'SWAT' team). This patronage allowed him, despite being only a sergeant, to become the de facto head of the Nahr-e Saraj police in the mid-2000s.

Abdul Salam (Mullah) Alizai/Khalozai. Brother of Zakir. Was responsible for the Taliban nezami system in northern Helmand until killed on 3 June 2012. Not to be confused with Abdul Salam (Noorzai) and Mullah Salam (Alizai/Pirzai).

Abdul Salam Noorzai. From Now Zad. Hizb commander and the major Taliban commander. Rose to become commander of the Herat Corps during the Taliban-era. Not to be confused with Abdul Salam (Alizai/Khalozai) and Mullah Salam (Alizai/Pirzai).

Abdul Wali Koka Alizai/Hassanzai. Musa Qala Chief of Police for most of the Karzai-era. One of Sher Mohammad's commanders and hated by the non-Hassanzai community.

Abdullah Jan (Haji) Noorzai. From Now Zad. Major Hizb commander. Abdul Rahman Jan comes from his clan (Noorzai/Darzai/Parozai).

Abu Bakr Alizai. Leader of the 3-4000 man Zamindawari / Alizai uprising against the British/Afghan(Barakzai) government in 1879. His forces almost certainly swung the Battle of Maiwand against the British.

Achakzai Tribe that is part of the Zirak branch of the Durrani tribal confederation. Said to have been split from the Barakzai (of which they were a sub-tribe) by Ahmad Shah Durrani (a Popalzai) as he feared the power of the Barakzai. In Afghanistan, they mainly live in Spin Boldak in Kandahar.

Aghezai Noorzai clan from Loy Bagh. Deliberately split itself across the government-mujahidin divide and the government-Taliban divide in the two eras. (In)famous members include Khano, Assadullah Sherzad, Abdul Sattar and Mullah Karim.

Ahmad Shah Durrani Popalzai. Reign 1747 – 1772. Seen as the founding father of the Afghan nation by the Pushtun. Forged and held a vast empire including Peshawar and Delhi. Direct descendants form the monarchical lineage of Afghanistan from 1747 – 1818: the Sadozais. Re-granted the Durrani tribes the land, in return for military service, that they are (largely) still living on in Helmand.

Ahmad Wali Karzai Half-brother of Hamid Karzai, the current Afghan President. Extensive rumours circulated that he was involved in the narcotics business. Killed by one of his own aides in July 2011.

Akhtur Khan Alizai. Leader of the 3000 man Zamindawari / Alizai uprising against the British / Afghan government in 1841. At national-level the government was Popalzai led, however in the South it was still dominated by the Barakzai.

Akhtur Mohammad Osmani Ishaqzai/Chowkazai. From Sangin. Head of Kandahar Corps during Taliban-era.

Taliban mahaz commander during Karzai-era. Killed by ISAF in 2006.

Akhwaendi Barakzai. Jamiat Amir for Helmand. Related to Allah Noor. Provincial Governor in 1993.

Akidawee Used to describe ideological Taliban in the Karzai-era.

Alikozai Tribe of the Zirak Branch of the Durrani tribal confederation. Related in ancestry to the Barakzai and Popalzai (Barak, Alik and Popal were bothers in antiquity). Mainly located in the Arghandab river valley in Kandahar province. The indigenous Helmandi Alikozai are in Sarwan Qala north of Sangin.

Alizai Major tribe of the Panjpai branch of the Durrani tribal confederation. One of the three biggest tribes in Helmand (see Noorzai and Barakzai for others). Apart from the first Taliban government (1995-2001), have provided Helmand's Provincial Governors 1993 - 2005. Live in the north of Helmand, in the ancient district of Zamindawar (modern districts of Baghran, Musa Qala, Kajaki and northern Sangin).

Allah Noor (Barakzai). Khalqi militia leader. Commander of the 93rd Division once Najib's government collapsed. Since 2001, he has been commander of the outer (militia) defence of Kandahar Air Field and a highway policeman under USPI. He is now the commander of the Afghan Border Police regiment in Helmand.

Amir lit. leader. The term used to designate the person in overall control of a mujahidin party's activities in a province. Effectively the head of the mujahidin patronage organisation.

Amir Mohammad Akhundzada Alizai. Sher Mohammad Akhundzada's younger brother. District Governor of Musa Qala in the post-2001 period, and Deputy Provincial Governor in 2005/6. Currently Governor of Uruzgan.

Andiwal/andiwali lit. friend. The term used to denote the mujahidin style of government. The nearest British equivalent would be sofa-government (obviously nowhere as bad as andiwali government!).

Angrez lit. English. Used as a derogatory term for people in Afghanistan (like 'the Hun' in British English). Still used to describe the British during the ISAF intervention.

Arab Noorzai. From Noorzo Kalay. A relative of Haji Lal Jan, the leader of the community. Allied himself with the 'Taliban' in order to attempt to take over leadership of the community from Haji Lal Jan.

Arif Noorzai Noorzai. Related to Hamid Karzai, Sher Mohammad and Israel (Mahmad Ashem's family). See family tree in Appendix 4.

Artillery Hill (taapuh) Soviet military HQ on the hill south of Gereshk.

Aslee The 'real' Taliban. Generally taken to be those who have a close link to the Quetta Shura (those above group commanders).

Assadullah Karimi The leader of the Hazara in Saidabad, southern Nad-e Ali. Also their head teacher. Had many feuds with the Popalzai and Ishaqzai over the water for his community..

Assadullah Sherzad Noorzai/Aghezai. Worked in Khano's militia. Involved in the ejection of 'Hizb' from Lashkar Gah in 1992. Chief of Police of Helmand in 2008/9.

Assadullah Wafa (Governor) Achakzai. Provincial Governor of Helmand from December 2006 to March 2008. Not considered effective by the British.

Atta Mohammad Ishaqzai/Chowkazai. Mujahidin commander in Sangin in the 1980s. Originally affiliated with Harakat, he later switched to Jamiat and then re-allyed himself with Harakat again. Most of this was driven by fighting with Dad Mohammad and Abdul Khaleq. Died in Quetta in the late 1990s.

Ayub (Khan) Noorzai. From Now Zad. Deputy Chief of Police of Helmand during the early Karzai-era. See Appendix 4 for family tree.

Baghrani Alizai. Known as Rais Baghrani - 'King of Baghran'. From the Khalozai sub-tribe of the Alizai. Has fought under Hizb, Jamiat, Taliban and Harakat franchises, before reconciling with the Karzai government in 2005. There is no post-2001 government presence in Baghran, save for Baghrani.

Barakzai One of the three biggest tribes in Helmand (see Alizai and Noorzai). Mohammadzai branch provided the royal lineage from 1826-1973. Concentrated in central Helmand, they control Gereshk. Generally fought under the Hizb franchise during the jihad in central Helmand.

Baz Mohammad (Mullah) Taraki. From Marjeh. Most senior Harakat commander in Nad-e Ali and Marjeh during the jihad.

Bismillah (Haji) Alizai. G968. Arrested after Mir Wali and Kadus played the US special forces in Gereshk. See Appendix 6 for more details.

Bughra See Nahr-e Bughra.

Chaiboy A man of even medium status will have a young boy to fetch tea and generally tend to his guests. Depending on their master, the boys are sometimes used for sex.

Charwaki(an) lit. (government) official. The rapacious nature of the government in Helmand over the past three decades has rendered other meanings onto charwaki including tax collector, policeman, bandit and robber.

Communist See PDPA.

Cumberband lit. belt. Used to denote the Soviet defensive lines around Lashkar Gah and Gereshk. See map 5.

Daakhelee Internal Taliban. Used to refer to those member of the post-2001 Taliban who are local, mostly resistance, fighters.

Dad Mohammad Alikozai. Jamiat Mujahidin commander in Sangin in the 1980s, fought Atta Mohammad for years, worked with the Akhundzadas, the Taliban and the Karzai government when he became head of the Afghan National Directorate of Security (NDS). Infamous for his continued mistreatment of the Ishaqzai. Eventually killed (probably by the Ishaqzai) in 2009. His brother, Juma Gul, was District Governor of Sangin under the early Karzai administration.

Dadullah Kakar. Pre-2001 Taliban commander and post-2001 was the most iconic Taliban mahaz commander in the South. Killed in 2007 by ISAF.

Daud (Governor) Safi. Governor of Helmand from Dec 2005 – Dec 2006. A settler in Helmand during the canal projects, educated technocrat, spoke some English.

Daud (Mullah) Brother of Haji Kadus and Idris. Guarded Camp Price from 2007-10(?). When removed, Camp Price came under attack every day. Was reinstated.

Depaye Zahir Shah-era militias raised in every district and usually led by the district head teacher. Their use continued sporadically into the communist-era, alongside a plethora of other militias.

Dostum Major Najibullah militia commander based in Mazar-e Sharif. Declared independence from Najibullah causing his administration's collapse. Supported Khano and the other 'communist' militia commanders post-Najib. Eventually arranged for their escape when their administration collapsed and Rasoul took over.

Durrani Eminent Pushtun tribal confederation in Afghanistan centred on Helmand, Uruzgan and Kandahar. Named after Ahmad Shah Durrani, who was titled Durr-e Durrani (Pearl of pearls) upon his enthronement in 1747.

Etihad Mujahidin party led by Sayaaf. Formed in 1981 as an alliance of all the parties. Split up immediately and became one of the seven mujahidin parties. Out of the seven parties, Etihad was the closest to Saudi Arabia and the UAE guaranteeing him the lion's share of their funding.

Ezmarai Barakzai. Former Khalqi police commander; father (also a Khalqi policeman in Gereshk) was killed by Hizb. Squad commander during Taliban government. Made his money as a highway policeman under a USPI contract. Chief of Police of Gereshk 2009-11.

Fatah Mohammad Ishaqzai/Chowkazai. Major drug smuggler originally from Sangin, but now living in Quetta. Funds various aspects of the Taliban resistance including a hospital in Quetta in which 'Taliban' fighters can receive treatment.

Ghaffour Akhundzada Alizai/Hassanzai. Brother of Nasim and Rasoul Akhundzada. Was Provincial Governor for less than a year after Rasoul's death in 1994 and before the Taliban chased the Akhundzadas out at the beginning of 1995. Eventually shot, supposedly by the Taliban, in Quetta in March 2000.

Ghilzai The second biggest Pushtun tribal confederation in Afghanistan after the Durrani. Lands between Kandahar and Kabul, but have fought against the

Durrani for control of Kandahar over the ages, creating enmity. Not native to Helmand, however thousands of families settled during the canal projects.

Girdi Jangal Refugee camp in Baluchistan province, Pakistan (opposite Helmand). Supposedly closed by the Pakistani government in 2007, it still has 40,000 people in it. Since its formation after the 1979 Soviet invasion, it has provided a safe area for Helmandis from the violence in the province, as well as a 'rear area' to equip, rest and relax.

Gul Agha Shirzai Barakzai. Leader of the Barakzai in Kandahar and son of famous mujahidin commander. Worked with US special forces in the 2001 attack on the Taliban in Kandahar and then closely with them in the early Karzai years when he was Kandahar's Governor. Rival of Karzai, and posted to Nangahar province. Supported Malem Mir Wali.

Gul Ehktiar (Haji) Land owner in Western Malgir / Eastern Babaji. ISAF patrol base is on his land, for which he receives rent. His nephew Sur Gul is a Talib and was recently (at time of writing) the Taliban District Governor for Washir.

Gulbuddin Hekmatyar Kharoti. The leader of Hizb-e Islami (Gulbuddin). One of the few mujahidin party leaders who is still alive and leading his party. Occasionally rumours surface that he is holding talks with Karzai about reconciliation. He still 'leads' a major part of the post-2001 insurgency.

Gurg Noorzai clan southern Afghanistan, but prominent in Loy Bagh. Important members include Shah Nazar Helmandwal, Provincial Governor during the Najib-era, and Abdul Ahad Helmandwal, Etihad commander and first chairman of the Nad-e Ali community council in 2009.

Habibullah (Khan) Noorzai. Soviet-era police commander and Nad-e Ali District Governor 2008-present. See Appendix 1.

Hafizullah Amin Kharoti. Ruled for a few months in 1979. Extreme left wing Khalqi President of Afghanistan. Killed by the Soviets when they invaded.

Hafizullah Khan Barakzai. Hizb-e Islami Amir for Helmand. See Appendix 1.

Hamid Karzai Popalzai. President of Afghanistan 2001-present.

Harakat-e Enqelab-e Islami (Harakat) Traditionalist Afghan mujahidin group fighting against Soviet forces. Mohammad Nabi Mohammedi was leader. Operated across southern Afghanistan. Was part of the 'Peshawar Seven' coalition of mujahidin parties. In Helmand, most important commander was Nasim Akhundzada.

Hassanzai. Currently, the preeminent sub-tribe of the Alizai in Helmand and led by Sher Mohammad Akhundzada. Notorious for feuding with the Pirzai and Khalozai sub-tribes.

Hazara. Ethnic group that populates the mountainous central area of Afghanistan. Said to be descended from Genghis Khan's men. Overwhelmingly Shia (as opposed

to the mainly Sunni Pushtun). Small pockets of Hazara live in Helmand, a legacy of the canal project. ~10% of the Afghan population.

Hekmatullah Barakzai. Malem Mir Wali's son and heir. Chief of Police in Sangin in 2012.

Hekmatyar See Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.

Hizb-e Islami (Hizb) Two factions: Khales and Gulbuddin. Gulbuddin faction prominent in Helmand. Most well-funded mujahidin party, but was dropped by Pakistan upon the rise of the Taliban in 1994. One of the two major mujahidin parties represented in Helmand alongside Harakat. Prominent commanders include Malem Mir Wali, Abdul Rahman Khan and Hafizullah Khan.

Hukumat lit. government. Term used to describe the physical government buildings that comprise a District Centre.

Ibrahim (Mullah) AKA Shakir. Kharoti. Local Taliban commander. Kharoti say he re-joined Taliban due to police brutality. Killed by ISAF in 2009/10. His car was turned into a shrine by the Kharoti.

Idris Brother of Haji Kadus and Mullah Daud. Killed by Badr, the Chief of Police, when trying to take over Gereshk's security (supported by the special force).

Ikhwan lit. brothers (Arabic). As in Muslim Brotherhood. Term (usually derogatory) used to describe members of Hizb and Jamiat.

Ishaqzai. The most marginalised of the Durrani tribes in Helmand. Important under the Taliban during 1995 – 2001, they provided senior commanders for the movement. Heavily persecuted by the Alikozai post-2001. Mainly live south of Sangin, Now Zad and Garmsir although there are some in Nad-e Ali, where they moved (illegally) during the jihad.

ISI - Inter-services Intelligence Pakistan's premier intelligence agency. Responsible for channeling US and Saudi funding to the mujahidin during the jihad. Heavily financed the Taliban during 1995 – 2001; strong evidence that they are currently providing assistance to the Taliban Quetta Shura.

Ismail Khan Tajik. Originally an army officer who played a key role in the initial rebellion against the Soviets in Herat. Was a major Jamiat commander during the jihad becoming the ruler of western Afghanistan from 1992 – 1995. Became Governor of Herat under Karzai and in 2005 was made a minister in Kabul. Despite differences in mujahidin franchise, was allied to the Akhundzadas in Helmand and helped them capture Lashkar Gah from the militias (who were also allied with Jamiat).

Israel Noorzai. Patriarch of Mahmud Ashem's important Now Zadi family. Important mediator during 'Hizb' and 'Harakat' war in the north of Helmand. Negotiated hand over from Taliban when they fled in 2001. Respected by many. See Appendix 4 for family tree.

Jabbar Qahraman. Noorzai. Originally an army officer and then a commander of a very effective militia that was used by the government in other parts of the

country as a mobile division. Jabbar Khan was appointed a hero, or 'Qahraman' of the communist government. Currently a Helmand MP. See Appendix 1 for description.

Jailani (Dr) Kharoti. Hizb commander from Shin Kalay. Supports Taliban narrative in the post-2001 era. Gave his 'clinic' over to the 'Taliban' during 2008, to enable them to keep the government out of Shin Kalay. Has a son in the 'Taliban'. Was on the security committee on the Nad-e Ali community council at the same time.

Jalalzai (Haji) Kharoti. Harakat commander from Noor Mohammad Khan Kalay. Haji Barakzai's uncle.

Jamiat-e Islami (Jamiat) Islamic political party in Afghanistan similar to the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt. Oldest Islamic political party in Afghanistan. Communitarian ideology based on Islamic law but is also considered moderately progressive. From 1968-2011 the official leader of Jamiat was Burhanuddin Rabbani. Major commanders include Ahmad Shah Masoud and Ismail Khan. Akhwaendi was the Amir in Helmand.

Jan Mohammad Barakzai. US special forces militia commander. Currently ALP commander, runs militia defending Camp Price and is on the US-led district response team.

Jereeb Afghan unit of measure equivalent to 0.2 hectare or ½ acre. Approximately 40m x 40m.

Jihad lit. struggle (Arabic). Like the religious terms of any religion this is open to different interpretations. Appears in the Koran as 'striving in the way of God' [as in a mental struggle], however can be interpreted to mean physical fighting. Used as a shorthand in Afghanistan to mean the period of resistance to the Soviet (1979 – 1989) and, depending upon your viewpoint, the current struggle against the western backed Karzai government.

Jirga See also Shura. Traditional Pushtun method of dispute resolution where male elders sit and discuss a problem until a solution is reached *in a consensus manner* as opposed to *an adversarial manner*. Younger children will sit and watch, but not participate. Male adults are all allowed to speak. Anyone may come. Sometime used interchangeably with Shura.

Kudos (Haji) Barakzai. Militia leader who was Mir Wali's second in command. Controlled the Barakzai area from Gereshk westwards towards Nad-e Ali. Militia funded by Assadullah Wafa and US special forces, however the funding stopped in 2007/8. The area previously occupied by his militia fell to the 'Taliban'. Now runs an aggregate mine near Camp Price.

Kakar A tribe from which families were settled during the canal projects, particularly in Garmsir and Nad-e Ali. Key member of this tribe was Mullah Dadullah – an infamous Taliban commander who was killed by ISAF in 2007. Predated upon by the provincial government during 2001-5.

Karez Underground water channel used for irrigation, particularly in northern Helmand.

Karim (Mullah) Noorzai/Aghezai. From Loy Bagh. Hizb commander and then worked with Taliban during 1994-2001. Continued to 'sit' on Taliban 'shura' in Nad-e Ali post-2001 as well as the district community council.

Karmal, Babrak. President 1979 – 1986. Installed by the Soviets, and was never more than a client of theirs. Probably mixed ethnicity. Later seen by the Soviets as not able to achieve their aims and was moved to retirement in Moscow.

Karzai See Hamid Karzai.

Khad Later called Ministry of State Security (WAD) or the National Directorate of Security (NDS). Unsavoury organisation under the control of the KGB until the Soviets left Afghanistan in 1989. One of its major roles is to watch over the other security services to make sure that they remain loyal to the state. Helmandis still often call the NDS Khad.

Khalifa Shirin Khan (Haji) Barakzai. Leader of the stronger side of the Barakzai tribal coalitions in Malgir. This comprised the Akhundzadakhel, the Utmanzai, the Bayezai and the Sardarzi clans. They generally allied with Hizb and later that the Taliban.

Khalozai Khankhel of the Alizai tribe. Located mainly in Baghran. Important members include Rais Baghrani and Abdul Rahman Khan.

Khalq / Khalqi More extreme of the two factions of the PDPA. Was in power in Kabul in 1978/9, however the army remained Khalqi dominated right through the 1980s. Ideologically defined the militias in Lashkar Gah at the end of the 1980s. Important leaders include Taraki and Amin.

Khan lit. Landowner. Also used as an honorific like 'Esquire' in English.

Khan Mohammad Barakzai. Harakat commander. Fought with Rasoul against Mir Wali when he was in the government. First to occupy Gereshk in 2001 when the Taliban left. First Chief of Police in Gereshk in Karzai-era. Massive smuggler, now in jail for drugs offenses.

Khano (Khan Mohammad) Noorzai/Aghezai. Militia commander who controlled Lashkar Gah in the early 1990s. Real name Khan Mohammad, originally from Farah, he became a militia commander because his brother was a well-connected member of the Khalq faction. Settled back in Lashkar Gah post-2001 and became a businessman with a small militia, but was eventually disarmed by Abdul Rahman Jan.

Kharoti Important Ghilzai tribe. Very prominent in Nad-e Ali, where they compete with the Noorzai for district leadership. Important members include Gulbuddin Hekmatyar (leader of Hizb) and Hafizullah Amin (President 1979). Closely allied to Taliban narrative in Nad-e Ali.

Koka See Abdul Wali Koka.

Kuchi lit. nomadic.

Lal Jan (Haji) Noorzai. Elder/militia leader of Noorzo Kalay in northern Nad-e Ali and he represents one of the

communities of Noorzai who settled from Now Zad and Washir during the 1990s; during the post-2001 period he controlled the Nahr-e Bughra from Chah-e Mirza to Loy Mandah. By 2008, his militia had been rolled into the Nad-e Ali police.

Lal Mohammad Barakzai. From Torghai. Petty commander, who has worked for the Taliban, the 93rd Division, the Taliban again, ISAF (ALP) and finally the Taliban again. A 'Torghai nationalist', he will go with whoever will guarantee Torghai's security.

Madrasah lit. school (Arabic). Generally considered in the context of Afghanistan and Pakistan to mean a religious school with a focus on Quranic education. Many groups within the region also use them to train young men for battle.

Mahaz Mujahidin party led by Pir Gailani. Probably the most poorly funded party because they represented the old moderate (Royal) order which the ISI did not wish to re-empower. Many commanders in Helmand allied with Mahaz and then switched when it was unable to provide them with enough weapons and funding.

Mahaz system c.f. nezami system. Channelled, patronage model of Taliban supply and organisation. Very similar to how the jihad was organised with the different parties being analogous to the different mahazes.

Maidan lit. field. Used by Helmandis for the airfield to the south of Lashkar Gah that was the Soviet HQ in Helmand.

Maiwand, Battle of A serious defeat suffered by British forces at Kush-e Nakud in what is now Maiwand district, Kandahar province in 1880. The battle was won by Ayub Khan with support from Alizai tribesmen led by Abu Bakr Khan.

Malem Mir Wali See Mir Wali.

Malem Yusof Barakzai. Hizb commander from Now Zad.

Manan (Haji) Noorzai. Nephew of Haji Lal Jan. Police commander who was seen as particularly cruel by the population of Nad-e Ali.

Mangal (Governor) Mangal. From Paktika. Appointed Governor of Helmand in 2008 and moved on in 2012. Strong evidence that he is corrupt.

Mir Wali Barakzai. Previous Hizb commander during the jihad, then joined the government in 1987. Became the 93rd Division Commander in early Karzai-era. Now MP. See Appendix 1 for more details.

Miraw Water manager. Sets out how much water each family can have from the canals and is the first person who arbitrates water disputes. Can either be selected by the community or appointed by the landowner, or a combination of the two. Usually paid in kind by the farmers. There are some government employed miraws in the canal-zone areas.

Mirwais (Khan) Kharoti. Son of Wakil Safar.

Mirza (Khan) Barakzai. Hizb commander during the jihad who became a commander in the 93rd Division. Stole some land in Gereshk and set his militia up with housing in early 2000s. Area now called Mirza Khan Kalay.

Mohammad Wali Alizai. Brother of Bismillah (G968). Was close ally of Sher Mohammad Akhundzada, Governor of Musa Qala when British first came, now MP. Not ally of Sher Mohammad anymore.

Mohammadzai Khankhel (chief lineage) of the Barakzai tribe and produced the lineage that ruled Afghanistan from 1826 – 1978. Concentrations of Mohammadzai around Gereshk as it was a seat of the sub-tribe.

Mujahidin lit. holy warriors. In the context of Afghanistan it means those who fought in the anti-communist resistance, but the fighters currently fighting the government also call themselves mujahidin.

Mullah Prayer leader. Usually one per village, responsible for the mosque, life rites and some religious education of children.

Murtaza Kharoti. G361. See Appendix 6.

Nahr-e Bughra Canal. The original and most extensive of the canals from the canal project. Construction started in 1936. Provides water for at least 100,000 people in Marjeh, Nad-e Ali and parts of Nahr-e Saraj.

Naim (Mullah) Alizai. From Garmsir. District Governor during Taliban-era. Led 'Taliban' resurgence in 2005 in Garmsir.

Najibullah, Mohammad President 1987-92. Previously had been head of Khad. Instituted a reconciliation and national solidarity programme and expanded militias in preparation for the Soviet withdrawal. Made many conciliations to the mujahidin not consistent with communism (for example, using Islam and its precepts much more in governing), however the fighting continued. Against all predictions, managed to remain in power for three years after the Soviet exit.

Nasim Akhundzada (Mullah) Alizai. Most (in)famous of the Helmandi jihadi commanders who led the Alizai and fought under the Harakat franchise. Accepted money from Khad throughout. Was so successful that many other commanders swore allegiance to him. He was killed by Hizb in 1990. His brothers (Rasoul and Ghaffour) succeeded him, becoming Provincial Governors of Helmand, as did his nephew, Sher Mohammad.

NDS See Khad. The Karzai-era Afghan internal security service.

Nejad Mujahidin party led by Mujaddidi. Not very prominent in Helmand.

Nezami system lit. organised or military. c.f. mahaz system. A more institutional, centralised form of supply and organisation instituted in 2009 by the Taliban. Not fully implemented in Helmand.

Noorzai. One of the big three Helmandi tribes (see Alizai and Barakzai). Previously, they were marginalised from

Helmandi politics due to their location in Now Zad, Washir and Garmsir, however during the 1990s they occupied abandoned land in Nad-e Ali and Marjeh, as they were in control of the Helmandi police in the post-2001 era. Also significant in Kandahar province.

Omar (Mullah) Hotak. Leader of the Taliban movement. Ruled Afghanistan from 1996 – 2001. Probably currently living in Quetta.

Osmani See Akhtur Mohammad Osmani.

Parcham / Parchami Less extreme faction of the PDPA (see Khalq). Ruled from 1979 until 1992. Dominated Khad (and its successor organisations) during that time. Important leaders include Karmal and Najibullah.

Paslow (Haji Mullah) Popalzai leader and Harakat commander in the south of Nad-e Ali. Taliban commander. Prominent family with several links to the post-2001 Taliban movement.

People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) PDPA was split into two factions, Khalq and Parcham, roughly split along tribal and ethnic lines, rural Pushtun (particularly Ghilzai) and Urban Pushtun/Tajik respectively. The PDPA was formed in 1965, split into its constituent factions in 1967, which were re-coalesced under Soviet pressure in 1977. The more extreme left wing Khalq faction seized power in the 1978 coup, but were replaced by the more moderate Parcham faction in 1979 upon the Soviet intervention. Due to Khalq purges during its time in power the Afghan Army was dominated by Khalq officers throughout the 1980s, yet the massive state internal security apparatus (Khad, or later, WAD) rapidly became Parcham dominated after 1979.

Pir Mohammad Sadat Kharoti. From Naqilabad. (In)famous Hizb commander. Was 93rd commander, then worked closely with the Taliban post-2005. Sat on the Nad-e Ali council 2009-10.

Pirzai One of the three main sub-tribes of the Alizai (see Hassanzai and Khalozai).

Popalzai Major Pushtun tribe in the Durrani confederation. President Karzai's tribe. Outside of Nawa, not very populous in Helmand.

Pushtun Ethnic group in the south of Afghanistan and the west of Pakistan. Split by the countries' borders (the Durand Line). ~40% of the Afghan population.

Qari Hazrat Ishaqzai/Mistereekhel. Son of Abdul Khaleq. Major 'Taliban' commander post-2005. Killed by ISAF 2010. Said to have been allied to Hizb and the Taliban at the same time in order to protect his clan's drug interests.

Quetta Shura The leadership shura of the Taliban in Baluchistan, Pakistan. Supported by the ISI. Allegedly surpassed in importance by the Peshawar Shura in 2011/2.

Rabbani, Burhanuddin Tajik leader of Jamiat. Also President of Afghanistan from 1992-96 and briefly in 2001. Killed by a suicide bomber in 2011.

Rahim Ishaqzai. From Now Zad. Major Taliban commander during Taliban-era. Taliban Provincial Governor 2001–8.

Rahmattiar Ishaqzai. Most prominent Hizb commander in the south of Nad-e Ali. From Jangal.

Rais Baghrani See Baghrani.

Rasoul Akhundzada Alizai. Brother of Nasim and Ghaffour. Helmand's Governor briefly in 1993/4 when he captured it with Ismail Khan's help from the ex-communist militias led by Khano. Father of Sher Mohammad Akhundzada.

Rauf Khadim (Mullah) One of Baghrani's sub-commanders in the 93rd Division in 1993/4. Became Taliban commander in movement (was Zakir's boss), spent time in Guantanamo. Released and re-joined the Taliban movement. Now Taliban Governor for Uruzgan.

Rauf Khan Ishaqzai. Mahaz Amir for Helmand. Joined government and became militia commander in 1987.

Safar (Khan) See Wakil Mohammad Safar.

Salam (Mullah) Alizai/Pirzai. Petty Taliban commander in post-2001 period. Had been Taliban Governor of Kajaki during Taliban-era. Made government District Governor of Musa Qala in 2007. Not to be confused with Abdul Salam (Noorzai) or Abdul Salam (Alizai/Khalozai).

Sardar Baghwani Allegedly Iranian intelligence officer. Crops up three times in the narrative: firstly in 1993 talking to Khano and Abdul Rahman Jan, secondly in 2002 inciting people to rise up against the Americans and then in 2006 to incite people to raise up against the British.

Shah Nazar Helmandwal Also Shah Nazar. Noorzai/Gurg. Allied with Mahaz. Then Provincial Governor during Najib period. Murdered, probably by Hizb, in the early 1990s. Nephew, Abdul Ahad Helmandwal, prominent Noorzai leader in Nad-e Ali who was first community council chair in 2009.

Shakir See Mullah Ibrahim.

Sher Mohammad Akhundzada (Alizai). Son of Rasoul Mohammad Akhundzada. Helmand's Governor from 2001–5. Very close to Karzai with intermarriages between the clans. Sacked in 2005 at British insistence due to his links to the narcotics trade. Now a Senator. See Appendix 1.

Shirzai See Gul Agha Shirzai.

Shura. See also Jirga. Meeting, less egalitarian / consensual than a jirga. In a strict sense, people should be invited to speak at a shura.

Specialporce The word that has entered the Helmandi lexicon to describe the US special forces in the post-2001 period. The Pushtun find it difficult to distinguish the sound of the letter 'f' from the letter 'p' hence '...porce'.

Sur Gul Barakzai. Nephew of Haji Gul Ehtiar. 93rd commander and then Taliban commander. Taliban District Governor for Washir until 2012.

Tajik Ethnic group in the north east of Afghanistan. Predominantly formed the Northern Alliance, which overthrew the Taliban with US support in 2001. ~30% of the Afghan population. Significant leaders include Masoud and Rabbani.

Tanai (General) Khalqi general who led a coup against Najib in 1990. Then began working with Hizb and led a 'Hizb'/'Khalq' rapprochement in Helmand between Hafizullah and Khano.

Taraki, Noor Mohammad Taraki. Afghan President from 1978-9. A member of the more extreme Khalq faction of the PDPA, he was ousted by Amin. Responsible for the reforms (esp. land reforms) that caused so much damage and resentment in Helmandi society. Also a tribe.

Topak salaran lit. warlords.

Tor Jan Noorzai. Cousin by marriage of Abdul Rahman Jan. Nad-e Ali Chief of Police 2006-8. Killed by a suicide bomber, which was described by some locals as a gift from the Taliban because he had been so cruel. Accused of being behind a spate of kidnappings for ransom of rich individuals in the district.

Ushr 10% agricultural Islamic tithe.

Wakil Mohammad Safar Kharoti. Led the Kharoti into Nad-e Ali in 1954. Highly respected leader. Also MP during Soviet period. Died in March 2009.

Yahya Noorzai. Etihad commander from Marjeh. Fought Nasim for control of the Garmsir bridge in 1989.

Zahir Shah Barakzai. Reign 1933 – 1973. Was very young in 1933 and so only exerted influence towards the end of his reign. Keen to advance Afghanistan, he wrote the 1964 Constitution which enshrined hitherto unseen rights, but was deposed by his cousin Mohammad Daud in 1973. Lived in exile in Italy during the communist-, mujahidin- and Taliban-eras before being invited back to an honorary position, *The Father of the Nation*, under Karzai. Died 2007.

-zai (suffix) Meaning sons of.

Zakat Annual Islamic tax on assets. Different rates, but e.g. 2.5% on money held over one lunar year. Redistributed to the poor and needy.

Zakir See Abdul Qayoum Zakir.

Zamindawar One of the four ancient districts of Pusht-e rud (ancient Helmand). Zamindawari is used interchangeably with Alizai.

Appendix 3: Timeline of key events affecting Helmand

1978 – April	Saur Revolution.
1978 – October	Baghran District falls.
1979 – January	Land redistribution begins; Musa Qala falls.
1979 – June	Now Zad, Sangin and Washir fall.
1979 – December	Soviets invade.
Mid–1980	Remaining central districts of Helmand have fallen; rebels on outskirts of Lashkar Gah; Soviets deploy 500 men to stabilise Lashkar Gah.
1981	‘Mujahidin’ start to fall out all over Helmand, particularly the north. Khad exacerbates this and offers them money to attack each other.
1980–83	Defensive cumberband established around Lashkar Gah and Gereshk. District centres re-established in Nad-e Ali, Nawa, Garmsir & Kahn Eshin.
1987	Najibullah becomes president. Militia programme starts. Shah Nazar Khan becomes Provincial Governor; ‘Hizb’-‘Harakat’ war in the north sponsored by Khad peaks.
1988/9	Soviets leave Helmand. District Centres outside of Nad-e Ali, Nawa, Lashkar Gah and Gereshk abandoned. Final Soviet operation in Sangin.
1991	Nad-e Ali District Centre falls. Tribes begin to have a series of tribal shuras to reconcile their members in the post-communist era.
1992	Najibullah falls, Hafizullah becomes Provincial Governor. Khano becomes Chief of Police; Allah Noor becomes 93 rd commander; much fighting.
Late 1992	Hafizullah ejected; Akhwaendi become Provincial Governor; much fighting.
1993	Rasoul takes over Lashkar Gah; Khano and co. escape; some stability.
1994	Rasoul dies of natural causes; Ghaffour takes over.
Late 1994	Taliban approach Helmand; Rais Baghrani switches sides; Ghaffour and other jihadis evicted.
1995	Several failed attempts to retake Helmand by the jihadis. Taliban establish control. Helmand stable.
1997	Conscription begins.
2000	Taliban opium ban.

Late 2001	Taliban leave Helmand as other cities in the country fall from Taliban control; Hafizullah Khan takes over control of Lashkar Gah; Abdul Rahman and Sher Mohammad then take over and become Chief of Police and Provincial Governor respectively. Dad Mohammad appointed NDS Chief and Mir Wali 93 rd Division commander.
2002	Tribes hold a series of tribal shuras to reconcile their members in the post-Taliban-era; US special forces deploy to Helmand; raise militias and arrest people and send them to Guantanamo.
2004	Malem Mir Wali disarmed by UN-sponsored DDR process; many former 93 rd groups ally themselves with the Taliban for protection; US PRT deploys to Lashkar Gah.
2005	Dad Mohammad and Sher Mohammad removed from posts (at British insistence). ISI-supported, Taliban-led, series of assassinations to remove remaining government officials.
2006	Government continues to collapse; British deploy brigade to 'stabilise' the province; outbreaks of fierce fighting as they move to the north of the Province; British in small numbers forced to use airpower to defend themselves; Sher Mohammad sends his men to work with the 'Taliban'.
2006 – April	Baghran falls / attacked.
2006 – May/June/July	Musa Qala, Now Zad and Sangin attacked.
2006 – Autumn	British pull out of Musa Qala; central Helmand still stable; Governor Daud removed and replaced by Assadullah Wafa.
2007	British conduct operations all over the north of the province particularly around Sangin. Described by some locals as like Soviet operations.
2008	US marines begin to deploy to bolster numbers of coalition troops; Governor Mangal appointed; British transport third turbine up to the Kajaki dam; Marjeh and Nad-e Ali 'fall' after Abdul Rahman's crops are eradicated; British launch operation to retake Nad-e Ali.
2009	Numbers of US troops continue to increase; British attempt to consolidate in Nad-e Ali; launch community shura in an attempt to channel development and develop governance.
2010	US surge announced. US troop numbers begin to increase and they expand into Khan Eshin and Now Zad; take over control of Musa

- Qala, Sangin and Kajaki from British. British consolidate in central Helmand; ISAF withdrawal announced for 2014.
- 2011 ISAF militia programme launched (ALP); Lashkar Gah handed over to Afghan control in July; British and Americans begin to close bases and hand them over to the Afghans; Nad-e Ali almost completely handed over by Dec.
- 2012 Problems with ALP programme causing it to be suspended; ISAF/Afghan operations continue into the desert, but generally stay away from the heavily populated areas; Governor Mangal sacked; Tribes begin a series of tribal shuras to reconcile their members in the post-ISAF era.
- 2014 Afghan presidential election; ISAF full withdrawal date.

Appendix 4: Tribal diagrams and family trees

NB These are by no means complete. Each one has been checked with two or more interviewees.

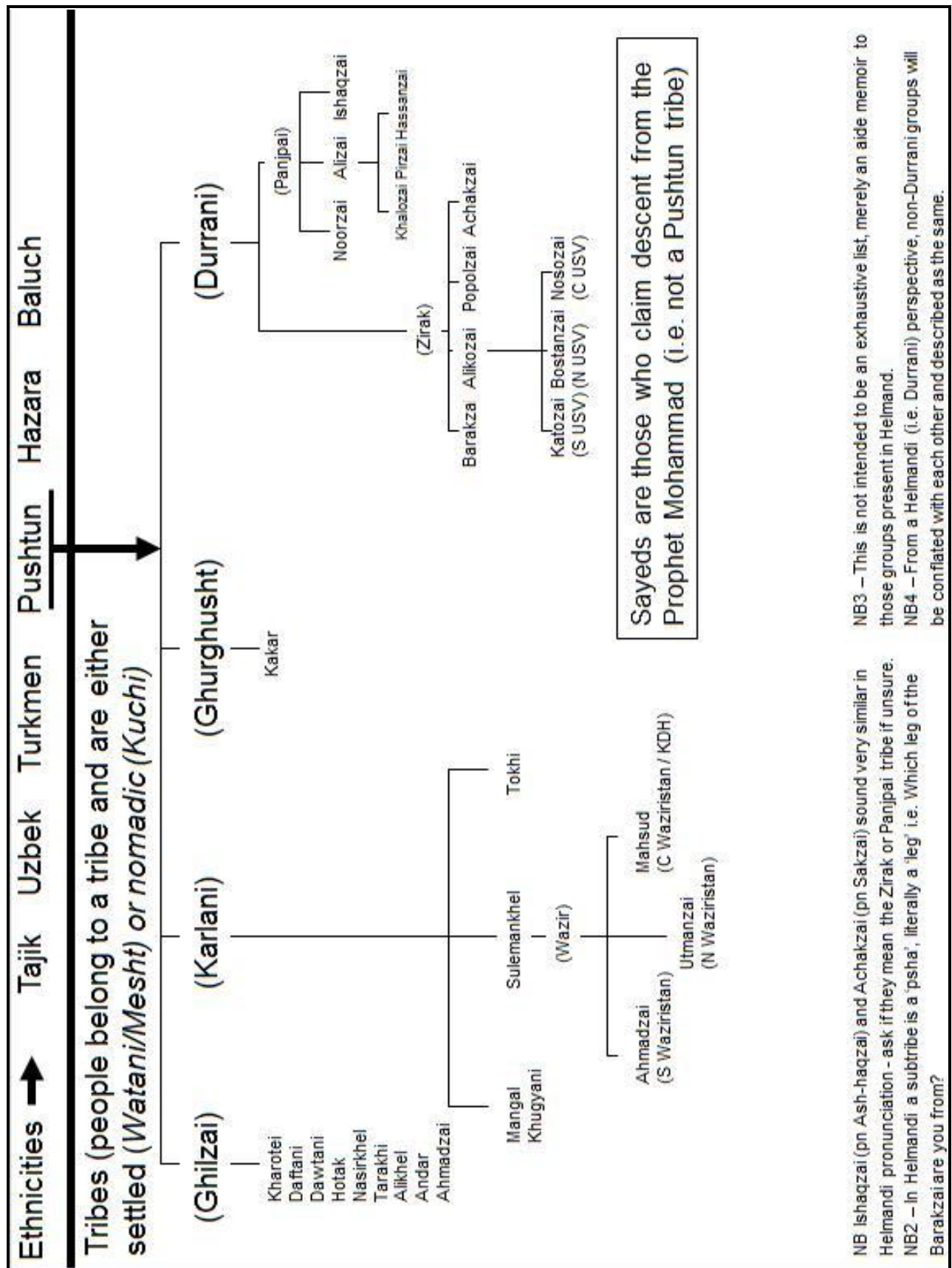


Figure 10: Diagram of the major tribes in Helmand

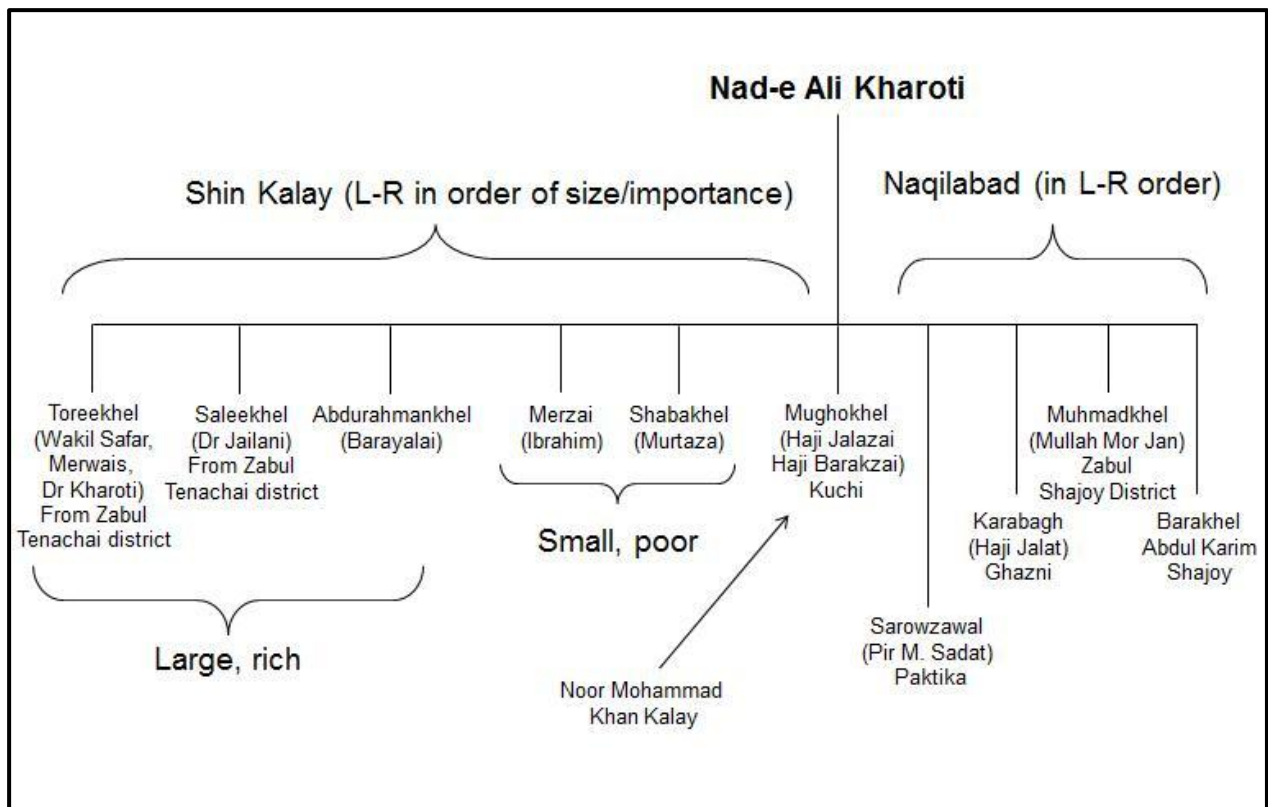


Figure 11: Diagram of the Kharoti sub-tribes in Nad-e Ali

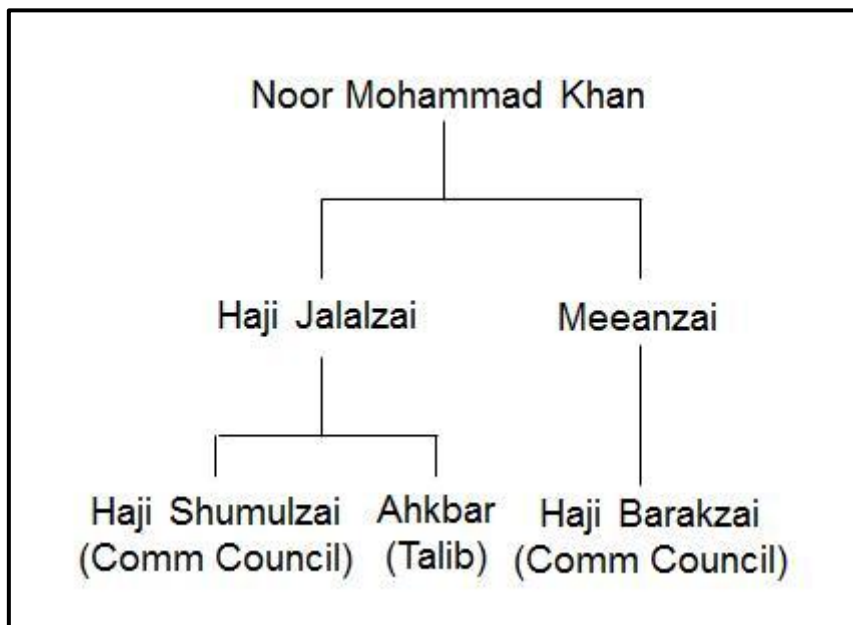


Figure 12: Noor Mohammad Khan's family tree (Kharoti/Mughokhel)

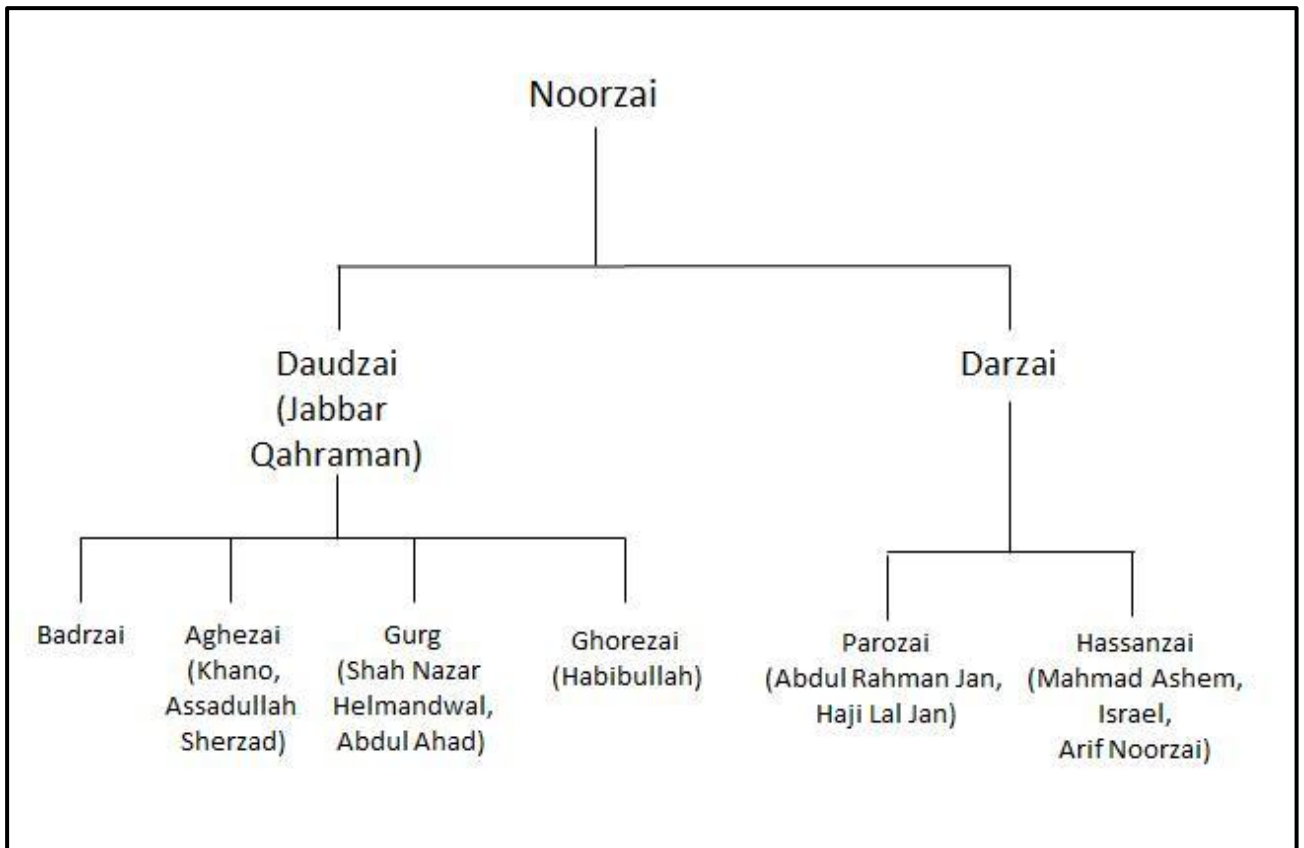


Figure 13: Diagram of the Noorzai sub-tribes in Helmand

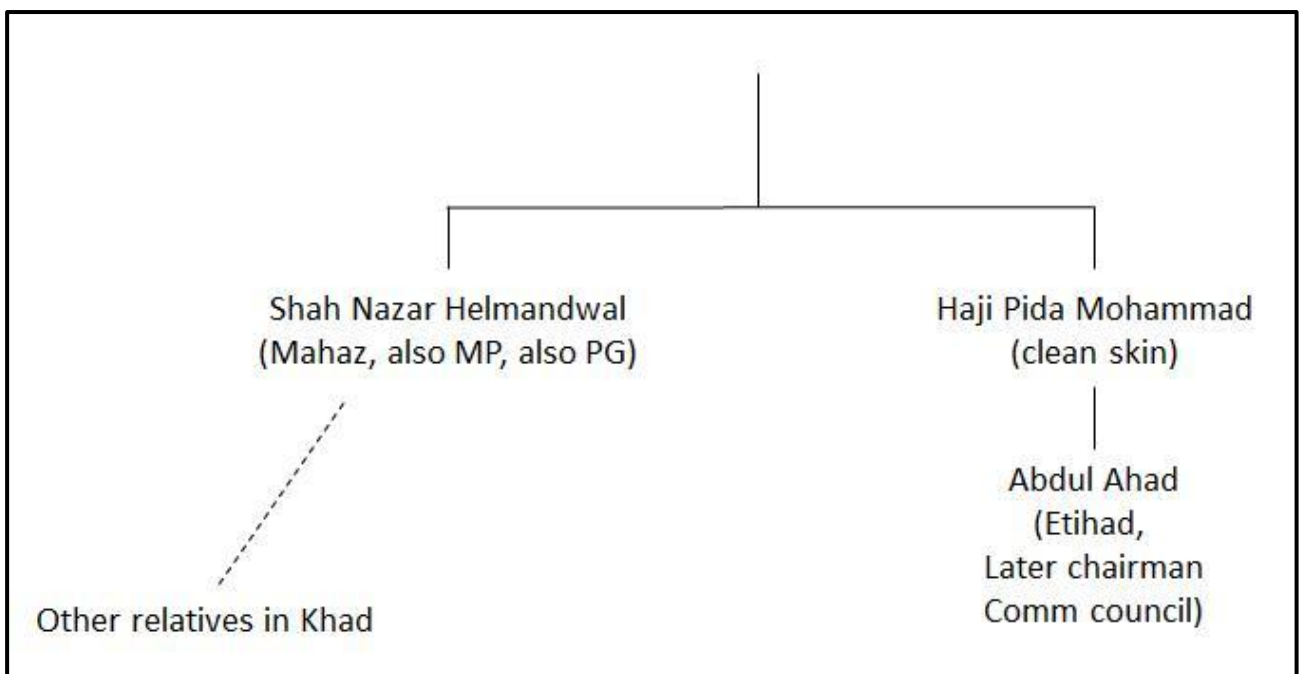


Figure 14: Shah Nazar Helmandwal's family tree (Noorzai/Gurg)

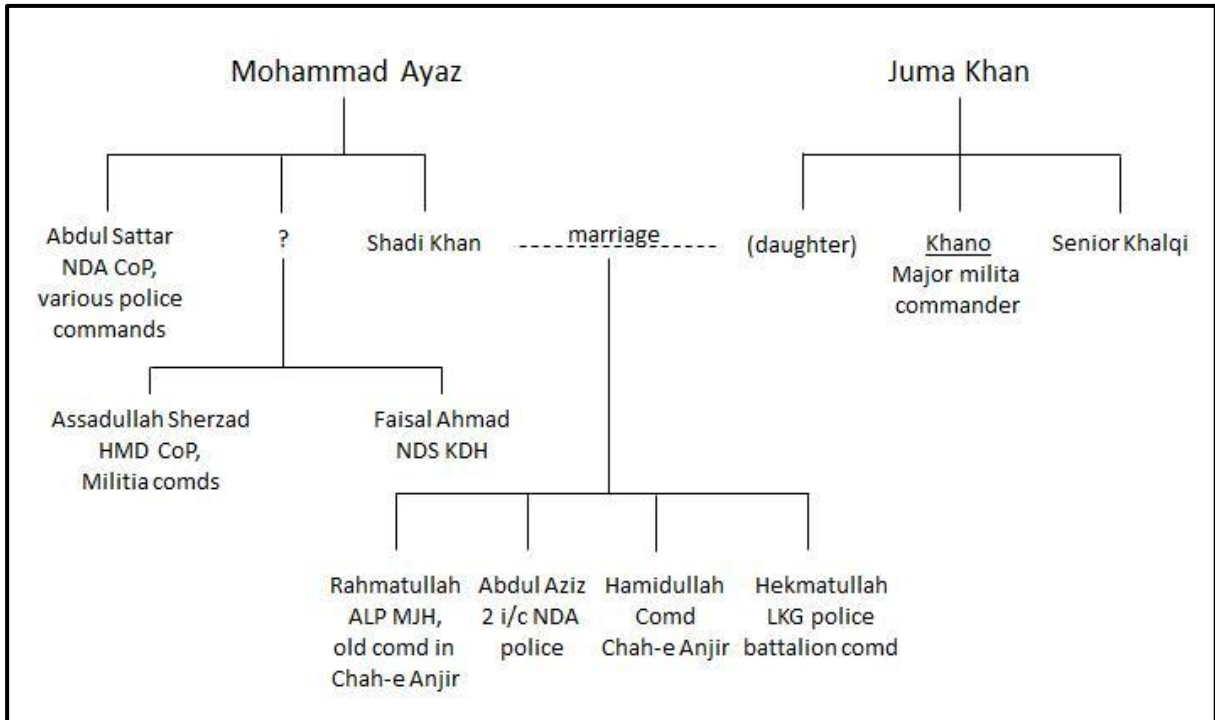


Figure 15: Khano's family tree (Noorzai/Aghezai)

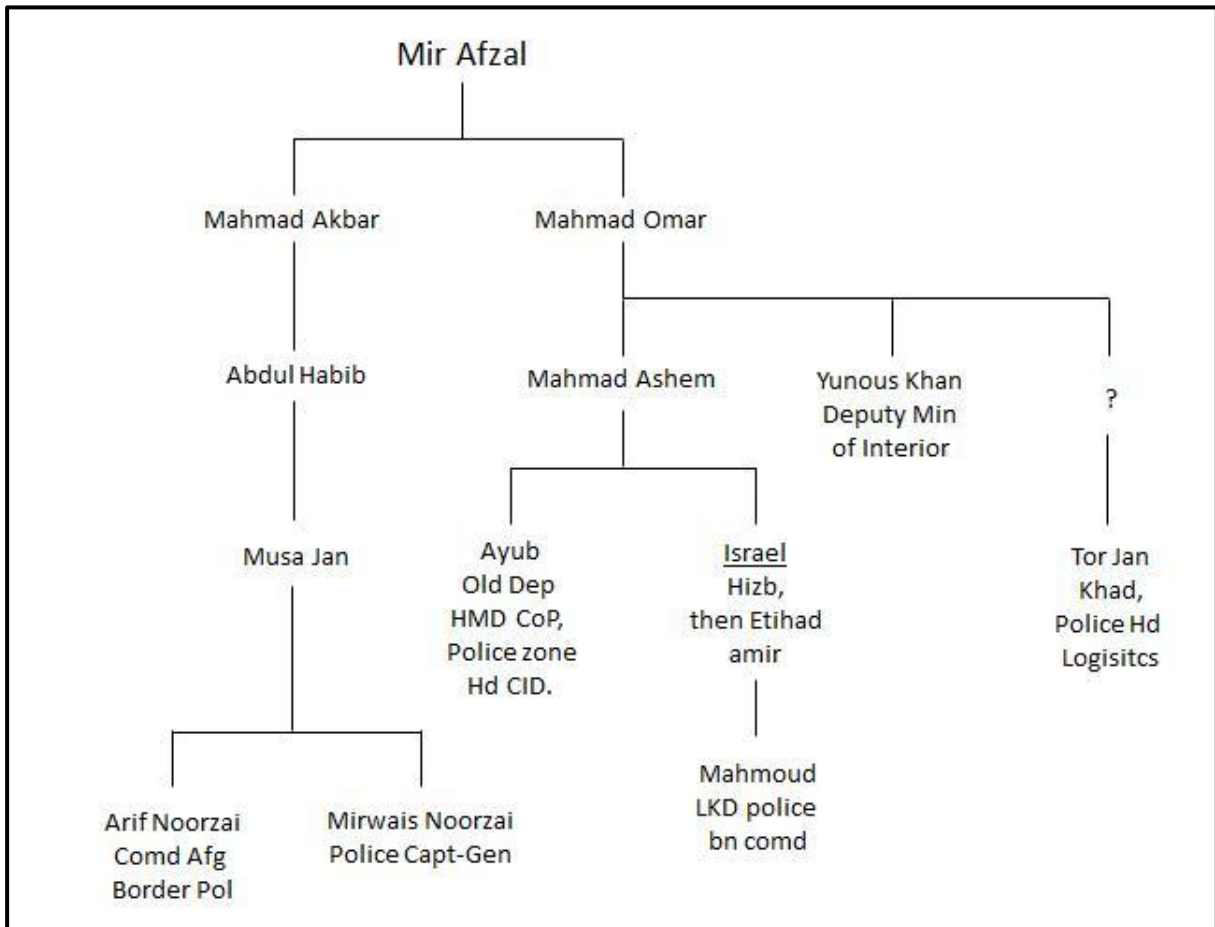


Figure 16: Israel's family tree (Noorzai/Darzai/Hassanzai)

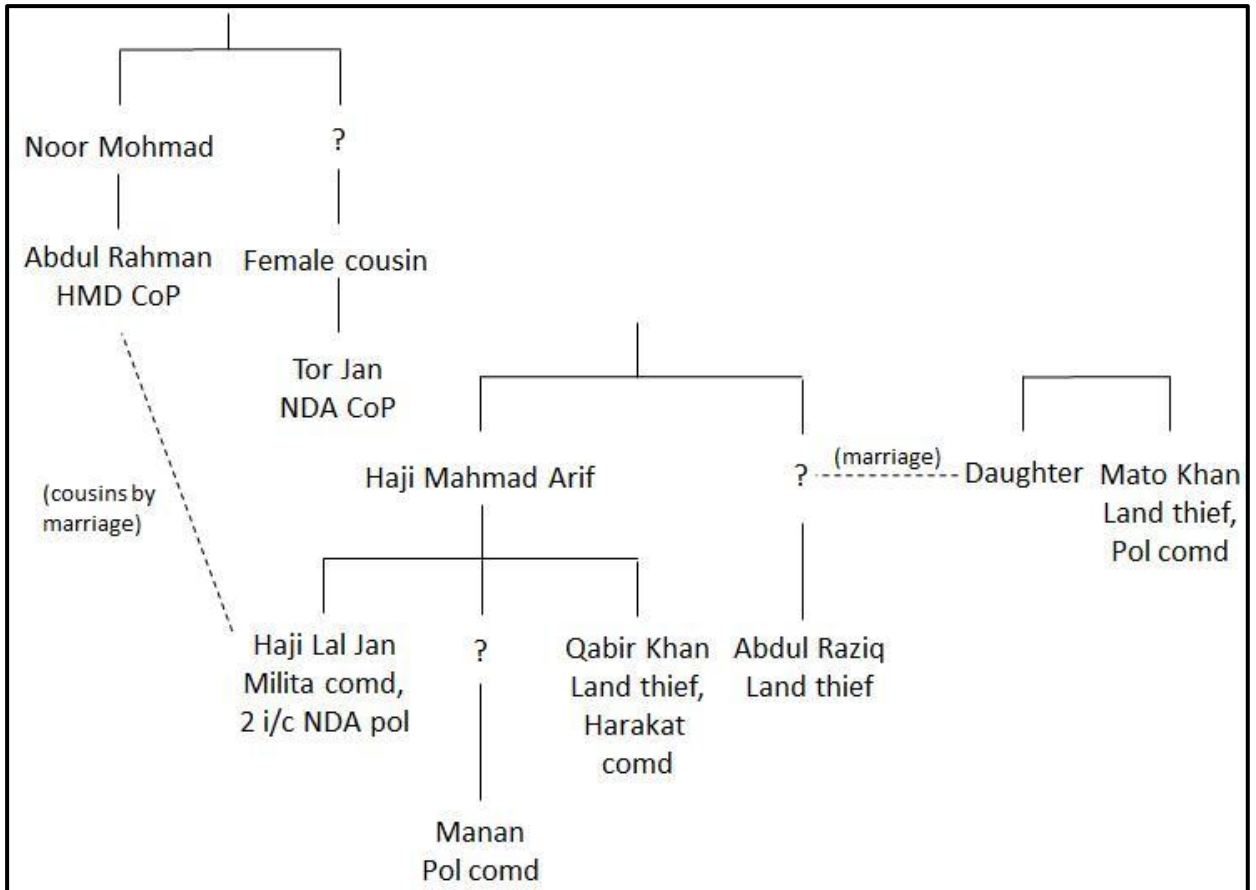


Figure 17: Abdul Rahman and Haji Lal Jan (Noorzai/Darzai/Parozai)

Appendix 5: Lists of Helmandi provincial, district and military officials

Provincial Governors

~1978	Majid Serbilard (Barakzai, Parchami, from Kandahar)
~1979	Fazal Jan Jahesh (Khalqi, from Paktia)
~1980	Mama Rasoul (Shinwari, Khalqi, from Nangahar)
1981-3	Khan Jan (Alikozai, Khalqi, from Kunar)
1984 (very short)	Zeyarmal (Barakzai, Parchami, from Kandahar)
1984/5-?	Gul Mahmud Khwashal (Noorzai, Khalqi, from Farah)
1987-91/2?	Shah Nazar Helmandwal (Noorzai/Gurg, Mahaz, from Loy Bagh)
1991/2?	Gul Mahmud Khwashal (Noorzai, Khalqi, from Farah)
1992 (6 months)	Hafizullah (Barakzai, Hizb, from Bolan)
1992-3	Akhwaendi (Barakzai, Jamiat, Nawa)
1993-4	Rasoul Akhundzada (Alizai, Harakat, Musa Qala)
1994	Ghaffour Akhundzada (Alizai, Harakat, Musa Qala)
1994-5?	Mullah Mahmud Karim (Noorzai, Talib, from Kandahar)
1995-2001	Mullah Abdul Bari (Alikozai, Talib, from Uruzgan)
2001-5	Sher Mohammad Akhundzada (Alizai, Harakat, from Kajaki)
2005-6	Daud (Safi, technocrat, from Gereshk)
2006-8	Assadullah Wafa (Achakzai, ?, from Kandahar)
2008-12	Gulabuddin Mangal (Mangal, Khalqi/Hizb, from Paktika)
2012-	General Naim (?, ?, ?)

Nad-e Ali District Governors

1978-1989	?
1989?-1991?	Mahmad Razer (Barakzai, ?, from Chah-e Anjir)
?	Rahman Jan? (Noorzai/Gurg, Etihad, from Now Zad)
1992-?	Khalifa Khwashkea (Noorzai, Jamiat, from Loy Bagh)
1993-4?	Mullah Said Gul (Alizai/Khalozai, Baghrani sub-commander, from ?)
1994-5	Mullah Ibrahim (Laghmani, Talib, from Garmsir)
~1995	Mullah Abdul Rahman (Noorzai, Talib, from Now Zad)
1995-6	Mawlana Sahib (?, Talib, from Uruzgan)
?	Mullah Abdul Rahim (Ishaqzai, Talib, from Uruzgan)
?	Mullah Sharwali (Daftani, Talib, from Nahr-e Saraj)
?	Mullah Abdul Haq (Daftani, Talib, from Waziristan)
?-2001	Mullah Saifullah (Alizai, Talib, from Uruzgan)

2002-4?	Mira Jan (Noorzai, Harakat, from Chah-e Anjir)
2004-7?	Mullah Qasam (Noorzai, Jamiat, from Sangin)
2007/8-	Habibullah (Noorzai, Khalqi, from Garmsir)

Nahr-e Saraj District Governors

1978-?	Zahir Khan (Barakzai, ?, Malgir)
?-1981	Malem Muskinyar (Barakzai, Khalqi, ?)
1981-7	Marg (Noorzai, Khalqi, from Uruzgan)
1987-92	Abdul Sangar (Barakzai, Parchami, ?)
1992 (briefly)	Saran Sahab (Barakzai, Khalqi, from Farah)
1992-1994	Khalifa Shirin Khan (Barakzai, Hizb, from Malgir)
1994-2001	Mullah Mir Hamza (Noorzai, Talib, Uruzgan)
2001-?(brief)	Khalifa Shirin Khan (Barakzai, Hizb, from Malgir)
2002	Mullah Qadoos (Alizai, Harakat, from Musa Qala)
2002-3	Mahmad Lal (Popalzai, Etihad, ?)
2004-6	Nabi Khan (Barakzai, Jamiat, from Nawa)
?2006-8	Manab Khan (Barakzai, Hizb, from Bolan)
?2008-10	Abdul Ahad Khan (Alizai, Khalqi, from Kajaki)
2010	Jan Gul (Barakzai, Khalqi, Lashkar Gah)
2010-1	Mohayadin (Alizai, ?, Kajaki)
2011	Amir Jan (Popalzai, Khalqi, ?)
2011-	Salem Rodi (Alizai, Harakat, ?)

Provincial Chiefs of Police

1978-80	?
1980-?	Musa Ensanmal (?, Parchami, from Allahabad)
?-1987	Ayub Khan (Tajik, ?, ?)
1987-1989	Karim Payekh (Alizai, ?, from Zamindawar)
1989-91	Mulakhel (Mulakhel, ?, from Ghazni)
1991-2	Hussein Khan Andiwai (Barakzai, Khalqi, from Babaji)
1992-3	Khano (Noorzai, ?, from Loy Bagh)
1993-4	Abdul Ahad (Ishaqzai, Harakat, from Now Zad)
1995-01	?Taliban era?
2001-6	Abdul Rahman Jan (Noorzai, various, from Marjeh)
2006-2007	Hussein Khan Andiwai (Barakzai, Khalqi, from Babaji)
2008	Mulakhel (Mulakhel, ?, from Ghazni)

2008-9 Assadullah Sherzad (Noorzai/Aghezai, various, from Loy Bagh)
 2009-2012 Angar (Alikozai, ?, from Kandahar)
 2012- Nabi Elham (Tokhi, Khalqi, from Uruzgan)

Nad-e Ali Chiefs of Police

1978-89 ?
 1989-91 Habibullah (Noorzai, Khalqi, from Garmsir)
 1991-5 ?Andiwal government?
 1995-2001 ?Taliban-era?
 2001-2 Haji Jalalzai (Kharoti, Harakat, from Noor Mohammad Khan Kalay)
 2002-4 Hakim Khan (Daftani, Jamiat, from Marjeh)
 2004-5 Haji Twayeb (Noorzai, ?, ?)
 2005-8 Tor Jan (Noorzai/Darzai/Parozai, ?, ?)
 2008-9 Abdul Sattar (Noorzai/Aghezai, ?, from Loy Bagh)
 2009 Sheryar (Tajik, ?, ?)
 2009-11 Shadi Khan (Popalzai, Khalqi, from Garmsir)
 2011- Haji Omar Jan (Andar, ?, from Marjeh)

Nahr-e Saraj Chiefs of Police

1978-92?
 1992-3? Wali Mohammad (Barakzai, ?, ?)
 1994-2001 ?Taliban-era?
 2001-3 Khan Mohammad (Barakzai, Harakat, from Deh Adam Khan)
 2004 Badr (Popalzai, ?, from Uruzgan)
 ?2004 Amanullah (Noorzai, ?, ?)
 ? ?Khan Mohammad
 ? Haji Dil Jan (?, Hizb, from Kandahar)
 2005? Haji Kadus (Barakzai, USSF, from Charkandaz)
 2006? Habibullah (Noorzai, Khalqi, from Garmsir)
 ? Rafiq Sheryar (Noorzai, Khalqi, ?)
 2008-10 Shuja (?, Khalqi, ?)
 Farouq (Barakzai, Khalqi, from Deh Adam Khan)
 Shuja (?, Khalqi, ?)
 Farouq (Barakzai, Khalqi, from Deh Adam Khan)
 NB Abdul Raziq (Barakzai, Hizb, from Malgir) de facto Chief of Police
 2010-11 Ezmarai (Barakzai, various, from Gereshk)

2011	Saifullah (Alikozai, Khalqi, ?)
2011-12	Shadi Khan (Popalzai, Khalqi, ?)
2012-	Gulie Khan (Baluch, Khalqi, from Garmsir)

Commanders of the 93rd Division

?-1989	Baba Tapa
1989-	Jenat Gul
?	Saber
?	Wardak
1992-3	Allah Noor (Barakzai, ?, Nawa)
1993-5/6?	Rais Baghrani (Alizai, various, from Baghran)
?-2001	?Talib
2001-4	Malem Mir Wali (Barakzai, Hizb, from Malgir)
2004	*Disbanded*

Appendix 6: Selected Helmandi Guantanamo prisoners

The purpose of the appendix is to discuss some of the Helmandi Guantanamo prisoners' cases in the context of the information contained in this thesis. Reading the documents it is clear that the Guantanamo personnel believe in the unitary nature of organisations like the Taliban and believe the public narratives surrounding them. The information contained in this appendix can be found in either deliberately released Guantanamo files (<http://projects.nytimes.com/guantanamo>) or leaked Guantanamo files (<http://wikileaks.org/gitmo/>—both accessed 21 November 2012). Also of great use was Andy Worthington's *The Guantánamo Files*. This appendix considers the following prisoners (followed by prisoner number if available):

- Abdul Wahid (no prisoner number as died in Camp Price).
- Hamidullah / Janat gul – 953.
- Abdullah Ghulam Rasoul (actually Abdul Qayoum Zakir) – 008.
- Abdul Rauf Khadim – 108.
- Abdul Rahman – 118.
- Murtaza – 361.
- Amanullah Alikozai – 538.
- Qari Hassanullah Pirzai – 562.
- Haji Bismillah – 968.
- Abdul Razaq (Achakzai) – 942.
- Haji Jalil – 1117.
- Abdul Wahab – 961.
- Rahmatullah – 964.
- Hafizullah – 965.
- Baridad – 966.
- Nasirullah – 967.
- Abdul Baghi – 963.
- Kushky Yar – 971.
- Akhtur Mohammad – 969.
- Arif Mohammad – 972.
- Abdul Kadus – 929.
- Mohammad Ismail – 930.
- Mohammad Nasim – 958.

Abdul Wahid

Very little is known about Abdul Wahid. It appears that he was tortured by the Afghan Militia Forces in Gereshk (i.e. Mir Wali's men) before being handed over to US special forces in Camp Price, where he died (on 6 November 2003). His autopsy recognised 'multiple blunt force injuries to head, torso and extremities'.¹⁷²⁶ Here follows a US investigation report into his death. One can conclude from this document that the US special forces were aware of the use of torture by their Afghan allies but did nothing about it.

229
(10/4)

After Action Report (AAR)
Preliminary Investigation into the death of a Detainee at
Gereshk Forward Operating Base, Helmand Province, Afghanistan

MISSION: Conduct a Preliminary investigation into the death of a detainee in custody at Gereshk Forward Operating Base (FOB), Helmand Province, Afghanistan.

SYNOPSIS:

On or about 4 Nov 03, USSF personnel took custody of Mr ██████████ an Afghan male, 25-27 yrs of age, a self-confessed member of the Taliban. When processed by the USSF medical staff he was noted to having several bruises to his hips, groin and buttocks area (some severe to minor), and numerous burns to his chest (which is a known interview/interrogation "technique" used by the local Afghanistan Militia Forces (AMF)). Allegedly, during interrogation ██████████ admitted to being involved in ambushes of OGA, USSF personnel and other coalition forces. ██████████ admitted to being involved in intelligence collection in efforts to ambush or kill coalition members, or impede operations conducted by coalition members. On 6 Nov 03, ██████████ was guarded by the AMF security force at the Gereshk FOB with one other detainee. The AMF Security guard left the detainment area, and when he returned he discovered ██████████ laying in a supine position, wrapped in a wool blanket in the center of the detainee area. The guard immediately summoned USSF medical personnel, who determined ██████████ was deceased. No life-saving measures were attempted due to the presence of rigor mortis. USSF personnel at the FOB immediately notified their higher headquarters (3rd Bn, 3rd SFG, Kandahar Air Field, AF) of the death. During an examination of the areas and the remains, no apparent signs of foul play, or struggle were noted.

An Autopsy of the remains is pending at the time of this report. The undetermined cause and manner of death is currently being investigated by the US Army Criminal Investigation Command (██████████), Kandahar Branch Office, AF, APO AE 09355.

SIGNIFICANT INTERVIEWS:

About 2150Z, 6 Nov 03, SA ██████████ interviewed SFC ██████████ (18D, SF Medic), ██████████ A Co, 3rd Bn, 3rd SFG, Gereshk FOB, who stated he was the SF Medic notified that the detainee was found dead in the detainee area. SFC ██████████ stated he conducted a preliminary assessment and based on the onset of rigor mortis no lifesaving measures were attempted (see attached Sworn Statement of SFC ██████████ for details).

About 2230Z, 6 Nov 03, SA ██████████ interviewed SFC ██████████ A Co, 3rd Bn, 3rd SFG, Gereshk FOB, who stated he initially received ██████████ from the AMF. SFC ██████████ stated at the time of his release to USSF, he was photographed and medically assessed by USSF personnel (SFC ██████████ A Co, 3rd Bn, 3rd SFG, Gereshk FOB, AF). SFC ██████████ stated he was the last USSF person to see ██████████ alive (See attached Sworn Statement for details).

AGENT'S COMMENT: SFC ██████████ is a 18E, SF Military Intelligence NCO.

About 0040Z, 7 Nov 03, SA ██████████ interviewed SSG ██████████ (18D SF Medic), who related he conducted an initial assessment of ██████████ when he was released to USSF personnel. SSG ██████████ stated ██████████ was observed to have burns to his chest and stomach areas, and bruising to his hips, groin and buttocks areas. SSG ██████████ it was not unusual to see detainees released to USSF with this injury. SSG ██████████ described these injuries as a normal interview/interrogation method used by the local AMF, that discovery was always determined by medical personnel. SSG ██████████ stated this was due

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CENTRAL

000031 Exhibit 9

DOD-045198

¹⁷²⁶ Worthington, Guantanamo: 245.

to a cultural difference. SSG [redacted] stated that showing your buttocks to other personnel (especially males) was offensive and embarrassing to the detainee, and was also considered a sign of weakness. 229(2004)

About 0045Z, 7 Nov 03, SA [redacted] coordinated with SFC [redacted] and confirmed the cultural aspects of showing buttocks, etc... SFC [redacted] stated they often saw this activity, or interview "technique" used by the AMF for this very reason. SFC [redacted] stated he could provide photographs of prior detainees with similar injuries when initially processed and photographed by the SF medics. SA [redacted] asked if the detainee complained of injury during his interrogations. SFC [redacted] stated he did not complain of anything, which he would note as unusual. Additionally, had the detainee showed signs of medical distress SF Medics would have been immediately summoned.

Additionally, SFC [redacted] stated he did not believe the AMF guards, watching the detainees (which consisted of the deceased and one other person) did not harm the detainee. SFC [redacted] stated he believed they had no reason to cause the detainee any harm. In fact, the USSF personnel were worried they may cause harm to the other detainee, due to his being involved in the ambush and killing of the local AMF commander, and they were only briefed that the deceased was a member of the Taliban and should be watched closely.



Detainee at time of release from AMF to USSF

OTHER INVESTIGATIVE ACTIVITY:

Initial Notification to CTF and CID:

About 1720Z, 6 Nov 03, CPT [redacted] Office of the Staff Judge Advocate, 3rd Battalion, 3rd Special Forces Group (SFG), Kandahar Air Field (KAF), AF reported a local national being detained by US Special Forces (USSF), and guarded by the AF Militia Security Forces (AMF), at Geresch Forward Operating Base (FOB), Helmand Province, AF, was discovered by an AMF guard crumpled on the floor dead. CPT [redacted] further requested this office (and USACIDC) conduct a preliminary investigation to determine culpability of USSF personnel, or eliminate wrongdoing on the part of USSF.

About 2030Z, 6 Nov 03, CPT [redacted] SA [redacted] SA [redacted] USACIDC, and MAJ (DR) [redacted] Battalion Surgeon, 3rd Bn, 3rd SFG, KAF, traveled via helicopter to the FOB.

NOTE: Prior to take off it was learned that the remains had been released to the next-of-kin for burial. USSF personnel at the FOB normally released remains for cultural and religious reasons. However, once learned the remains would be needed, FOB personnel were dispatched to recover the remains. It should be noted that the deceased ([redacted] s/o [redacted]; approx. 26 years of age, and from the village of Geresch, Helmand Province, AF) was a self confessed member of the Taliban, and lived in an area known to be pro-Taliban. Attempting to recover the remains was a dangerous task due to the family's ties to ACM forces. However, while enroute to the FOB it was learned the remains were recovered, and safeguarded at the FOB medical center.

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Medical Assessment at FOB:

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SENSITIVE

0937D
Exhibit 9

DOD-045199

About 2100Z, 6 Nov 03, SA [redacted] exposed photographs of injuries noted by MAJ (DR) [redacted], who stated there was extensive bruising and swelling to the hips, buttocks and groin area. Further, there were burn marks (which were in various stages of healing) to the chest area. Further, there was a bruise to the left shoulder, and various abrasions to his lower extremities, in various stages of healing. There were no apparent injuries to the head or neck area, and the deceased did not have any injuries to his hands (palm or back of hand). DR [redacted] noted the presence of rigor mortis, and lividity to the back and back of the legs of the deceased. At the time of the examination the deceased was unclothed and wrapped in a wool blanket. (See photographs for details). b(7)(C)-3

NOTE: The clothes of the deceased were reported as removed by the family in preparation for burial.



Details injuries at time of processing of scene

Physical Examination of the Remains:

About 0830Z, 7 Nov 03, LTC (DR) [redacted], General Surgeon, 911th Forward Surgical Team (FST), Task Force (TF) Warrior, KAF, conducted a physical examination of [redacted] remains, in an effort to ascertain the cause and manner of death. LTC [redacted] limited his examination to opening the chest cavity, obtaining tissue (heart and liver) and blood samples for toxicology. X-rays of the remains were exposed, and no remarkable injuries were noted. Photographs of the examination were exposed by SA [redacted] (see the Medical Report, Evidence Form and Photographs for details). b(7)(C)-5



"Pulmonary Trunk"

"Heart w/scale"

NOTE: LTC [redacted] could not make an opinion of findings, and a medical legal autopsy was scheduled, to be performed at Bagram Air Field. b(7)(C)-3

CRIME SCENE VERIFICATION:

About 2200Z, 6 Nov 03, SA [redacted] conducted a crime scene examination of the detainee area, located 3' from the main entrance into Geresch FOB, Helmand Province, AF. b(7)(C)-3

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCENE: The area identified, as the detainee area was a plywood structure shaped octagonal, with approximately 4' high, and 4' deep cubicles. The cubicle areas had a ceiling (about 3' x 4') and three walls (about 4' x 3'), and was open in the center of the structure. The area was free of debris and appeared clean. There was a folding metal chair, resting upright on the floor, and centered on the west wall, and a box, which contained drinking bottled water. The structure was unpainted and was constructed of treated plywood. There was an entrance and exit way, which was merely a 2" x 4" piece of wood, which made a person bend at the waist to enter the structure. There was no door, noir locks to keep a person from leaving. However, the structure was surrounded by concertina wire, and two Afghanistan Militia Forces soldiers, who was stationed inside the detainee area, guarded the area. The guard area consisted of merely a holding area within the structure, and the folding metal chair. The over-watch consisted of US Special Forces (USSF) b(7)(C)-3

LAW ENFORCEMENT
EVIDENCE

000033 Exhibit 9

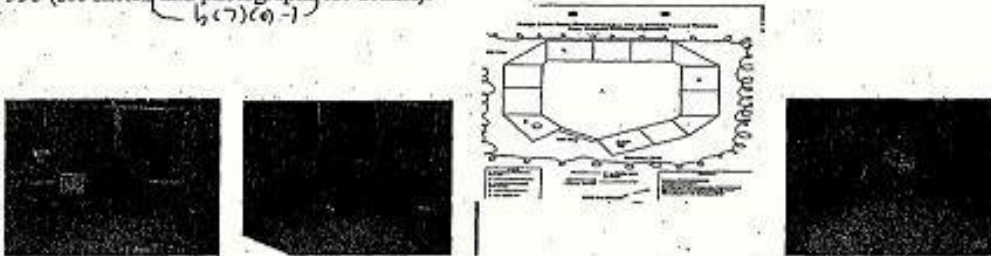
DOD-045200

229 (4 of 4)
soldier's on-duty in a guard tower within the FOB, which was 100 meters inside the base, and was about 50' high up.

CONDITION OF THE SCENE: The scene was clean of dirt, and there were several empty bottles of water laid on the floor of the detainee area at the time of the examination, and there was only one detainee sleeping in a cell of the structure. The detainee area was structurally sound, and appeared unsecured, besides the guards positioned inside the structure guarding the detainee. There was also a heat source in another of the cells, which was not operating at the time of the examination.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS: At the time of the outdoor scene examination the outside temperature was about 35 degrees Fahrenheit, and there was a slight wind. No unusual odors were noted. There had not been any precipitation within the last twenty-four hours.

SCENE DOCUMENTATION: A Rough Crime Scene Sketch was completed by SA [redacted] b(7)(C)-1 and verified by SA [redacted] SA [redacted] also exposed digital photographs of the scene using a Nikon Coolpix, Model 995 (see sketch and photographs for details). b(7)(C)-1



IMPROVEMENTS:

b(7)(C)-1 b(7)(C)-3
SA [redacted] coordinated with CPT [redacted] Trial Counsel, 3rd Bn, 3rd SFG, regarding future deaths of detainees at FOB's. SA [redacted] and CPT [redacted] agreed that medico legal autopsy's in the future be conducted by qualified Pathologist. Further, that CTF/CID could coordinate with our higher headquarters to ensure a Pathologist was available in a timely manner. CPT [redacted] stated this would become policy, to ensure future incidents were conducted properly. b(7)(C)-3

STATUS OF INVESTIGATION: This investigation is currently being investigated by the local USACIDC element under Report of Investigation: [redacted] b(6). No further action is anticipated by this office.

REPORT PREPARED BY:

IIIS/II
[redacted] b(7)(C)-1
Special Agent
CTF-Kandahar, AF

REPORT APPROVED BY:

IIIS/II
[redacted] b(7)(C)-1
Resident Agent in Charge
CTF-A

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SENSITIVE

6937F
Exhibit 9

DOD-045201

Hamidullah / Janat Gul - 953

Arrested 30 January 2003 in Lashkar Gah. Transferred to Afghan custody 18 April 2005. (Although the JTF-GITMO Assessment states that he was transferred to Guantanamo on 22 March 2002). He was arrested because he was President of Ariana Airlines (Afghanistan's

flag carrier) during the Taliban period. Evidence against him included the facts that the Ariana office was located in an area of Kabul near Taliban and Al-Qaeda offices and that three previous employees of the airline had been located at an early 2002 Hizb-e Islami meeting: 'this indicates that the airline was not only supporting the Taliban, but also the [sic] Hizb-e Islami Gulbuddin'. Reading the transcripts it is clear that the Tribunal members are not aware that there is a separate date system in operation in Afghanistan. An educated man, he claims he joined Ariana to escape Taliban conscription. Assessed as having a high intelligence value.

Abdullah Ghulam Rasoul (actually Abdul Qayoum Zakir) – 008.

Arrested in the North at the end of 2001. Transferred to Afghan custody on 12 December 2007. Zakir gave his father's name during his detention and claimed that he was a foot soldier. The US interrogators thought that he might have been a bodyguard for a high ranking Talib (he was actually a deputy corps commander under Rauf—see below). What is clear is that the Americans are not sure why Dostum, who originally captured him, included him in a group of prisoners given over to the Americans. He was accused of owning a Casio 'wrist watch', which could be used as a 'possible explosive device'. He admitted that it was 'fine to wage jihad against Americans, Jews or Israelis if they were in his country'. He was assessed as having a medium intelligence value. When released to Afghan custody, Zakir quickly rose to become the head of the Taliban military (nezami) commission.

Abdul Rauf Khadim – 108.

Arrested in the North at the end of 2001. Transferred to Afghan custody on 12 December 2007. Claimed he was a bread deliverer (was actually a Taliban corps commander). Assessed as having a medium intelligence value. The Tribunal President correctly identified him as Alizai and then asked if that tribe was associated with the Taliban. The next question made clear that the questioner thought that the Northern Alliance (NA) was a Pushtun organisation: he was confused that the detainee did not join the NA. Even though Rauf provides conflicting stories about when he lost his leg, the US releases him. He quickly begins working with the Taliban and is currently the Taliban Governor for Uruzgan.

Abdul Rahman – 118.

Abdul Rahman was arrested in the North at the end of 2001. Transferred to Afghan custody 15 December 2006. He was severely mentally ill with schizoaffective disorder, depressive disorder and major depressive disorder with psychotic features. He was assessed as a medium risk to the US and its allies. He claims he was conscripted in Sangin.

Murtaza – 361.

Arrested at the end of 2001 in the North. Transferred to Afghan custody on 23 March 2003. He claimed he was a Taliban driver and was assessed as a low intelligence value. Upon release he was harassed by Haji Manan, a Noorzai ‘police’ officer, based on the accusation that he had been in Guantanamo.¹⁷²⁷ This continued for some time and included having his house raided several times and his opium stolen. He then went to Washir and formed links with the Taliban for his own protection from the police (see section 4.12). The Kharoti claim that he fought to defend them from the police, but he also fought British forces in 2008/9. He was eventually arrested by ISAF in 2009.

Amanullah Alikozai – 538.

Arrested in early 2002 by Mohammad Jan, Karzai’s appointee as Governor of Uruzgan. Released to Afghan custody on 14 March 2004. Amanullah was the cousin of Abdul Bari, the Taliban Governor of Helmand. Bari stayed in Amanullah’s house briefly in January 2002, but not while Amanullah was there. The US assessed him as a low threat.

Qari Hassanullah Pirzai – 562.

Arrested on 24 February 2002. Transferred to Afghan custody on 25 August 2006. Hassanullah was actually working for Karzai’s government in Kajaki as Sherafuddin’s clerk (Sherafuddin was a relative of Sher Mohammad). It appears that he tried to turn in two former members of the Taliban who had been harassing him. It then appears that Sherafuddin turned him into the US (that is a feud and a counter-feud). His mental health problems meant that he was incorrectly assessed by US interrogators as using incoherence as a counter-interrogation technique. Accusations include that he spoke with an Iranian accent (he had spent nine years in an Iranian prison for smuggling drugs) and was an Iranian spy (he was captured with some ‘code’ books, that were later shown to be religious talismans). Several accusations referred to incidents that occurred after he was arrested and in US custody. He was also accused of working with Al Qaeda, at the same time that he was an Iranian spy. He was assessed as a medium risk to the US. Hassanullah told the US interrogators that their beliefs were ‘too far from reality’.

Haji Bismillah – 968.

Arrested in Lashkar Gah on 12 February 2003. Transferred to Afghan authority on 17 January 2009. Bismillah was appointed Director of Transport in Gereshk by Sher Mohammad. Bismillah’s brother, Mohammad Wali, was Sher Mohammad’s driver and is now

¹⁷²⁷ 007, 015.

an MP for Helmand. During the course of his duties he had contact with both the Helmandi government and US forces. On the day of his arrest he was actually trying to help US forces and Amir Mohammad resolve an issue regarding weapons permits. Accused of being a member of the Taliban and of 'Fedayeen Islam' (not heard used in the context of Helmand, supposedly the 'combined effort of Hizb-e Islami and active Taliban'). Bismillah's US interrogators accuse him both of being with Sher Mohammad ('number two in the Taliban organisation in Helmand' and someone who '[alerted] his insurgent counterparts by satellite phone' about US troop movements) and Rais Baghrani ('leader of forty-man terrorist unit'), yet the most basic knowledge about Helmand would have shown that these two families have been feuding for decades. The US rated him as a high threat to their interests.

Bismillah's brother claims that Bismillah was given to US special forces by Haji Kadus and brothers because he ran the government transportation department road tolls in Gereshk, whose revenue Haji Kadus coveted (a point that Bismillah and his brother make independently in their respective testimonies). On the day of his arrest, Sher Mohammad, Dad Mohammad and Abdul Rahman all pointed out to the US that it was almost certainly a false denunciation. In 2006, his brother signed a sworn affidavit to this effect and took Donald Rumsfeld, the US Secretary of Defense, to court on behalf of Bismillah. Bismillah had previously requested his brother's testimony during his Combatant Status Review, as was his 'right'. Yet the US and Afghan government claimed they could not find his brother despite him making repeated representations to the US and Afghan authorities and actually working for the Afghan government. Mohammad Wali also confirmed in his affidavit that he had not been contacted. Meanwhile, Mohammad Wali had been appointed District Governor of Musa Qala, a prospect that US officials found 'least appealing [among a series of corrupt appointments]'. One of the reasons given was that Mohammad Wali had a brother in Guantanamo.¹⁷²⁸

Abdul Razaq – 942.

Arrested in Lashkar Gah on 21 January 2003. Died in Guantanamo on 30 December 2007 of cancer. Was Rais Baghrani's driver during the jihad and was involved in freeing Ismail Khan from Taliban custody in Kandahar in March 2000 (for which the Taliban and Al Qaeda put a bounty on his head). He was assessed as a high threat to US interests. Much of the evidence against Abdul Razaq seems to come from another detainee.¹⁷²⁹ This included being a member of Al Qaeda and the infamous forty-man Taliban and Al Qaeda unit, whose existence has not been discussed outside of Guantanamo files. The US also claimed that he

¹⁷²⁸ Wiki: 'PRT/LASHKAR GAH - POPPY ERADICATION MOVING FORWARD' (8 Mar 2006).

¹⁷²⁹ G850.

had started as a driver for the Taliban in 1992 (before the movement was formed). The interrogator accused him of being a member of Jamiat Ulema-e Islam (a Pakistani political party with links to the Taliban), rather than Jamiat-e Islami (what he said), which was a group supplied by the US during the jihad. He was kept in custody so that he could provide information on Rais Baghrani who reconciled with the government (again) during his period of detention. He was also accused of things that happened after he was arrested. He claims he was arrested by a former Taliban commander who had reconciled with, and was working for, Sher Mohammad (this was because he was a Baghrani acolyte). Of him, Abdul Raziq said 'I'll put a horse's penis in his wife's vagina'.

Haji Jalil – 1117.

Haji Jalil was handed over to US forces by Dad Mohammad in response to the deaths of the two US soldiers in March 2003 (section 4.8). He was transferred to Afghan custody on 11 March 2005. There were multiple reports surrounding this incident as Sher Mohammad, Mir Wali and Dad Mohammad all gave names to the US of those they claimed were responsible. In this case the US realised and wrote 'it appears that his capture by AMF and subsequent handover to US forces was based on fraudulent claims given by AMF personnel themselves'. The US authorities then go on to state in the documents that they believe that Dad Mohammad may have been involved in the ambush and that Haji Jalil was offered as a way of escaping culpability. US forces on the ground in Helmand, however, continued to work with Dad Mohammad. This is one of the few Guantanamo reports where it can be shown that US personnel were aware of the fact that they were being manipulated.

Abdul Wahab – 961.

Abdul Wahab was one of the ten Helmandis rounded up after the Lajay incident in Feb 2003 (section 4.8). He was transferred to Afghan custody on 31 August 2008. He had voluntarily passed through a nearby US checkpoint after the incident to do some shopping. His crimes included wearing a green jacket (common in the area), that the ambushers had used. He was accused of hearing loss at the time of the incident but there is no evidence of the US testing his hearing. Abdul Wahab repeatedly pointed this out. The US special forces interpreters were Hazaras (who speak Dari) and it is possible that the miscommunication between the special forces and Abdul Wahab was misinterpreted as hearing loss. When it was pointed out that he had a watch that was used for making bombs, he pointed at the Presiding Officer, who was wearing the same watch. The tribunal also confused Bagram and Baghran, and Jamiat-e Islami and Jamiat Ulema-e Islami. This second confusion was further compounded when the US officer stated that because his brother had fought in 'Jamiat' that

was valid grounds for Abdul Wahab's incarceration. Abdul Wahab described the accusations as 'nonsense'.

Rahmatullah – 964.

Rahmatullah was also arrested after the Lajay incident. He was transferred to Afghan custody on 15 December 2006. Many of the same accusations about hearing loss and jackets surface in his documentation as well. Unfortunately, one of the tribunal members did not know where Helmand was and so was unable to judge some of the evidence in front of him. He asks the detainee who thinks it is a trick question, swears he doesn't know and that it is near to Kandahar. He was accused of having blood and powder burns on his clothes, but it appears that these items did not survive the detainee processing chain. Aged twenty-two, he was asked if he had ever fought the Russians. 'No, I was just a little boy', he replied. When asked what he thought of the US, he replied 'I don't know. I don't understand'.

Hafizullah – 965.

Arrested in same incident and transferred on same date as 964, above. Similar accusations. He asks to see the evidence against him, but this is refused because it is classified. He repeatedly points out that it is very important that the US makes efforts to find the witnesses that he nominated. There is some confusion over the name of an uncle who is allegedly a member of the Taliban. In the secret detainee assessment Sher Mohammad and Rais Baghrani (they also got his tribe wrong) are both assessed as supporting the Taliban and Al Qaeda. There is no mention of Sher Mohammad being the Provincial Governor. These facts were both used as part of the justification over his imprisonment. The detainee claims to have never left his village and not to have known what Kabul was before he came to Guantanamo. He was assessed as a medium risk to the US.

Baridad – 966.

Same dates and same accusations as 964 and 965.

Nasirullah – 967.

Arrested at the time of the Lajay incident but transferred to Afghan custody on 2 November 2007. He was accused of being a member of the forty-man unit that provided security for Osama Bin Laden. However, Nasirullah worked for Sher Mohammad at the Lashkar Gah airport – this information could have been easily checked.

Abdul Baghi – 963.

Arrested at the time of the Lajay incident and transferred to Afghan custody on 8 February 2006. He was arrested with his uncle, 971, discussed below. Same accusations about green jackets. He was also accused of being a member of the forty-man group that Rais Baghrani led out of Musa Qala (which would have been difficult as it was Sher Mohammad's stronghold). His documents are littered with inconsistencies about whether he was arrested with a weapon, whether he had recently cached it (never recovered) or whether he didn't have a weapon. 'It cannot be confirmed detainee was involved in insurgent operations...his denial seems to be plausible'. He was in custody for just under three years.

Kushky Yar – 971.

Uncle of 963, above, and has the same arrest and transfer dates. Same accusations. He attempted to hang himself in Guantanamo. He was accused of having a signalling mirror, but this was a snuff box carried by most males in Helmand. He pointed out that he was wearing a brown jacket rather than a green one, but their personal items do not seem to have made it to Guantanamo with them. An American officer accuses that the green jackets were the 'uniform' of the Taliban. A poor villager, he was asked what date he was captured. 'I don't know dates...it was daytime when I was captured'. Much of the evidence against him is based on things that he 'said himself', yet in the review documents he denies ever saying them and there is no proof available that he did ever say them. Kushky Yar points out several times that there had been problems with the interpreters misinterpreting. The Presiding Officer admits that the only sources of evidence to their guilt that they have are Kushky Yar and his nephew, Abdul Baghi.

Akhtur Mohammad – 969.

Arrested in the Lajay incident and transferred to Afghan custody on 14 March 2004. He was arrested because his name was similar to Rais Baghrani's driver (Akhtur Mohammad is a common name in Afghanistan, like Dave Jones in Britain).

Arif Mohammad – 972.

Arif Mohammad was in his sixties at the time of his detention. He was captured on the day of the Lajay incident. He was transferred to Afghan custody on 15 Dec 2006. Same accusations about the green jackets. There is some confusion over his capture. He was either armed, in Baghrani's compound, or washing himself in a stream outside (unarmed), or trying to escape with weapons and ammunition. Guantanamo personnel are unable to resolve these inconsistencies, presumably because the evidence for one assertion or another (e.g. statements) are not available. He was assessed as a medium risk to the US. The secret

assessments make the deduction that the residents of Baghran often defend the valley from 'invaders' and with his mujahidin experience (he fought for Nasim Akhundzada) it is likely that he would have picked up a weapon. This is a very poor standard of evidence.

Arif claims that he has a blood feud with Baghrani, who the US claims that he works for. He also claims that the Hazara interpreters at the Lajay incident caused him to be arrested. Factual inaccuracies include the fact that Nasim (who the US supported as a mujahed almost until he died in 1990) was the Taliban Director of Transportation for Bamian Province. Nasim had been dead for six years when the Taliban took Bamian. Nasim was also linked to Hizb by Guantanamo personnel, but he actually spent the 1980s fighting them (and they eventually killed him). Baghrani is 'linked' in the evidence to Sher Mohammad even though they have a decades old family feud. Sher Mohammad is also said to be part of the 'insurgent infrastructure' (which was not true at that point). The most basic knowledge about Helmand would have dismissed this evidence, irrespective of whether it had any relevance to the detainee.

Abdul Kadus – 929.

Abdul Kadus was approximately fifteen when he was arrested in Gereshk by (probably) Mir Wali's men in early Jan 2003 (the date is not clear from his files, it could have been Dec 2002 due to his detainee number). He was transferred to Afghan custody on 18 April 2005. He claims that he was travelling to Gereshk to visit his uncle and spent the night in a military checkpoint ('soldiers in a tent'). The next morning he tried to leave and they stopped him, told him that he had to take a weapon and then fight the Americans. He said that he wanted to go to his uncle's house. They took him to jail. In the secret assessment of Abdul Kadus, it is claimed that he went to the soldiers and asked them for a weapon to fight the Americans. Reading the transcript one gets the impression of a child who has no idea what is going on. It appears that this could be a 'sting operation' to have him arrested for the bounty money. See also 930.

Mohammad Ismail – 930.

Mohammad was approximately sixteen when he was arrested in December 2002. He was transferred to Afghan custody on 28 Jan 2004. He and a friend were travelling to Gereshk to look for work and found some 'soldiers in a tent'. They asked if they could work with them on a ditch digging project they were engaged on, but they were offered the chance to fight the Americans. They agreed but were apprehensive. The next day they were turned over to American forces and his friend was released. The file paints a very similar picture to those of 929.

Mohammad Nasim – 958.

Mohammad was arrested on the 11 February 2003. He was transferred to Afghan custody on 18 April 2005. He was arrested because he had the same 'last name' as a Taliban commander heard on an intercepted communication regarding US troop movements ('Mullah Nasim' was overheard, in a radio transmission in the north of Afghanistan). However, in Afghanistan people do not have last names. Everyone is given two 'first' names, and is identified by their father's name (and their tribe if they are Pushtun). Mohammad claimed he had never left Helmand, did not know where Lashkar Gah was (he was from Baghran) and did not know what 'north' or 'south' were.

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