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The Ongoing Battle for the Schools

Uprisings, Negotiations and Taleban Tactics

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is a follow-up on AAN's December 2011 study of the changing Taleban approach towards state schools in Afghanistan: slowly allowing schools to re-open in the areas under their control. The earlier report described the policies of the Taleban and the Ministry of Education (MoE) towards the re-opening of schools in the middle of their evolution, and was based on research done in 2011.

The report concluded that:

- there had been a change in the attitude of the Taleban in 2010;
- the change was more likely caused by community pressure, rather than being a direct result of negotiations with the MoE;
- nonetheless the MoE was interested to negotiate and to compromise;
- as a result of this interest, education officials were making local deals with the Taleban to re-open schools in the districts; and
- at the higher level, the Taleban wanted concessions from the MoE in order to reach a more formal agreement.

During the year after the report's release, however, the discussions between the Taleban and the Ministry of Education stalled and the trend of re-opening schools, with the acquiescence of the (local) Taleban, was partially reversed. At the same

time, a series of highly publicised 'uprisings' against the Taleban took place in the spring and autumn of 2012. This prompted a new round of research in late 2012, based on interviews with MoE officials in Kabul and Taleban cadres in Peshawar and the study of three cases where the school closures caused uprisings, violence, or animated debates: Ghazni, Wardak and Nangrahar.

The analysis of the Taleban's policy on education is complicated by its dual management structure. The Taleban's Education Commission, one of several specific commissions that play the role of shadow ministries, was originally established in Quetta in 2006. In 2009 a second education commission was formed in Peshawar under the supervision of the Peshawar Shura of the Taleban. The result is two Taleban education commissions that have a mainly geographical division of responsibility; their activities overlap in areas where both have influence. They do not really cooperate and are organised in different ways: the Peshawar Education Commission has a network of provincial education commissions, whereas the provincial education commissioners under Quetta report to the provincial governors.

The Peshawar education commission claims to be better organised than the original education commission and to keep track of anything concerning the Taleban and education. Along with Taleban cadres on the ground, it described the

Taleban's position on schools as being that education is a right, but also subject to a number of conditions and to the scrutiny of the Taleban. The most important conditions are: exclude certain subjects (such as English language for girls), ban mixed gender teaching, expand the Islamic subjects in the curriculum, exclude teachers deemed to be hostile to the Taleban, increase funds for madrasas, and permit the Taleban to proselytise. These conditions resemble closely those already found in the 2011 AAN report, but with additional conditions, such as the requirement that teachers report to the Taleban. It is not clear whether these conditions were already in place but were missed in the 2010–11 interviews or whether they have been introduced recently.

If schools fail to comply with the rules imposed by the Taleban, the commission in Peshawar may order school closures and, failing that, attacks on education staff. District and provincial education commissions do not have the authority to order closures or attacks, although in reality they do occasionally appear to do so. The head of the Peshawar education commission explained that targeted attacks against MoE staff, or students who refuse to comply with Taleban rules, are the official policy of the Taleban, but that attacks on school buildings are banned. Where the Peshawar Taleban acknowledge that individual Taleban networks may pursue their own aims towards state schools, including ordering violent attacks, they blame this mainly on Quetta's disorganisation.

The Peshawar and Quetta systems partly overlap, as in some areas individual networks were incorporated into the command-and-control system of Peshawar, which comes under the Military Commission. This power struggle within the Taleban complicates the analysis of Taleban decision-making concerning schools, because the Military Commission supervised the education commissioners in areas where it had full power, but elsewhere the Taleban networks were still deciding autonomously how to behave on a whole range of issues, including education.

In the new series of interviews carried out for this report, the Taleban still mostly denied being involved in violent attacks against schools. At the official level, the MoE, including Minister Wardak, generally endorse Taleban claims that they are not

responsible for attacks on schools, often pointing the finger at 'foreign intelligence agencies' instead. As indicated in the 2011 AAN report, such allegations – that attacks on schools are done by foreign fighters or Taleban elements closely linked to foreign intelligence services – are nothing new. The Taleban claim that the ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence of the Pakistani armed forces) insists on such harsh punishments against schools in order to weaken the political legitimacy of the Taleban and to prevent them from establishing a negotiating position of their own. This could of course simply be an attempt to scapegoat others for the Taleban's most unpopular activities. Despite Taleban claims to the contrary, research in the provinces suggests that some of the attacks against schools and against MoE staff have been ordered by the Taleban leadership, or parts thereof, in cases where threats were insufficient to enforce compliance or to close the schools.

New sources within the MoE described how direct negotiations on education, with both Taleban and Hezb-e Islami, started in 2010. Negotiations with Hezb-e Islami on safeguarding schools had reportedly been relatively smooth and successful. The MoE sources maintain that Hezb-e Islami respected the terms of the agreement and abstained from attacking schools, MoE staff or students. The Taleban however claim that Hezb-e Islami is still involved in such attacks.

MoE efforts to reach out to the Taleban leadership in Quetta and Peshawar had started on 13 June 2010, four months earlier than with Hezb-e Islami, when representatives were dispatched to Pakistan to negotiate to reduce violence against schools. A dialogue started, but no formal agreement was reached. Officials from the MoE were also able to communicate with Taleban in the provinces, including through teachers already working for the MoE.

The Taleban, according to a well-placed MoE source, were divided over the issue of an agreement with the MoE. While many Taleban were ready to allow the re-opening of schools based on the conditions listed above, others opposed it in principle and in particular bitterly opposed girls' schools. For the MoE, the most controversial of the Taleban demands was the request for curriculum changes. Although no

formal agreement was reached, some of the networks reportedly did agree not to attack schools.

MoE sources, like the Taleban, also indicate that at least the Peshawar leadership continues to be interested in an agreement, even if a final deal had not been reached by the time this report was written. And like the Taleban themselves, the MoE talks of certain groups ('foreign Taleban') being opposed to any agreement on schools and effectively trying to sabotage negotiations. The MoE picture is still largely one of progress, with violence against schools still decreasing, despite local setbacks, and more schools re-opening. But although the Taleban education commission seems intent on regulating the violence against the educational establishment, violence has not been abandoned. Attacks on educational personnel continue and, despite claims to the contrary, Taleban sources admit that at least some of the attacks on school are being ordered from above.

The picture of a slowly successful campaign to re-open schools in difficult areas was complicated by events in Ghazni in mid-2012 that led to an anti-Taleban uprising. In April 2012 the Ghazni governor closed the roads to motorbikes and the Taleban retaliated by closing schools. In early May this led to demonstrations by students and teachers against the governor; they accused him of not protecting the schools, while some rural communities took up arms to defend the schools against the Taleban. Forty-eight schools in Andar, Qarabagh and Moqur re-opened as a result of these 'uprisings'. Similar events were reported in other provinces, although the extent to which all these episodes of armed resistance against the Taleban were imitations of the Ghazni uprising is unclear.

The incidents were often described as a 'wave of uprisings' and were hailed by some external observers as a turning point in the war. This seems to have been an overstatement of their importance, but in terms of image, the Taleban had indeed taken a blow. More importantly, the resistance showed an underlying stream of resentment against the Taleban and their education policy. Hezb-e Islami played a role in these 'uprisings', particularly in Ghazni, although apparently without the endorsement of the party

leadership in Pakistan. By spring 2013 the constant military pressure exercised by the Taleban incurred high losses, forcing the rebels to accept Kabul's help. This consolidated the 'arbakai' force into a militia supported by Kabul, which started harassing and abusing local residents and, most noteworthy, failed to keep most of the schools open.

From the perspective of this study, the main importance of the 'uprisings' is that they highlighted underlying tensions over the schools. Ghazni villagers for instance complained about indoctrination and recruitment taking place in some of the state schools where deals with the Taleban were in force. Similar controversies took place in Wardak and Nangrahar. A particularly strong point of contention was the continuing, if occasional, violence against schools, educational staff and students, which the Taleban used to enforce their 'rules'.

Remarkably, even when the crisis over schools was at its peak, local contacts with MoE officials were never interrupted. Both sides seem to have judged that negotiations to re-open schools should continue. This was confirmed by the opening of more schools. In other areas, however, the re-opening of the schools continues to be difficult. It thus remains to be seen whether the positive attitude expressed by the education commissioner of the Peshawar Shura towards education and the re-opening of schools represents that of the majority of the Taleban and will indeed be widely implemented.

1 INTRODUCTION

In December 2011, AAN published a report by the same authors about the changing Taleban approach towards state schools in Afghanistan, with the Taleban slowly allowing schools to re-open in the areas under their control.¹ That report described the policies of the Taleban and the Ministry of Education (MoE) in the middle of the policies' evolution. At the time of writing, it was not clear to what extent the two sides were effectively converging, as was reflected in the report (although many media commenting on the

¹ Antonio Giustozzi and Claudio Franco, 'The Battle for the Schools: The Taleban and State Education',

Key Events

Pre-2006. Violence against schools becomes a major manifestation of the Taleban's campaign against the new regime.

2006. The Taleban's campaign of attacks against schools peaks, with dozens killed and hundreds of schools affected.

Taleban Education Commission is established in Quetta.

2007. The Taleban's first contacts with the Ministry of Education (MoE) take place.

2007–10. A trickle of local deals between the MoE and the Taleban continues.

2009. Peshawar Education Commission is formed.

2010. The pace of local negotiations accelerates considerably, perhaps because the Taliban remove the authorisation to attack schools from their *Code of Conduct (Layha)* in 2009.

June 2010. The MoE starts direct negotiations on education with the Taleban.

October 2010. The MoE starts direct negotiations on education with Hezb-e Islami.

Late 2010-early 2011. The MoE decides to restart negotiations at the top level. The levels of violence drop substantially.

Spring 2012. The MoE approves a new history curriculum and new textbooks are developed.

April 2012. Ghazni: the governor closes the roads to motorbikes.

May 2012. Ghazni: the Taliban retaliate by closing schools. Students and teachers demonstrate against the governor, accusing him of not protecting the schools, while some rural communities take up arms to defend the schools against the Taleban. Forty-eight schools in Andar, Qarabagh and Moqur re-open as a result.

'Uprisings' are reported in other provinces as well.

2012. Negotiations with MoE officials are never interrupted and schools continue to re-open.

report portrayed it as a done deal). The report was based on research done in 2011. In the ensuing year the discussions between the Taleban and the MoE stalled. At the same time, a series of highly

publicised 'uprisings' against the Taleban took place in the spring and autumn of 2012. While these uprisings were not just about schools, and were not always actual uprisings, they highlighted how the original predominantly positive reaction to the re-opening of the schools was giving way to concerns and dissatisfaction.

For the 2011 AAN report, tens of Taleban, teachers and elders were interviewed about the shifting attitude of the Taleban towards the schools. The conclusion was that:

- there had been a change in the attitude of the Taleban towards education in 2010, backing away from a totally negative attitude towards state schools;
- the change was likely caused by community pressure rather than as a direct result of negotiations with the MoE;
- nonetheless, the MoE was interested to negotiate and, if necessary, to compromise;
- as a result, education officials were making local deals with the Taleban to re-open schools in the districts;
- at the higher level, the Taleban wanted concessions from the MoE to reach a more formal agreement and that such concessions included:
 - Taleban-approved textbooks;
 - Taleban-approved syllabuses with many more hours dedicated to religious subjects;
 - removal of teachers hostile to the Taleban;
 - hiring of teachers (of religious subjects and Arabic) recommended by the Taleban;
 - no mixed (male-female) education;
 - girls' education only up to sixth class.

The Taleban who were interviewed at the time expected that the negotiations with the MoE would result in their redaction of new textbooks and changes to the syllabus to meet the Taleban's demands. In spring 2012 a new history curriculum was indeed approved and textbooks were developed in which controversial references to Mullah Omar as a rogue or to Commander Massud as a hero were deleted, albeit as part of broader changes in which the whole last 30 years of history of Afghanistan were removed. Although the MoE did not say the change was meant to appease the Taleban, Minister Wardak did state that the

intention was to make the textbooks less controversial:

'There are hundreds and thousands of issues over which there is disagreement in the nation,' he told the BBC. 'My responsibility is to bring unity not disunity in the country. I am not going to encourage a divisive education agenda. 'Now, if I am writing something over which there is no national consensus – I am taking the disagreement, even the war to the class, and school of Afghanistan. I will never do that.'²

After the talks with the armed opposition started in 2010, the MoE also included former Taleban figures in the commission for the curriculum of Islamic subjects: Abdul Hakim Mojahid, Arsala Rahmani (assassinated in Kabul by the Dadullah network on 13 May 2012),³ Pir Mohammad Rohani (former Taleban chief of Kabul University), alongside Mr Kashaaf, the head of the National Ulema council and some other members of this council.⁴

The trend described in the earlier report, of re-opening schools with acquiescence of the (local) Taleban, was partially reversed during 2012 in Ghazni, Wardak and Nangrahar, among others. There is, moreover, conflicting information on whether the trend in declining attacks on schools continued in 2011–12. Attacks against schools continued being reported in 2010–11, even if sources agree that overall numbers were below the 2006–9 peak. In the period March–September 2011, the MoE claimed to have recorded just 11 attacks on schools, compared to 28 in 1389 (2010/11) and 32 in 1388 (2009/10).⁵ UNAMA

figures do not seem to confirm a further decline of violence in 2011 after the 2010 drop. According to UNAMA, 35 schools were burnt and 32 forcefully closed in 2011, although it should be noted that the base periods are different and direct comparison is not possible.⁶ Official data for 2012 was not available yet at the time of writing, but attacks have spread to new areas, such as previously untouched Bamian and Jowzjan provinces, indicating that progress is at least mixed.⁷

Several questions remained about what was really going on in the Afghan educational system, in particular concerning the character of the MoE engagement with the Taleban, the presence of different attitudes within the Taleban, and the prospects of further developments. This was however not reflected in press accounts surrounding AAN's 2011 report, with several media outlets mistakenly reporting the existence of a deal with the Taleban at the top levels of the MoE.⁸

In addition, new questions arose surrounding the apparent backtracking of the Taleban in some areas. This report therefore aims to take stock of recent developments and to further explore issues left somewhat unclear by the previous report. The present report is largely based on information provided by both MoE officials in Kabul and Taleban cadres in Peshawar. It also reviews three provinces (Ghazni, Wardak and Nangrahar) where school closures caused uprisings, violence or animated debates and draws conclusions about the state of the negotiations concerning schools.

This report is based on 17 additional face-to-face interviews with Taleban cadres of various levels, linked to both the Quetta and the Peshawar

² Bilal Sarwary, 'Why Afghanistan's Past Is Being "Rewritten"', *BBC News*, 18 August 2012; <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-18579315>.

³ Bill Roggio, 'Mullah Dadullah Front Claims Assassination of Afghan High Peace Council Member', *The Long War Journal*, 4 May 2012, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/05/mullah_dadullah_fron_1.php#ixzz2OdfHB4c8.

⁴ Communication with Amanullah Eman, spokesperson of the Ministry of Education, November 2012.

⁵ 'Afghan Official Says Number of Attacks on Schools Declining', *BBC Monitoring International Reports*, text of report by Afghan Arzu TV, 18 December 2011. These figures do not exactly match the figures provided by the MoE on other occasions that were utilised in Giustozzi and Franco, 'Battle for the Schools' [see FN1], although the time periods were different: 16 schools destroyed in 2010 and 40 in 2009.

⁶ Report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council (A/66/782-S/2012/261) issued on 26 April 2012, <http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/6A89029BD14B9B2285257A4B00711127>.

⁷ 'Taleban Attack Girls' School in Afghanistan's Bamian Province for First Time', *BBC Monitoring International Reports*, text of report National Afghanistan TV, 12 October 2012, National Afghanistan TV, Kabul, in Pashto 1530gmt 11 October 2012; Programme summary of Afghan Ariana TV news in Dari 1530 GMT 6 July 2012.

⁸ Giustozzi and Franco, 'Battle for the Schools' [see FN1]. For an example of mistaken press commentaries see Julian Borger, 'Kabul "Agreed Deal with Taleban" to End Attacks on Schools, Report Reveals', *Guardian.co.uk*, 13 December 2011.

Shuras, all the way up to the education commissioner in Peshawar, as well as with MoE officials, witnesses of Taleban violence and participants in the 'uprisings' against the Taleban. Most, but not all, of the senior Taleban cadres interviewed come under the authority of the Peshawar Shura. The interviews were carried out in September through December 2012. In addition, five telephone interviews were carried out with Taleban cadres and leaders in August 2012 through March 2013.

This report discusses a number of actors. First of all, the Taleban, who are themselves divided into groups and factions. Among these factions one finds differing attitudes towards schools, varying connections with the MoE, and varying relations with local communities, with some groups of Taleban being more influenced by local elders than others. Second, this report discusses the MoE as the obvious counterpart in the negotiations entertained by the Taleban at every level: district, provincial and national. In Afghanistan's centralised system, heads of education departments at the district and province levels should not initiate negotiations with the armed opposition without being authorised by the MoE, which indicates that these officials either were authorised from Kabul, or acted beyond the limits of their prerogatives. Third, the report looks into the views and roles of other relevant actors, including representatives of the local population and the underground Hezb-e Islami, led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. Elders and students provided insights on how the agreements with the Taleban were perceived at the local level. The role of Hezb-e Islami was important because it was reported to have quickly and successfully negotiated a deal with the MoE to not attack schools and also to have played a role in the uprisings by helping to mobilise armed men against the Taleban. The relationship between Hekmatyar's Hezb-e Islami and the Taleban has always been fraught with ups and downs: sometimes the two organisations collaborate in the insurgency and at other times fight each other. The 'uprisings' were certainly not the first occasion in which Taleban and Hezb-e Islami clashed directly; in the past they fought even more serious battles in a number of provinces, including Wardak (but not Ghazni or Nangrahar). Hezb-e Islami's

involvement in the 'uprisings', therefore, was not a turning point in its relationship with the Taleban, but it is important to note its involvement and the enabling role that it played in the armed resistance to the Taleban.

2 THE TALEBAN'S POSITION

2.1 The Education Commissions

To better understand the mechanics and implementation of the ban on education locally, it is crucial to understand the Taleban structure and how it makes decisions and to note that Taleban structures are not always organised in a straightforward way and that fissures internal to the movement have an impact on decision-making.

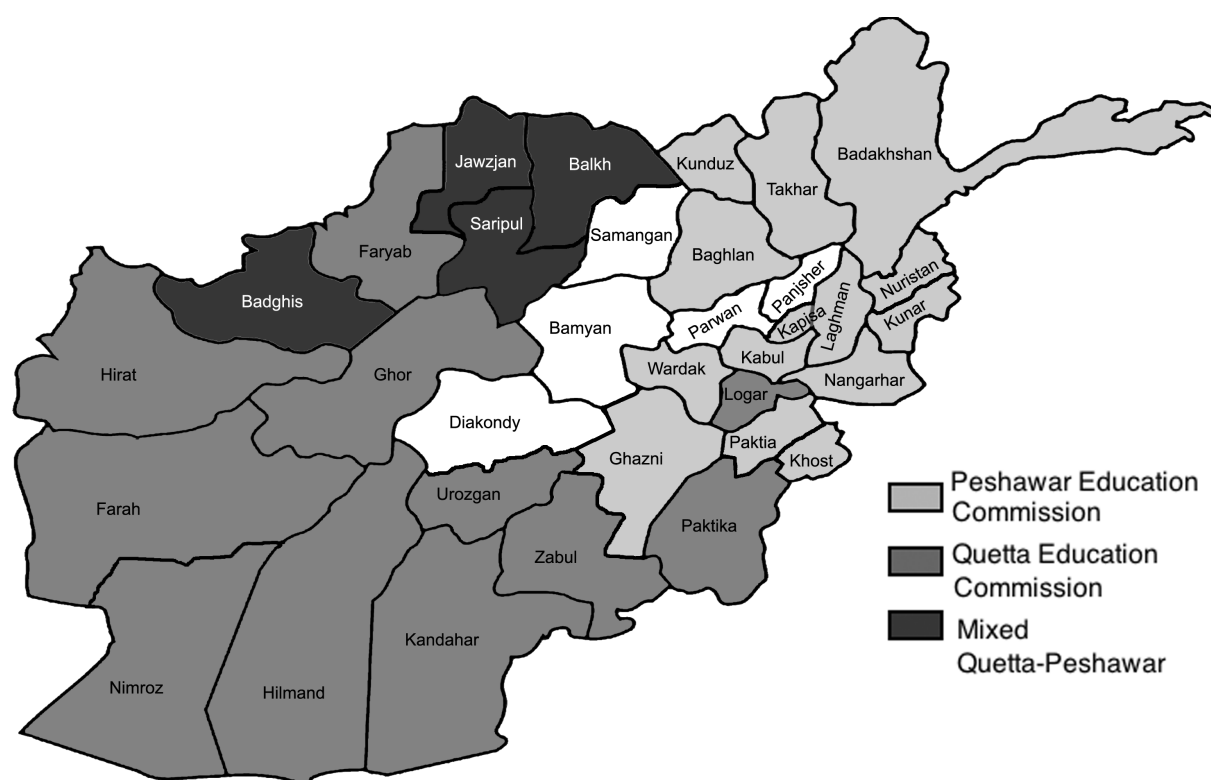
Since the early years of the Taleban insurgency (which started in late 2002), its Pakistan-based leadership has been organising itself in a number of commissions, committees and councils that have gradually expanded following the intensification of the Taleban's effort to present themselves as the legitimate government and the counter state. The Education Commission was one of several dedicated to specific issues and playing the role of shadow ministries. The Education Commission first appeared in 2006 in Quetta. In 2009 a second Education Commission, of similar powers, appeared in Peshawar under the supervision of the Peshawar Shura of the Taleban.⁹ There are therefore two Taleban Education Commissions. The Peshawar one is headed by Education Commissioner (Massul) Mawlawi Abdul Ghani, while the other is based in Quetta and is headed by Mawlawi Ahmad Jan Akhwanzada. According to the Peshawar commission itself, they divide their responsibility over the provinces as illustrated in Map 1.¹⁰ The distribution of responsibility does not follow entirely the military chain of command of the Taleban: most noteworthy, Logar is under the Quetta Education Commission despite being under the Peshawar Military Commission, and vice-versa Ghazni is under the Quetta Military Commission but falls

⁹ Personal communications with Taleban cadres in Quetta and Peshawar, summer 2012.

¹⁰ Interview with Mawlawi Ghani, President of the Education Commission in Peshawar, December 2012.

Map 1

Areas of responsibility for the Quetta and Peshawar Education Commissions



under the Peshawar Education Commission. The reason for this incoherence is that Wardak and Ghazni have a joint education commission, based in Wardak, while Logar appears to have been assigned to Quetta in compensation for the 'loss' of Ghazni and in consideration of the strong presence of southern networks there alongside Peshawar-based networks.¹¹

The two commissions do not really cooperate and are organised in different ways; their activities overlap in areas where both have influence. The Peshawar one operates through provincial education commissions, presided over by provincial education commissioners, who in turn supervise district education commissioners. Not all districts have an education commissioner and in such cases the military commissioner handles education matters. The education commissioners in any case are part of the provincial and district military commissions where they work closely with the military commissioner who implements any ban on schools.

The Peshawar Education Commission is composed of five members according to Education Commissioner Ghani, who as of December 2012 was the only Afghan on the commission; the other four were Pakistanis, despite the fact that the commission only operates in Afghanistan:

- Mawlawi Abdul Ghani, president (Afghan);
- Qari Rizwan, nephew of Mullah Fazl-ur-Rahman of the Shura Jami'at-e Ulema-e- Islami (a Pakistani political party);
- Qari Tahir of the Sunnat-ul Jami'at (another Pakistani organisation);
- Mawlawi Eftikhar of the Tahriki Taleban-e-Pakistan (TTP); and
- Mawlawi Qari Eid Gul, son of Abdul Saleh, president of the Peshawar Shura.

Mawlawi Fazal, also a Pakistani, was the assistant to Ghani as of March 2013. Several pro-Taleban Pakistanis, members of jihadist organisations, sit in the Peshawar Shura, so their presence in the education commission as well should not come as

¹¹ Personal communication with Taleban cadre in Peshawar, March 2013.

a surprise.¹² Also, many if not most Ulema supporting and advising the Taleban are Pakistani. Ghani, the head, reports to Abdul Saleh, the president of the Peshawar Shura of the Taleban, who countersigns the decisions of the education commission. According to an official of the commission, the order to close schools in Ghazni, Nangrahar and Wardak in 2012 was issued by Saleh. Another Peshawar Shura leader influential in education policy making was indicated as Qari Habibullah, one of Saleh's deputies.¹³

Under the Quetta Education Commission, the commissioners have tasks similar to those working under the Peshawar Shura, but the environment in which they operate is different. Under Quetta, the education commissioners in the provinces work under the provincial shadow governors. Because the authority of the governors is weaker than that of the military commissioners and not coordinated at the top of the Taleban's structure in Pakistan, the work of the education commissioners is less coherent. To further complicate their task, they deal with a number of Taleban networks, which are not well coordinated by any supreme authority. The main networks are Abdul Qayyum Zakir's, Mullah Sattar's, Mullah Janan's, Mullah Baradar's, Dadullah's and Mullah Naim's, but there are others. These networks are semi-autonomous and are first of all loyal to their own leaders. Where no education official is present and the governor is also absent, some network representative will take responsibility.¹⁴

The Quetta Education Commission has four Afghan members. As of December 2012 the members were:

- Mawlawi Sahib Abbas;
- Mawlawi Noor Mohammad;
- Mawlawi Hafizullah; and
- Mawlawi Dost Mohammad.

¹² Personal communications with Taleban cadres in Peshawar, summer 2012 and March 2013.

¹³ Interview with Mawlawi Ghani, President of the Education Commission in Peshawar, December 2012.

¹⁴ Interview with Mawlawi Ghani, President of the Education Commission in Peshawar, December 2012; interview with Taleban cadre in Jaghori district, December 2012. For more information on the Taleban networks and leadership structure see AAN's forthcoming report by Claudio Franco and Antonio Giustozzi.

Until early 2013 the Quetta Education Commission did not have a president; the four members were all peers. From February 2013 the Quetta Education Commission has however been presided over by Ahmad Jan Akhunzada and two deputies were also appointed: Mawlawi Abdul Jalal and Amir Khan Mutaqi.¹⁵

The Peshawar Education Commission claims to be better organised and to keep track of anything concerning the Taleban and education. According to one source, Educational Commissioner Ghani in Peshawar claimed that 257 schools were burnt down when the campaign against schools began until September 2012, with 68 teachers and 210 students killed. Ghani said on a different occasion that the two commissions (Quetta's and Peshawar's) closed 385 schools, while allowing the re-opening of 100 in the first 11 months of 2012. According to Commissioner Ghani, the closures were inflicted against schools which did not respect the rules imposed by the Taleban, with the exception of Ghazni as explained below. According to the same source, both the Quetta and the Peshawar commissions ordered schools to close in 2012: 200 were closed by Quetta and 185 by Peshawar. The Peshawar Education Commission also kept a record of how many teachers were fired between January and November 2012 at what they claim was the request of the Taleban (2,385), and how many were hired on the same basis (1,265). As discussed in the previous report, the Taleban also try to sponsor private and NGO schools which accept the Taleban's conditions; this was confirmed by the Commissioner Ghani, according to whom 89 such schools were opened in the first 11 months of 2012.¹⁶

A cadre insisted that the Taleban's position on the schools is dictated by the most recent version of the *Layha*, which he proceeded to quote:

- 1: It is the right of human beings to get education, but:

¹⁵ Interview with Mawlawi Ghani, President of the Education Commission in Peshawar, December 2012; interview with high-level Taleban cadre in Quetta, March 2013.

¹⁶ Interviews with Mawlawi Ghani, President of the Education Commission in Peshawar, September and December 2012.

- 2: in those areas which are under the control of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, any Afghan can open schools but they must contact the Taleban's academic administration [that is the Taleban's provincial or district education commissioners].
- 3: In those areas which have schools or where schools are opening, the books, teachers and lessons must be under Taleban observation. The lesson should be delivered as dictated by the Taleban.
- 4: The Taleban do not allow those subjects which are against jihad, women's freedom [as defined by the Taleban] and Muslims.
- 5: Male teachers don't have the right to teach female students and female teachers don't have right to teach male students.
- 6: In education the focus must be on Islamic subjects such as Quran-e Sharif, Fiqh, Aqaid, Hadith and Arabic subjects. This must be from first class to the end of education.
- 7: The teachers must be Afghans.
- 8: The clothes of teachers and students must be Islamic style.
- 9: The administrator of every school must give a monthly report to the responsible person in that area and tell the teachers not to motivate students against Islam and jihad.
- 10: The teacher who works against Islam and jihad must be punished and fired from the job.
- 11: Those schools which are against Taleban and jihad will be closed.
- 12: Those girls who are going to school and studying with boys must be warned two times; if they do not stop going to such classes, they must be killed.
- 13: Those teachers who make programs and courses for girls and help them to fight against their right, must be warned; if not then that teacher must be killed too.¹⁷

These conditions resemble closely what was already found in the 2011 AAN report, but with

additional conditions such as demands that teachers report to the Taleban. It is not clear whether these conditions were already in place, but were missed in the 2010–11 interviews, or whether they have been introduced recently. There have been claims that the Education Commission is involved in paying salaries as well. According to Taleban sources in Wardak, the MoE is required to pay the salaries of teachers who are hired on the Taleban's recommendations, through the local Taleban education commissions, which then proceed to pay the teachers. This however has not been independently confirmed.

Additional conditions mentioned by the Taleban in Wardak include an increase in government funding for madrasas (the Taleban want at least ten functioning madrasas in each province), that the MoE abstains from stopping students from joining the Taleban, and the abolition of English classes for girls.¹⁸

Schools open with Taleban authorisation are reported to have Taleban informers (typically three, according to the Taleban), who report to the local education commissioner what is going on in the school. If a school does not comply with the rules imposed by the Taleban, the commission in Peshawar may order the school closed and, failing that, attacks on education staff. The district and provincial education commissions, in principle, do not have the authority to order closures or attacks.¹⁹ According to Peshawar Education Commissioner Ghani, targeted attacks against MoE staff and even students who refuse to comply with Taleban rules is official policy of the Taleban, whereas attacking school buildings is banned.²⁰ As discussed below, it is unclear to what extent this ban is being effectively upheld.

In sum the interviews suggest that as far as the Taleban leadership (at least the education commission in Peshawar) is concerned, the stated policy towards education did not change

¹⁷ Interview with Andar Shadow District Governor Haji Rasul, October 2012. These 'rules' were not contained in the 2011 edition of the *Layha*, but appear in the new edition that was approved in 2012 but has not been widely circulated at the time of this writing. The *Layha* is in fact a compilation of rules issued by the Taleban from time to time, so these specific rules might have been issued separately from the *Layha* to be integrated into the next edition of the *Layha*.

¹⁸ Interviews with two Taleban cadres in Wardak, December 2012.

¹⁹ Interviews with two district Taleban military commissioners, December 2012.

²⁰ Interview with Mawlawi Ghani, President of the Education Commission in Peshawar, December 2012. On Peshawar's and Quetta's organisation see AAN's forthcoming report by Claudio Franco and Antonio Giustozzi [see FN14].

substantially in 2012. More-detailed demands may have been added to those already issued in 2010–11, but nothing that would represent a major turn. Talks and contacts with the MoE have reportedly continued in 2012. The interviews suggest that the more-structured talks were limited to discussions with the Peshawar Commission, although ad hoc meetings seem to have happened between MoE officials and local cadres of southern networks to discuss re-opening schools (see *The Role of the Ministry of Education* below).²¹

2.2 Differences among the Taliban

The way the Taliban are organised from a military point of view is relevant to understanding their behaviour towards state education. As of 2012 the Taliban were characterised by a dualistic organisational structure, with a structured and relatively centralised command-and-control system centred in Peshawar, and a decentralised management system based on semi-autonomous networks, centred in Quetta.²² In part the two systems overlapped, as in some areas the networks were incorporated into the command-and-control system of Peshawar (the Military Commission). Some networks totally refused the authority of the Military Commission and other cooperated to varying extents. This power struggle within the Taliban complicates the analysis of Taliban decision-making concerning schools, because the Military Commission supervised the Education Commissioners in areas where it had full power, but elsewhere the Taliban networks were still deciding autonomously how to behave in a whole range of issues, including education.²³

²¹ In Jaghori, where the presence of the Taliban is very modest, one such cadre claimed to have met a senior MoE official for negotiations in two distinct occasions, April 2011 and June 2012. Interview with Taliban cadre in Jaghori district, December 2012, October 2012, and with MoE official.

²² The characterisation of Quetta's chain of command as not clearly defined and organised, with each network having its own policy concerning schools, is largely based in sources within the Peshawar shura. Although this description may be partially self-serving, there are reasons to believe that it is fairly accurate.

²³ For a discussion of this matter see AAN's forthcoming report by Claudio Franco and Antonio Giustozzi [see FN14].

As a result confusion is considerable over the Taliban's attitude towards schools. While both the Taliban and the MoE in Kabul deny that the Taliban have been attacking schools since 2010, attacks still take place and they are usually attributed to the Taliban by other Afghan government agencies. While not all reported incidents might be the result of insurgent attacks (in particular with regard to the mysterious 'school poisonings'),²⁴ the question remains how such attacks might be explained. In the interviews carried out for the earlier 2011 report, some Taliban and elders argued that the Taliban were divided over the issue of re-opening schools while others accused unspecified foreign intelligence agencies or foreign Taliban of being responsible for the attacks. This was repeated during interviews in 2012.

In the new series of interviews carried out for this update, the Taliban still mostly denied being involved in violent attacks.²⁵ A Taliban cadre in Peshawar, working with the Education Commission, was adamant that attacks on schools bring disrepute to the Taliban (as opposed to attacks on education staff which he considered more narrowly targeted) and criticised Quetta for not enforcing a clear policy on this (whether Peshawar's policy or any other). This is a usual criticism by the better-organised Peshawar Shura towards the fragmented Quetta Shura, not just in matters of education. This source stated that in December 2012, mediation involving the leader of the Quetta Military Commission, Abdul Qayyum Zakir, had aimed to reach a common understanding concerning education issues. Despite a split in Quetta between the supporters of Akhtar Mansur and Zakir in autumn 2012, the two

²⁴ See for instance "‘Mass Hysteria’ Likely behind Reports of Taliban Poisoning Afghan Schoolgirls: Expert", *AFP*, 28 May 2012, <http://tolonews.com/en/afghanistan/6380-mass-hysteria-likely-behind-reports-of-taliban-poisoning-afghan-schoolgirls-expert>.

²⁵ See also *BBC Monitoring International Reports*, 'Programme Summary of Nangrahar Killid Radio News 1230 GMT 11 Jul 2012', for report of an attack in Achin; 'Programme summary of Afghan Ariana TV News in Dari 1530 GMT 6 Jul 12', on Jowzjan; 'Taliban Deny Burning Schools, Poisoning Students', text of a statement by the Islamic Emirate regarding burning of schools and poisoning of female students in the country published in Afghan Taliban Voice of Jihad website on 27 May 2012.

factions continued to cooperate in the Quetta Education Commission, with two members each (Dost Mohammed and Abas belonging to Mansur's faction). A first achievement of the negotiation effort was the appointment of Akhundzada at the top of the commission, meeting Peshawar's key demand: that the Quetta Commission establishes a clear line of authority. Reportedly the president of the Peshawar Shura, Abdul Saleh, had been so upset with Quetta's inability (or unwillingness) to act coherently that he had refused to have direct talks with the Quetta Education Commission even when Zakir offered to bring the Quetta Education Commission to Peshawar. According to the same source mentioned above, Peshawar had also approached Dadullah's network over the issue, but without success.²⁶

At the official level the MoE, including Minister Wardak, tended to endorse Taliban claims that they did not attack schools, often accusing 'foreign intelligence agencies' of being responsible, saying, 'In many cases the Afghan Taliban has not committed the arson of schools, but rather it's been done by strangers.'²⁷ NDS (National Directorate of Security) sources however hinted that although dedicated underground structures for disrupting the Afghan educational system existed, these are part of the Taliban and the Taliban do not oppose their aims. A security official referred to Abdul Qayyum Zakir, head of the Quetta Military Commission, as being involved in the attacks.²⁸ As indicated in the 2011 AAN

report, allegations of attacks on schools being the preserve of foreign fighters or Taliban elements closely linked to foreign intelligence services are nothing new. The credibility of such claims, however, remains a point of contention.

Although Peshawar denies having ordered school burnings, it maintains that Quetta's disorganisation may allow Taliban networks based there to pursue their own aims towards state schools, including violent attacks. The Peshawar Education Commission receives reports from all of Afghanistan through the Military Commission and keeps a record of attacks, even attributing them to different Taliban networks. They attributed just over 50 per cent of such attacks to Dadullah's network, 20 per cent and 10 per cent respectively to Sattar's and Janan's networks and the remaining 20 per cent or so to foreign jihadists.²⁹ The attacks attributed to Dadullah, Sattar, Janan and the foreign Taliban occur not only in the southern provinces, but in fact mostly in the areas under the responsibility of Peshawar, where the southern networks also operate. More schools exist in eastern Afghanistan, where support for schools is more rooted in local communities, which have been more exposed to state education, so targets are more plentiful than in the south.³⁰ Because of the overlap between the areas of Peshawar's responsibility and those of the southern networks, it is not so easy to determine which networks promote violence against schools by simply looking at the geographical distribution of the violence. Such attacks are, according to Taliban sources, not necessarily motivated by the desire to punish schools which have not been respecting the Taliban's rules, but seem to occur at random as well. Taliban cadres in Wardak and Ghazni supported claims that violence was the result of the activities of a few Taliban networks, mentioning Dadullah's people as the main troublemakers. While adding that some other networks might have carried out attacks for mercenary reasons, or under direct orders, they

²⁶ Interview with Taliban cadre in Peshawar, December 2012; communication with Taliban cadre in Peshawar, March 2013. It is unclear how the Quetta Shura views this.

²⁷ Jawed Stanikzai, 'Minister Claims School Arson Not the Work of Taliban', *ToloNews*, 28 February 2013, <http://tolonews.com/en/afghanistan/9620-minister-claims-school-arson-not-the-work-of-taliban>.

²⁸ 'Outsiders Blamed for Attacks on Schools,' *Pajhwok News Agency*, 9 May 2012, <http://watanafghanistan.tumblr.com/post/22984696264/outside-blamed-for-attacks-on-schools>; Ratbil Shamel, 'Afghans Defend Their Schools against the Taliban', *Deutsche Welle*, 5 July 2012, <http://www.dw.de/afghans-defend-their-schools-against-the-taliban/a-16073726>. It should be noted that while Zakir as head of the southern military commission is responsible for Ghazni, he is not responsible for either Wardak or Nangrahar. Most interviewees among the Taliban cadres in the field assessed the causes of attacks on schools in terms similar to the Peshawar source.

²⁹ The networks of Dadullah (named after the defunct Taliban military commander, killed in 2007), Sattar and Janan are three of the main networks which form the Quetta Shura.

³⁰ See Antonio Giustozzi, 'Nation-Building Is Not for All', *Afghanistan Analysts Network*, Thematic report 02/2010, <http://www.aan-afghanistan.org/uploads/AAN-Politics-of-Education.pdf>.

explicitly mentioned that the Haqqani network never attacks schools.³¹

Two Taleban interviewees pointed out that many of the rank-and-file of Dadullah's network are not Afghans; in particular they believe this network has close relations with Lashkar-e Jhangvi, the Pakistani jihadist group. Dadullah's men are believed to operate sometimes within the framework of the Taleban's military structure and sometimes independently. However, these are all allegations made by Taleban who dislike Dadullah's people. Dadullah's men, when challenged by the military commissioners, deny any involvement in attacks against schools. Other networks are also believed to be willing to carry out attacks against schools and educational staff if ordered by the Military Commission or for mercenary reasons – reportedly prizes are given for attacks carried out by 'foreign intelligence agencies':³²

Those responsible for these attacks are spy and intelligence groups, for example Pakistan ISI, and also some Taleban which belong to Pakistan. We want to protect schools from their attacks and give them punishment, if we find them. We also have information that Hezb-e-Islam is also involved in these attacks.³³

The other southern networks of the Taleban are reportedly not involved in violence against schools, except for Zakir's network, which is accused by the NDS of attacking schools. Among the southerners, the network most opposed to violence against schools is reportedly Naim's.³⁴ Some Taleban interviewees tried to substantiate their claims of being opposed to attacks on schools with details of clashes with 'anti-school Taleban'. Naim's cadre in Jaghori³⁵ claimed, for example, to have tried to prevent attacks on schools, although he could not

stop them entirely.³⁶ In Nawa district, following an attack against a school in Qala-ye Khoon village by a group belonging to Dadullah's network, another Taleban combat group clashed with Dadullah's men and six Taleban were killed in the ensuing fire fight.³⁷

A senior Taleban figure alleged that Western intelligence agencies are manipulating some groups of Taleban into attacking schools, in order to damage the movement, but he did not provide details.³⁸ The Taleban routinely make such allegations, although as discussed in Section 4 below, it was much more common for our Taleban interviewees to make this allegation against the Pakistani security services. In addition, the district- and province-level cadres as well as sources in Peshawar claim that the ISI has been relying on purposely formed sabotage-and-hit teams (staffed by a mix of Pakistanis and 'Pakistanised' Afghans recruited by Tehrik-e Taleban Pakistan or TTP, Lashkar-e Taiba and Lashkar-e Jhangvi) for attacking soft civilian targets inside Afghanistan. These teams are reportedly small (rarely exceeding ten members) and get rewarded with substantial payments for carrying out attacks on selected targets. The Taleban believe that the real reason the ISI insists on harsh punishment is not just because the rules should be implemented forcefully, but because the Pakistanis aim at weakening the political legitimacy of the Taleban and preventing them from establishing a negotiating position of their own.³⁹

This could of course be an attempt to scapegoat others for the Taleban's most unpopular activities. Sometimes that does indeed appear to be the case, particularly when the Taleban use language similar to the Afghan government's language, blaming foreign intelligence networks and the 'enemies of the Afghan people'. One district education commissioner, for instance, denied that the Taleban had damaged any schools and accused

³¹ Interview with district military commissioner, Wardak, December 2012; interview with Taleban cadre, Andar, October 2012.

³² Interviews with Taleban cadres in Chak and Sayedabad, December 2012; communication with Taleban cadre in Peshawar, October 2012.

³³ Interview with Taleban cadre, Andar, October 2012.

³⁴ The Jaghori Taleban cadre, who belongs to Naim's network, stated that he did close down schools following his orders, but only reluctantly so. Ghazni province is under the authority of the Quetta Shura (hence is mainly populated by southern networks).

³⁵ [See FN34].

³⁶ Interview with Taleban Hazara cadre, Jaghori district, December 2012.

³⁷ Interview with Taleban cadre, Nawa district, December 2012.

³⁸ Interview with Mawlawi Ghani, President of the Education Commission in Peshawar, December 2012.

³⁹ High-level Taleban source in Peshawar, contacted November 2012; interview with district military commissioner, Wardak, December 2012.

'intelligence agencies' and Hezb-e Islami of conspiring against the Taleban:

We did not torch schools but we did close those schools which work against Islam and Jihad. If we didn't manage to close the schools then we'd kill the head master and would not let the students keep studying. Teaching is a holy work but if a teacher is working against Islam and jihad even if he were our father, we would kill him. Yes there were demonstrations but these demonstrations were planned by Hezb-e Islami against us. We know the people who burn schools; they are intelligence people and Hezb-e Islami people. They want to present us in a negative light and find a place for themselves in the people's heart, so we gathered people and told them if we arrest these people, we will stone them to death. . . . Burning schools, throwing acid on girls' faces are the works of the enemies of the Taleban and of the Afghan people. If we arrest such people, we will give them such punishment that no one will repeat such crime again.⁴⁰

The district education commissioner stated that in one case in Jalrez, he stopped some Taleban who wanted to burn a school and had them investigated. They were subsequently accused of being on the 'ISI's paybook' and executed. He also alleged an Iranian involvement in some of these attacks not authorised by the Taleban leadership. One of the province's district military commissioners stated that he had personally arrested an individual who had been paid by the TTP to attack a school.⁴¹ This commissioner commented acidly on the attitude of Pakistani jihadist groups towards education in Afghanistan:

They belong to different groups like Lashkar-e Jhangvi, Sunnat-ul-Jamiat, Tehrik-e Taleban and Jamiat-ul Ulema. Unfortunately the daughter of Jamiat's leader is studying in London, but here in Afghanistan his organisation doesn't let girls to go to school.⁴²

Some MoE officials also accuse the Pakistani intelligence of being behind the attacks because of their desire to 'prevent the development of Afghanistan'.⁴³

It is difficult to say whether the Taleban are simply denying responsibility for unpopular actions or whether a rogue element within the Taleban really is attacking schools. But indications are that at least some of the school burnings have been ordered through the Taleban chain of command. For instance, a (different) district military commissioner in Wardak explained:

In one month we burned two schools and closed three schools in Maidan Shar. We did this because we told them not to open the schools but they opened anyway.⁴⁴

The district military commissioner explicitly admitted having ordered his subordinate combat units to attack schools. The implication is that while some attacks might be rogue ones, others are ordered by the leadership as a result of a confirmed lack of compliance with the rules:

To our groups the order of burning or closing comes from the Peshawar Shura, but to other groups I don't know. When we close or burn schools, before that we do a complete research or investigation. When we find problems, then we close or burn the schools, otherwise not.⁴⁵

The existence of both authorised and unauthorised attacks was confirmed by one of the Wardak district military commissioners:

Sometimes [the front leader] needs authorization from the district military commissioner but sometimes they attack without the authorization from the district military commissioner. When the military commissioner or commission asks a local front leader why there were attacks on schools, the local front leader rejects that his front carried

⁴⁰ Interview with Taleban district education commissioner, Wardak, October 2012.

⁴¹ Interview with district Military Commissioner 2, Wardak, December 2012.

⁴² Interview with district Military Commissioner 2, Wardak, December 2012.

⁴³ For example, interview with MoE official, Nangrahar Education, October 2012.

⁴⁴ Interview with district Military Commissioner 1, Wardak, December 2012.

⁴⁵ Interview with district Military Commissioner 1, Wardak, December 2012.

out that action, even if really the action or attack was done by them.⁴⁶

Sources in Peshawar acknowledge that schools are targeted on the basis of information provided by the Taleban intelligence networks. The allegation is that 'teams' carry out rogue attacks not authorised by the leadership, including the most controversial ones such as acid attacks, while other attacks are carried out by groups of Afghan Taleban.⁴⁷

On the whole, research in the provinces suggests that some attacks against schools and against MoE staff have indeed been ordered by the Taleban leadership, or parts thereof, when threats have been insufficient to close schools down. These attacks keep up the pressure for schools to comply with Taleban orders. There are indications of diverging views between the Education Commission and the Military Commission, which leaders do not want to acknowledge so that they can maintain the image of the Taleban as a unified entity. However, it also appears probable that rogue attacks against schools occur, perhaps on the instigation of foreign agencies, or as the result of indiscipline within the Taleban's ranks and the leadership's inability to fully control the actions of some Taleban networks. It seems unlikely, however, that the Taleban's reluctance to admit attacks against schools is motivated by the unpopularity of such acts – after all, the Peshawar Shura does not hesitate to admit ordering the killing of teachers and students who did not comply with Taleban rules. Such killings must surely be more unpopular than the burning of schools.

3 THE ROLE OF THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Officially, the MoE maintains that agreements with the Taleban on re-opening schools are brokered by local community elders, sometimes through the school protection shuras organised by the MoE.⁴⁸

However, several sources in the MoE and within the Taleban confirm that direct discussions between the MoE and the Taleban took place, perhaps following contacts between Taleban and elders.⁴⁹ While the 2011 report did not provide much detail concerning such top-level negotiations, new sources within the MoE say that direct and high-level negotiations started in 2010 with both Taleban and Hezb-e Islami. Another source within the MoE indicated that negotiations with Hezb-e Islami on safeguarding schools had been relatively smooth and successful. On 4 October 2010, MoE officials and Hezb-e Islami started negotiations and reached an agreement, not just to avoid attacking schools and education staff, but also to prevent the Taleban from damaging and burning schools and killing teachers and students. This source claims that Ghairat Bahir, the head of the party's leadership council and Hekmatyar's son in law, negotiated in person, promising to help prevent Taleban attacks. MoE officials expressed sympathy for Hezb-e Islami's position: education should be Islamic and not influenced by non-Muslims, but education opportunities for girls should be guaranteed.⁵⁰ It is not that surprising, therefore, that they reached a deal. The MoE sources maintain that Hezb-e Islami respected the terms of the agreement and abstained from attacking schools, MoE staff or students. However, the Taleban claim that Hezb-e Islami is still involved in attacks.

MoE efforts to reach out to the Taleban leadership in Quetta and Peshawar had started earlier, on 13 June 2010. MoE representatives were dispatched to Pakistan to negotiate a reduction of violence against schools.⁵¹ They talked with Taleban leaders, but did not reach a formal agreement. Qari Habibullah (deputy of the Peshawar Shura) took part in several meetings; he represents the Shamshatoo component within the Peshawar Shura,⁵² which is mostly composed of former Hezbis. Habibullah himself used to be in Hezb-e

⁴⁶ Interview with district Military Commissioner 2, Wardak, December 2012.

⁴⁷ High-level Taleban source in Peshawar, contacted November 2012; interview with district military commissioner, Wardak, December 2012.

⁴⁸ See Giustozzi and Franco, 'Battle for the Schools', [see FN1], 10ff.

⁴⁹ Meeting with Kabeer Haqmal, Director of Communication and Publication Department, MoE Kabul, 16 April 2013.

⁵⁰ Interview with MoE advisor, October 2012.

⁵¹ Interview with MoE advisor, October 2012.

⁵² This is one of the key components of the Peshawar Shura; Shamshatoo is a refugee camp in Pakistan, which used to be one of the main bases of support for Hezb-e Islami.

Islami. Officials from the MoE were also able to communicate with Taleban in the provinces, including through teachers already working for the MoE. The MoE denies having issued any guidelines concerning negotiations with the Taleban, which is likely true, given the absence of a comprehensive deal with them.⁵³

While both sides acknowledge the role of elders in starting communication between the MoE and the Taleban, Taleban sources further claim that the negotiations over local agreements included direct talks between local Taleban representatives and high-level representatives of the Ministry of Education on several occasions starting in early 2010. The talks included meetings with the provincial education commissioner of Wardak province and other local Taleban cadres in March 2010 and then again in September 2010, June 2011 and February 2012. Similar meetings involving senior MoE figures are said to have taken place in Nangrahar and Ghazni; these three provinces were recognised by the Taleban as characterised by high levels of tension as far as the schools were concerned, so 'special' deals might have been arranged here.⁵⁴

MoE officials have gone on record that although they have reached local understandings with the Taleban, no comprehensive deal has been achieved:

Mohammad Sediq Patman, a deputy education minister said the government has to be flexible in order to keep schools open. In areas where the Taleban had more control, sometimes the government lets them influence what subjects are taught and even allows them to check student attendance, Patman said. 'There was no deal between the government and the Taleban, but only in order to keep the schools open and running the Education Ministry had shown flexibility to this issue,' he said.⁵⁵

Another MoE source acknowledged that in some areas the Taleban monitor schools and deal harshly with absentee teachers.⁵⁶ The Taleban, according to an MoE source, were divided over how to deal with the issue of an agreement with the MoE. According to him it was the 'foreign Taleban'⁵⁷ who opposed re-opening schools, while the 'Afghan Taleban' were in favour; the two groups reportedly 'fought and killed and wounded each other' (see below for some confirmation of this by Taleban sources). The 'Afghan Taleban', he argued, would be in favour of an agreement which guaranteed the Taleban's changes to the curriculum, in the textbooks and in the teaching staff. The 'Afghan Taleban' also wanted:

- more Islamic subjects;
- 'Afghan' teachers (meaning no exchange teachers from abroad who however would probably hardly ever turn up in the rural areas, but also implying a threat against Westernised Afghan teachers);
- gender separation for teachers and students (that is the prerequisite of the *Layha* as indicated in *The Taleban leadership's position* above).

By contrast, according to the MoE source, the 'foreign Taleban' opposed the re-opening of the schools in principle and in particular opposed girls' schools. For the MoE, the most controversial of the 'Afghan Taleban' demands was the request for curriculum changes. Within the 'Afghan Taleban', some had problems with the re-opening of girls' schools, while others were more amenable to the idea, but only under certain conditions.⁵⁸

Although no formal agreement was reached with the Taleban, some of the 'Afghan Taleban' networks reportedly promised the MoE to not attack schools, despite opposition from within the Taleban ranks. MoE sources concur with sources within the Peshawar Shura structure, indicating that these networks included at least part of the Peshawar Shura, while (as stated above) Taleban sources indicate that some components of the

⁵³ Meeting with Kabir Haqmal, Director of Communication and Publication Department, MoE Kabul, 16 April 2013.

⁵⁴ Interviews with Taleban cadres in Wardak, December 2012; interview with Mawlawi Ghani, President of the Education Commission in Peshawar, December 2012.

⁵⁵ Nick Paton Walsh, 'Taleban Tightens Grip on Afghan Schools', *CNN*, 22 May 2012,

<http://edition.cnn.com/2012/05/22/world/asia/afghanistan-taliban-schools>.

⁵⁶ Meeting with Kabir Haqmal [see FN53].

⁵⁷ It is unclear whether he meant the Taleban in the service of foreigners, or actually Pakistani Taleban.

⁵⁸ Interview with MoE advisor, October 2012.

Quetta Shura (at least Naim's) also wish to refrain from attacking schools. The MoE source stated that in areas controlled by the agreement-friendly 'Afghan Taliban', attacks on schools declined significantly. The remaining attacks were attributed by the MoE source to the Pakistani Taliban, supported by the Pakistani ISI, which is the same interpretation provided by many of the Taliban interviewees. The MoE claims that prisoners who were involved in attacks on schools stated under interrogation that the ISI had organised the attacks.⁵⁹ Overall, according to the MoE, the situation improved greatly after 2009: the number of closed schools declined from 4,000 before communication started between the MoE and the Taliban in early 2010 to 1,247 in September 2012 and 471 in March 2013 (see also *Introduction* above).⁶⁰ If correct, this data would suggest that schools have re-opened at a fast pace in late 2012 and early 2013. The MoE source believed that where the Taliban have stopped attacking schools, the Taliban's relationship with the local communities has improved.⁶¹

The MoE sources thus convey a picture of the negotiations over schools quite compatible with the one provided by the Taliban: the Peshawar leadership, at least, is seemingly interested in an agreement, even if a final deal had not been reached by the time this report was written, and, like the Taliban themselves, the MoE talks of groups ('foreign Taliban') being opposed to any agreement on schools and effectively trying to sabotage negotiations. The MoE picture is still largely one of progress towards reducing violence against schools even in 2012, despite some local setbacks, with more schools re-opening. While such a picture is not altogether unwarranted, there are problems with it. As discussed above, while the Taliban Education Commission clearly is trying to regulate violence against the educational establishment, this does not mean that violence is abandoned, just that it may be more carefully

targeted. Attacks on educational personnel continue and, despite claims to the contrary, some Taliban sources admit that at least some of the attacks on schools are being ordered from above.

4 FINDINGS FROM THE PROVINCES

As explained in the introduction, the issue of the role of the Taliban in state education in Afghanistan was brought back to public attention by an anti-Taliban uprising in Ghazni in May 2012. After the Ghazni governor closed the roads to motorbikes and the Taliban retaliated in April by closing schools, students and teachers demonstrated against the governor in Ghazni town, accusing him of not having taken any measures to protect the schools, while some rural communities fought to defend the schools against the Taliban. Forty-eight schools re-opened after communities took up arms (the so called 'uprisings') against the closure of schools in Andar, Qarabagh and Moqur.⁶² 'Uprisings' were then reported in other provinces as well, although the extent to which all these episodes of armed resistance against the Taliban could be considered a wave of imitation of the Ghazni uprising is far from clear. This section discusses in detail three case studies where our research effort was focused: Ghazni, Nangrahar and Wardak. Each case had local origins and roots, but in all cases it was essentially prevarication against local schools and educational staff by the Taliban that set off a reaction. The cases were not necessarily connected to each other: the Ghazni uprising might have represented a vague encouragement for the anti-Taliban elements in Wardak and Nangrahar. The 'uprisings' in Wardak and Nangrahar were very modest in comparison to Ghazni's and some of the others, and at the outset of the research the importance of school closures in these 'uprisings' was not yet clear. While the Ghazni uprising started in May 2012, the small outbursts of protest in favour of the schools occurred in Wardak in August-

⁵⁹ The allegations against ISI paying Taliban or insurgents to attack schools are circulated widely and were known in detail even to students (interview with Sayedabad student Omar Gul, October 2012).

⁶⁰ Interview with MoE advisor, October 2012; 'Still 471 Schools Remain Closed', *Ariana News*, 19 March 2013, <http://ariananews.af/regional/still-471-schools-remain-closed-moe/>.

⁶¹ Interview with MoE advisor, October 2012.

⁶² Interview with MoE official, Ghazni, October 2012. For a similar account see Yaroslav Trofimov and Habib Khan Totakhil, 'Lessons Learned in Afghan School Closures', *Wall Street Journal*, 18 May 2012, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702303879604577410081056024316.html>.

September 2012 and in Nangrahar in September 2012.⁶³ And while the two small uprisings in Wardak and Nangrahar seem to have lasted a few days only, the Ghazni one was still going on at the end of 2012. In Ghazni the wave of Taleban school closures in 2012 was much stronger and more widespread than the few schools closed down in either Wardak or Nangrahar, a fact which probably fuelled the strong anti-Taleban resistance.

Therefore, while something was definitely going on concerning the Taleban and schools during those months, speaking of a 'wave of uprisings' might be an exaggeration.

The remainder of Section 4 first discusses Taleban violence and coercive measures against schools in each of the three provinces and the findings with regard to the 'uprising'. Then factors are examined that may have played a role in the 'uprisings' even if they were not the immediate cause, such as allegations of Taleban indoctrination in schools. Despite the media's tendency to magnify the 'uprisings' and reports of the Taleban being upset by this, local-level negotiations over the re-opening of the schools continued, as discussed in the last paragraph of Section 4.

4.1 School Closures and Attacks

Ghazni

The initial 2012 Taleban crackdown on schools occurred in Ghazni. Until the crackdown, Ghazni was in line with the rest of the country as far as schools were concerned. The April 2012 blanket closure of the schools was specific to Ghazni and was ordered by the Taleban in retaliation for the governor's order banning motorbikes on the roads.⁶⁴ It appears

that closing down schools was the only effective way to exercise pressure on the government, particularly where the government did not have much presence otherwise. The head of the MoE in Ghazni tried to convince Governor Musa Khan Akbarzada not to go ahead with the motorbike ban as he feared grave consequences for the schools, but the governor did not agree. The MoE officials tried to portray themselves as neutral in this particular conflict. A commonly held position among MoE staff was that all sides in the conflict should refrain from using schools for their own purposes and involving them in the motorbike conflict.⁶⁵

As of September 2012, of 380 primary and secondary schools in Ghazni, 28 had been destroyed or damaged and 110 were closed because of threats; the majority of the closed schools re-opened in 2010–12 before being closed again as a result of the Taleban May crackdown.⁶⁶ The closures also disproportionately affected Pashtun areas. Many schools in Hazara districts of Ghazni have remained open so far and many other schools are clustered around the provincial capital and the district centres where they enjoy some protection from Taleban pressure. In the more remote, Pashtun populated districts of Ghazni, fewer schools were established in the first place, compared to more accessible and more secure areas. Therefore, the 110 schools which were closed as of September 2012 represented a very large portion of village-based schools in the Pashtun districts of Ghazni.

The Taleban shadow governor confirmed that the Taleban closed schools in response to the ban on motorbikes. He essentially argued that although the Taleban have a policy on education, it can be overrun by wider considerations, presumably if the Military Commission decides that the security situation has to take priority (see reference to Zakir's role in the *Background* section above):

Sometimes our policy towards schools changes, such as when there is any restriction on us. Then we are ordered by our senior

⁶³ 'Nangrahar Elders Send Warning to Taleban', *TOLOnews.com*, 17 September 2012, <http://tolonews.com/en/afghanistan/7613-Nangrahar-elders-send-warning-to-taliban>; Mohammad Farid Karimi, 'Taleban Threat Shuts Girls' Schools in Wardak', *Pajhwok Afghan News*, 7 May 2012, <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2012/05/07/taliban-threat-shuts-girls-schools-wardak>.

⁶⁴ See Fabrizio Foschini, 'The Battle for Schools in Ghazni – or, Schools as a Battlefield', *Afghanistan Analysts Network*, blog, 3 July 2012, <http://www.aan-afghanistan.org/index.asp?id=2844>; Emal Habib, 'AAN Reportage: Who Fights Whom in the Andar Uprising?', *Afghanistan Analysts Network*, Blog, 10 August 2012, <http://www.aan-afghanistan.org/index.asp?id=2916>; Ron Moreau, 'Tired of the Taleban', *Newsweek*, 25 June

2012, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2012/06/24/how-the-taliban-drove-afghan-villagers-to-rise-up-against-them.html>.

⁶⁵ Interview with MoE official, Ghazni, October 2012.

⁶⁶ Interview with MoE official, Ghazni, October 2012.

leaders to bring changes in our policy, like when the government banned two people riding on motorcycle, our policy was to close the schools.⁶⁷

The Taleban shadow district governor of Andar acknowledged the Taleban order to close schools, but denied responsibility for the attacks on the schools and dismissed the uprisings as having been orchestrated:

The attacks on schools in the south or southeast are the plan of America and foreign intelligent groups to motivate people against the Taleban and we can say this is a campaign against Taleban. Only a few number of schools were closed. . . . There is local opposition and fighting against us in Qarabagh, Moqur and Andar Districts and I can surely say that these are not local people who showed opposition; these are local police dressed like local people and they are supported by the government and America.⁶⁸

Wardak

The cases of Wardak and Nangrahar are significantly different because there was no motorbike ban to affect the Taleban's standard policy on schools. In Wardak province, out of 310 primary and secondary schools, 28 were destroyed and 48 were closed because of the threatening environment as of September 2012. These schools were mostly in the districts of Chak, Sayed Abad, Narkh, Jaghatu and Dad-i Morad.⁶⁹ As for human losses:

75 students were killed in different incidents in Wardak province, of these 75 students 80 per cent were killed by the Taleban and 20 per cent by ISAF. Twenty-three teachers were killed, of these teachers six were killed in ISAF bombardment and 17 by Taleban and unknown others.⁷⁰

From 2010 onwards, according to MoE sources in Wardak 18 schools have re-opened, thanks to 'the help of village elders, Islamic scholars and Hezb-e

Islami'. The local Taleban agreed with this count of re-opened schools. The view from the school level is that the schools were closed in response to anti-Taleban remarks by MoE staff. The elders reportedly promised the Taleban that the schools would not be used to agitate against them and warned that communities would not allow the Taleban to enter their areas if the schools were not re-opened. As a guarantee that teachers would not engage in 'anti-Taleban propaganda', pro-Taleban teachers were hired.⁷¹ The Taleban education commissioner for Jalrez district also explained that 35 schools (his count) in Jaghatu, Jalrez, Nerkh, Dad Morad, Chak and Sayed Abad were closed because some MoE staff were carrying out hostile propaganda against the Taleban:

Taleban never want to close the schools but only those schools which are against Islam and jihad. . . . In these schools teachers, students and other officials were making plans against Taleban, Islam and jihad.⁷²

Concerning new school closures in 2012, six girls' school were closed in Maidan district in May, which was the cause of the school crisis in this province.⁷³ Some schools were not re-opened and new closures took place because MoE officials did not accept all the conditions originally imposed by the Taleban ('do all the things under our *Layha*'), or did not implement them.⁷⁴ On girls' schools, the Taleban have been particularly nervous and strict in the implementation of their 'rules'; as a result intimidation against parents allowing their daughters in school was widespread. One example:

My own female cousins are not going to school now, because the Taleban warned my uncle. Because they were going to schools, one day the Taleban blasted the house door and told my uncle this is the door, if you send your daughters again, we will blast them as we blasted the door. Then our uncle decided not to send them to school anymore. . . . They let only small girls go to school, they should go to

⁶⁷ Interview with Taleban cadre, Andar, October 2012.

⁶⁸ Interview with Taleban cadre, Andar, October 2012.

⁶⁹ Interview with MoE official, Wardak province, October 2012.

⁷⁰ Interview with MoE official, Wardak province, October 2012.

⁷¹ Interview with Sayedabad student, October 2012.

⁷² Interview with Taleban district education commissioner, Wardak, October 2012.

⁷³ Karimi, 'Taleban Threat' [see FN63].

⁷⁴ Interview with MoE official, Wardak province, October 2012; interview with Sayedabad student, October 2012.

schools in burka and the teachers must be women not men.⁷⁵

Sources among the MoE staff indicated that one factor that provoked the new 2012 school closures in Wardak was the teaching of English language in girls' schools.⁷⁶ The Taleban education commissioner also expressed hostility towards NGO professional education courses targeted at women, accusing them of wanting to make women 'free and independent'. He confirmed that allowing girls in school had been a recent development, as girls' schools had previously been banned altogether, but that there were strict conditions attached to the re-opening (see Section 2.1 above for a detailed discussion of the conditions).⁷⁷

The Taleban claim their reasons were understood by the elders in Jaghatu, Narkh, Dad Morad, Chak and Sayed Abad, with whom they had discussions about the school closures; the elders, according to the Taleban, guaranteed that 'anti-Taleban activities' (the refusal to comply with Taleban rules) would not occur again and some schools re-opened, while for other schools negotiations were still on-going as of October 2012. Some senior Taleban officials, probably at the provincial level, reportedly entertained negotiations with the MoE, while at the lower level negotiations were not direct but occurred through the elders.⁷⁸ However, another Taleban source mentioned an unspecified 'big meeting' (probably involving high rank MoE officials) at the beginning of the 2012 school year, where it was decided that schools could open once the changes requested by the Taleban were implemented.⁷⁹

On top of the new school closures, attacks on schools continued in Wardak in June-September 2012, with four schools being burnt in Chak and Sayed Abad. The local Taleban deny having been involved in these attacks, while acknowledging they ordered the school closures, and accuse Taleban groups managed by 'intelligence agencies' of being responsible (see Section 2.2 above). Apart

from the murders of teachers perceived as violating the rules imposed by the Taleban, several teachers were forced to leave Wardak; most moved to Kabul. English teachers in particular appear to have moved en masse. The remaining teachers were often not in a position to oppose the activities of the pro-Taleban teachers and students.⁸⁰

Nangrahar

The case of Nangrahar is similar to Wardak's. Despite being one of the main areas of operation of Pakistani Taleban (contrary to either Wardak or Ghazni), Nangrahar province has been less affected than either of the other two provinces by attacks on educational establishments. By September 2012, out of a total of 812 schools, 28 had been closed and 16 damaged in the violence. Of the 16 damaged schools, 12 had been damaged by the Taleban and four by ISAF (International Security Assistance Force).⁸¹ The 28 closed schools were so distributed:

- Khogyani district: seven;
- Shirzad district: four;
- Chaparhar district: six;
- Pachir Agam district: two;
- Hesarak district: five;
- Achin district: three; and
- Mohmandara district: one.

While the Nangrahar MoE could not provide details of human losses for the whole province, it did indicate that students and MoE's members of staff had been killed, possibly including the Khogyani district director of education.⁸² In Shirzad, five schools were burnt, and six teachers and 14 students were killed by the Taleban as they tried to resist the closure of the schools; the Taleban also killed an administrator who had re-opened his

⁷⁵ Interview with Sayedabad student, October 2012.

⁷⁶ Mohammad Farid Karimi, 'Taleban Threat' [see FN63].

⁷⁷ Interview with Taleban district education commissioner, Wardak, October 2012. See Giustozzi and Franco, 'Battle for the Schools' [see FN1] on this point.

⁷⁸ Interview with Taleban district education commissioner, Wardak, October 2012.

⁷⁹ Walsh, 'Taleban Tightens' [see FN55].

⁸⁰ Interview with Sayedabad student, October 2012.

⁸¹ Interview with MoE official, Nangrahar Education, October 2012.

⁸² Afghan government sources reported the killing of a school principal in Khogyani in October 2012; it is not clear whether this is the same incident the Taleban were referring to ('President Karzai: Attacks on Education Are Carried Out by Those Who Want Afghans to Remain Uneducated and Needy', official news release, 10 October 2012, <http://www.afghanembassy-egypt.com/NewsDetailsEn.aspx?ID=15>).

school under pressure from elders and the MoE but without the agreement of the Taleban.⁸³

Like many others, the MoE official considered Pakistan the main culprit because it 'doesn't want the people of Afghanistan to be educated, because educated people cannot be exploited as easily as the uneducated'. However, he did not believe in differences among the Taleban, and indicated that the Afghan Taleban had to be involved as well, saying, 'Pakistani Taleban don't have courage to do such thing without Afghan Taleban.' And the school administrator, who claims to have sympathised with the Taleban when they first turned up in the area in 2005, for this reason dissented with the line taken by the MoE:

The ministry of education wants to talk with Taleban, I told them don't talk with Taleban, talk with Pakistan, Pakistan is using Taleban for these attack. If Pakistan doesn't stop such interfering, it will continue forever. This closing of schools is the job of Pakistan. For the closing of one school, Pakistan gives 600,000 Afghanis to our villagers.⁸⁴

The closed schools in Nangrahar were all located in remote areas; as of October 2012 the MoE was trying to negotiate their re-opening through the elders, but without success even though the elders had promised to help. The elders according to the MoE were trying to get the local Taleban on board and were asking them to prevent the other (non-local) Taleban from carrying out attacks. In some districts, officials of the MoE were also in direct contact with the Taleban in order to carry out their ordinary work.⁸⁵

The account provided by a Pakistani Taleban commander active in Nangrahar was, however, somewhat different; he acknowledged having ordered the closure of 14 schools in Khogyani and Shirzad (rather than 11), with another six being burnt because the school staff refused to close the school.⁸⁶

I closed these schools because they were against Islam, jihad and Taleban. I am really happy with my work. There are also some schools which are still open because their aim is to teach people and we don't want to close them. In Khogyani and Shirzad Districts we closed 14 schools and burned six other schools, in which the teachers taught Christianity lesson and boys and girls were studying together and the boys and girls were coming for socialising not for studying. They were studying the books which are against jihad. . . . We also warned some more schools that if they don't stop such things, we will also close or burn them down. We also told them to bring changes in the curriculum and not to teach the subjects which are against our religion, culture and society.⁸⁷

Concerning the allegations of divisions within the Taleban, the commander formally denied their existence but in fact confirmed them:

All Taleban are happy with this decision. Those who say that some Taleban are happy and some Taleban are not happy are not right. We are doing these actions as agreed by all Taleban, even we have some Taleban from these two districts and they reported to us that these schools must be closed. Only a few Taleban do not agree with us, we are not listening to them and they have links with the government. . . . There are some groups in Taleban that say leave schools as the teachers and Ministry of Education want, let girls to go where they want to study in girls' schools or co-education.⁸⁸

4.2 Resistance and Uprisings

The uprisings started in Andar in late May 2012 and then affected some other districts of Ghazni,⁸⁹ after which they were reported in a number of other provinces, among which were Want Waygal

⁸³ Interview with school administrator, Nangrahar, October 2012.

⁸⁴ Interview with school administrator, Nangrahar, October 2012.

⁸⁵ Interview with MoE official, Nangrahar Education, October 2012.

⁸⁶ Interview with Pakistani Taleban commander, Nangrahar, October 2012.

⁸⁷ Interview with Pakistani Taleban commander, Nangrahar, October 2012.

⁸⁸ Interview with Pakistani Taleban commander, Nangrahar, October 2012.

⁸⁹ Habib, 'Who Fights...' [see FN64].

district in Kunar in July 2012,⁹⁰ Jawand and Qadis in Baghdis, Ayub Zazai in Paktia⁹¹ and Nijrab in Kapisa in September 2012⁹² and Sarobi in Kabul province in October 2012.⁹³ These incidents were hailed by some external observers, such as the Kagans, as a turning point in the war.⁹⁴

In reality these uprisings were not such a new development as claimed by the press and some observers. As one analyst rightly pointed out:

Careful not to push the community too far, the Taleban dances a fine line as well. Abuse the population too little and they won't fear you, but abuse them too much and you give them nothing left to lose. Inevitably, the Taleban either misread the population's redlines or arrogantly exceed them, confident that no one would dare challenge their writ no matter how cruel they are. When faced with a possible rebellion, the Taleban will frequently roll back their demands (re-opening schools, for instance) and the population will resume its previous indulgence of modest though frustrating restrictions, such as the requirement to stay at home at night. And the dance continues.

Ultimately, it is not rare for Afghan civilians to fight the Taleban independent of the government; far harder is sustaining the battle beyond the adrenaline rush of the first few days or weeks. Once a community warns or attacks the Taleban, they become perpetual targets in repeated and intense firefights

requiring ample ammunition that most civilians lack. Moreover, any area where the Taleban can exert control is remote and by definition difficult for Afghan and NATO forces to reach, so the concept of 'back-up' becomes laughable to these minutemen. Once locals retaliate or decide to revolt, then, where do they get help?⁹⁵

The 'uprisings' might have been the result of an increased readiness in some Afghan government quarters to use local forces and militias to conduct the war. Still, whatever the actual military situation on the ground (which is not our main concern here), the Taleban's image had taken a blow from the uprisings. More important, the uprisings showed an underlying stream of resentment against the Taleban because of their education policy.⁹⁶

It is not always clear to what extent the schools were at the centre of these uprisings. Sources tend to agree on the main components of the Ghazni 'uprising', the best known: the leadership of Luftullah Kamran, an engineer previously linked to the Taleban (and Hezb-e Islami), the support provided by the NDS and Asadullah Khalid (the then security head of the southern zone and Minister of Tribes and Border Affairs and hailing from Ghazni),⁹⁷ the role of Hezb-e Islami networks (locally led by Faizaullah Faizan, a former governor of Ghazni), and the lack of sympathy for the Kabul government among the anti-Taleban rebels. The Taleban reportedly tried to negotiate with the rebels, but the latter did not trust the Taleban to respect any deal.⁹⁸ As of October 2012, the Hezb-e

⁹⁰ 'Students Launch Anti-Taleban "Uprising" in Afghan East', *BBC Monitoring International Reports*, text of report by Afghan Helmand Local FM radio, 26 July 2012.

⁹¹ Farid Behbud and Chen Xin, 'Afghan Villagers Take up Arms to Drive out the Taleban', *Xinhua*, 17 September 2012, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/world/2012-09/17/c_131855488.htm.

⁹² 'Kapisa Residents Take Fight to the Taleban', *TOLOnews.com*, 4 September 2012, <http://tolonews.com/en/afghanistan/7448-kapisa-residents-take-fight-to-the-taliban->.

⁹³ 'Anti-Taleban Uprisings Reach Kabul', *TOLOnews.com*, 18 October 2012, <http://tolonews.com/en/afghanistan/8012-anti-taliban-uprisings-reach-kabul->.

⁹⁴ Frederick W. Kagan and Kimberly Kagan, 'The "Andar Uprising" and Progress in Afghanistan', *Wall Street Journal*, 4 October 2012, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10000872396390444004704578032160624939562.html>.

⁹⁵ David H. Young, 'The Anatomy of an Anti-Taleban Uprising', *Foreign Policy* (blog), 12 September 2012, http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/09/12/the_anatomy_of_an_anti_taliban_uprising.

⁹⁶ Neither Wardak nor Nangrahar have stood out for large-scale anti-Taleban uprisings, but they were selected for this study because of school closures taking place there. The purpose of this study is not to examine the uprisings as such, but to discuss the relationship between such school closures and forms of resistance against the Taleban.

⁹⁷ Assadullah Khalid, also a former governor of Ghazni, was appointed as head of the NDS on 15 September 2012.

⁹⁸ Ben Farmer, 'Armed Uprising against Taleban Forces Insurgents from 50 Afghan Villages', *The Telegraph*, 14 August 2012, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/afgh>

Islami component of the rebellion, in Andar at least, was weakened by the clashes and seemed to have accepted negotiations with the Taliban, while the local population was beginning to describe the anti-Taliban militias as having been co-opted by the government and becoming a nuisance for the local population.⁹⁹ The motives of Hezb-e Islami were the matter of much speculation, as was the sudden organisational rebirth of the party in areas (such as Andar) where it had not maintained an active presence for many years.¹⁰⁰

The role of Hezb-e Islami in the uprising in Andar was confirmed to the research team, by local MoE officials who had communication with a Hezbi commander; they claimed 15 schools were re-opened thanks to Hezb-e Islami, which pushed the Taliban out of tens of villages.¹⁰¹ Sources in the MoE in Kabul confirmed the predominant role of Hezb-e Islami in the 'uprising', but provided different figures, saying the anti-Taliban rebels re-opened 27 of the 40 schools closed by the Taliban.¹⁰² The Andar Taliban shadow governor confirmed Hezb-e Islami's role, but denied that the school closures motivated the group's participation in the fighting and indicated instead that Hezb-e Islami simply wanted to expand its influence, even

alleging that Hezb-e Islami had been behind the school closures and attacks:¹⁰³

In Andar district the schools which are closed, attacked or burned are the work of Hezb-e Islami to remove our popularity among the society. . . . Hezb-e Islami is so clever because since 30 years they are fighting in Afghanistan and they know all the tricks. They closed two or three schools and blame the Taliban. We know they signed a contract with the government; the minister of education is also a person of Hezb-e Islami. Their main purpose of closing schools is to attract people to themselves and bring areas under their control and then deal with government.¹⁰⁴

According to the MoE official, people who used to support the Taliban were the ones who revolted against their ban on the schools. Other sources have indicated how some Taliban linked to Hezb-e Islami revolted and raised the Hezb-e Islami flag.¹⁰⁵ At least some elders appear to have done the same, although their political alignment is not very clear. One of the elders involved in the movement, who was interviewed for this study, acknowledged the support of Hezb-e Islami and expressed his sympathy, without giving away any previous connection to the party:

I . . . collected other elders to campaign against Taliban and our fighting is still in progress against the Taliban. Up to now 20 villages are under our control and we want to push them out of the whole Qarabagh District. We are so happy about Hezb-e-Islami, which supports us a lot with guns and other supplies to stand against the Taliban. Hezb-e Islami is better than government to us. . . . The Taliban are the slaves of Pakistan ISI and Karzai is the slave of America. If Hezb-e Islami wants to participate in the presidential election, we all will support it. We welcome such people who love Afghanistan.¹⁰⁶

The elder said that until his son was co-opted by the Taliban, he was feeding the Taliban in his house, but now he was fighting against them.

anistan/9475141/Armed-uprising-against-Taliban-forces-insurgents-from-50-Afghan-villages.html; Alissa J. Rubin and Matthew Rosenberg, 'Ragtag Revolts in Parts of Afghanistan Repel Taliban', *New York Times*, 25 August 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/26/world/asia/ragtag-revolts-in-parts-of-afghanistan-repel-taliban.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0; David H. Young, 'An "Afghan Summer" of Revolt', *Foreign Policy*, 12 September 2012, http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/09/12/an_afghan_summer_of_revolt.

⁹⁹ Emal Habib, 'The Andar Uprising – Co-opted, Divided and Stuck in a Dilemma', *Afghanistan Analysts Network*, blog, 30 October 2012, <http://aan-afghanistan.com/index.asp?id=3086>.

¹⁰⁰ 'Hezb-e Islami Using Anti-Taliban Uprisings to Gain Power: Senators', *TOLOnews.com*, 26 August 2012, <https://e-ariana.com/ariana/eariana.nsf/allDocs/F86050E6A357B0EB87257A680042C6DF?OpenDocument>.

¹⁰¹ Interview with MoE official, Ghazni, October 2012. For a similar account see Trofimov and Totakhil, 'Lessons Learned... [see FN62].

¹⁰² Interview with MoE advisor, October 2012.

¹⁰³ Interview with Taliban cadre, Andar, October 2012.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Taliban cadre, Andar, October 2012.

¹⁰⁵ The most detailed account is Habib, 'Who Fights' [see FN64].

¹⁰⁶ Interview with village elder, Ghazni, October 2012.

What the elder was implying is that not only people linked to Hezb-e Islami participated in the uprising, but also that the party (meaning presumably Hekmatyar's organisation) actively supplied the rebels. No mention was made of the NDS or Asadullah Khalid, but this is not surprising as the rebels are trying to portray themselves as independent of both Taleban and government. According to the 'uprising' elder, the killing of a young female medical student in Qarabagh by the Taleban proved particularly unpopular. He stressed how the anti-Taleban movement strove to effectively re-open the schools after the Taleban had been pushed out and make them functional, finding replacement teachers in Ghazni town to be sent to the villages.¹⁰⁷

Hezb-e Islami's participation in the 'uprisings' in Wardak and Nangrahar appears to have been more limited in scale, if for no other reason than that these uprisings were much smaller. One of the Taleban education commissioners confirmed that they clashed with Hezb-e Islami in Hidar Khail village of Sayed Abad.¹⁰⁸ In Nangrahar the role of Hezb-e Islami was described by an MoE official as 'against the government, but not against the MoE'. The MoE official stated that Hezb-e Islami even brought people in from Kunar to fight the Taleban because of its opposition to the school closures.¹⁰⁹ The Pakistani Taleban interviewee however denied any significant intervention of Hezb-e Islami in Khogyani:

They cannot fight us here and even they cannot come in front of us. We also contacted Hezb-e-Islami in Bajaur not to interfere in our decisions about schools.¹¹⁰

Probably the most plausible explanation for Hezb-e Islami's involvement in the 'uprisings' in Ghazni, Wardak and Nangrahar is that the organisation saw an opportunity to expand its influence by sponsoring a popular grievance, perhaps after the initial spontaneous involvement of one of its local networks in Ghazni. In any case it is obvious that

Hezb-e Islami networks were not the only source of opposition to the Taleban on schools.¹¹¹

In Ghazni the crisis over the schools was not resolved as of October 2012. Attacks against schools were continuing even in the central district of Ghazni, and the Taleban were preventing textbooks from being distributed to the schools, at least in Moqur. Although reportedly the situation improved in Moqur and Qarabagh as a result of the 'uprisings', in Andar the conflict was violent and elsewhere the Taleban remained in full control.¹¹² By the end of 2012 the Ghazni uprising seemed to be running out of steam, not least because of the clumsy attempt of both ISAF and the Afghan government to claim ownership, which some of the uprising's leaders seemed not to appreciate.¹¹³ By spring 2013, the Andar uprising no longer resembled a local uprising. The Taleban's military pressure and the high losses forced the rebels into accepting Kabul's help. The Afghan government's involvement consolidated the 'arbakai' force created in Andar into a militia supported by Kabul. The force however started harassing and abusing local residents and, most noteworthy, failed to keep most of the schools open. At that point more schools were open in Taleban-held parts of Andar than in areas under arbakai control, as the Taleban were softening their approach to schools.¹¹⁴

There was no major uprising in Wardak, but according to a MoE official, the widespread hostility towards the closure of schools pushed the Taleban towards softening their position:

The Taleban's view about schools has also changed because they know now when they closed schools, their reputation worsened

¹¹¹ Interview with MoE official, Ghazni, October 2012. For a similar account see Trofimov and Totakhil, 'Lessons Learned..' [see FN62].

¹¹² Interview with MoE official, Ghazni, October 2012.

¹¹³ Report in Pashto, 'The Leader of Anti-Taleban Uprising in Andar: Foreign Forces Cause Our Uprising to Fail', published by privately-owned Afghan daily *Sarnawesht* on 11 November 2012.

¹¹⁴ Emal Habib, 'The Morphing of the Andar Uprising: Transition to Afghan Local Police', *Afghanistan Analysts Network*, blog, 2 April 2013, <http://aan-afghanistan.com/index.asp?id=3327>; Yaroslav Trofimov, 'Once-Touted Afghan Force Falls on Hard Times', *Wall Street Journal*, 27 March 2013, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887323639604578370411388498932.html>.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with village elder, Ghazni, October 2012.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Taleban district education commissioner, Wardak, October 2012.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with MoE official, Nangrahar Education, October 2012.

¹¹⁰ Interview with Pakistani Taleban commander, Nangrahar, October 2012.

among people, so they want to find a place in people's heart again. . . . After closing schools, most of the villagers showed opposition to them and people stopped supporting them, then they understood and changed their policy and attitude towards all service organisation such as schools, hospitals and others.¹¹⁵

Sources among the local population also indicated that the move to close schools was deeply unpopular among the villagers in Wardak and cost the Taliban dearly in terms of popularity. A student who witnessed the uprising says:

Taliban also knew if we do something wrong, people's relationship would be bad with them as when our school was closed in Hidar Khail village, all the people cut relationship with them, while before that people had good relationship with them like giving place for night, lunch, dinner, even money, but after closing schools, people were not helping them.¹¹⁶

In part, resentment against the Taliban may stem from an underlying change in the villagers' attitude. MoE sources report a changing attitude towards education among village elders:

First our elders were opposed to girls' education, but those elders now also agree and they say the uneducated are like the blind and this 35 years of fighting was because of the lack of education.¹¹⁷

Says a student:

Our elders were also disagreeing with state education. Now we see that there are no women doctors, they know that education brings brightness to life.¹¹⁸

Even a Taliban cadre from Chak agreed that the school closures harmed the Taliban in terms of popularity:

[The elders] have talked [to the Taliban] many times but no one listens to their talk. When

the local people stand against Taliban, then they listen otherwise they didn't listen. Many times local people came and told them but they didn't open the schools. When they stood against Taliban, Taliban understood and opened the schools in those areas in which Taliban were not able to resist, but in those areas in which Taliban were able to resist, Taliban didn't open schools there.¹¹⁹

Some other Taliban also admitted the existence of opposition to school closures and said that violent attacks against schools affected their popularity negatively because they were being attributed to the Taliban anyway.¹²⁰ Another Taliban cadre was instead dismissive of the pro-school elders and questioned their representativeness:

What we are doing is by the agreement of the local people because we have a commission for schools, we collect the youth of that village, in which area we want to close schools, not the old people because they are bought by the Ministry of Education and Hezb-e Islami.¹²¹

The extent of active opposition to the Taliban in Wardak should not be overstated, however. Armed resistance to the Taliban's closure of schools was limited to Chak district; in Maydan Shahr there was a demonstration against the MoE because of the closure of the schools.¹²² As MoE sources acknowledge, 'most of the teachers and head teachers are in contact with Taliban.'¹²³ The curriculum changes imposed by the Taliban (more hours of religion, no English language teaching for girls) do not appear to have been very controversial among the population, as they were not mentioned by any of the elders, students or teachers we interviewed.

In Nangrahar, too, the MoE official interviewed argued that the villagers opposed the decision of the Taliban to close the schools. He believed that the attacks on the schools have greatly reduced

¹¹⁵ Interview with MoE official, Wardak province, October 2012.

¹¹⁶ Interview with MoE official, Wardak province, October 2012.

¹¹⁷ Interview with MoE official, Wardak province, October 2012.

¹¹⁸ Interview with Sayedabad, student, October 2012.

¹¹⁹ Interview with Taliban cadre in Chak district, December 2012.

¹²⁰ Nick Paton Walsh, 'Taliban Tightens...' [see FN55].

¹²¹ Interview with Taliban cadre in Sayedabad district, December 2012.

¹²² Interview with MoE official, Wardak province, October 2012.

¹²³ Interview with MoE official, Wardak province, October 2012.

the popularity of the Taleban in Nangrahar. He believed that the villagers were keener on education than ever:

In Khewa district, Taleban shot two girls and the girls were wounded; when they recovered, they started going to school again. This situation changed people's ideas in one way – that is the respect they had with Taleban before, they don't have now.¹²⁴

As in Ghazni and Wardak, students and teachers demonstrated in the district centres, and some communities mobilised with weapons to protest, but the Nangrahar 'uprising' was on an even smaller scale than Wardak's. The MoE official admitted that he was warning villagers that they must protect schools if they wanted the MoE to build more:

The situation will be improved as we know from the feedback of the people, because when we want to build a school, we call and collect the people and tell them if you can protect this school, we can build it, if not we will not build it in such far away districts.¹²⁵

The only fighting over schools in Nangrahar occurred in Khogyani. In Shirzad no armed mobilisation against the Taleban took place, probably because there is a heavy Taleban presence in this area. Some of the wealthiest villagers moved to Jalalabad to give their children access to school. The locals heard that in other areas of Nangrahar, Hezb-e Islami intervened in defence of the schools, however.¹²⁶

4.3 Underlying Tension

The findings in three provinces suggests that school closures were indeed unpopular, but that the anti-Taleban mobilisation was relatively limited and the press and some observers had exaggerated its scale. In particular, the break between the situation after the Ghazni uprising and the previous status quo appears to have been overstated. Tension over schools in Ghazni in fact

predated the 2012 Taleban crackdown. Particularly controversial was the Taleban's prohibition against male teachers teaching females, preventing many girls from receiving education due to a shortage of female teachers; attempts to have male teachers working with girls were met with threats and occasional attacks. The education of girls was in any case only allowed until class six.¹²⁷ These were the same problems that were being experienced countrywide.

If the immediate cause of the 2012 crisis was the Taleban crackdown which followed the governor's motorbike ban, obviously there was underlying tension over the schools. Ghazni villagers complained about the indoctrination that was taking place in some of the state schools where deals with the Taleban were in force. According to an elder involved in the anti-Taleban mobilisation:

In the whole of Qarabagh there are 35 schools. Of these 35 schools, 10 are closed and five schools were burned and the remaining 20 are open but the number of the students is small because these attacks affected a lot of students. My own child was a student in 11th class in Omar high school. He was indoctrinated by the Taleban to participate in a suicide attack. My son disappeared from my house for two months, then his classmates said he was indoctrinated by our school headmaster and he carried out a suicide attack in Ghazni province. After that I took my other three sons out of the school and other villagers did the same. I can say schools have become fighting centres and Taleban use the students of these schools. In Charda Village, Mushki village and Nani village the schools cannot be called schools. They are the centres of Taleban. . . . My personal view about schools and education is that when government opens schools, they must control them. If they cannot control them, then opening the schools is not necessary, because students in schools are used by different groups. From our village ten boys were sent to Miranshah to train for performing suicide attacks. Taleban don't have a place to stay at night and I saw myself that they are coming at night to the schools for sleeping. . . . The

¹²⁴ Interview with MoE official, Nangrahar Education, October 2012.

¹²⁵ Interview with MoE official, Nangrahar Education, October 2012.

¹²⁶ Interview with school administrator, Nangrahar, October 2012.

¹²⁷ Interview with MoE official, Ghazni, October 2012.

schools under their control, we cannot call them schools, we can call them madrasa and training centres. . . . First they wanted the changes in curriculum and textbook, but when such changes came again they wanted something more. I think the Taleban want only a reason for fighting, nothing more.¹²⁸

The quote above also shows the elder's resentment against the failure of the government to protect the schools, from which the need to strike a bargain with the Taleban derived. One member of Ghazni's provincial council, Hamida Gulistani, went public with her criticism of the compromises made with the Taleban, contradicting denials by the Ministry of Education that they gave, on occasion, authority to the Taleban to hire teachers: 'The rebels ran the schools and hired teachers of their choice,' she said, claiming, 'I have documents to substantiate my assertion.' She blamed the education director for his inefficiency [and] dereliction of duty, demanding the official be sacked to promote the cause of education. Aslami, a school worker in the district, said, 'A student can't migrate from one school to another without approval from the Taleban Commission.'¹²⁹

The Taleban acknowledge that they recruit in high schools, but say that such recruitment is done by students linked to the Taleban, not by teachers.¹³⁰

Similar controversies took place in Wardak. In the Omar Ben Walid high school in Hidar Khail Village, one teacher who had been speaking against the Taleban, Niamatullah, was reportedly killed and then the school closed. To re-open it, three Taleban teachers were recruited (typically local mullahs brought in to teach religious subjects), but they reportedly used their positions to preach in favour of jihad against foreign occupation. The new Arabic teacher in particular was reportedly mostly busy doing propaganda for the Taleban rather the teaching and even the headmaster was believed to be linked to the Taleban. Taleban recruitment inside the schools was also reported, although it is

not possible to say whether this increased after the teachers were inserted. There were also allegations that the Taleban were using the school for meetings during night-time.¹³¹

Taleban conditions for re-opening schools proved controversial in Nangrahar too. The administrator of one of the schools closed by the Taleban in Shirzad contended that the curriculum they imposed was antithetic to good education ('These schools don't look like schools. They look like madrasas.') and that the teachers imposed by the Taleban ('There are two, three, up to five such teachers in each school which has re-opened.') would indoctrinate the students for jihad. He alleged that 70 students were recruited by the Taleban in Shirzad's schools alone.¹³²

A particularly strong point of contention was the continuing, if occasional, violence against schools, educational staff and students, which the Taleban used to enforce their 'rules'.¹³³ As highlighted in the AAN 2011 report, the types of deals the MoE negotiated with the Taleban were bound to arouse some opposition. While the school closures unleashed the uprisings, participants and sympathisers of the uprisings also mentioned a number of reasons for being opposed to striking deals with the Taleban on schools. Fears that the Taleban would use their newly acquired influence over schools to recruit young boys into their ranks were probably the most serious.

4.4 Continuing Negotiations

Remarkably, one aspect of the 2012 crisis over schools in these three provinces was that negotiations with MoE officials were never interrupted. Even in Ghazni, where the fighting was most intense, the provincial MoE negotiated with the Taleban, with the endorsement of the MoE in Kabul, although the latter's request that motorbikes be allowed to travel without number plates proved unacceptable for the governor; the head of education asked the MoE to discuss directly with the governor the issue of number plates to resolve the impasse. The Taleban shadow

¹²⁸ Interview with village elder, Ghazni, October 2012.

¹²⁹ Saifullah Maftoon, 'Many Ghazni Schools Being Controlled by Taleban', *Pajhwok Afghan News*, 12 December 2012, <http://www.pajhwok.com/ps/node/192902>.

¹³⁰ Interview with Taleban cadre, Nawa district, December 2012.

¹³¹ Interview with Sayedabad student, October 2012.

¹³² Interview with school administrator, Nangrahar, October 2012.

¹³³ Interview with village elder, Ghazni, October 2012.

governor acknowledged that the MoE was negotiating the re-opening of schools and was open to contacts with the Taleban, and that the Taleban education commissioner regularly met with MoE officials, but he also criticised the MoE for not agreeing to the Taleban's position.¹³⁴ These negotiations went on even if the Ghazni head of education was not particularly pro-negotiations. Neither was he inclined to differentiate between pro-education and anti-education Taleban, preferring instead to lump them all together and explain differences in the ability of the MoE to keep schools open with the strength or weakness of the Taleban as a whole. He however hinted that some groups of Taleban were more willing to play a positive role in resolving the schools issue, in particular local Taleban 'not linked to foreign intelligence agencies'.¹³⁵

The central MoE was thus a driving force behind negotiations and invited the provincial officials to meet and negotiate with the Taleban regarding re-opening schools. Such negotiations were still underway in Ghazni in October 2012.¹³⁶

Our talks are in progress about the remaining schools with Mawlawi Sahib Abdul Fahim who is the senior commander of Taleban in Maidan Wardak province. I met him myself by the help of village elders and he promised me that the remaining schools to be opened very soon.¹³⁷

In Wardak, too, negotiations never stopped. The MoE faced the most persistent problems in re-opening schools in Chak, Sayed Abad and Jalrez. The MoE official assessed the apparent readiness of the MoE to accept changes in the textbooks, the inclusion of two-to-three pro-Taleban teachers in each school and 'changes in the curriculum' as a positive development leading to some optimism for the future re-opening of schools in these districts. The MoE involved the local elders in the negotiating process and claims to have obtained their endorsement: 'The villagers told the Taleban:

if you don't let schools, we will not let you in our areas.'¹³⁸

One of the Taleban education commissioners stressed the role of the elders, denying the existence of a deal between Taleban and MoE and claiming that the schools were re-opened only because of the demands of elders and mawlawis. He insisted that schools will be allowed to operate after obtaining the authorisation of the Taleban's education commissioner, which in turn is conditional on what is dictated by the *Layha*, and proceeded to list all the conditions, which coincided with the ones listed in section on *The Taleban leadership's position* above.¹³⁹ In addition to these conditions, the Taleban in Wardak appear to systematically request as an essential condition the insertion of Taleban among the teaching staff. A teacher confirmed the changes to the curriculum and the presence of Taleban minders overseeing the syllabus.¹⁴⁰

In Nangrahar, as well, negotiations continued during the second half of 2012. The Taleban commander interviewed for this project was a Pakistani and no moderate:

Schools for girls are not necessary because once they finish education, they will work with men in offices and this is not good. So they must study madrasa and Islamic lesson to get benefits from it in life and after death for the second life. If they want to study, their age must be less than 12 years old, no more than that.¹⁴¹

He was also one of few Taleban interviewed willing to admit ordering attacks on schools. He nonetheless said that he was in touch with school staff and elders. The MoE, he says, knows the rules specified in the *Layha* but does not want to accept them; in fact he says that the position of the MoE has hardened in recent times. He explained the absence of violence against schools in other districts by claiming that either there are few Taleban there, or that the *Layha* is accepted by the

¹³⁴ Interview with Taleban cadre, Andar, October 2012.

¹³⁵ Interview with MoE official, Ghazni, October 2012.

¹³⁶ Interview with MoE official, Wardak province, October 2012; interview with Taleban district education commissioner, Wardak, October 2012.

¹³⁷ Interview with MoE official, Wardak province, October 2012.

¹³⁸ Interview with MoE official, Wardak province, October 2012.

¹³⁹ Interview with Taleban district education commissioner, Wardak, October 2012.

¹⁴⁰ Nick Paton Walsh, 'Taleban Tightens...' [see FN55].

¹⁴¹ Interview with Pakistani Taleban commander, Nangrahar, October 2012.

local schools. The commander did not feel that the closure of the schools had aroused serious opposition against the Taleban in the villages.¹⁴²

If they really want their children to learn something, they must accept our *Layha* and if they tell the Ministry of Education, it will accept. But unfortunately these village elders are taking money from the government and they are government people. They don't think of the students, the new generation.¹⁴³

The turmoil in 2012 however did create tension with the MoE. This commander did not appreciate the MoE effort to mobilise elders on its side:

The Ministry of Education gathered the village elders of Khogyani and Shirzad districts and gave them 10,000 Afghanis [approximately USD 200] to use these elders against us. We warned these village elders to stop such things, if not we will kill them too. . . . The people cannot fight with us and they cannot organise demonstrations here in these districts, if they can organise a demonstration, it will be in the provincial centre. What we are doing is good for the people and for the new generation. The villagers are not against our actions, just a few village elders are against us, like those who work with government, parliament and other government offices.¹⁴⁴

In the end however this commander believed that gradually the Ministry of Education in Nangrahar was bowing to Taleban pressure and accepting the rules imposed by the Taleban, including the removal of hostile teachers.¹⁴⁵

The fact that negotiations continued after the appearance of multiple reports of 'uprisings' against the Taleban in defence of the schools seems to suggest that the position of the MoE has not been affected. Although the MoE might have been involved in mobilising opposition among the elders to school closures and the Taleban might have been displeased by this, the two sides seem

to have judged that negotiations to re-open schools should continue, as confirmed by the opening of more schools as discussed in Section 3. Perhaps some local MoE officials encouraged the elders to resist the Taleban of their own initiative, without Kabul's endorsement. Alternatively, the MoE in Kabul might have encouraged local resistance to the Taleban in order to enhance its negotiating position, but with no intention of altogether rejecting the deals being made, remaining aware that the balance of strength in many villages was still such that a compromise with the Taleban on the terms dictated by them was inevitable.

5 CONCLUSION

The 2011 report described how the re-opening of schools seemed to be widely welcomed and how possible concerns about the terms of local deals being made were initially outweighed by the relief many felt that violence was subsiding. It also discussed how some of these conditions were likely to prove controversial among the public, once they became widely known. The current report argues that although the impact and scope of the 'uprisings' against the Taleban appear to have been exaggerated in the initial media reports, an underlying current of anti-Taleban resentment did indeed exist. This resentment was rooted in the continuing attacks on schools and educational staff (albeit at a reduced pace), which many Afghans attribute to the Taleban even when they issue denials. New discontent was fuelled by the Taleban's conditions for re-opening schools, seen by many as a hijacking of the state educational system. This is one of the new features of 2012. Complaints about alleged Taleban indoctrination and recruitment in schools fed opposition to their control over schools. Also new in 2012 was a more widespread effort by a range of actors opposed to the Taleban (Hezb-e Islami networks, figures aligned with the government, the NDS, local elders) to exploit this anti-Taleban resentment.

The series of 'uprisings' against the Taleban started in Ghazni, but the case of that province is unique as the Taleban closed schools for reasons which had nothing to do with their education policy. This illustrates the conditions under which the Taleban education commissioners operate: despite the

¹⁴² Interview with Pakistani Taleban commander, Nangrahar, October 2012.

¹⁴³ Interview with Pakistani Taleban commander, Nangrahar, October 2012.

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Pakistani Taleban commander, Nangrahar, October 2012.

¹⁴⁵ Interview with Pakistani Taleban commander, Nangrahar, October 2012.

importance awarded to education, military considerations may trump whatever policy the Education Commission might develop or negotiate with the MoE in Kabul. Agreements on schools, in other words, could be at least temporarily blocked or undone by decisions made by the Taliban military command structure. These priorities of the Taliban further complicate the MoE's negotiations with them.

The main challenge to understanding Taliban policies on education concerns the persistence of violent attacks against schools, and that the majority of the Taliban deny responsibility for them. The interviews for this report indicate some reasons for this:

- First, sources within the Peshawar Shura claim that the Quetta Shura has no agreed education policy, due to differences among the various networks which constitute it, and therefore has little ability or willingness to restrain violence against schools. The claim was in part verified through contacts with Taliban belonging to some southern networks.
- Second, beyond the areas under Quetta's responsibility, groups of Afghan and Pakistani Taliban oppose, in principle, state education and, in particular, girls' schools, and they carry out attacks against them. It remains unclear to what extent such attacks are authorised by the Taliban leadership, but at least some are likely authorised by the Military Commission, in violation of the rules set out by the Education Commission.
- Third, the narrative is widespread that the intelligence services of foreign countries try to discredit the Taliban (or radicalise them when Taliban networks are encouraged, as opposed to external elements) in order to isolate them politically and tarnish their image among sections of the public, in Afghanistan and internationally. While the Taliban might be expressing these allegations to evade responsibility, some among the MoE staff and the civilian population shared the same perceptions.

The Taliban claim that their policy on schools has not changed during 2012 and that schools can re-open provided that their rules are followed. Strictly speaking this may be correct, with apparent

changes in policy being caused by problems in controlling the commanders in the field or by the interference of the Military Commission, according to a pattern which was also observed in 2010–11. The school closures of 2012 should therefore not necessarily be interpreted as a tightening of Taliban policy, but rather as a tightening of the implementation of a policy which did not change. Failure to follow the Taliban's rules always carried the risk of a school being closed or of MoE staff and students being targeted. In addition, some southern Taliban networks and perhaps some elements of the Peshawar Shura remained opposed to re-opening schools and may carry out attacks even when not strictly warranted by Taliban rules. This was not a new development, but was already the case in 2010–11.

The Peshawar Education Commission distinguishes in principle between attacks on schools (a property of all Afghans which should be spared in the war) and attacks on 'misbehaving' teachers and students, whom they consider potential legitimate targets if they continue their 'errant' behaviour after having been warned. The Taliban have always openly targeted MoE staff who do not bow to their requests; before 2010 they were also openly targeting schools. In 2010–11, when the new policy of local deal making came into full force, the result was a downward trend in the violence, as more and more educational establishments complied with Taliban demands.

Our 2011 paper reported the widespread optimism among the Taliban rank-and-file that the MoE would sign a formal agreement, given that both Peshawar and some of the Quetta networks were working on it. Many elders interviewed by the authors shared this optimism. The new round of research for this report, however, found that this optimism was premature.

By 2012 the original optimism had waned, mainly because of the failure to make progress towards a firm deal with Quetta, but also because the implications of deal-making had become more obvious to important sections of Afghan society. Elders, students and teachers interviewed by the authors complained about handing a substantial amount of control over schools to the Taliban. They also accused the Taliban of using the newly influenced schools as recruitment grounds.

Together with the fact that violence is once again rising and schools are again being closed, the accusations of Taliban indoctrination in schools highlighted the price of the compromise over schools.

At the time of writing, the MoE continued to talk to the Taleban at different levels; progress about re-opening schools was reported in some areas by both MoE and Taleban, but in some areas re-opening schools was proving particularly difficult and in some areas new closures have occurred. The Taleban education commissioner in Peshawar, who was interviewed for this report, remained optimistic and said that he planned to negotiate more deals on schools in the forthcoming year, including with Quetta. It remains to be seen to what extent his views represent the full spectrum of the Taleban movement and whether the strict conditions imposed by the Taleban will further stiffen opposition to the deals

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