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# Local Defence in Afghanistan

## *A review of government-backed initiatives*

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Given events happening in Afghanistan and in the region, as well as domestic pressures building in the United States and Europe regarding further engagement in Afghanistan, decision makers are under pressure to find new solutions to restore security in large parts of the country. Against this backdrop, the Afghan government and its international supporters are giving in to a cyclical temptation of working with informal armed groups to provide security, particularly in remote rural areas where the *Taliban* are gaining ground.

The first initiative examined in this paper is the Afghanistan National Auxiliary Police (ANAP), launched by the Ministry of Interior with international support in 2006 to provide a 'community policing' function. Recruits were selected, trained, armed, equipped and deployed in provinces mainly in the south and southeast. A number of problems were quick to emerge on issues such as logistical support, vetting, command and control and loyalty. Contrary to its intent, the program was used to regularise existing militias, many of which were ill suited to community policing and did not result in new 'boots on the ground.' ANAP was shut down in 2008 but no effort was made to learn from this experience before new, similar projects were initiated.

Soon after, the Ministry of Interior (MoI), working almost exclusively with the US military (and US Special Forces in particular) launched the Afghan Public Protection Program (known as AP3), the second initiative, which aimed to 'extend the reach

of the Government to provide stability and strengthen development through community security.' A pilot project that started in Wardak in March 2009 is ongoing. To date 1,100 men – more than the number of provincial police – have been recruited in Wardak, mainly through direct patronage by elders, local power brokers and prominent *jihadi* commanders, bypassing the intended *shura*-based mechanism. Many of the problems that had plagued the ANAP came back to haunt AP3. The program has not been considered successful enough to replicate in other provinces but a similar program (the Afghanistan Public Protection Force) has been included in the overall MoI police strategy.

The most recent and most experimental of the three programs is the Local Defence Initiatives (LDI). Experiments with LDI started discreetly in mid-2009. LDIs in different parts of the country are so unlike one another that it is hard to see them as part of the same initiative. According to policy documents, the overall aim of LDI is to 'secure local communities' by giving 'responsibility and employment to village members' so that they 'no longer provide support for insurgents' and 'will not allow insurgents to live within their village'. In a part of Arghandab district in Kandahar province, the program is at a more advanced stage: a group of 'defenders' selected from the community provides security and work closely with US Special Forces, while a large group of villagers receives incentives in the form of agricultural and cash-for-

work projects. The program is funded by the US military. Reports from other areas where LDI is being tested are far less positive.

A number of conclusions emerge from an examination of ANAP, AP3 and LDI:

First, the relationship between government-backed armed groups and the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) is often problematic. In many ways these new programs replicate, rather than circumvent, old problems faced by the ANSF, particularly by the Afghan National Police (ANP) on questions such as vetting, *jihadi* influence and logistics. The new programs may in fact deter recruits from joining the ANA or the ANP. Overall, government-backed armed groups emerge as rivals rather than partners to the ANSF.

Moreover, experience suggests that it is difficult to avoid picking sides when working with informal armed groups and that the consequences of today's alliances on tomorrow's political and security landscape are close to impossible to predict. There are reasons to believe that ANAP, AP3 and LDI will cause further instability in the future. In addition, there is a growing feeling of alienation expressed by those, particularly non-Pashtuns, who are not benefiting from the new programs.

Where the informal armed groups have been considered a relative success, this was usually in large part – though not exclusively – due to their close relations with adequately trained and experienced international military forces. It is unlikely that a sufficient level and quality of involvement by the international military can be replicated on a larger scale or that the relative success will survive a scaling down of involvement by the international military.

LDIs, which are likely to expand in the future, are not without contradiction. There is a significant divergence of views on the purpose of LDI between those, such as the US Special Forces, who see it is a tool of unconventional warfare to access the so-called 'darkest pockets of the insurgency' and those in the Afghan government who view this is a governance program aimed at rewarding districts and villages that show good governance. This fundamental difference affects how and where LDI should be applied. It needs to be addressed before LDI goes further.

The model of LDI used in parts of Arghandab is a best-case (or least-bad) scenario for the initiative. It highlights some of the ideal features of the 'small is beautiful' approach: a homogeneous community led by effective tribal and district leaders working in partnership with a group of well-informed, well

trained international military staff. However, given that every valley or village in Afghanistan has its own characteristics, and few of them are as homogeneous, it is unrealistic to assume that the Arghandab model can be replicated in other areas. In particular, it is unclear how it could be implemented in larger, more heterogeneous areas of territory, where accountability mechanisms are likely to be less effective than they are at a more local level.

Discussions on the purpose of local defence programs have become intertwined with discussions on reintegration. Those who support this link see informal armed groups as potential job-creation programs for returning insurgents. Others, including the members of the US Special Forces who work most closely with LDI, opposed a reintegration component, arguing that it is against the program's 'philosophy' and creates dangerous perverse incentives. This debate is now largely moot as the link with reintegration is being presented as a *fait accompli*. This does not mask conceptual differences that point to the lack of a unified approach in the way local defence programs are viewed. This disagreement also highlights two conflicting narratives at play: one where such tactics are part of a 'fight-to-win' strategy and another where they are geared towards an exit from the conflict. Current dynamics, at least on the question of local defence, suggest the latter has gained the upper hand.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Informal armed groups have played an important role throughout Afghanistan's history and the period since the fall of the *Taliban* is no exception. While some of these groups are mainly loyal to and backed by Afghanistan's strongmen, the Afghan government and its international backers have sponsored, more or less formally, a large number of them. These have developed in such an uncoordinated and often opaque manner that it is impossible to keep track of all of them.

This paper will focus on three recent and relatively formal programs: the Afghanistan National Auxiliary Police (ANAP) launched in 2006 and abruptly shut down in 2008, the ongoing Afghan Public Protection Program (known as AP3) and the more recent Local Defence Initiatives (LDI). Although operationally different, these programs emerged from the same historical and doctrinal context and were designed to reach similar objectives. All three programs leaned heavily on

interpretations of the *arbakai*<sup>1</sup> concept that traditionally only existed in the southeast but has extended to other areas, while AP3 and LDI in particular drew from the concepts underlying the Sons of Iraq program, which enrolled up to 100,000 Sunnis in the fight against Al Qaida in Iraq starting in 2006.<sup>2</sup> All three programs were largely designed, implemented and funded by the American military in consultation with Afghan partners, the government and, more tangentially, some other countries contributing troops to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF).

The first section of the paper presents the context, including the growing frustration with the weakness of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and Kabul politics in general, the emergence of a counter-insurgency strategy as the guiding doctrine for international engagement in Afghanistan and an old fascination with 'traditional structures' increasingly seen by some as a panacea for the country's ills. The next section looks at ANAP, a somewhat different program to AP3 and LDI,<sup>3</sup> focusing on the pilot province of Zabul, drawing mainly from official documents and interviews conducted by the author in the province in 2006 and 2007.

The third section looks at AP3 in Wardak, drawing from official documents and interviews with provincial officials, police officers, elders and ordinary Wardakis. A brief description of the newly conceived Afghanistan Public Protection Force (APPF) follows. APPF, a 'pillar' of the new Afghan police strategy, is partly informed by AP3 in Wardak. The fourth section describes the early days of LDI, drawing from official documents and interviews conducted with Afghan and international officials involved in its design and implementation. The case of LDI in Arghandab district is described in some detail and complemented by reports from other areas.

<sup>1</sup> Tariq Osman defines *arbakai* as a 'tribal based community policing system grounded in volunteer grassroots initiatives' in Tribal Security System (*arbakai*) in Southeast Afghanistan, LSE Crisis States Research Centre Occasional Papers (December 2008).

<sup>2</sup> See International Crisis Group report *Iraq After the Surge I: The New Sunni Landscape*, 30 April 2008.

<sup>3</sup> ANAP is arguably conceptually different from AP3 and LDI in that it was a more formal police program, but it remains interesting to examine the three programs in sequence, with ANAP as a precursor to AP3 and LDI. Very little has been written about ANAP. One exception is Andrew Wilder, 'Cops or Robbers? The Struggle to Reform the Afghan National Police' Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit, Issue Paper Series, July 2007.

To date, these and similar programs have come and gone with very little publicly available information or analysis. Even internal documents available to policymakers, implementers and stakeholders seem to be scarce, particularly regarding the closing down of ANAP. This paper therefore aims to fill a gap in existing information by making facts available about programs that are (or were, in the case of ANAP) sizeable and may well form an important part of the international community's strategy in the next phase of the conflict. As the paper describes initiatives that are still evolving rapidly, it is by nature not comprehensive or exhaustive, particularly in the case of LDI, which is still in its early days. Some of the information presented here will become outdated as programs change or are renamed, expanded or shut down. However, documenting the evolution of these programs may inform future initiatives in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

Discussions with Afghans about local armed groups stir up painful memories, particularly for those who suffered at their hands during three decades of war when the ruling regime either actively supported such groups (during the People's Democratic Party and under President Karzai) or had emerged from them (during the *Mujahedeen* and *Taleban* regimes). In this context, the terminology has become loaded, swaying the debate. The term 'militia' is used to evoke negative images of large criminal gangs loyal only to ruthless warlords while, at the other end of the spectrum, *arbakai* has become increasingly popular, particularly among non-Afghans who use the term to depict well-meaning, disciplined, traditional community defence forces, obedient only to the call (*chigha*) of the tribal assembly (*jirga*). Without more widely accepted definitions, one person's 'evil militia' becomes another's 'well-meaning *arbakai*'. In order to avoid these minefields, this paper refers to specific programs or uses generic terms such as 'government-backed armed groups'.

Research for this paper was conducted mainly in Kabul and Kandahar in February and March 2010. More than 40 interviews were conducted with Afghan officials at the national, provincial and district levels, with community elders and members of the Afghan National Police (ANP) as well as international officials and military staff. This paper also draws on the author's previous experience in Afghanistan, particularly regarding the ANAP in Zabul province.

## 2. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The creation of ANAP, AP3 and LDI should be seen against the general backdrop of growing insecurity in Afghanistan. The year 2006, when ANAP was created, marked a turning point in the conflict, particularly in the southern half of the country, where a resurgent and increasingly aggressive *Taleban*-led insurgency was gaining ground. Afghans acutely felt this deterioration. The United Nations, for example, estimates that casualties from the conflict increased three or four fold from 2005 to 2006.<sup>4</sup> This caused a profound sense of insecurity among Afghans and created a sense of urgency among international and Afghan officials.

### 2.1 A growing frustration with Kabul

Serious concerns about security only intensified an existing frustration with the slow process of building Afghanistan's institutions. Many international and some Afghan officials were increasingly wary that international efforts in Afghanistan had become too focused on ministries and ministers in Kabul whose ability to positively impact the lives of ordinary Afghans throughout the country remained very limited. This exacerbated a tendency, particularly among international officials, to look for policies that could go around the slow and cumbersome process of institution building. By 2008, the US and some other ISAF members were also looking for ways to bypass a government with which they had increasingly tense relations caused by, among other contentious issues, reports of corruption and links to the narcotics trade. Relations would further deteriorate in the run up to the 2009 presidential elections.

Specifically, the intent behind programs like ANAP, AP3 and LDI was to circumvent the slow and problematic development of the ANSF and particularly the Afghan National Police (ANP). It was clear then – and it remains now – that it would take years before a capable, honest and locally accepted police presence could be effectively deployed at the district and village level.<sup>5</sup> The ANP suffers from endemic corruption and has a poor

<sup>4</sup> See The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for Peace and Security, Report of the Secretary-General to the UN Security Council, 11 September 2006. Available on [www.un.org/Docs/sc/](http://www.un.org/Docs/sc/).

<sup>5</sup> See Reforming the Afghan National Police, Foreign Policy Research Institute and Royal United Services Institute, November 2009; or International Crisis Group Policing in Afghanistan: Still Searching for a Strategy, 18 December 2008.

image among many Afghans in part because many of its units preserve the structures of former *mujahedeen* and other informal armed groups whose fighters are more loyal to their commanders than to the government. Some communities are not willing to accept the ANP into their areas, either because they are under pressure from the *Taleban* or because they do not want to attract trouble. US planners, and many Afghan officials, therefore concluded that to establish some form of government or pro-government presence at the local level, where it mattered most, they would have to leap frog the Kabul bureaucracies and the police to reach the villages directly.

### 2.2 A counter-insurgency strategy emerges

Recent informal security efforts, particularly AP3 and LDI, are closely linked to the emergence of counter-insurgency (COIN) as the guiding doctrine of US and international strategy in Afghanistan. COIN gradually rose to prominence in 2007 and 2008 as the US and its allies realized that existing tactics needed to be changed or, at minimum, supplemented with new ideas to tackle a resurgent *Taleban*-led insurgency.

Several strategic reviews<sup>6</sup> concluded that the insurgency's success came in part from focusing on remote rural areas where most Afghans live, far from the effective reach of the Afghan government, the Afghan National Army (ANA) and ANP, the international military and aid agencies. The perception emerged that the *Taleban* and their allies had successfully renewed their ties with local networks at the village, valley, sub-tribal or tribal levels,<sup>7</sup> through a 'bottom-up' approach. US officials concluded that this was proving effective and explained why the *Taleban* was increasing its hold on large swathes of the country.

A new 'population-centric' COIN strategy called on the government and international community to reach down to the village level by working with local communities to access these remote areas, what the US Special Forces refer to as 'the darkest pockets'<sup>8</sup> of the insurgency, challenging the

<sup>6</sup> See for example Gen. McChrystal's 'COMISAF's Initial Assessment', 30 August 2009 available at [media.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/documents/Assessment\\_Redacted\\_092109.pdf?sid=ST2009092003140](http://media.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/documents/Assessment_Redacted_092109.pdf?sid=ST2009092003140).

<sup>7</sup> For an analysis of *Taleban* networks at the local level, see relevant chapters of Antonio Giustozzi (ed), *Decoding the New Taliban: Insights from the Afghan Field* (Hurst and Company, London 2009).

<sup>8</sup> Interview with US Special Forces personnel, Kabul,

*Taliban* and its allies and denying its monopoly over this physical and social space.

As part of COIN, the US military, particularly the Special Forces (SF),<sup>9</sup> mobilized to design, fund and implement some of the more experimental components of the new strategy. The central role played by the SF in two of the programs discussed in this paper (AP3 and LDI) deserves to be highlighted. Some Afghans perceive the SF to be more effective, more knowledgeable about Afghanistan and Afghans and better trained and equipped than the ANSF and the rest of ISAF, making the SF an operationally credible actor. Undeniably, though, many ordinary Afghans dislike and fear the SF and associate them with house searches, night raids, arbitrary detentions and other aggressive and culturally unacceptable actions. These contrasting opinions need to be kept in mind.

In the terminology of the SF, working with informal armed groups falls under the headings of 'unconventional warfare' (defined as 'a form of warfare that usually involves the cooperation of indigenous or surrogate personnel and their resources, coupled with United States Government assets, to defeat a State, an occupying force, or non-State actors'<sup>10</sup>) and 'foreign internal defence' ('the participation by civilian and military agencies of a government in any of the action programs taken by another government or other designated organization, to free and protect its society from subversion, lawlessness, and insurgency'<sup>11</sup>).

### 2.3 Those fascinating 'traditional structures'

ANAP, AP3 and LDI also emerged as part of a new upswing in a long-standing fascination with 'traditional structures' and 'the tribes'. This fascination is particularly prevalent among some western military planners and diplomats but also exists among senior Afghan officials in Kabul who view Afghanistan, or at least Pashtun-dominated areas, primarily as a traditional society dominated by networks of kinship or tribes. Tribes – so this

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February 2010.

<sup>9</sup> Under the US Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command-Afghanistan.

<sup>10</sup> See Field Manual 3-05 (FM 100-25), Army Special Operations Forces, Headquarters, Department of the Army, September 2006.

<sup>11</sup> See United States Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Tactics, Techniques and Procedures for Foreign Internal Defense, 30 April 2004.

argument goes – play a primary role in defining the identity of most Pashtuns and providing public goods such as security and justice through traditional governance mechanisms, as if they represented a monolithic, unchanged and unchanging reality.

The historic significance, academic validity and relevance to policy of the concept of tribes in Afghanistan are the subject of a debate in academic and military circles.<sup>12</sup> The purpose of this paper is not to take part in this debate. However, this fascination - and the resulting policies of 'tribal engagement' - are an important element of context needed to understand the local defence programs discussed.

## 3. AUXILIARY POLICE, ANYONE?

### 3.1 Overview

Programs and their acronyms come and go at remarkable speed in Afghanistan. One of the largest and most short-lived was the Afghanistan National Auxiliary Police or *polis-e kumaki* (ANAP), launched as a major initiative in late 2006 and quietly shut down in May 2008. ANAP was created on the recommendation of the Policy Action Group with strong backing from President Karzai. According to one senior MoI official involved in the management of the program in the south, President Karzai, the commanders of ISAF<sup>13</sup> and the US Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan (CSTC-A) were the main advocates for creating ANAP.<sup>14</sup> The ANAP-approved staffing structure (*tashkeel*) reached a maximum of 11,271 in late 2006 but the MoI estimates that only about 9,000 recruits were deployed on the ground before the program ended.

According to official MoI documents on ANAP,<sup>15</sup> the force was to provide a community policing

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<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Masood Karokhail and Susanne Schmeidl, 'Integration of Traditional Structures into the State-Building Process: Lessons from the Tribal Liaison Office in Loya Paktia', pp. 59–79, in Publication Series on Promoting Democracy under Conditions of State Fragility, Issue 1: Afghanistan (Berlin: Heinrich Böll Foundation 2006); or, US Special Forces Major Jim Grant, One Tribe at a Time; or, US Army, My Cousin's Enemy is My friend: A Study of Pashtun 'Tribes' in Afghanistan, Afghanistan Research Reachback Center White Paper, TRADOC G2, Human Terrain System.

<sup>13</sup> Then General Eikenberry, currently the US Ambassador to Afghanistan.

<sup>14</sup> Interview, Kabul, February 2010.

<sup>15</sup> Information is drawn from official documents on ANAP

function to 'ensure government control of territory' and to 'take part in joint operations with ANA, ANP and the National Directorate of Security (NDS)'. In theory, recruits were selected locally by providing 'two recommendations from the community' and information about 'criminal records, family, ethnic and tribal origin.' In practice, as illustrated by the case of Zabul discussed in the next section, recruits were not selected locally and were ill suited to do community-based policing. Again, on paper, vetting was to be conducted by MoI and NDS but in reality very little vetting was done.

Selected recruits received 80 hours of training in the regional or provincial ANP training centre. The US security company DynCorps International provided most of the training, in classroom subjects such as human rights, the Afghan constitution and the rule of law. Practical training included weapons handling, vehicle manoeuvres and tactics.

ANAP recruits were provided uniforms, similar to the ANP but with a distinct ANAP badge, and received one AK-47, ammunition and winter gear. The initial plan was to pay recruits \$70 per month through the MoI's 'individual banking system'. This proved insufficient and salaries had to be supplemented through other means and discretionary funds. Donor funding for ANAP was channelled through the Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan (LOTFA).

On paper and to some extent in practice, ANAP was integrated into the ANP structure as a separate unit 'at both district and provincial level' although as the case of Zabul shows, the loyalty of the ANAP recruits quickly proved problematic. The provincial chief of police served as the ANAP commander for the province and the regional ANP command oversaw the ANAP and was responsible for recruiting and equipment issues. According to the MoI, provincial and district governors would be 'able to play a role, but not command ANAP'.

### 3.2 Early problems in Zabul

MoI and CSTC-A launched a pilot project of ANAP in Zabul in September 2006 and the program was quickly expanded to other provinces in the south and southeast.<sup>16</sup> Several specific problems that

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including the MoI's 'Procedures for Recruitment and Vetting of ANAP' signed by Minister of Interior Moqbel as well as from the author's own extensive interviews of MoI, DynCorps, CTSC-A officials and ANAP recruits in Zabul in 2006 and 2007.

<sup>16</sup> Although the plan was to deploy ANAP to 21

emerged in Zabul are worth looking into as they became widespread and eventually led the MoI and its international backers to shut down ANAP altogether.

In contradiction with the concept of operations, recruits were ill suited to 'community policing' because, for the most part, they were not from the community. For example, out of 200 recruits in the second class of ANAP trainees in Zabul, 80 were from Kandahar, 26 were from Kunduz, 23 from Uruzgan and 17 from Ghazni. Only 16 were from Zabul.<sup>17</sup> The gap between intent and reality was never clearer than during training sessions when instructions given in English by DynCorps trainers had to be translated into both Pashto and Dari because some of the recruits did not speak Pashto. Conducting community-based policing activities in Dari in Zabul, where most inhabitants only speak Pashto, would have been difficult to say the least.

Interviews with recruits showed that ANAP was being used not to supplement the police but to regularise hundreds of men belonging to existing informal armed groups. Most of these men were already working informally with the ANP to protect highways, road construction projects and mobile phone towers, among others. Before ANAP, these men were paid from a variety of discreet funds including the Governor's Special Operations Funds so the governor and others seized the opportunity presented by ANAP to transfer these salaries to the regular ANAP (LOTFA) payroll by simply 're-badging' them as ANAP. The result was a budgetary exercise and did not result in a net gain of 'boots on the ground' in the province.

It was also evident from speaking to recruits that very little vetting had been conducted. In Zabul, two MoI intelligence officials were sent from Kabul to vet candidates. They rarely left the ANP compound<sup>18</sup> in Qalat to conduct background checks (blaming the security situation). They had no way of doing even rudimentary checks on candidates' criminal and personal records; it is unlikely that such files even existed.

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provinces, forces were deployed to fewer provinces when the program was terminated. There were also reports of 'spontaneous' auxiliary police forces springing up in provinces where no deployment of the ANAP was planned.

<sup>17</sup> Figures collected by the author during interviews with ANAP recruits in Zabul. Interestingly, no one involved in the ANAP recruitment systematically collected data on place of origin.

<sup>18</sup> Author's interviews with these officials in Qalat in 2006.

*Jihadi* commanders, eager to access the salaries and resources of ANAP for their fighters, infiltrated ANAP.<sup>19</sup> One particular case in Zabul was Gul Kumandan ('Commander Gul'), the brother of the head of the provincial council, Haji Hashem. A significant number of ANAP recruits openly stated that they were 'Gul's men' and that Gul and Haji Hashem had brought them into the program.<sup>20</sup> Another notorious commander, Muhammad Rassul (also known as Colonel Aqa, a former district chief of police in Shahr-e Safa district of Zabul) had managed to get 80 of his men into the ANAP in Kandahar and Zabul.<sup>21</sup>

This prominent role given to *jihadi* commanders in ANAP in Zabul and elsewhere essentially rehabilitated groups and their leaders who were – in theory – being targeted by the Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG). In this sense, in places like Zabul, ANAP counteracted DIAG, a program that the Afghan government had approved with the full political and financial backing of the international community.

The MoI and the ANP also quickly discovered that managing ANAP added to their workload in ways they had not foreseen. Little administrative support, either from MoI or through CSTC-A, was added to the MoI structure to deal with an overwhelming number of requests regarding personnel, training, equipment and pay for the ANAP. The influence of *jihadi* networks, which challenged those networks already established within the ANP, and the bureaucratically burdensome nature of ANAP, were among the reasons that the ANP developed a growing resentment for ANAP at the provincial and regional levels,<sup>22</sup> particularly among professional ANP officers who looked down on ANAP. As ANAP grew, senior ANP generals in the field increasingly came to see the new force as both a potential rival and a time-consuming effort unlikely to yield any positive results. As one senior ANP general said, referring

to ANA, ANP and ANAP, 'the government has given me two phones that don't always work very well but instead of fixing my phones, they have given me a radio. I don't need a radio; I just need my phones fixed!'

The ANAP may in fact have deterred recruitment to the normal police. ANAP recruits had all the trappings and prestige associated with the police: a similar uniform, a salary (only slightly lower than the ANP), an official identification document and a weapon. Given that recruitment to the ANAP was easier than the ANP, demanded less training and guaranteed employment close to home (avoiding the risk of being deployed to a far away and potentially more dangerous province), aspiring recruits often chose the easier route, further hindering a struggling recruitment drive.

Salaries being offered for the ANAP were deemed insufficient at first. Delbar Jan Arman, the provincial governor at the time, said he supplemented the \$70 per month offered by MoI with \$30 per month from the province's Special Operations Fund.<sup>23</sup> Delays in establishing the individual payment system and in setting up a system of identification for ANAP recruits led to long delays in payment. News of these delays led to massive desertions among the ranks of the ANAP in the first few months. The Zabul Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) noted at the time that several recruits had come to ANAP from the regular police because ANP salaries were not being paid on time.<sup>24</sup> There were shortages of food, equipment and accommodation, especially in the harsh winter months, that should have been provided by the MoI; recruits survived on handouts from the PRT.

### 3.3 ANAP is quietly brushed under the carpet

By 2007, prompted by criticism and questions by members of the international community (including UNAMA and the European Union) and increasingly disparaging media reports describing an ineffective, illiterate group of child soldiers, criminals and drug users,<sup>25</sup> CSTC-A and ISAF suggested that ANAP should be shut down. Eventually, following a final pressing call from the UN Security Council for 'proper monitoring of the

<sup>19</sup> The Foreign Policy Research Institute and Royal United Services Institute suggest that as many as one in ten ANAP recruits was a 'Taliban agent'. Foreign Policy Research Institute and Royal United Services Institute, *Reforming the Afghan National Police*, November 2009.

<sup>20</sup> According to Abdul Awwal Zabolwal, Gul had managed to get 300 of his men into the ANAP. See Abdul Awwal Zabolwal, 'Taliban in Zabul: A Witness' Account' in Antonio Giustozzi, *Decoding the New Taliban* (see FN 7).

<sup>21</sup> Based on interviews conducted by the author in Zabul, 2006.

<sup>22</sup> Interviews with Zabul Chief of Police General Noor Muhammad Paktin and with ANP southern regional command officers, 2006 and 2007.

<sup>23</sup> Interview, Qalat, 2006.

<sup>24</sup> Interviews with PRT staff, Zabul, 2006.

<sup>25</sup> 'There's Marijuana in Their Socks; Afghanistan's Auxiliary Police. (A Desperate Remedy?)', *The Economist*, 18 November 2006; 'Child Soldiers Operating on Several Fronts', IRIN, 19 December 2007.

deployment of the Auxiliary Police to ensure its accountability to central authorities' in the text of a Council resolution<sup>26</sup>, the ANAP was brushed under the carpet as discreetly as possible.

Officially, the 11,271 men in ANAP on the Mol *tashkeel* were transferred to the regular police.<sup>28</sup> CTSC-A estimates that about 3,200 ANAP men underwent the three weeks of additional training required to join the ANP,<sup>29</sup> although the Mol says it has not kept detailed records of this. No records were kept of the arms and equipment handed out to the ANAP. One senior ANP general working in the south at the time estimates that most of the weapons, uniforms and equipment were never returned or accounted for.<sup>30</sup>

It appears that neither the Mol nor CSTC-A has conducted a thorough *post-mortem* assessment of the universally recognized failure of the ANAP. This is perplexing given the size and ambitious nature of the program and the fact that similar efforts, particularly AP3, were launched only a few months after the collapse of ANAP.

## 4. THE AFGHANISTAN PUBLIC PROTECTION PROGRAM IN WARDAK

### 4.1 Overview

US and Afghan officials first discussed the Afghanistan Public Protection Program (*niru-ye muhafizat-e mahalli-ye amniat*) in October 2008. Formally under the Mol and the Independent Directorate for Local Governance (IDLG), the program, known as AP3, was designed, funded and implemented mainly by the US military. A concept of operations drafted by the Mol in January 2009<sup>31</sup> states that AP3 aims to 'improve security conditions and the local population's confidence and trust in the Government of Afghanistan'. According to the document, AP3 should conduct 'community security operations that prevent insurgent attacks on key infrastructure and facilities', 'deny insurgent havens' resulting in

'increased stability that establishes the conditions for greater development', 'extending the legitimate reach of the Government of Afghanistan'.

Wardak, which had been relatively safe until late 2005, witnessed a rapid deterioration in security conditions<sup>32</sup> as insurgents made a push for this strategic province. The *Taleban* and *Hizb e Islami (Gulbuddin)* both have a history of support in Wardak and, starting in 2006, successfully re-established themselves in Pashtun-dominated rural areas in Jaghatu district and expanded northwards. By the end of 2008 most of Wardak was under *de facto Taleban* control.<sup>33</sup>

An AP3 pilot project was launched in March 2009 in four districts (Chak, Jalrez, Maidanshahr and Nirkh). Wardak was chosen as a pilot province because of this growing insecurity, its strategic location near Kabul, because it lays at the crossroads of major highways and because, since early 2008, it hosted a pilot project of the Afghanistan Social Outreach Program (ASOP) run by the IDLG.

ASOP was launched by IDLG to 'ensure stability and security by addressing the gap between people and the state and to strengthen traditional leadership roles and relations to the government and help prevent the destruction posed by insurgents', according to an assessment of ASOP conducted by The Asia Foundation.<sup>34</sup> A number of district-level ASOP *shuras* or community councils were established in the province with a view to 'bring together influential elders elected by the communities and district officials to discuss a range of issues including development and security'. The intent was that ASOP *shuras* would help select AP3 'guardians' and play some role in the management of AP3.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>26</sup> UNSCR 1746 (2007), United Nations Security Council Resolutions, 23 March 2007.

<sup>28</sup> According to a CSTC-A document obtained by the author comparing the 2007 and 2008 tashkeels.

<sup>29</sup> See International Crisis Group Policing in Afghanistan: Still Searching for a Strategy, 18 December 2008.

<sup>30</sup> Interview, Kabul, February 2010.

<sup>31</sup> Drawn from a January 2009 Mol document.

<sup>32</sup> From January to September 2009, the Afghanistan NGO Safety Office reported that 329 security incidents took place in Wardak, almost twice the level of Kabul province and more than the number of incidents in Logar and Paktya provinces combined.

<sup>33</sup> See Muhammad Osman Tariq Elias 'The Resurgence of the Taliban in Kabul, Logar and Wardak', p. 54, in Antonio Giustozzi (ed) *Decoding the new Taliban, Insights from the Afghan Field* (Hurst and Company, London, 2009)

<sup>34</sup> Quoted from an assessment of ASOP in Wardak conducted by The Asia Foundation in November 2008. The assessment does not mention ASOP's role in the selection of AP3 but highlights a number of challenges in the elections, leadership and management of the community councils in Wardak.

<sup>35</sup> According to some accounts, the initial intent of some



How AP3 started in Wardak is a matter of some disagreement. Provincial Governor Halim Feda'i says<sup>36</sup> that demand for the program came from the population. He says elders asked him, in 2008, to establish a local defence group managed by Wardakis to deal with the deteriorating security situation and spread of the *Taleban*, particularly in Sayedabad and Nirkh districts. Not everyone agrees with this version of events. In December 2008, the MoI and NDS held a three-day seminar in Kabul to present the idea of AP3 to local community leaders. The participants were vocal in their misgivings about the program and refused to sign a memorandum of understanding with the government.<sup>37</sup> Instead, they drafted a statement requesting a greater role for the ANA and ANP in the province.<sup>38</sup>

These elders told the governor and other officials during the meeting that they were not prepared to agree to AP3 because Wardak had painful experiences with government-sponsored militias during Dr Najibullah's regime when a large, supposedly pro-government militia in Jalrez district turned against it immediately after it was established, taking along 'truck loads of weapons' according to locals.<sup>39</sup> These elders reminded participants that infighting among rival militias had caused 2,000 deaths in Wardak during the war and AP3 would likely lead to more infighting.

Governor Feda'i has considerable political capital invested in AP3's success and is unsurprisingly one of the program's leading proponents.<sup>40</sup> He thinks AP3 can be instrumental in 'bringing the government to the village level' and 'involving people in their own security' thereby gaining people's trust, 'the key to sustainable security'. He sees AP3 as paving the way towards a gradual withdrawal of international forces from Wardak. He also sees great value in AP3 as a job creation program for the province, attracting potential rank

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senior Afghan officials and the US was to include a community defence component in ASOP itself. Other donors taking part in ASOP resisted this, which led to the creation of AP3 as a stand alone program.

<sup>36</sup> Interview, Kabul, February 2010.

<sup>37</sup> Interviews with several provincial officials and elders, February 2010.

<sup>38</sup> Copy of the statement received by AAN.

<sup>39</sup> Negative experiences with government-backed militias (particularly during Dr. Najibullah's regime) feature prominently in almost every conversation with ordinary Wardakis. They are an important factor in explaining the reticence to take part in AP3.

<sup>40</sup> Interview, February 2010.

and file *Taleban* who are fighting for economic reasons.

The MoI's concept of operations states that selection of AP3 'guardians'<sup>41</sup> should be done through 'established district level *shuras*, preferably ASOP community councils'. Although some provincial officials, including Feda'i, say this was done, very few Wardaki elders or local and provincial officials think that ASOP *per se* played a prominent role in the process. In fact, many Wardakis appear to be unaware of the exact role of ASOP and, in some cases, of its existence in the province suggesting that its presence in Wardak remains limited. The selection process for AP3 is a mix of direct patronage by elders and local power brokers including prominent *jihadi* commanders.<sup>42</sup> The *shura*-based process seems to exist but most AP3 recruits have circumvented it.

The MoI document states that vetting should be conducted by MoI intelligence officers and by NDS. However, senior MoI officials working on AP3 admit that vetting remains limited because MoI, NDS and the SF do not have the capacity or the time to 'really know who is who for every case'.<sup>43</sup> Given the absence of criminal or civil records in Afghanistan, vetting is likely to be a subjective and time-consuming exercise, easily bypassed for the sake of expediency. Experiences with the ANAP suggest that any vetting mechanism is unlikely to detect infiltration from insurgents or criminal networks. Vetting is not a priority in the management of AP3, but as one western diplomat points out, this is not specific to AP3, and that 'very little vetting is done for regular ANP recruits'.<sup>44</sup>

When pushed about the details, even Governor Feda'i agrees that the implementation of AP3 has not gone as smoothly as he would have liked.<sup>45</sup> In

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<sup>41</sup> The strategy specifies that 'guardians' must be Afghans between the age of 25 and 45, fit, not using drugs, living in (or from) the district, trustworthy, respected by the community, not employed by any other Afghan government organisation and with no criminal record. MoI Documents on AP3, January 2009.

<sup>42</sup> Interviews with Wardak elders, Kabul, February 2010.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with senior police officer, Kabul, February 2010.

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Western diplomat, Kabul, February 2010.

<sup>45</sup> He says his recommendations for amendments to the program, submitted several times in writing to Kabul, have not been taken into consideration. Unless AP3 is reformed, he thinks it will fail. Other provincial officials, including heads of department, are reported to have submitted written complaints about AP3 to the authorities in Kabul.

theory, between 100 and 200 AP3 guards were to be recruited in each district, for 1,200 guards for the province.<sup>46</sup> Recruitment, particularly among Pashtuns, was slow when the program was launched.<sup>47</sup> Early recruits were mainly Tajiks, encouraged to join by the provincial head of NDS (a Tajik) and Hazaras,<sup>48</sup> eager to access weapons and resources to use in their ongoing feud with Kuchis in both Behsood districts of Wardak and in the central highlands.

## 4.2 Enter the strongman

The program only gathered momentum with the controversial appointment of Ghulam Muhammad Hotak as the commander of AP3 in December 2009. Ghulam Muhammad is a *jihadi* commander from Jalrez district. He is a former *Harakat-e Inqilab-e Islami* commander who joined *Hizb-e Islami (Gulbuddin)* and later the *Taleban* regime. He was reported to have led a group of up to 3,000 men during the mid-1990s. He was arrested by the US military, sent to Bagram in 2004, and released in 2006.<sup>49</sup> His brother, Haji Musa Hotak, was a commander of *Harakat-e-Inqilab-e Islami* and a former deputy minister of planning under the *Taleban* and is currently a member of parliament. In January 2010, the UN removed Haji Musa from its *Taleban* black list.<sup>50</sup>

The Special Forces regard Ghulam Muhammad well. The original intent was not to appoint a provincial commander for AP3, out of 'fear that this would lead to the formation of a militia'.<sup>51</sup> However, the SF think Ghulam Muhammad has performed 'exceptionally well' in part because he has been able to recruit 'guardians' from areas that were previously not well disposed to the government and to influence 'fence sitters'.<sup>52</sup> It

<sup>46</sup> The current strength of AP3 is 1,100. By comparison, the tashkeel for ANP in January 2009 was 688. This has since been increased to 900 according to the provincial chief of police.

<sup>47</sup> Currently, AP3 'guardians' are 63 per cent Pashtun, 24 per cent Tajik, 7 per cent Hazara, and 6 per cent Sadat, according to the US military.

<sup>48</sup> Tom Coghlan, 'US Pins Its Hopes on "Dad's Army" to Turn Tide in Fight for Local Loyalties' *The Times*, 27 April, 2009.

<sup>49</sup> 'Ex-Taliban Commander Seized in Afghanistan', Associated Press, 19 July 2004.

<sup>50</sup> See <http://www.un.org/sc/committees/1267/docs/Delisted.pdf>.

<sup>51</sup> Interview with US military officer, February 2010.

<sup>52</sup> US military report obtained by the author.

recognizes that he has been instrumental in arranging meetings between AP3, the US forces and insurgent leaders.

Most Wardakis have a far less positive view and the appointment of Ghulam Muhammad has become the main point of criticism of AP3, as summarized by one elder:

How can a man who was a *Taleb*, who was arrested by the US and taken to Bagram for two years be guarding us? He is only motivated by money. He is not loyal to anyone. He probably still has links to the *Taleban* and could rejoin them tomorrow if it is his interest. He is known for double dealing, he did it with the *Taleban* and with the Northern Alliance during the civil war. His power has been restored and the Americans don't understand the consequences of this.<sup>53</sup>

About 500 'guardians' followed Ghulam Muhammad. Most of these were *mujahedeen* who fought under him in the past. They were brought in to AP3 very quickly, circumventing the *shuras'* selection process and any form of vetting. This group, composed of Pashtuns almost exclusively from Jalrez district, makes up almost half of the 1,100-strong AP3 even though, on paper, only 200 men should have been recruited from Jalrez.

The governor recognizes that this creates an imbalance – that deploying people from Jalrez in other districts goes against the intent of having recruits patrol their own areas – but sees it as a temporary fix. He thinks that when recruits from other districts join the program, the extra Jalrezis will be absorbed by either the ANA or the ANP<sup>54</sup> although it is unclear if a bridging mechanism is in place or that these men would accept to join the ANA or the ANP. Like the Special Forces, Fedai is grateful and accommodating to Ghulam Muhammad for reviving what had been a faltering recruitment campaign before his appointment.

Another concern with AP3 is command and control. The decision to appoint an AP3 commander for the province subverted the original command and control charts issued by MoI, which only mention that district-level commanders should report to the ANP district chiefs. According to the provincial chief of police, General

<sup>53</sup> Interview, Kabul, February 2010. Several other people interviewed thought Ghulam Muhammad still maintains active links with the *Taleban*.

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Wardak Governor Halim Fedai, Kabul, February 2010.

Muzafaruddin, the structure was modified to make way for Ghulam Muhammad who was ordered to report to the Deputy Provincial Chief of Police.<sup>55</sup> In practice, relations between AP3 and the ANP are stormy at all levels. Ghulam Muhammad and General Muzaffaruddin do not get along well. Despite formal instructions from MoI, Ghulam Muhammad refuses to accept that he and his men are under the authority of the ANP. Ghulam Muhammad says he only reports to the US Special Forces and to General Sadat, the head of the APPF department in MoI (see next section). In the field, there is profound distrust among AP3 'guardians' about the willingness or capacity of the ANP to help them if they need assistance. They rely primarily on the SF for support, according to interviews of AP3 'guardians' conducted by the US military.<sup>56</sup>

A look at concepts of power in Afghanistan reveals why the AP3 commander would be reluctant to work with General Muzaffaruddin: For a *mujahedeen* like Ghulam Muhammad, with little or no formal education, the amount of power one possesses is proportional to the number of men working for him. Ghulam Muhammad currently has 1,100 'guardians' in 'his' force while Gen. Muzaffaruddin has just over half of that.

There are also deeper historic rivalries at play. General Muzaffaruddin is a staunch *Hizb e Islami* supporter and Ghulam Muhammad and his brother personify *Harakat*. Wardak is a hornet's nest of rivalries, between different *mujahedeen* 'parties', between Pashtuns and non-Pashtuns, between Kuchis and Hazaras and between people from the provincial capital and the districts. A large and rapidly established armed group such as AP3 inevitably upsets the local balance of power.

Early in the program, AP3 (like the ANAP) struggled with logistical issues regarding equipment and pay although the US military and the government say that these problems have now been solved. AP3 'guardians' receive one AK-47 rifle and three magazines of ammunition, provided by MoI, and two uniforms, supplied by the US military. One vehicle for every 25 'guardians' and one radio for every ten are also supplied by the US military. Basic AP3 guard salaries were increased from \$100 to \$170, although the AP3 commander (unsurprisingly) says this is still insufficient to keep recruits motivated.<sup>57</sup> Training in a variety of

practical and theoretical subjects<sup>58</sup> is conducted in 21-day modules in Laghman province by the ANP, supervised by the Special Forces.<sup>59</sup> As of March 2010, six groups of between 100 to 200 men each have gone through the training program.

### 4.3 International discussions on AP3

Aside from the US, members of the International Police Coordination Board (IPCB), including the European Union Police Mission, other EU institutions, UNAMA, EU member states and other donors, appear to have been only marginally involved in discussions, planning and implementation of AP3.<sup>60</sup> There was some discussion about ASOP in late 2008 in the IPCB. The AP3 concept was presented to the board in early 2009, but there has been little follow-up discussion since in this setting. US allies including European nations and institutions have been given little information about the program.

Several members of the IPCB indicated early on that they were opposed to AP3, arguing that these groups could not be controlled in the long term. Some IPCB members indicated that the experience in Wardak showed signs of promise but that the program would be difficult to replicate on a wider scale.<sup>61</sup> The European Commission, the second largest donor to LOTFA, was the most vocal in its criticism of AP3 in principle. It argued that EC funding of the ANP comes through a 'governance and rule of law' fund whose internal guidelines prohibited support for combat or paramilitary programs such as AP3.<sup>62</sup>

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patrolman or an ANA soldier. AP3 is mainly funded by the US Department of Defense's Afghanistan Security Forces Fund, through the Ministry of the Interior. Payments are not made through the Law Enforcement Trust Fund for Afghanistan.

<sup>58</sup> According to the US military, recruits receive training in 'use of force, use of small arms, vehicle checkpoints, drug interdiction, driver training, search and detention, concept of security in Islam, definition of the enemy, IED detection, discipline and following orders, first aid, Afghan constitution, police policy, ethics and the rule of law, human rights'. Email communication with US military officers, March 2010.

<sup>59</sup> Due to better weather in Laghman, allowing for year round training, according to the ANP.

<sup>60</sup> The same is true for LDI.

<sup>61</sup> Interview with IPCB staff, March 2010.

<sup>62</sup> AP3 'guardians' are being used in combat operations. General Sadat, the head of the APPF department in the MoI, says that 12 AP3 guards were killed and 50 injured in combat since the start of the program. Interview,

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<sup>55</sup> Interview with AP3 Commander Ghulam Muhammad, Kabul, February 2010.

<sup>56</sup> Interview with US military officer, Kabul February 2010.

<sup>57</sup> This is roughly equivalent to the base salary of an ANP

It does not appear that the US made much effort to engage the IPCB on AP3, judging that the time and diplomatic resources required to convince other donors in the bureaucratic setting of the IPCB would probably produce little support or real funding. The US appears to have decided early on to 'go it alone' on AP3 (the same can be said of LDI), choosing to fund the program bilaterally through the Department of Defence's Afghanistan Security Forces Fund, rather than multilateral channels like LOTFA.

#### 4.4 Measuring AP3's impact

Measuring the effectiveness of AP3 is difficult. Although the program was officially launched in early 2009, it faced several delays and only became operational in late 2009, at the start of the winter lull. It is therefore still too early to gauge real progress. Data on security trends in Wardak are incomplete and somewhat contradictory. Anecdotal information collected by NGOs working in the area<sup>63</sup> and some of the responses from interviews conducted for this paper suggest that security conditions have improved, particularly in Jalrez where AP3 is most heavily deployed, according to provincial officials.<sup>64</sup> The US military says there have been no attacks on provincial government installations in the provincial capital since AP3 started.<sup>65</sup> Data collected by the Afghanistan NGO Safety Office contradicts this, showing an increase in attacks in the province during the first quarter of 2010 when compared to a year earlier.<sup>66</sup>

Not surprisingly, the AP3 commander says his 'guardians' are more effective than the ANP at providing security. He claims 50 AP3 'guardians' were able to secure the section of the Kabul-Kandahar highway that goes through Wardak, something the ANP Quick Reaction Force was unable to do for years. This claim could not be

verified but the road remains dangerous and is still closed to UN and other internationals south of the provincial capital Maidanshahr.

Even Wardakis who are otherwise critical of AP3 recognise that the program has resulted in easier travel along roads from the provincial capital to the district centres, chiefly along the road to Jalrez, known as a particularly dangerous road.<sup>67</sup> To showcase the improvements along the roads, Governor Feda'i and his provincial administration walked from the provincial capital to Jalrez district centre in late 2009. Members of the provincial council recognise that the situation has improved but they say the security situation in the districts, even in Jalrez, is still too unsafe for them to spend the night in the district centres.<sup>68</sup>

Assessing AP3 requires an approach that goes beyond a narrow security focus. AP3 was designed as a COIN program, with a 'hearts and minds' as well as a security objective, so it should be assessed with an eye on political and social impact. The full significance will not become fully apparent for several months but, as outlined above, worrying signs indicate that problems may be looming. It is also apparent that the criteria applied by locals and by the international military differ significantly in evaluating AP3. To many Wardakis, AP3 has all the trappings of a 'bad old militia'. It is run by a *jihadi* commander with no formal training or education who has a chequered past and many enemies. His loyalty is questionable and it is unclear whether he has lastingly severed his ties to the *Taliban*. Most of the 'guardians' appear to be at least as loyal to their commander<sup>69</sup> as they are to the Government or the community. Even the ANP and provincial officials recognise that they have limited control over Ghulam Muhammad's 'guardians'.<sup>70</sup>

To many in Wardak, it is just a matter of time before the AP3 turns against the government, delivering its manpower, weapons and equipment to the insurgents<sup>71</sup> as 'has happened with past

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Kabul, February 2010.

<sup>63</sup> According to the Afghanistan NGO Safety Office, 'NGOs report that the program (AP3) has been successful in bringing some stability'. ANSO Quarterly Data Report Q.1 2010, available on [www.afgnso.org](http://www.afgnso.org).

<sup>64</sup> Interview, Kabul, February, 2010.

<sup>65</sup> The US military say 18 IEDs have been found since November. One weapons cache was turned in to the APPF in November 2009. There was one kidnapping in 2009, but none so far in 2010.

<sup>66</sup> The ANSO Quarterly Data Report Q.1 2010 states that there were 38 armed opposition group attacks in Wardak whereas the Quarterly Data Report Q.1 2009 mentions fewer than 30 attacks.

<sup>67</sup> Several major IED incidents took place along this road from 2007 to 2009.

<sup>68</sup> Interview with members of the provincial council, Kabul, February 2010.

<sup>69</sup> According to a US military report 'many of these men cited their respect for Ghulam Mohammed and desire to work with him as why they join AP3'.

<sup>70</sup> Interviews, Kabul, February 2010.

<sup>71</sup> This would not be the first time this has happened. As recently as February 2010, members of the ANP in Chak district of Wardak joined the *Taliban*, taking their weapons and vehicles with them. This was confirmed by the provincial chief of police in an interview in Kabul in

militias' according to one provincial official who says 'these men don't see their weapons as national weapons, they are only for themselves'.<sup>72</sup> There are no provisions for the disarmament of AP3 should the program be closed.<sup>73</sup> Given the size of the force, this would significantly upset the balance of power in Wardak and perhaps beyond.

#### 4.4 What next for AP3?

US officials say that although AP3 has been 'a success', the program will not be expanded to other provinces.<sup>74</sup> The main reason seems to be that AP3 was slow to take off and proved to be more resource-intensive than initially foreseen. The creators of AP3 had hoped for a more nimble approach that would have a rapid impact on security and help win 'hearts and minds'. In practice, AP3 was slow to start, remains costly and requires considerable monitoring and management.

Putting AP3 'back in its box' is not realistic, as Governor Feda'i and several senior MoI officials say. It is unlikely that Ghulam Muhammad's men would just go home quietly if AP3 were shut down. If the government were to decide to shut down AP3, it would need to provide the 'guardians' with alternative sources of income either through jobs in the ANA and ANP (which they might not agree to), in a future informal security program or through a demobilization and reintegration program. Given the costs and bureaucracy involved, these options are improbable.

Formally, the future of AP3 has not been decided<sup>75</sup> but, despite a mixed record and many detractors both in the Afghan government and in the international community, it is unlikely the program will be shut down. One reason is that the concept of AP3 inspired, in part, the similarly named Afghan Public Protection Force (APPF), part of a recently endorsed police strategy discussed in the

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February 2010. See also Rod Norland, '25 Afghan Police May Have Joined Taliban' *The New York Times*, 18 February 2010.

<sup>72</sup> Interview, Kabul, February 2010.

<sup>73</sup> Tracking weapons is a problem for the ANSF in general. See 'Lack of Systematic Tracking Raises Significant Accountability Concerns about Weapons Provided to Afghan National Security Forces', United States Government Accountability Office, Report to Congressional Committees, January 2009.

<sup>74</sup> Interview with US embassy staff, Kabul, February 2010.

<sup>75</sup> Heath Druzin, 'Future Unclear for Widely-Praised Afghan Militias', *Stars and Stripes*, 13 March 2010.

next section. Closing AP3 in Wardak just as a similar but broader initiative is launched would be hard to imagine.

## 5. PUBLIC PROTECTION: A NEW PILLAR OF THE POLICE STRATEGY

To add to the existing confusion of acronyms, the new police strategy approved by Minister of Interior Atmar in March 2010 refers to an Afghan Public Protection Force (APPF) as one of six 'pillars of reform and growth' of the police.<sup>76</sup> APPF is largely distinct from the model used in Wardak but the relationship is confusing. APPF seems designed in part to provide the conceptual and policy framework for provincial programs (such as AP3 in Wardak) but includes a number of broader concepts that Minister Atmar and the MoI could use creatively to cover a variety of initiatives, including LDI (which the Minister links to APPF though he seems to be the only one to hold this view).

Minister Atmar describes the objectives of APPF as 'strengthening the state monopoly over the armed forces while protecting the Afghan people at the local level through traditional defence mechanisms'.<sup>77</sup> The new police strategy states that:

- APPF will operate at the district level to protect key infrastructure, facilities, construction projects and personnel, with a special focus on the protection from insurgency.
- It will also provide protection to those facilities for which donors, international agencies and private sector organisations currently contract private security companies. This will remove the need to employ trained Afghan Civilian Police in guard positions. The introduction of APPF will permit the more highly trained police to focus on providing more effective law enforcement. APPF will gradually replace the private security companies.
- Every effort will be made to institutionalise the APPF as part of the Afghan National Security Forces under the direct command and control of the MoI. The APPF will be a regular state

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<sup>76</sup> The other pillars are Afghan Civilian Police, Afghan National Civil Order Police (a type of gendarmerie), Afghan Border Police, Afghan Anti-Crime Police and Enabling Forces (including support functions).

<sup>77</sup> Summary of proceedings, JCMB (Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board) meeting of 20 January 2010.

security force rather than a militia but it will not have a police mandate to investigate or arrest suspects.

- APPF will be funded by the MoI without the use or diversion of LOTFA money.
- The MoI will create an APPF working group with international community representatives to supervise and direct the creation of APPF over the next five years. The working group will provide details on, but will not be limited to, APPF funding, command and control structures, size, shape, role, recruitment and vetting, training, equipment and the regulation of private security companies.

On 20 January 2010, a draft police strategy was endorsed 'in principle' by the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board, but members, including the UK, remained sceptical, noting that they 'look forward to further discussions under the auspices of the International Police Coordination Board on command and control structures, recruitment and vetting and training provisions for the APPF'.<sup>78</sup> The US position on APPF is unclear. Despite thinly veiled reservations about the success of AP3 in Wardak, US officials say they support the APPF pillar but expect the working group on APPF to clarify the concept and *modus operandi* of the APPF.<sup>79</sup>

One of the primary functions of APPF is to reduce the influence of private security companies, one of President Karzai's favourite populist themes. In his inaugural speech in 2009, Karzai promised that 'within the next two years, we want operations by all private national and international security firms to be ended and their duties delegated to Afghan security entities'.<sup>80</sup> Given that many Afghan power

<sup>78</sup> Summary of proceedings, JCMB meeting of 20 January 2010. The meeting also endorsed the proposal to increase the ANP to 109,000 by October 2010 and to 134,000 by October 2011 and to increase the ANA to 134,000 by October 2010 and to 171,600 by October 2011.

<sup>79</sup> Interview, Kabul, February 2010

<sup>80</sup> See 'Un-official Translation of the Inaugural Speech by H.E. Hamid Karzai, President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan' available at [www.president.gov.af/Contents/72/Documents/960/President\\_Karzai\\_s\\_Inaugural\\_Speech\\_Nov.pdf](http://www.president.gov.af/Contents/72/Documents/960/President_Karzai_s_Inaugural_Speech_Nov.pdf). For more on private security companies, see Susanne Schmeidl, 'Case Study Afghanistan – Who Guards the Guardians?' pp.14–45 in *Private Security Companies and Local Populations, An exploratory study of Afghanistan and Angola*, Swisspeace, November 2007. [http://www.swisspeace.ch/typo3/fileadmin/user\\_upload/pdf/PSC\\_01.pdf](http://www.swisspeace.ch/typo3/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf/PSC_01.pdf).

brokers and many international actors either directly own or have significant interests in private security companies, breaking those patronage networks will not be an easy task.<sup>81</sup> So far, there has been some success. According to General Sadat, who heads the APPF department in MoI, it is currently guarding 21 companies and NGOs and these contracts have generated 145 million Afghanis (around \$3 million) from March 2009 to February 2010.

It is odd, but typical, that a large APPF department was established in the MoI structure in 2009, months before the strategy outlining APPF was drafted, discussed or approved. General Sadat, who also oversees the AP3 in Wardak, says his department has three main operational tasks: (1) to protect government buildings and projects (including government departments, schools, clinics, large infrastructure projects such as the copper mines in Logar, the coal mines in Bamyan, the Salma dam in Herat and the Hairatan railway), (2) to protect NGOs and private companies and (3) to protect embassies and international organisations like the UN. He says he has about 6,000 men under his command.<sup>82</sup>

## 6. THE EARLY DAYS OF THE LOCAL DEFENCE INITIATIVES

In part as a reaction to some of the perceived problems and delays with AP3 in Wardak, military planners started to try out smaller programs, hoping these would more closely tie with the communities at the village level. Experiments on the ground with the Local Defence Initiatives (*ibtikar-e defa'-e mahali*, previously referred to as the Community Defence Initiatives) started amid some confusion in mid-2009, after an unclear announcement was made in early 2009 without stating what the program would look like or who would be in charge on the Afghan side.

### 6.1 LDI on paper and in practice

The early days of LDI have been quite chaotic. Strikingly different types of programs – so different that it is hard to see how they are connected – are

<sup>81</sup> A senior US official says that a project to catalogue all the private security companies working directly or indirectly for the US in Afghanistan was abandoned because there were too many.

<sup>82</sup> About 4,400 men protect government buildings and projects (this figure includes AP3 Wardak), 600 protect NGOs and companies and 1,000 protect international organisations. Interview, Kabul, February 2010.

being tested in different parts of the country. The full list of LDIs is not in the public domain and is evolving rapidly but in early March 2010, officials working closely on the program confirmed that some form of LDI has started in Arghandab (Kandahar province), Nili (Daikundi province), Achin (Nangarhar, but this has since been stopped), Gereshk (Helmand) and 'areas in greater Paktia'<sup>83</sup> 'among others'. By early March 2010, LDI had not been launched in Khakrez, but the US military confirms it will be soon. Various diplomatic sources reported that LDI had also started in Shindand (Herat) and Chamkani (Paktia) but these reports were not confirmed.<sup>84</sup>

As was the case for AP3, practice preceded policy and it was only in early 2010, several months after LDI was first tried, that the government and the US produced a strategy<sup>85</sup> for discussion in Kabul. The strategy was finalized in March 2010 and should form the basis for a presidential decree endorsing LDI. On several important issues, such as pay or the role of the ANP, the document bears little resemblance to the reality of the programs underway.

The document says that LDI is designed to 'secure local communities by denying insurgents access to and support in local communities' by countering the 'reasons insurgents are effective at the village level: poverty, unemployment, lack of adequate protection, lack of education'.<sup>86</sup> It intends to provide 'responsibility and employment to village members' so that 'villagers no longer provide a source of support for insurgents' and 'will not allow insurgents to live within their village or allow village members to join the insurgents'.

According to the Special Forces<sup>87</sup> who designed and implement LDI in most areas, it is to be used exclusively in a defensive posture and the 'defenders' should not be involved in combat operations. Reports received from some areas such as Nili in Daikundi province contradict this (see below).

<sup>83</sup> According to officials working on LDI, the program had not been launched in Barmal district of Paktika province.

<sup>84</sup> Interviews with several diplomatic missions, Kabul, February 2010

<sup>85</sup> Final draft, Local Defence Initiative Strategy, March 2010.

<sup>86</sup> A village is defined in the strategy as a unit of 100–150 homes or 600–900 people.

<sup>87</sup> Interviews with US Special Forces staff working directly on LDI, Kabul, February 2010.

The LDI strategy states that 'the District Governor will work with the Community Development Councils (CDC) or the village *shuras* if the CDCs are not present and will coordinate through a District Council (ideally the Afghanistan Social Outreach Program council) to select, vet, and locally supervise LDI'. This is partly being done, at least in the case of Arghandab (see below) but not through ASOP which is not present in most areas with LDIs.

The strategy specifies that 'village leadership, along with District Governors, Chief of Police and NDS are responsible for vetting LDI 'defenders'. Village leadership should also 'verify that members of the LDI are receiving payments, ensure the performance and readiness status of the LDI and demand loyalty and responsible action under a compact framework'. LDI forces 'will not have authority to act outside their home village area or form alliances with other LDI forces'.

In a significant departure from the views held by the Special Forces who implement LDI,<sup>88</sup> the strategy mentions that individual payments to the 'defenders' will be made, 'at 50 per cent of the current ANP rate within the district and will be provided through the MoI pay process'. For the SF, a key principle behind LDI is 'no guns and no pay'. The primary incentive should not be an individual salary but development projects that benefit the community as a whole. In some areas, the SF says it found that tribal or traditional structures have been 'badly damaged' by years of civil war and community incentives prove insufficient to attract volunteers. In those areas, limited individual payments are being used though the intent is to keep this to a minimum. Experience in Arghandab and reports from Nili confirm that individual pay is being used, as discussed in detail below.

The LDI strategy specifies that LDI will 'be considered an auxiliary force to the district police' but will have 'no arrest or detention authority'. In practice, relationships with the police appear to be minimal, as explained below in the case of Arghandab.

Unlike the AP3 'guardians' in Wardak, LDI 'defenders' are not provided with weapons but are expected to bring their own. Although the strategy says individual weapons used by the 'defenders' must be licensed, as of February 2010, no process for registering LDI weapons had been initiated.

The program provides government 'support and assistance' to the community 'through development programs and projects tied to local security. At the approval of the District Governor,

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

the Government will provide additional support and payments in the form of micro-development projects for villages with successful LDI (i.e. construction projects, small business support, health clinics, education, extension, etc...). So far, the US military, not the government, is providing most of the development component through contracted organisations.

## 6.2 The LDI experiment in Nagahan village (Arghandab district)

In mid-2009, Special Force field commanders were instructed to suggest areas where LDI could start. The criteria for selection were: (a) a history, presence or willingness to accept the 'arbakai model' and a tradition of 'resistance';<sup>89</sup> (b) strategic importance of the area, both for the *Taleban* and for the government and the international military and (c) logistical feasibility and access.

One of the areas selected, and the place where LDI has come the longest way, is Nagahan village in Arghandab district of Kandahar province. Located close to Kandahar city, Arghandab is one of the smallest districts of the province with a population of about 51,600 people.<sup>90</sup> The district population is homogeneous, with 80 per cent belonging to the Alikozai tribe.

A group of 14 prominent district elders<sup>91</sup> say that security had deteriorated rapidly following the death of Mullah Naqib, the influential Alikozai leader and former *mujahedeen* (*Jamiat-e Islami*) commander, in 2007<sup>92</sup> and the assassination of his heir apparent Abdul Hakim Jan in a massive IED attack (killing 80 people) in Kandahar on 17 February 2008. Three waves of *Taleban* attacks followed, creating an atmosphere of insecurity in which 'locals did not want to be involved with ISAF or foreigners'. The district *shura* stopped functioning out of fear of *Taleban* reprisals.

According to Special Forces<sup>93</sup> staff, initial discussions about LDI took place with elders

<sup>89</sup> This is used loosely but one can assume that this means resistance to the *Taleban*.

<sup>90</sup> Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, Kandahar Provincial Profile, [www.mrrd-nabdp.org/Provincial%20Profiles/Kandahar%20PDP%20rovincial%20profile.pdf](http://www.mrrd-nabdp.org/Provincial%20Profiles/Kandahar%20PDP%20rovincial%20profile.pdf).

<sup>91</sup> Interview with 14 district elders from a variety of tribes, Kandahar, February 2010.

<sup>92</sup> See Sarah Chayes, 'A Mullah Dies, and War Comes Knocking,' *The Washington Post*, 18 November 2007.

<sup>93</sup> Interview, February 2010.

including Karimullah Khan, the current Alikozai leader, in October 2009. District Governor Abdel Jabbar Khan says he worked with elders to identify Nagahan as the best place to start LDI because the area is in a strategic location, near the border with Panjwai and Zharai districts<sup>94</sup> and has a 'history of resistance to the *Taleban*'<sup>95</sup> as well as good district leadership. Following several meetings, this materialized into an official 'invitation' to the SF from the villagers of Nagahan.

A week after the first meeting, elders from nearby villages asked to join the program, which expanded to about 12 hamlets around Nagahan. The program also started in the village of Adirah, but Abdel Jabbar Khan says success there has been more limited. On 21 February 2010, elders from 75 other villagers asked to be included in the program but the Special Forces have not made a decision following this request.

In November 2009, a small team of about 20 SF moved into a fortified house (*qala*) just outside Nagahan, where the district governor says they live 'free of charge'.<sup>96</sup> There are currently 25 full-time 'defenders', recruited from the area, living with the SF inside the *qala*. According to the elders, these guards were trained by the SF and draw a salary.<sup>97</sup> An additional 50 'defenders' were selected from the area. These men live in their own houses and do not draw a salary but receive food and support from the community. This second group received no formal training from the SF but may have received some from the ANP although there are conflicting reports about the extent of ANP's involvement in training. Some elders said that 10 ANP were deployed to Nagahan to help monitor and train the 'defenders' and to provide a liaison with the ANA and ANP at both district and provincial levels but the district governor says that ANP involvement in the program has been minimal so far. The district chief of police is not supervising

<sup>94</sup> Interview with Arghandab District Governor Abdul Jabbar Khan, Kandahar, February 2010.

<sup>95</sup> The history of resistance to the *Taleban* in Arghandab is a matter of some discussion, outside the scope of this paper. Mullah Naqib, who resisted the *Taleban* during certain periods, was also very closely associated to the *Taleban* at other times. See Abdul Salam Zaeef, *My Life With the Taliban* (Hurst and Company, London, 2010), p.70.

<sup>96</sup> Interview with Arghandab District Governor Abdul Jabbar Khan, Kandahar, February 2010.

<sup>97</sup> Special Forces staff working on LDI in Kabul say that, in theory at least, the guards should not be getting paid. The group of 25 may be drawing a salary for working as guards for the *qala* but not for their work for the community, which should be on a voluntary basis.



LDI, in contrast with the provisions of the LDI strategy.

None of the LDI 'defenders' received a weapon as part of the program – they brought their own – but they receive ammunition from the ANP and, when necessary, from the SF.

No specific LDI *shura* was established to select the 'defenders' and manage the program in Arghandab. The village *shura* was revived and used as the forum for discussions on LDI. The elders interviewed did not link this *shura* with other programs such as the community development councils,<sup>98</sup> IDLG or ASOP.

Arghandabi elders say that the Nagahan and district *shuras* selected the 'defenders' and beneficiaries from among the local population. Elders say that they are aware that the program has not been registered and is not yet being monitored by the government but they say they have the ability to manage and control it themselves because they 'know all of these people'.

The 'defenders' conduct frequent foot patrols with the SF and, according to the district elders, since the program started, security has improved in the area to such an extent that 'the Americans can move around alone, on one motorbike'. Recent media reports from Arghandab suggest that some problems of trust between the Americans and the LDI 'defenders' have emerged.<sup>99</sup> Another report, which would need to be corroborated, mentions that some 'defenders' have started collecting taxes and harassing the local population<sup>100</sup>

The elders say the development side of the program is composed of cash-for-work and crops-for-work projects managed for the US military by International Relief & Development, an American organisation funded through the Department of Defence Commander's Emergency Response Program. In total, about 9,000 people benefit. Of those, 3,350 currently work in an agricultural program that includes distributing improved seeds and fertilizers (106 sacks have so far been distributed in Nagahan). Other projects include the

<sup>98</sup> There are reportedly 64 CDCs in Arghandab district. MRRD provincial profile (see FN 89).

<sup>99</sup> Jon Boone, 'US Keeps Secret Anti-Taliban Militia on a Bright Leash' The Guardian, 8 March 2010.

<sup>100</sup> A report received from one Afghan source mentions that relationships between the local people and the LDI 'defenders' have deteriorated after 'defenders' had started collecting taxes and harassing the local population. This report would need to be verified with other sources.

construction of a 2,400-meter flood protection wall, three gravel roads and culverts in the area. Labourers working on the project receive \$6 a day and about 350 supervisors receive \$10 a day.

According to the district elders, the *Taleban* have tried to discourage local people from taking part in the program by sending night letters in late 2009. Now, according to one village elder, one *Taleb* has asked to join the program. US officials working on the program say that *Taleban* propaganda material has been produced in Pakistan condemning LDI as an American ploy and threatening anyone who takes part.

The locals and the SF are keen to point out that security has improved, though this is difficult to measure independently. Abdel Jabbar Khan, the Arghandab district governor optimistically says that '90 per cent of the district is secure now'. A Nagahan elder says that now 'if someone tries to infiltrate the community from the outside, we know immediately. 'Two days ago, some of the villagers captured members of the *Taleban* placing IEDs near Khal-e Shak village. We stopped them and handed them in to Afghan security forces.'

Arghandab elders are eager to portray the positive side of the program and they seem genuinely satisfied, for now at least. They think LDI needs to expand to other areas in the district because 'with one flower, you cannot say spring has arrived' as one elders puts it.

The neighbouring district of Khakrez (Kandahar province) offers an interesting insight into the LDI experiment in Arghandab. Elders from Khakrez are aware,<sup>101</sup> and envious, of the benefits being handed out to their neighbours. They attribute success in Arghandab to effective district officials, good tribal leadership and homogeneous tribal affiliations.<sup>102</sup> According to some elders, although jobs are badly needed, LDI could not be effective in Khakrez because it lacks all of these conditions. They say both the district governor and chief of police are corrupt and are not liked by the local population. Although they claim that tribal relations are peaceful, there is a long-standing conflict between Alikozais and Popalzais in Khakrez that has led to several violent incidents in recent years, for example following the death of District Governor Haji Abdul Wahab, in an IED attack in 2009. This is a significant source of tension in the

<sup>101</sup> Group interview with nine Khakrez elders a variety of tribes, Kandahar, February 2009.

<sup>102</sup> The population of Arghandab is 80 per cent Alikozai according to the Tribal Liaison Office. Interview with TLO official, Kabul, February 2010.

area. In February 2010, the SF said LDI would start in Khakrez soon.

### 6.3 Reports from other areas

A much larger project was launched in Achin district (Nangarhar province) in late 2009 in an attempt to recruit members of the Shinwari tribe *en masse*. The US military refers to this as LDI though it bears little resemblance to the Nagahan experiment. Unlike initiatives in other areas, the US Combined Joint Task Force-82, rather than the SF managed it. The SF is keen to point out that this is not being executed according to the same 'philosophy' as in Arghandab and other areas. It was launched on a much larger scale, targeting an entire tribe (the 400,000-strong Shinwaris<sup>103</sup>). According to several reports, the incentive component was much larger, including up to \$1million in development projects<sup>104</sup> and large cash payments to tribal elders.

Despite some rosy media reports early on, the program ran into considerable difficulties in its first few weeks. US military officers say LDI was almost immediately scaled back, and has since been stopped altogether, following a disagreement with the Shinwaris over the establishment of small international military bases in the district, a *sine qua non* for the US military. Tribal rivalries among Shinwari sub-tribes appear to have flared up again in Achin, indicating that LDI had not succeeded in appeasing the area.<sup>105</sup> It should be noted that Achin is composed of a variety of tribes, in addition to the Shinwaris. Engaging with just one of the tribes in the district partly explains why local conflicts have flared up as a result.

An LDI project was also underway in Nili district of Daikundi province, although its status is unclear. As in the case of Achin, this program bore little resemblance to the LDI concept or the Arghandab experience. In early 2010, several people from Daikundi reported that the US military had recruited a *jihadi* commander named Sedaqat, originally from Khideer district, to assemble a group of up to 500 men to assist with security in the province. Sedaqat is a well-known

troublemaker who was behind the 2008 kidnapping of two French nationals working for the NGO Action Against Hunger<sup>106</sup> and provincial officials say he remains involved in criminal activity. The local population greeted Sedaqat's recruitment to LDI with surprise and dismay. 'When he was asked to go to the American base, at first the people thought he would be arrested and they were very happy about this. Instead, they seem to be empowering him' says one local official.<sup>107</sup>

In late February 2010, residents of Nili reported that the US military asked Sedaqat to gather a group of around 140 men and bring them from Khedir to Nili to join a battle pitting the US military against local *Taleban* in Gizab district, or possibly even Helmand. According to local reports, the provincial governor objected to this plan and demanded that any initiative should go through the government and not just through the international military. A local government official with close knowledge of the case believes that the rotation of the local SF unit may have been the reason that the plan was not implemented after all.<sup>108</sup> After three days, Sedaqat and his men returned to Khideer.

In other areas, early discussions with local elders never materialized into a formal LDI. In Delaram district of Nimroz province, officials working on LDI say that *Taleban* threats of reprisals if LDI was launched in the area scared off local elders who were initially receptive to the idea. It is also possible, given the history of cooperation with the *Taleban* in this area, that the local population did not want to break ties with the *Taleban*.

In Kunduz, an area which has a particularly long history with militias, the US military say they decided not to pursue initial discussions with elders on LDI because they became wary that what they describe as 'traditional militias'<sup>109</sup> would take over. Kunduz has a multiplicity of recently emerged or re-emerged militias of different types, so it is not clear what 'traditional militias' means.<sup>110</sup> It is

<sup>103</sup> The Shinwaris have had an agreement with the government in the past – referred to as the 'stone agreement' – whereby they provide security in the area. Communication with Dr Susanne Schmeidl.

<sup>104</sup> Dexter Filkins 'Afghan Tribe, Vowing to Fight Taliban, to Get U.S. Aid in Return' New York Times, 27 January 2010.

<sup>105</sup> Alissa J Rubin, 'Afghan Tribal Rivalries Bedevil a U.S. Plan' New York Times, 11 March 2010.

<sup>106</sup> 'Afghan Commander Says Kidnapped Two French Nationals', Reuters, 22 July 2008.

<sup>107</sup> Interview, February 2010.

<sup>108</sup> Communication with AAN, February 2010.

<sup>109</sup> The most prominent commander in Kunduz, Mir Alam Khan, is reported to have been the SF's interlocutor. Interviews with US officials involved in LDI, February 2010.

<sup>110</sup> See for example Thomas Ruttig, 'Militia Sightings' posted on 11 November 2009 on the AAN website <http://aan-afghanistan.com/index.asp?id=485>.

possible that, seeing this crowded field and the mixed record of some of these groups, the risks of creating a new group, or empowering an existing group, was assessed as too high and other areas were prioritized.

#### 6.4 Turf battles in Kabul

Although LDI was initially developed and implemented with minimal involvement from the government, as the program expands, it is being formalized and re-branded to give it wider government and international ownership. On the Afghan side, three main institutions are involved in a turf battle over LDI: the IDLG, the Ministry of Interior and, to a lesser extent, the yet-to-be-approved (and impossibly named) Independent Directorate for the Protection of Public Spaces and Highways with Tribal Support led by *Wolesi Jirga* Member Aref Noorzai.<sup>111</sup>

Like many things about the 'Noorzai Directorate', its level of involvement in LDI remains unclear, but appears to be limited. In Kabul, officials working for Mr Noorzai are eager to assert the role of the directorate as the 'government lead' in LDI. In this view, LDI overlaps neatly with the election security forces (sometimes referred to as Community Protection Forces) which President Karzai asked Aref Noorzai, his relative through marriage, to recruit to protect polling stations for the 2009 presidential elections.<sup>112</sup> In the districts, the directorate does not appear to be involved in LDI. In fact, the directorate no longer appears to have a provincial presence in Kandahar or in the south due to delays, by both President Karzai and parliament, in approving the directorate and compounded by a severe lack of funds.

IDLG emerged as the lead agency in coordinating LDI in the framework outlined by the LDI strategy.

<sup>111</sup> Interestingly, the Ministry of Defence has been an early and frequent critic of LDI. According to an international official who attended the briefing, Minister Wardak was one of the few Afghans to speak out against it during a briefing on LDI by the ISAF Commander in December 2009.

<sup>112</sup> Officials at the directorate in Kabul say that the election security shuras and forces were mobilized in 21 provinces but former employees of the directorate in the southern region say the program was never fully deployed because funding to pay for salaries for shura members and guards (advertised as 10,000 and 8,000 Afs per month, respectively) dried up after only a month. The program quickly lost credibility among tribal elders. Author's interviews with officials working for the Independent Directorate for the Protection of Public Spaces and Highways with Tribal Support, Kabul and Kandahar, February 2010.

More specifically IDLG is called upon to work 'with MoI, MoD and NDS to draft compacts and agreements between local *shuras* and district, provincial and government leadership' and 'with MoI to draft "oaths of allegiance" and scope or authorities for LDI defenders to sign'. Though it has won out in Kabul, experiences on the ground suggest that IDLG's lead role in LDI remains limited to the presence of provincial and district governors (who represent IDLG). Beyond this, IDLG does not appear to have the capacity to engage at the village level, given its current structure and performance record.<sup>113</sup>

With the notable exception of Minister Atmar, there was never much appetite for LDI within MoI. Senior police officers either disapprove of the program in principle or see it as a potential rival or distraction from their main task of building the ANP. Minister Atmar was a strong supporter of LDI, which he linked to his APPF police pillar although recent media reports suggest he has reversed this position,<sup>114</sup> perhaps realizing MoI has lost out to IDLG in the battle for control of LDI.

President Karzai was said to be broadly in support of the idea of LDI. He was instrumental in setting up the ANAP and has reportedly supported the creation of AP3 in Wardak. His main concern about LDI is that in the early days the program was managed with little government control or involvement. He was reportedly enraged at hearing about the LDI initiative in Achin district (see above) for the first time through the media.

LDI has been a bone of contention among US officials. In late 2009, US Ambassador Eikenberry, was reported to be hesitant about the program for the same reason as President Karzai – it lacked buy-in from the Afghan government. In late 2009, Ambassador Eikenberry intervened to 'put the brakes' on LDI<sup>115</sup> asking that the Afghan government become more involved. There are probably other dynamics at play, given existing competition between US government organisations working on Afghanistan. The embassy and the US Department of State may have wanted to assert more direct control over a

<sup>113</sup> Most people interviewed for this paper were very critical of the role and performance of IDLG so far, often referring to it as a 'nuisance'.

<sup>114</sup> See Rajiv Chandrasekaran, 'U.S. Training Afghan Villagers to Fight the Taliban', *The Washington Post*, 27 April 2010.

<sup>115</sup> Greg Jaffe and Rajiv Chandrasekaran, 'U.S. Ambassador Puts Brakes on Plan to Utilize Afghan Militias against Taliban', *The Washington Post*, 22 January 2010.

program that was being developed largely by the military, with little consultation with other parts of the US government.<sup>116</sup> The ambassador's decision may have blocked some USAID funding for LDI but it has only had minimal impact on the project overall, which went ahead using military funds over which he has very limited control.

At least in its early phase, as in the case of AP3, there was little official discussion of LDI among other members of the international community.<sup>117</sup> After some vague announcements in early 2009, little information was made available until late in 2009 when the ISAF commander and his aides gave a briefing on LDI. The UK appears to support the concept but has had limited involvement on the ground.<sup>118</sup> European donors and EU institutions are broadly critical of LDI and of any experiment with militias outside of the context of the ANA and ANP.

These turf battles and disagreements will not have much effect on a program specifically designed to escape the perceived inefficiencies of national institutions. Some would contend that these arguments in Kabul are a welcome smoke screen, keeping the bureaucrats busy while LDI expands quietly on the ground.

## 6.5 The emerging narrative of reintegration

LDI was developed before the flurry of interest in reconciliation and reintegration that followed the January 2010 London conference, but a degree of reverse engineering is at play to link the two issues. While reconciliation aims at the *Taleban* leadership, reintegration focuses on the rank and file insurgents who – so the widely heard argument goes – are not ideologues but have joined the *Taleban* and their allies mainly because of poverty, unemployment and pressure from insurgent leaders. The need to reintegrate *Taleban* foot soldiers into society has been widely endorsed and should be discussed during the upcoming peace *jirga*.

Whatever shape reintegration takes, it will require the government to provide both employment and

<sup>116</sup> 'Eikenberry was never an SF lover', according to an international military officer. Interview, Kabul, February 2010. See also Richard A. Opiel and Rod Norland, 'U.S. Is Reining In Special Forces in Afghanistan', New York Times, 15 March 2010.

<sup>117</sup> A briefing on LDI was given by US officials to ISAF commanders and Afghan officials in late 2009 as part of the ISAF commander's brief meetings.

<sup>118</sup> According to British officials, the UK is not involved in LDI in Helmand. Email communication with the author.

security guarantees to reintegrated fighters. Those who link local defence and reintegration, including Massum Stanakzai, President Karzai's advisor on reconciliation and reintegration, hope that test balloons such as LDI can expand rapidly to address the economic and security needs of the reintegrated fighters by providing jobs and a steady income and to contribute to a safer environment, free from the pressures of the insurgents.

Not everyone welcomes the linkage of LDI with the reintegration narrative. Some of the Special Forces officers working most closely on LDI are adamant that it should not be part of the reintegration of insurgents into society as rewarding those who have acted against the community in the past is 'not in the philosophy of LDI'.<sup>119</sup> It risks creating a perverse incentive whereby fighters are rewarded while those who have chosen not to fight are excluded or marginalized. They also argue that the communities where LDI would be most usefully deployed are characterized by damaged community relations as a result of pressure from the insurgency. Restoring these relations, for example by reviving local governance mechanisms to administer the development component of LDI, is a delicate exercise that may not withstand the introduction of returning *Taleban* fighters.

Two conflicting broader narratives are at play here. On the one hand, those who want to isolate local defence from reintegration point out that programs such as LDI were designed prior to any discussion of reintegration as part of a fighting strategy aimed, in the long run, at securing a victory over the *Taleban*. On the other hand, those who are keen to highlight the link with reintegration,<sup>120</sup> particularly in the international community, probably see this as an important component of a strategy to exit the Afghan conflict.

## 6.6 What next for LDI?

At the field level, those working most closely on LDI think the program offers great promise and, rapidly using available resources, can expand to

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> The link with reintegration seems to have been made, at least if one looks at the funding mechanism for LDI and AP3, which comes mostly from CERP funds. These were recently expanded and extended by the National Defense Authorization Act, which 'provides authority for reintegration into Afghan Society of those individuals who have renounced violence against the Government of Afghanistan.' Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, 30 January 2010.

other areas. The Special Forces believes that it acts as a 'catalyst' and that LDI can be expanded with minimal supervision, building on relationships developed in the early stages of the program. For example, the SF thinks that it can build on the perceived success working with Alikozai elders in Arghandab to expand the program throughout the 'Alikozai belt'. When asked about the resources needed to expand LDI, SF officers say they have what they need to provide supervision and monitoring for the next phase. For example, they claim that expanding LDI to the entire district of Arghandab would only require very few if any additional SF troops. They say the future of LDI will also largely depend on the emergence of the Afghan Special Forces, capable of carrying out this type of unconventional warfare.

There is an important disagreement between the SF on one side and the Afghan government (and perhaps the US embassy) on the other regarding how and where LDI will be used in the next phase. The LDI strategy states that the program will be used in districts that have 'effective leadership in the District Governor and chief of police level'. This view holds that LDI provides a way to reward and consolidate, rather than initiate, progress in local governance. The intent of the Special Forces is very different. They see LDI as a more aggressive COIN tactic to reach the 'darkest pockets' of the insurgency. These areas are, by definition, characterized by poor or non-existent government. LDI, in this view, is not a reward but a tactic to break existing links between communities and the *Taliban* and to reintroduce a limited form of government presence where there was none. The SF believes that LDI should be rapidly expanded during the spring of 2010 in order to deny the *Taliban* access to as many areas as possible ahead of the 'fighting season'. They think LDI can be useful if deployed in areas around large military operations such as Operation Mushtarak, launched in Marja in January 2010.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

Given the increasing pressure on the government and its international backers to show progress in the face of an increasingly assertive insurgency, they are again succumbing to the cyclical temptation of using government-backed armed groups. Discussions on local defence groups generally follow a pattern: They emerge out of a frustration, usually expressed first by the international military or diplomats, over the lack of progress with the ANSF amid growing insecurity. The ill-defined '*arbakai* model' and other so-called 'traditional' mechanisms are considered as

possible solutions and pilot projects are carried out, often discreetly and informally in various areas and without an Afghan lead. Once news gets out that these tests are underway, the process is formalised, a strategy is drafted and the program is linked to government institutions and discussed as a *fait accompli* among the international community.

This cycle risks repeating itself unless an effort is made to learn from past experiences, including very recent ones. For example, it is worrying that no comprehensive assessment was conducted of the ANAP, a significant, costly and destabilizing program universally regarded as a failure. This is most worrying given that similar programs like AP3 were launched shortly after the ANAP's collapse. Even though this should have been done when ANAP was shut down, such an assessment would still be timely. Without this effort to learn from experiences, taking into consideration legitimate concerns expressed by large parts of the Afghan population whose hearts and minds are supposed to be won, little progress can be expected from one program to the next.

An examination of recent programs, including ANAP, AP3 and LDI, suggests a number of preliminary conclusions, many of which will need further exploration.

The relationship between government-backed armed groups and the ANP is often problematic. In many ways, programs such as ANAP, AP3 and LDI replicate rather than solve problems already faced by the ANP. For example, the new programs were affected by the ANP's old problems regarding lack of vetting for recruits, *jihadi* influence and logistics. In addition, programs like the ANAP and AP3 at times in fact discourage recruits from joining the ANP by providing all the benefits and fewer of the problems. The command and control relationship between the ANP and these armed groups posed problems in all three of the programs examined here. ANP control was clearly spelled out in theory but realities on the ground are more competitive.

In areas such as Wardak, Nili (Daikundi province) and Achin (Nangarhar province), experience shows that it is difficult to avoid picking sides when working with informal armed groups. Government and US military support to commanders such as Ghulam Muhammad in Wardak or Sedaqat in Nili is likely to upset the local balance of power. The same can be said of the efforts to enlist the Shinwari tribe in Achin or of the intent to apply LDI throughout the 'Alikozai belt'. The effect these alliances will have on security and political dynamics are hard to predict. It is likely, or cannot be excluded, that backing one commander or one

tribe will antagonise other groups and may lead to further instability.

The consequences of these alliances are not just local. At the national level, given the near exclusive focus of these programs on the Pashtun-dominated south and southeast, non-Pashtuns and Pashtuns from northern Afghanistan are concerned that they are being left out. This ties in to a general narrative of marginalization by non-Pashtuns who say they agreed to be disarmed through programs such as the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) and DIAG while Pashtuns, who they say were never disarmed, are being armed and supported through government-sponsored programs such as ANAP, AP3 and LDI. This narrative is clearly exaggerated (not all non-Pashtun armed groups in the north were disarmed through DDR and DIAG and many Pashtun armed groups were disarmed both during and after the *Taleban* regime) but it is widespread and will have to be addressed.

There is considerable risk that these programs will create perverse incentives by rewarding the wrong people. Reports from areas such as Nili or experience in Wardak illustrate that the government ends up rewarding criminal *jihadi* commanders instead of peaceful members of the community. To some, this may form an incentive to take up arms in the hope of accessing government funding and employment.

The model of the LDI in Nagahan, so far, represents a best-case (or least-bad) scenario. It illustrates some of the ideal features of the 'small is beautiful' approach: a small homogeneous community led by effective tribal and district leaders working in partnership with a group of well-informed, well trained and culturally aware international military staff to provide security and improve livelihoods. However, given that every village, every valley and every family or sub-tribe has its own complex characteristics, it is unrealistic to think that this model can simply be replicated in other areas. In particular, it is unclear how this model can be used in larger and more heterogeneous areas of territory.

Experiences discussed in this paper show that close involvement by adequately trained and experienced international military forces are one important, though not sufficient, criterion for success. It is unclear that necessary resources are available to ensure the careful design and monitoring of an expanded version of LDI. In particular, despite assurances to the contrary, it is unlikely that enough Special Forces (or similarly trained and experienced international or Afghan military staff) can be mobilized to implement LDI in

the way that it is being done in places like Nagahan.

Programs such as LDI are experimental in nature and fraught with risks of abuse by any of the parties involved. This highlights the need for some form of accountability mechanism and, in particular, credible ways to seek redress. The government or traditional mechanisms (such as credible and accountable *shuras*) may provide this. Given the weakness of government institutions at the local level, particularly in the areas of justice and the rule of law<sup>121</sup> it is unlikely that they will be able to fulfil this role. Traditional mechanisms are therefore particularly important, but their geographical reach is often limited, making expansion of programs such as LDI difficult.

More by opportunity than through careful planning, discussions on local defence have become inextricably tied to the issue of the reintegration of lower-level *Taleban* fighters. Given the pressures placed on decision makers to find solutions for reintegration, arguably as part of an overall exit strategy from the Afghan conflict, this reintegration component is being presented as a *fait accompli*. This does not mask conceptual contradictions. To some, linking programs such as LDI to reintegration goes against the 'philosophy' of local defence because experiments with local defence are fragile and are not designed as job-creation programs for former insurgents. Adding a reintegration element will make such programs more difficult to manage by, among others, introducing an element of fear and distrust that is not conducive to strengthening community structures. In addition, where some see experiments with local defence as a tool of unconventional warfare, others see them as ways to reward areas with good governance. These contradictions point to the absence of a unified approach in the way local defence programs are viewed. This should be addressed if the considerable risks involved can be mitigated.

<sup>121</sup> Some in the US military talk about building an 'honest broker' capacity into LDI but the modalities of this remain very vague. Interview, Kabul, February 2010.

## **ABOUT THE AFGHANISTAN ANALYSTS NETWORK (AAN)**

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