Strategic Conflict Analysis
Kunduz Province
Working for a Sustainable Culture of Peace
About CPAU

Cooperation for Peace and Unity (CPAU) works for the promotion of knowledge and awareness of peace, social justice, and human rights as the foundation upon which the nation-building efforts in Afghanistan should be based. Through direct encouragement and participation in active peacebuilding by means of training and educational programs, CPAU hopes to contribute to the creation of a viable alternative to war and violence, as the first step towards building lasting peace.

Since 1996 CPAU has played a crucial and unique role in the process of sustainable community peace building and conflict resolution in Afghanistan. Through its ongoing training and coaching programs, CPAU works at district and local level, to build up the skills and capacities of local community leaders and representatives from diverse ethnic backgrounds by using a participatory approach which builds inter-ethnic cooperation and transforms conflict. CPAU strives to strengthen the role of community institutions in order to influence change at grassroots level in promoting a lasting culture of peace and social justice in Afghanistan.

In addition, CPAU has been providing capacity building to many aid community actors on issues of peace building and community development in order to enable them to mainstream peace building components into the process of reconstruction and development. CPAU has also been providing peace education for about 30,000 school children across the 25 provinces in which the organization is present.

Based on its 15 years of field experience, CPAU also uses its community links and networks to undertake various research projects, reflecting the issues of concern to Afghan people directly from the grass-roots level. Through its research department, CPAU seeks to enable effective community feedback on existing interventions between communities and external change agents, and to facilitate the systematic analysis of the relationship between processes and outcomes across a wide range of communities.
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Author: Seth Peavey

For more information about this report and CPAU’s work, please contact: info@cpau.org.af
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Executive Summary

This Strategic Conflict Analysis report seeks to identify drivers of peace and conflict and provide recommendations for conflict-sensitive development support in Kunduz. A predominantly rural province in northern Afghanistan, Kunduz has been the site of growing insecurity since 2009, when the Taliban and other armed, non-state actors, including illegal militia groups, began to establish a strong presence in rural and outlying areas of the province.

Actors with an impact on peace and conflict in Kunduz include provincial and district-level officials, the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), anti-government groups, legal and illegal militias, local commanders, community elders, and local religious leaders. On a provincial level, the main conflict dynamics are between the Afghan government, supported by ISAF, and armed opposition groups (AOGs). The government security forces are currently supported by the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), which has begun to shift from a less aggressive to a more supportive role in advance of the 2014 deadline for the withdrawal of combat troops.

The Taliban is currently the largest and most active opposition group in Kunduz. Other AOGs include the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Hezb-i-Islami Gulbuddin, and the Haqqani Network. The security situation is complicated by the presence of other armed actors, including local warlords, militias, and criminal gangs. In particular, there are thousands of official and unofficially recognized militias who operate with minimal government oversight and regularly engage in various criminal behaviors, including land-grabbing, illegal taxation, theft, and murder.

Major drivers of conflict in Kunduz include poverty, unemployment, lack of education, poor governance, insecurity, lack of access to justice, and the proliferation of armed, non-state actors. Most households rely on agriculture as a primary source of revenue, and disputes over land ownership, water access, and other livelihood issues are common. These problems are aggravated by a lack of infrastructure and rule of law in rural areas. Poverty and lack of jobs has contributed to Afghans, especially young men, choosing to join various armed groups, including the Afghan army and police, Taliban, legal and illegal militias, and criminal gangs.

Meanwhile, widespread corruption and the government’s inability to provide justice, development, and social services has undermined security and created widespread popular resentment. Low levels of education and a lack of awareness of legal rights has also made residents more vulnerable to victimization by powerful actors and prone to recruitment by violent and/or radical groups. Finally, conflict trends have also been aggravated by larger political trends in the country and region, including the ongoing conflict between national government and AOGs and the negative interference by Afghanistan’s regional neighbors.
Pakistan, in particular, has been a major supporter and funding source of local Taliban groups in Kunduz.

Potential sources of peace in Kunduz include economic growth, education, improved governance and security, disarmament of non-state actors, better access to justice, and the promotion of peace by local elders and religious figures. Economic development can reduce the population of jobless youths who are most vulnerable to joining AOGs, militias, or criminal groups. Meanwhile, initiatives to reduce corruption and increase the capacity of government institutions to provide security and governance are necessary, long-term steps for peace and stability. In the short-term, informal institutions such as shuras or jirgas (groups of local elders who make decisions on behalf of their communities) can also reduce conflict by providing community-level governance and resolving local disputes before they lead to violence.
Acronyms

ALP – Afghan Local Police
ANA – Afghan National Army
ANP – Afghan National Police
ANSF – Afghanistan National Security Forces
AOG – Armed Opposition Group
CPAU – Cooperation for Peace and Unity
GIRoA – Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
HI - Hezb-i-Islami (political party)
HIG – Hezb-i-Islami Gulbuddin (armed opposition movement)
IED – Improvised Explosive Device
IMU - Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan
ISAF – International Security Assistance Force
JI – Jamiat-i-Islami (political party)
MoI – Ministry of Interior
MoJ - Ministry of Justice
MRRD – Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development
NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDS – National Directorate of Security
NGO – Non-Governmental Organization
NSP – National Solidarity Programme
PRT – Provincial Reconstruction Team
SCA – Strategic Conflict Analysis
SIDA – Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
UN – United Nations
USAID – United States Agency for International Development
Dari and Pashtu Terms

**arbakai** – community-based security forces that often function as *de facto* tribal militias. These groups are traditionally recruited by and report to a local council of elders. In some but not all cases, these groups are officially recognized by the government. In practice, however, there is minimal government oversight or control of these groups. Since 2011, there has been attempt to reform and re-label some of these groups as Afghan Local Police (ALP).

**huqooq** – the rights of an individual under the law; also used to refer to the Civil Law Offices administered in each district by the Ministry of Justice. These Civil Law Offices resolve civil disputes and regularly refer cases to either the formal courts or to informal justice providers, such as *shuras* or *jirgas*.

**jirga** – a community-based process for collective decision-making that originates from traditional Pashtun culture. Usually a temporary or ad-hoc group of respected elders that convenes when necessary to resolve disputes.

**mirab** – ‘water master,’ usually a local farmer who is recruited by local communities to oversee the distribution of water resources and maintain irrigation infrastructure.

**mujahedeen** – literally “people doing jihad”; generally refers to loosely affiliated guerilla fighters who fought against the Soviet occupation between 1979 and 1989 and were among the primary combatant groups during the civil war period of the 1990s.

**mullah** – Islamic scholar, someone who has studied *sharia*.

**sharia** – Islamic Law as interpreted from the Quran and the *hadith* (sayings of Prophet Muhammad)

**shura** – a group of local elders or recognized leaders who convene regularly to make decisions on behalf of their community. These groups vary in structure and composition and are not always representative of their communities. These councils are often but not always elected by their constituents. In some cases, these councils have been created by powerful individuals or groups, such as the government (e.g. Community Development Councils, created as part of the National Solidarity Programme) or the Taliban. While most *shuras* are village-based, the term can also refer to groups convened on a district, provincial or national level.
Introduction

This Cooperation for Peace and Unity (CPAU) report is a strategic conflict analysis (SCA) of Kabul Province. Located in northern Afghanistan, the predominantly rural province of Kunduz has been the site of some insecurity and opposition activity since 2009. This insecurity is driven by a variety of economic, political and social factors. The purpose of this evaluation, which was conducted with funding from the Dutch Embassy in Kabul, is to identify drivers of peace and conflict, including actors, behaviors, and structures that contribute to conflict trends in Kunduz Province. The study also looks at how community members in Kunduz are vulnerable to and positively or negatively affected by these drivers. Specific focus is given to the districts of Ali Abad, Char Dara, Imam Sahib, and Khanabad.

As Afghanistan nears the 2014 deadline for the end of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) combat mission, responsibility for security has gradually shifted to Afghan forces. The foreign forces, meanwhile, have begun to shift towards a supportive role, including logistical and technical support to the Afghanistan National Security Forces (ANSF) and the distribution of development aid to support the growth of the Afghan economy, improve the livelihood of local residents, and strengthen the institutions of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIRoA).

The goal of this SCA paper is to provide the Dutch government and other international organizations, foreign donors and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with knowledge of conflict trends and development needs in the province. In doing so, CPAU seeks to encourage the implementation of development projects that most effectively address the needs of local residents without unintentionally or adversely affecting conflict trends in the province. Too often, foreign-funded development projects in Afghanistan have been implemented without a sufficient awareness of local needs and cultural norms, leading to resentment or even hostility. A conflict-sensitive project is one that addresses local needs in a way that mitigates rather than aggravates the drivers of conflict.

This SCA report is primarily based on qualitative research conducted in Kunduz Province, including each of the target districts, in late 2012. This research included structured interviews with provincial and district-level officials, police, local elders, religious leaders, former Taliban, militia members, and regional experts. As an Afghan-led research and program organization with years of experience working with communities in Kunduz, CPAU is well-placed to conduct research on conflict trends and the development needs of residents. This research was informed by a similar SCA conducted by CPAU in cooperation with Swede Peace in the northern

The first two sections of this paper describe the theoretical foundations and methodology of the SCA research. These sections are followed by a strategic analysis of provincial-level drivers of peace and conflict in Kunduz, including a discussion of key actors, behaviors, and structures and their affect on local residents. The paper then provides district-level analyses of drivers of peace and conflict in Ali Abad, Char Dara, Imam Sahib, and Khanabad. The final section offers recommendations for conflict-sensitive development aid and governance support based on the conflict trends and potential sources of peace identified in the preceding sections.
Theoretical Foundations

In conducting this research, CPAU relied on the Manual for Conflict Analysis developed by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). This manual, which provides methods and instructions on analyzing peace and conflict, was utilized by CPAU to conduct an SCA evaluation of Northern Afghanistan in collaboration with Dr. Björn Holmberg of Swede Peace in late 2011. The SCA process seeks to illuminate drivers of peace and conflict by identifying and analyzing (A) actors and attitudes, (B) behaviors, and (C) structural factors that contribute to peace and conflict trends. Together, these three components form a “conflict triangle,” which is shown in the figure below.

By analyzing the key interactions and dynamics between the three corners of the conflict triangle, it is possible to understand their combined effect and identify the key drivers of peace and conflict. This study is not a contextual analysis of Afghanistan, but instead seeks to focus on the most salient thematic factors and dynamics. For example, a previous SCA conducted in 2008 identified a combination of factors that created a driver for conflict in mountainous poppy-growing regions of southern Afghanistan. The international forces (actor) had an interest (attitude) in eradicating poppy fields (behavior) to limit the conflict resources available to the Taliban and other armed opposition groups. Meanwhile, the Taliban (actor) had an interest in opposing the foreign occupation (attitude) by recruiting soldiers to carry out attacks against ISAF (behavior). However, as an unintended consequence of the poppy field eradication (behavior), the young men who were faced with a poor economy and no other means of generating income (structure) were more easily recruited by armed opposition groups. This combination of actors/attitudes, behaviors and underlying structures combined to create a salient driver of conflict that has had a negative effect on peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Below is a refined model of the conflict triangle proposed by Dr. Björn Holmberg of Swede Peace. The model has been expanded to include D, as in drivers for peace and conflict, along with related programming options, and how those options can have a positive effect on the actors/attitudes, behaviors and structures. When a driver, like the drug eradication example given above, is identified, it will be related to a programming option for aid. In this example, a programmatic option would be to counter the economic vulnerability of unemployed young men (structure) through private sector development in order to create viable job opportunities.

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while continuing to fight the drug trade through alternative and more conflict-sensitive means (behavior), such as anti-corruption measures and a stronger emphasis on border control.

This theoretical framework formed the foundation of the SCA research conducted by CPAU and Swede Peace in four provinces of northern Afghanistan (Balkh, Sari Pul, Jowzjan, and Samangan) in late 2011. That research was based on panel discussions with experts, both Afghan and expatriate, in Kabul to identify the key actors/attitudes, behaviors, and structures that drive peace and conflict on a national level in Afghanistan. This was followed by interviews with local stakeholders and community members in six districts of the four target provinces. The study used conflict theory as a point of departure in combination with best practices in the promotion of human security. An emphasis was also placed on conflict sensitivity, or how to avoid unintentionally having a negative impact on conflict dynamics through aid, which was analyzed using the conflict triangle.

For this SCA report on Kunduz, these research methods have been adapted and modified by the CPAU’s Afghan and expatriate research staff in Kabul City with the assistance of the organization’s Kunduz field staff. In doing so, this report seeks to best capture the province and district-specific drivers (actors/attitudes, behavior, and structures) of peace and conflict in Kunduz Province. These drivers have identified based on the input of a range of local actors, ranging from community residents to government officials to representatives of civil society organizations. A focus has also been placed on identifying community needs with regards to peace and livelihood issues. Meanwhile, an emphasis remains on conflict sensitivity and understanding peace and conflict dynamics in order to promote a “do no harm” approach to development support.
Methodology

This report is based primarily upon a qualitative assessment of key stakeholders and knowledgeable sources in Kunduz Province. Structured interviews were conducted with a total of 67 individuals. This included 14 in Ali Abad, 12 in Char Dara, 19 in Imam Sahib, and 10 in Khanabad District, and 12 in Kunduz City or Kabul. These interviews were primarily conducted between October and November 2012.

Methods development occurred at CPAU's main office in Kabul with significant input from the organization's primarily Afghan research and program staff. The research tools employed during the joint CPAU-Swede Peace strategic conflict analysis of northern Afghanistan in 2011 were used as a starting point for the current research design. A subsequent SCA conducted by CPAU in Kapisa Province in mid-2012 was also used as a guide. The quantitative questionnaire consisted of four primary questions, each with several components and follow-ups. Four versions of these questionnaires were used in order to identify peace and conflict trends on a village/community, district, province, and national level. An English version of these research tools can be found in Annex 1.

The interviews were conducted on-site in the target districts by CPAU's Afghan research staff. Two staff members participated in each interview, including an interviewer and a note-taker. All interviews with the local population were conducted in Dari or Pashtu, although some supplementary interviews with foreign experts were conducted in English. The interview targets were selected based on their personal knowledge, connections, and/or professional experience in their respective locations. Efforts were made to include a diverse range of knowledgeable respondents, including village elders, police, government officials, representatives of civil society groups, former members of the Taliban, regional experts.

This qualitative data was translated and transcribed in Kabul by the bilingual research staff who participated in the original interviews. Further debriefs and data analysis was also conducted by CPAU's Afghan and expatriate research staff in December 2012 and January 2013.

Limitations to this research methodology included security, logistical, and cultural obstacles. Physical security varies significantly among and within the target districts, and it was not possible for CPAU staff to travel safely to all areas of the target districts. In particular, the significant presence of Taliban in Char Dara District and the large numbers of arbakai and other unknown armed groups in Khanabad District limited CPAU's ability to conduct research in those respective districts. Within Khanabad, the area of Aqtash was completely insecure, which
prevented CPAU from interviewing any individuals in that area. Meanwhile, CPAU encountered fewer security obstacles in Ali Abad, Imam Sahib, and the provincial capital.

Strong cultural restrictions relating to gender norms were also a limiting factor. According to Afghan traditions, it is culturally inappropriate for women to interact with men outside of their family. These cultural barriers were strongest in rural areas outside of the provincial capital. This meant that it was often not possible for CPAU’s male research team to interview female community members. CPAU’s Kunduz office, which includes a couple of female staff members, was able to assist in arranging a few interviews with women in Kunduz City, Ali Abad, and Imam Sahib. However, cultural and security obstacles prevented CPAU’s research team from conducting any interviews with women in the districts of Char Dara and Khanabad.

CPAU also encountered some initial difficulty and delays in obtaining interviews with provincial and district level officials, despite obtaining letters of permission from the relevant government ministries in Kabul. In the end, CPAU was able to conduct interviews with district governors and at least two or three other officials in each the target districts, along with several provincial level officials (Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Women's Affairs, Provincial Court, National Directorate of Security, and Provincial Council). However, the office of the provincial governor and the ANP headquarters did not respond to requests for interviews. In addition, the sensitive nature of the research topic meant that some interviewees, especially government officials, only provided partial responses and declined to comment on individuals, groups, or institutions that contribute to conflict trends in the province. CPAU attempted to compensate for this deficit by interviewing a wide range of individuals, including community elders and members of non-state organizations who had greater freedom to speak on these sensitive issues.
Strategic Conflict Analysis: Kunduz

Background Information: Kunduz Province

Traditionally known as “the bread basket of Afghanistan,” Kunduz is an economically important province in northern Afghanistan. Kunduz is located along the national border with Tajikistan and also shares a border with the provinces of Takhar, Baghlan, Samangan and Balkh. The province covers an area of 8,040 km, of which 12 percent is mountainous or semi-mountainous. The province is dominated by the Kunduz River Valley. The Kunduz River flows north into the Amu Darya, which forms part of the border between Afghanistan and Tajikistan. To the south, the province brushes against the northern fringes of the Hindu Kush. The capital and largest city is Kunduz. With a population of a quarter million, Kunduz City is also one of the larger urban areas in the country. The province has seven districts, including Ali Abad, Char Dara, Dasht Archi, Imam Sahib, Khanabad, Kunduz, and Qala-e-Zal.

Kunduz had an estimated population of 953,800 as of 2012-13. The major ethnic groups are Pashtuns, Uzbeks, and Tajiks, with significant minorities of Hazara, Turkmen and other groups. Pashtuns are the largest ethnic group in a majority of the districts. However, Uzbeks form a plurality of 45 percent in Imam Sahib District, while Turkmen account for about 90 percent of the district population in Qalay-I-Zal. Within the Pashtun community, the largest tribe is the Ghilzai. There is also a small population of Kuchi nomads, whose numbers range from approximately 45,000 in summer to 88,000 in winter. The major languages are Pashto and Dari, but Uzbeki and Turkmeni are also commonly spoken. The overall literacy rate is relatively high at 33 percent. However, only about one quarter of women are literate, compared to two-fifths of men.

With nearly three quarters of the population living in rural areas, agriculture is a major source of income for 66 percent of the households in Kunduz. In addition, 74 percent of rural households and 44 percent of urban households own livestock or poultry. While Kunduz has

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8 Ibid.
9 NPS. (2011).
10 WFP (2009).
historically not been a major opium producer itself, it has since become an important trafficking route for drugs coming from the south as well as from more traditional opium cultivating areas such as Badakhshan.\textsuperscript{11}

Given Kunduz’s proximately to Central Asia, the area was historically prone to invasion from Uzbek, Mongol, Turkmen and other Central Asian groups, some of whom settled in the area. Later, beginning in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, Kunduz saw an influx of Pashtun settlers from the south as a result of the Afghan monarchy’s ‘pashtunization’ policy.\textsuperscript{12} In the 1920s and 30s, the area experienced a new wave of Central Asian immigrants seeking to flee the oppressive policies of the newly created Soviet Union. The arrival of additional Pashtun farmers and settlers throughout the 20\textsuperscript{th} century led to various conflicts over land and water in the following decades.\textsuperscript{13}

During the 1970s and 80s, Kunduz played host to two of the major anti-Soviet Mujahedeen groups: the Ghilzai Pashtun-dominated \textit{Hizb-i-Islami}, led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, and the primarily Tajik, Uzbek and Turkmen \textit{Jamiat-i-Islami}, led by Burhanuddin Rabbani. Kunduz fell to the Mujahedeen in 1988, after which the province became increasingly fragmented by various military and political groups who exacerbated ethnic tensions in the province.\textsuperscript{14} Exploiting this ethnic polarization and the large Pashtun presence in the area, the Taliban captured Kunduz City in 1999. Later, Kunduz was the last major city to be held by the Taliban before its fall to the U.S.-backed Northern Alliance in November 2001.

Kunduz Province remained relatively stable for most of the following decade until Taliban began to infiltrate the area again in 2009.\textsuperscript{15} That same year, the province was also the site of a deadly U.S. airstrike that killed at least 142 people, mostly civilians, after German coalition forces requested a strike against two oil-transport trucks that had been hijacked by the Taliban.\textsuperscript{16} The governor of the province, Mohammad Omar, an ethnic Pashtun formerly associated with Abdul Rasul Sayyaf’s Islamic Dawah Organization of Afghanistan, was later killed by a bomb at mosque in neighboring Takhar Province in 2010.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{11} Devlin, Lawrence, et al. (2009). \textit{Conflict analysis: Kunduz city, Kunduz province}. Kabul, Afghanistan: CPAU.
\textsuperscript{12} NPS. (2011).
\textsuperscript{13} Devlin, Lawrence, et al. (2009).
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
Major political parties and factions in Kunduz include: *Jamiat-i-Islami; Hizb-i-Islami; Junbish-i-Milli*, a predominantly Uzbek party led by General Abdul Rashid Dostum; and *Hizb-i-Wahdat*, a Shia, Hazara-dominated party led by Mohammed Karim Khalili. The province is currently represented by 9 seats in the *Wolesi Jirga*. Two of those seats are reserved for female candidates, while the other seven are currently occupied by men.

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18 NPS. (2011); Devlin, Lawrence, et al. (2009).
Province SCA: Kunduz

Security Overview

The security situation in Kunduz is mixed, with limited government control and high levels of insecurity in the outlying areas of the province. Although located far from the tumultuous southern and eastern regions of Afghanistan, Kunduz has been the site of greater insecurity and anti-government violence than other neighboring northern provinces such as Takhar and Balkh. Kunduz City was the last remaining stronghold of the Taliban during the 2001 war, and the province remained relatively secure for most of the following decade. Since 2008, however, Kunduz has seen a decline in the rule of law, especially in rural and borders areas, and an uptick in violence and attacks against government targets in the province. Recently, there has some modest progress in reducing the presence of anti-government groups, but the slight decline in AOGs has been accompanied by a large increase in other armed, non-state actors who adversely affect security in the province.

Within Kunduz, the southern districts of Char Dara and Khanabad and the northern border districts of Qala-e-Zal, Imam Sahib, and Dasht Archi have poor rule of law and a limited government presence. In contrast, the smaller and least populated district of Ali Abad, located to the south of Kunduz City along the main highway between Kunduz and Kabul, has seen an improvement in security since 2010 and is considered relatively more secure. Meanwhile, Kunduz District, which contains the largest city and provincial capital, has the strongest government presence and higher levels of stability and rule of law than the outlying districts. However, the capital has also been the site of numerous anti-government and anti-ISAF attacks, including an recent attack in September 2012 that killed 16 people, including 11 police officers,19 or an attack against a German guesthouse in August 2011 that killed four Afghans.20 In addition, the former provincial governor was killed in a suicide bombing at mosque in neighboring Takhar Province in 2010.21

Various groups contribute to this insecurity, including drug-traffickers, local militias and warlords, corrupt officials, criminal gangs, and armed opposition groups (AOGs). Currently, the Taliban and their local affiliates are the most active AOG in Kunduz and have claimed responsibility for numerous anti-government or anti-ISAF attacks in the province. Other AOGs

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with a smaller presence in Kunduz include the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, the Hezb-i-Islami militia led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar (HIG), and the Haqqani network, led by former mujahidin commander Maulavi Jalaluddin Haqqani and his son Sirajuddin Haqqani.\(^{22}\) Attacks by the Taliban and other AOGs have included suicide bombs, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and conventional firearms. While these armed groups have the greatest presence in rural and outlying areas of the province, most prominently in Char Dara District, they maintain the ability and resources to carry out attacks against government and Western targets in all areas of the province. The fighting between the ISAF-supported government forces and AOGs has led to significant civilian casualties, most notably from the controversial and deadly NATO airstrike against two Taliban-captured oil tankers in September 2009 that killed as many as 142 Afghans, mostly civilians, in a hamlet several kilometers south of Kunduz City.\(^{23}\) Since 2010, government military operations against the Taliban led by the ANA and ANP have had mixed success, leading some Taliban to relocate to Pakistan or other provinces.\(^{24}\)

The proliferation of various other armed groups in outlying areas of the province, however, has also undermined security and made it more difficult for the civilian population to protect their livelihoods and access necessary government services. Local warlords, militias, and criminal gangs have taken advantage of the poor rule of law to engage in drug-trafficking, robbery, kidnapping, and various other criminal behaviors. In particular, government-sanctioned militia groups known as *arbakai* are prevalent in rural areas of the province. Although intended as a countermeasure against the Taliban in areas outside the control of the ANA and ANP, these *arbakai* lack any meaningful government oversight and often function as criminal gangs or as *de facto* tribal militias under the control of local warlords. Such groups have had a mixed or negative impact on security and rule of law in the rural communities where they operate.

Government corruption is also a significant cause of insecurity in the province. Many police and government officials are believed to be involved in bribe-seeking, drug trafficking, and other illegal activities.\(^{25}\) In addition, illegal land seizures by powerful individuals with links to the

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\(^{24}\) Interview - NDS Director. Kunduz City, Kunduz. 5 November 2012.

government are widespread and a major source of instability and anti-government sentiment in the province.\textsuperscript{26}

**Key Actors, Interests and Behaviors**

The key actors who influence peace and conflict in Kunduz Province include provincial and district-level officials, government security forces, local commanders, militias, Taliban and other AOGs, local elders and religious leaders, and community members. On a provincial level, the main conflict lines are between the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), supported by ISAF, and anti-government opposition groups, of which the Taliban are the most active. The overall security situation in Kunduz, however, is complicated by the presence and activities of militias, criminal gangs, and other armed groups that often operate outside of the law.

**Formal Government Actors**

On the formal government side, the ANSF includes the Afghan National Army (ANA), Afghan National Police (ANP), and the National Directorate of Security (NDS). These formal forces have the strongest presence in Kunduz City, with lower numbers in the outlying districts. As of 2011, there were 1691 ANP assigned to Kunduz Province, including approximately 600 police in Kunduz District; about 200 in Khanabad, Char Dara, and Imam Sahib; 100 in Ali Abad and Dasht Arche; and 50 in Qala-e-Zal.\textsuperscript{27} The NDS and ANA also have a significant presence in the province. The provincial headquarters of the main government ministries are also located in Kunduz City, with smaller offices or representatives in the capitals of the surrounding districts. This includes the police, courts, and the ministries of Justice, Education, and the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD), among others.

The provincial administration is led by a governor appointed by the central government in Kabul. That post is currently held by Muhammad Anwar Jigdalak, an ethnic Tajik affiliated with the Northern Alliance who previously held the posts of mayor of Kabul and president of the National Olympic Committee. He was removed from his previous positions in 2004 by President


Hamid Karzai amid complaints of bribery and land-grabbing by senior government officials and was also involved in a land scandal in the wealthy Shirpur neighborhood of Kabul prior to his appointment as Kunduz governor. His predecessor, Muhammad Omar, a Pashtun affiliated with Abdul Rasul Sayyaf’s Islamic Dawa Organization of Afghanistan, was killed by a suicide bomb while visiting a mosque in neighboring Takhar Province on October 8, 2010.

Within the provincial government, Jamiat-i-Islami has the most influence, followed by Hezb-i-Islami. Jamiat's support is strongest among the Tajik community, but the party also benefits from its national network and connections with influential powerbrokers in Kabul, including Vice President Mohammad Fahim. The political party of Hezb-i-Islami (not to be confused with the separate militant wing of the organization led by Hekmatyar Gulbuddin) draws its support from the province's Pashtun majority. Other pro-government political parties with a significant presence in the province include General Dostum's predominantly Uzbek Junbish-i-Milli and the Hazara Hezb-i-Wahdat. Many high-level officials in the provincial government and state security forces previously fought for the Northern Alliance during the mujahedeen and Taliban period. These officials benefit from these political networks and connections to the current government, and have established patronage networks that provide political and financial benefits to themselves and their supporters.

The motivations of the individuals who comprise provincial government includes political power, financial power, their personal security, and the security and well-being of their respective families, tribes, and communities. These individuals and their supporters often benefit financially and politically from their positions in the current government, and therefore have a strong incentive to prevent an erosion of the government’s control in the province. Furthermore, government officials are often a primary target of AOG attacks and regularly receive threats from the Taliban against themselves and their families. In particular, those with links to Jamiat-i-Islami receive more threats than those with ties to other parties. These AOGs represent a threat to not just the physical well-being but also political and financial well-being of government officials.

The provincial government attempts to advance its goals through the provision of security, rule of law, development projects, and social services, such as education and health care. However,
widespread corruption, including bribery and land-grabbing, and ongoing insecurity has undermined the capacity of the provincial administration to deliver services and provide proper governance. In particular, illegal seizures of land by powerful individuals is a major problem in Kunduz and a significant source of anti-government sentiments and local disputes. These individuals often have strong ties to the provincial government and the ruling political parties, including Jamiat and Junbish, which prevents local victims from seeking help from the police and formal justice institutions.

Just as elsewhere in Afghanistan, the effectiveness of government programs and development projects in Kunduz is often greatly reduced by an inappropriate diversion of financial resources into the pockets of government officials, commanders, local contractors, and non-state actors. Meanwhile, the provincial security forces remain highly reliant on ISAF financial and technical support, even as foreign forces have increasingly taken a backseat to the ANA and ANP during military operations against AOGs in the province ahead of the planned 2014 withdrawal.

**Anti-Government Actors**

The Taliban are currently the largest and most active AOG in Kunduz Province, with a growing presence since 2009. They have claimed responsibility for many anti-government or anti-ISAF attacks in the province, including the suicide bomb in neighboring Takhar that killed Kunduz Governor Muhammad Omar in October 2011. Other AOGs with a smaller presence in Kunduz include the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Hezb-i-Islami Gulbuddin (HIG), and the Haqqani network. Attacks by the Taliban and other AOGs have included suicide bombs, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and conventional firearms. While these armed groups have the greatest presence in rural and outlying areas of the province, they maintain the ability and resources to carry out attacks throughout the province.

During the Taliban era, Kunduz was one of the Taliban’s biggest strongholds in northern Afghanistan. From 2002 to 2008, the province remained relatively stable, with relatively few

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31 Interview - Acting Director, Ministry of Women’s Affairs. Kunduz City, Kunduz. 4 November 2012.
32 Interview - Deputy Chairman, Provincial Council. Kunduz City, Kunduz. 7 November 2012.
33 Interview - Head of NSP Shura. De Kalan De Wairan Village, Khanabad, Kunduz. 13 October 2012.
anti-government attacks. Since 2009, however, there has been a considerable resurgence of Taliban activity in the province, especially in Char Dara and other rural districts of Kunduz.\textsuperscript{36}

The Taliban have gained and maintained power in the province by carrying attacks against the government and ISAF as well as by addressing the unmet needs of rural communities for security, governance, and justice. The Taliban have established a shadow government in the province, complete with tax collectors and informal courts for implementing quick and efficient, if sometimes brutal, justice.\textsuperscript{37} Meanwhile, the Taliban have expanded their influence by eliminating education for girls and using so-called "night letters" to threaten violence against residents who cooperate with the government or ISAF or attempt to bring disputes to government institutions, such as the police or courts.\textsuperscript{38}

The Taliban have successfully taken advantage of the high unemployment, poor governance, and a lack of education to recruit significant numbers of unemployed and uneducated young men in Kunduz. According to four former members of the Taliban interviewed by CPAU in Imam Sahib district, reasons for joining the Taliban included government corruption, ethnic discrimination, failure of the government to resolve disputes in a fair and efficient way, presence of foreign troops, financial motivations, and the influence and manipulation of Pakistan.\textsuperscript{39} One former Talib in Aftab Logh Village, Imam Sahib said that he had previously had a dispute over land, which the government refused to solve without a bribe that he could not afford to pay. Instead, he sought justice from the Taliban. "I heard that the Taliban had a shura that was solving disputes quickly and without bribes, so I referred my case to them. After they solved my case, I decided that I should stand and fight against this corrupt government."\textsuperscript{40}

Each of the former Taliban interviewed by CPAU complained about the corruption and discrimination by the government. However, all of them also criticized the Taliban for being under the authority and negative influence of Pakistan, which eventually led each of them to leave. "The Pakistanis have come to our country to encourage us to fight against our own people and to destroy our country," said a former Talib who had previously overseen a group of 12 fighters in Hawa Shenase Village, Imam Sahib.\textsuperscript{41} Another Talib complained that many of the

\textsuperscript{36}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{38}Interview - Head of District Court. Char Dara, Kunduz. 3 November 2012.
\textsuperscript{39}Interviews - Taliban (x4). Aftab Logh and Hawa Shenase villages, Imam Sahib, Kunduz. 17 October 2012.
\textsuperscript{40}Interview - Talib # 3. Aftab Logh, Imam Sahib, Kunduz. 17 October 2012.
\textsuperscript{41}Interview - Talib # 2. Hawa Shenase, Imam Sahib, Kunduz. 17 October 2012.
Pakistani-dominated Taliban in Afghanistan were fighting not for Afghanistan but for Pakistan and/or for their own financial benefit. "When I saw a Pakistani [Taliban leader] who was gathering money for himself to build an apartment in Pakistan, I realized that this person is a foreigner who wants to destroy my country, so why should I continue to fight for him against my own homeland and people?"42

While political and religious ideology matters, financial concerns are often one of the most significant motivations for choosing to join or leave armed groups such as the Taliban. Unemployment is high in Kunduz, and many rural residents live in poverty with few options for earning an income to feed their families, other than through joining armed groups. Financial incentives have therefore been a used by the government to entice low-ranking individuals away from the Taliban. Of the four ex-Taliban interviewed by CPAU in Imam Sahib, two claimed that they had received a payout of 7000 Afghanis (about US$140) from the Afghan government in return for laying down their arms and leaving the Taliban.43 Meanwhile, two former Taliban in Ali Abad who said they had been fighting against the government until mid-2012 told CPAU that they had decided to leave the Taliban after the government offered them a salary to work as Afghan Local Police.44

Since 2009, the increase in fighting between the government and the Taliban and other AOGs has led to significant civilian casualties in Kunduz. Attempts by the Pakistan-dominated Taliban to disrupt ISAF supply lines from Tajikistan to Afghanistan, which pass through Kunduz, contributed to the deadly 2009 NATO airstrike against two captured oil tankers that accidentally killed at least 142 Afghans, most of whom were civilians.45 Furthermore, the use of IEDs and other weapons by the Taliban and other AOGs have made it more dangerous for civilians, the government and ISAF to travel in the province. Government officials from Jamiat-i-Islami in particular have been a common target of assassinations.46 These attacks have become increasingly common since 2009. Government and ISAF have so far only had limited success in addressing this threat, although a joint ANSF-ISAF operation in Imam Sahib on December 31, 2012 did succeed in killing Nurullah Khan, one of the primary Taliban leaders in Kunduz.

46 Interview - Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) Advocacy Officer. Kabul City, Kabul. 27 December 2012.
responsible for overseeing the transportation and distribution of weapons and IEDs to anti-government fighters.

Meanwhile, other AOGs have taken advantage of the lack of security in Kunduz to establish a presence in the province. This includes the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), HIG, and the Haqqani Network. Of these, the IMU has the largest presence and is closely integrated with the Taliban's network in Kunduz, with IMU commanders serving as key members of the Taliban shadow government. The IMU, which also maintains links with Al'Qaeda, has been involved in a number of coordinated attacks with the Taliban against government and ISAF targets in Kunduz, including a multiple suicide attack against a German guesthouse in Kunduz City that killed several Afghans in August 2011. IMU fighters from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and even Chechnya have been discovered in the province, where they have been supporting the Pakistan-based Taliban. Meanwhile, HIG and Haqqani currently have a smaller presence and are less active in the province.

**Militias and Other Armed Groups**

The security situation in Kunduz Province is complicated by the presence of local strongmen, militias, drug-traffickers, and various criminal groups. Some of these entities are tentatively aligned with the government, some oppose the government, while others have shifting loyalties, depending on the current political and security situation in their area. Rising insecurity has led to a proliferation of these armed groups, who in turn further undermine local governance by operating outside of the law. In general, these local armed actors are motivated by financial gain, personal power, and/or a desire to protect themselves and their families or communities from other armed actors.

Among these armed groups, the most prominent are the *arbakai*, community-based security forces that often function as *de facto* tribal militias and criminal gangs. Some of these *arbakai*

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48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
have been officially designated as Afghan Local Police (ALP) as part of a US-supported initiative since 2010 to allow local shuras to recruit and deploy officially recognized local security forces to protect their respective communities.\(^2\) These militia groups were created as a temporary solution for insecurity in rural and outlying areas where the ANP and ANA lacked sufficient resources and personnel to provide security.\(^3\)\(^4\) However, the arbakai and the more official ALP have been widely criticized for failing to provide effective community policing, in large part because they have merely absorbed the existing militias of local strongmen with almost no vetting or training of recruits.\(^5\) In practice, there is often little difference and considerable overlap in the identities and behavior of the arbakai and more officially sanctioned ALP.\(^6\)

Within Kunduz, the local warlord Meer Alam was instrumental in creating and arming thousands arbakai and ALP throughout the province. An ethnic Tajik and former Northern Alliance commander, Meer Alam is member of Jamiat-i-Islami with close ties with the NDS, the provincial police chief, and members of the national government in Kabul, including Vice President Mohammad Fahim.\(^7\)\(^8\) In 2008, Meer Alam’s former deputy in the Northern Alliance was the head of NDS in the province, and together they oversaw the rearming of thousands of his former supporters as part of the ISAF and government-sanctioned arbakai and ALP programs.\(^9\) This pattern was followed by other local strongmen, including Nabi Gechi in Qala-e-Zal, Mohammad Omar in Khanabad, and the Ebrahimi family in Imam Sahib.\(^10\) Although not as powerful as Meer Alam, the forces controlled by these local warlords is still significant. For example, Mohammad Omar, a former mujahedeen commander and Abdul Rasul Sayyaf supporter, was asked by the NDS in 2008 to organize a militia and now controls an network of

\(^6\)MPIL. (2011).
\(^7\)Interview - Head of NSP Shura. De Kalan De Wairan Village, Khanabad, Kunduz. 13 October 2012.
\(^9\)Ibid.
\(^10\)Ibid.
an estimated 4,000 or 5,000 unofficial *arbakai* in a string of villages along the southern bank of the Khanabad river in the Aqtash area of Khanabad District.\(^6^1\)\(^6^2\)

As of 2011, there were roughly 1,500 officially recognized militias deployed throughout the province.\(^6^3\) However, the number of unofficial militias is believed to be far higher, with the ANP chief of Khanabad District estimating the number of "armed irresponsible people" in his district alone could be as high as 20,000.\(^6^4\) Although the *arbakai* are believed to be the most numerous in Khanabad,\(^6^5\) there are currently legal and/or illegal *arbakai* in all districts of Kunduz.

While these militias have sometimes participated in fighting against the Taliban, they have also emerged as a serious threat to the rule of law in Kunduz Province. Without any effective mechanism for oversight, these militias have regularly engaged in criminal activities such as drug-trafficking, bribe-seeking, theft, and kidnapping. It is also common for the *arbakai* to finance their activities by setting up road blocks on rural roads to collect tolls and demanding illegal taxes from community members.\(^6^6\) Meanwhile, these groups often forcibly seizing land owned by local farmers, which they then occupy themselves or sell to other individuals.\(^6^7\) Previous interviews and focus groups by CPAU with community members and local officials in Kunduz have repeatedly identified the *arbakai* as a significant source of instability and local conflict in the province.\(^6^8\)\(^6^9\)

In more severe cases, the ALP or *arbakai* have engaged in murder, rape, or forced marriage. In a recent incident in September 2012, a group of ALP responded to the abduction and murder of one of their members by the Taliban by launching a series of reprisal killings in the majority Pashtun village of Kanam in northern Kunduz. The ALP group executed 11 unarmed, male civilians who they accused of helping or sheltering the Taliban. The incident provoked protests in Kunduz City as well as criticism of the government and the US military for training and

\(^{61}\) Ibid.
\(^{62}\) Interview - Head of District Court. Khanabad, Kunduz. 14 October 2012.
\(^{63}\) Ibid.
\(^{64}\) Interview - ANP Manager. Khanabad, Kunduz. 13 October 2012.
\(^{67}\) Interview -Head of NSP Shura & Deputy of Peace Shura. Yar Khan Village, Khanabad, Kunduz. 14 October 2012.
supporting the ALP.\textsuperscript{70} Meanwhile, there have also been reports of the ALP engaging in the rape, abduction, and/or forced marriage of young women in Kunduz, including one incident in June 2012 in which a shepherd's teenage daughter was abducted and raped by an ALP member and his brother.\textsuperscript{71}

In response to criticisms of the unlawful actions by illegal militias, the government has made some tentative, but almost entirely unsuccessful, attempts to disarm these groups in Kunduz. However, the close political links between some of the local warlords and government officials in the national and provincial government, including the provincial governor and ANP commander, has been a major obstacle for disarming the militias.\textsuperscript{72} In particular, Meer Alam, who maintains close ties with \textit{Jamiat} and is supported by Vice President Mohammad Fahim, has been one of the single biggest obstacles to disarming militias in Kunduz.\textsuperscript{73}

In addition to the \textit{arbakai}, various other criminal and armed groups have taken advantage of the lack of security to engage in drug-trafficking, land seizures, theft, and other criminal offenses. In contrast to the Taliban, ideological reasons are not generally a significant factor for joining the \textit{arbakai}, ALP, or criminal gangs. Instead, financial motivations are usually the primary motivation of the unemployed young men who are usually recruited by such groups. Joining a militia represents an opportunity for youths with few alternative job prospects to obtain a weapon and a small monthly salary. These same motivations, however, can drive militia members to engage in criminal activities, including drug trafficking, kidnapping and petty robbery. The illegal activities of these groups undermine the rule of law and create additional financial and physical hardships for Afghans who live or travel in rural areas.

\textit{Other Influential Actors}

Other actors with an influence on peace and conflict in Kunduz include local elders, \textit{mullahs}, and informal institutions such as \textit{shuras} and \textit{jirgas}. Based on centuries of Afghan tradition and culture, local elders and religious figures tend to play an outsized role within their respective

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{72} Hewad, Gran (2012). "Legal, illegal: Militia recruitment and (failed) disarmament in Kunduz." Kabul: Afghanistan Analysts Network. 10 November 2012.
\item \textsuperscript{73} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
Strategic Conflict Analysis: Kunduz

In the absence of a strong government, it has largely been the responsibility of community elders to provide governance, oversee the implementation of public works, and resolve the disputes of local residents. The respect and authority conferred upon these figures allow them to influence, either positively or negatively, the views of those who live within their communities.

In particular, Islamic scholars and preachers known as mullahs have the potential to affect local attitudes and behaviors on peace and security. Religion is a major component of the lives of many Afghans, and it is the duty of the mullahs to interpret the Quran and the hadith (the sayings of Muhammed) to the general population. By tradition, mullahs occupy a unique and respected place in the social hierarchy of a typical Afghan community, and social norms generally prevent community members from directly challenging his sermons. For example, when a mullah announces that the government is un-Islamic and calls upon Afghans to support the Taliban mission of driving the foreign forces from Afghanistan, then this can motivate individuals to join AOGs and embrace conflict. Conversely, if a mullah uses his sermon to emphasize peace and brotherhood and calls upon Muslims to stop fighting each other and unite to rebuild their country, then this may have the opposite effect.

While other elders do not necessarily have the same unquestionable status as the religious authorities, but they are still able to influence the attitudes and behaviors of their respective communities. A shura refers to a group of elders who meet regularly to discuss and resolve issues within their communities. Similarly, a jirga is a gathering of local elders and influential individuals who meet on an ad hoc basis to resolve important issues. These issues could be development projects, local disputes between households, or other issues relating to the peace and security of their village. These informal institutions can vary greatly in structure, composition and the degree to which they are representative of their communities. In many cases, these councils are elected by their constituents. In other cases, institutions have been appointed by powerful individuals or groups, such as the government, local commanders or the Taliban. While most shuras are village-level entities, the term can also refer to groups convened on a district, provincial or national level.

In the absence of state government institutions, local shuras and jirgas can provide a forum for community members to resolve disputes over issues such as land, water access and inheritance before they develop into conflict. The elders on these councils have also traditionally serve as representatives and spokesmen for their communities, assisting local residents in conveying their needs and concerns to the government and other power-holders. Notably, there have been some attempts over the last decade to formalize these local institutions, including the
creation of government-sanctioned shuras known as Community Development Councils (CDCs), which was facilitated by the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) through the National Solidarity Programme (NSP). The membership of the CDCs often overlaps with the members of preexisting shuras, jirgas or individual elders who were already playing a similar governance role within their communities. The members of the CDCs and other formal or informal shuras can also convey the development needs of their communities to the MRRD and district government, and oversee the smooth implementation of projects that are undertaken in their villages. Through their varying roles in dispute resolution, community governance, and community oversight, elders can have a positive effect on peace.

It is important to note, however, elders can also have a potentially adverse effect on peace if they choose to abuse their authority for political or financial gain. As with government actors, nepotism and tribal favoritism can lead to corruption and the exclusion of vulnerable groups, which can create resentment or tensions. Examples include issuing favorable dispute outcomes to members of their own family or to richer or more powerful community members, and the disproportionate distribution of development projects (e.g. drinking wells, irrigation, NSP-sponsored food-for-work programs, etc.) and agricultural aid to households with family connections to prominent shura members. As noted earlier, these institutions vary in the degree to which they are representative of communities. Most problematically, while some female shuras do exist, most of these institutions are exclusively male (a problem that is also equally true of most government offices, especially outside of the major cities). These local institutions also may or may not be ethnically inclusive.

It should be noted that arbakai are also traditionally recruited and governed by local shuras or jirgas. This is also the case for their more modern equivalent, the Afghan Local Police, which requires a local shura to approve an ALP recruit before they are officially registered with government. In practice, however, this oversight by local elders is often minimal. In other cases, shuras or jirgas are co-opted by local commanders, who use the institutions to create or provide legitimacy for their own personal militias.

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Structures and Sources of Conflict

The population of Kunduz is faced with significant economic, governance, and security difficulties that undermine support for the government and create space for AOGs and other armed, non-state actors to operate. Poverty and unemployment are major concerns throughout the province, with most households dependent on agriculture and livestock to obtain an income. A lack of income and job prospects lead many unemployed young men to join various armed groups, including the ANA, ANP, Taliban, legal and illegal militias, and criminal groups. Other key sources of conflict include a lack of education, poor governance, insecurity, the proliferation of armed groups, and the negative influence of foreign countries such as Pakistan.

Within Kunduz, land ownership and access to water are among the most common local disputes brought to formal and informal justice institutions in Kunduz. Access to these resources is essential for the majority of households in Kunduz that rely on agriculture or livestock as a major source of income. Unfortunately, poor governance, insecurity, and a lack of awareness of legal rights has contributed to a large number of land-related conflicts. During the chaotic civil war years of the 1990s, many residents of Kunduz left their property and fled to neighboring countries such as Pakistan, Iran, and Central Asia. Of the refugees who returned in the 2000s, many found that their land had been occupied by others. Many of these cases remain unresolved, due to a lack of documentation and insufficient access to fair and efficient dispute resolution mechanisms.

Meanwhile, powerful individuals in the province have also taken advantage of insecurity and weak governance to seize both private and public land. This has included an estimated 4,500 acres of public land, primarily in the districts of Khanabad, Imam Sahib, Char Dara and on the outskirts of Kunduz City. Numerous private residents have also found their lands seized by warlords, militias, and other armed actors in recent years. Many of these groups and powerful individuals have links to the provincial government or major political parties, who use their influence to prevent the police and courts from resolving the cases. Finally, land inheritance cases are very common in rural areas, leading to disputes within and between households.

76 Interview - Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) Advocacy Officer. Kabul City, Kabul. 27 December 2012.
77 Ibid.
these inheritance cases, a significant number involve women, who are often inappropriately denied the land and inheritance to which they are legally entitled.\footnote{Interview - Director, Women’s Office, Ministry of Justice. 5 November 2012.} These type of land disputes are aggravated by a lack of awareness of legal rights, including women’s rights, and a lack of access to dispute resolution mechanisms.

The economic situation in Kunduz is also aggravated by a lack of irrigation and other infrastructure, which can create significant hardships for residents living in rural and outlying areas of Kunduz. Specifically, a lack of irrigation increases the vulnerability of rural communities to floods and droughts and reduces the ability of farmers to produce sufficient crops to support their families. Traditionally, the considerable majority of Afghanistan’s irrigated water has been distributed by informal systems operated by a \textit{mirab}, or ‘water master’, hired by the surrounding communities.\footnote{DAI. (2006). \textit{Water User Associations (WUAs) in Afghanistan Report}. Washington: Development Alternatives Inc.} These \textit{mirab} systems rely on basic irrigation infrastructure such as canals, dykes, siphons, aqueducts, spillways, and embankments and typically function with minimal oversight or guidance from the government.\footnote{Rout, B. (2008). \textit{How the Water Flows: A Typology of Irrigation Systems in Afghanistan}. Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit.} Much of this infrastructure and the informal networks that oversee them, however, were badly damaged by three decades of violence and instability. This infrastructure deficit, coupled with the marginalization and coercion of \textit{mirabs} by armed groups and local strongmen, has had an adverse affect on the livelihoods of local farming communities.\footnote{CPAU. (2012c). \textit{Participatory Vulnerability Conflict Analysis: Kunduz and Takhar}. Kabul: CPAU. May 2012.}

Low levels of education and poor access to schools reduces the job opportunities for community members. Without education, Afghans have few prospects for employment outside of agriculture and manual labor. This economic vulnerability raises the possibility that community members, especially young men, will be compelled to engage in criminal activity or join armed groups. Low levels of education are also associated with a lack of awareness of legal and civil rights and peaceful means of resolving disputes, which increases the chance that victimized individuals will resort to violence or be recruited by radical groups.\footnote{Ibid. & Interview - Interview - Acting Director, Human Rights Office, Ministry of Justice. Kunduz City, Kunduz. 4 November 2012.} In addition, a lack of education and awareness of civil rights among male and female residents has also contributed to violence and crimes against women, including forced marriage, child marriage, rape, domestic abuse, family disputes, and suicide.\footnote{Acting Director, Ministry of Women’s Affairs. Kunduz City, Kunduz. 4 November 2012.} These crimes against women are highest in
the outlying areas of the province, where education and access to justice institutions is lower.\footnote{Interview - Acting Director, Human Rights Office, Ministry of Justice. Kunduz City, Kunduz. 4 November 2012.} Unfortunately, cultural and logistical barriers often prevent women from traveling to justice institutions, and those who do often encounter a lack of assistance or obstruction by police and

In recent years, corruption and poor governance have significantly undermined support for the government. Even government officials interviewed in Kunduz City and each of the four target districts readily acknowledged that corruption and abuse of power by members of the district, provincial, and national governments have created distrust and resentment among the general population. As in other parts of Afghanistan, former Northern Alliance commanders and other powerful individuals have captured key institutions and government offices and have used their positions to empower and enrich themselves at the expense of the public. This corruption ranges from routine bribe-seeking by low-level officials and ANP officers\footnote{CPAU. (2012b). \textit{Contextual Analysis of Police and Justice System in Kunduz: 2011 Baseline Study}. Kabul: CPAU. 22 March 2012.} to the seizure of thousands of acres of public and private land by government-linked individuals.\footnote{Pajhwok News. (2012). "Official says can't take on land-grabbers." Kabul: Pajhwok News. 18 December 2012.} Meanwhile, members of the police and other government officials are widely believed to be involved in the opium trade that runs through Kunduz on the way to lucrative markets in Central Asia, Russia, and Europe.\footnote{Devlin, Lawrence, et al. (2009). \textit{Conflict analysis: Kunduz city, Kunduz province}. Kabul, Afghanistan: CPAU.} These illegal actions by public officials adversely affect local communities and discourage victimized individuals from bringing disputes to government institutions.

These economic and governance-related resentments, along with the government's inability to provide security, have allowed AOGs to gain a foothold and become active in the province. This insecurity has allowed the Taliban and other groups to recruit local members and carry out attacks against government and ISAF targets throughout the province. This violence often harms local civilians and hampers economic growth, leading to greater hardships and increases the number of unemployed and/or victimized youths who are vulnerable to recruitment by various armed groups. Furthermore, the proliferation of legal and illegal militias, a phenomenon that was encouraged by the government and the US military,\footnote{Oxfam. (2011). \textit{No Time to Lose: Promoting the Accountability of the Afghan National Security Forces}. Oxford, UK: Oxfam International.} has further
undermined governance and security in some areas, creating additional hardships and popular resentment.\footnote{Interview - Director, Educational & Training Center for Poor Women and Girls of Afghanistan (ECW). Kunduz City, Kunduz. 7 November 2012.}

These structures of conflict in Kunduz are ultimately affected by larger national and international trends. The explosion of opium production in southern Afghanistan after the fall of the Taliban in 2001 has transformed Kunduz and other border provinces into important transit points for drug-trafficking, which has contributed to government corruption and insecurity. Meanwhile, the return of Taliban to Char Dara and other outlying areas of Kunduz in 2009 corresponded to a national resurgence by the organization. On a national level, the Taliban have taken advantage of growing resentment towards the Karzai administration and ISAF to expand beyond their traditional strongholds in the southern and eastern regions of the country.\footnote{Holmberg, B., et al. (2011). Strategic Conflict Analysis of Afghanistan. Kabul: CPAU & Swede Peace.} Within the north, the disproportionately Pashtun population of Kunduz previously made the province one of the Taliban's most important strongholds prior to 2001. These prior connections in the province also made Kunduz a logical destination as the latest generation of Taliban insurgents sought to expand their activities to the north.

The Taliban's leadership are currently based in Pakistan, and the organization is widely believed to receive extensive funding, training, and logistical support from the Pakistani government, particularly the Directorate for Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI).\footnote{Bajoria, Jayshree, and Eben Kaplan. "The ISI and Terrorism: Behind the Accusations." New York: Council on Foreign Relations. 4 May 2011.} Through its support of the Taliban, Pakistan has sought to maximize its geo-political influence in Afghanistan and the region as a whole, especially vis-à-vis its neighbor and closest rival India. Pakistan is also a major trading partner of Afghanistan, and has benefited considerably from cross-border trade between the two countries. This includes the transportation of fuel and military supplies into Afghanistan by the US and other NATO countries since 2001.

As a border province in northern Afghanistan, Kunduz is an important transit point between Afghanistan and Central Asia. This northern trade route represents an alternative to the Pakistan-based trade links to the south, and therefore reduces Pakistan's monopoly on the transportation of NATO supplies. Kunduz's importance as a transportation hub has since made the province a prime target for the Pakistan-funded Taliban. Indeed, the Taliban and other AOG within Kunduz have regularly targeted NATO supply lines, including the deadly 2009 incident in
which Taliban captured two oil tankers and were counter-attacked by US warplanes, leading to more than a hundred civilian casualties.\(^{94}\)

Together, these economic, governance, and political structures have contributed to a rise in conflict and instability in Kunduz. This instability is greatest in rural and outlying districts, but civilians living throughout the province have been negatively affected by the resulting violence and insecurity.

**Potential Sources of Peace**

Potential sources of peace in Kunduz include economic growth, education, improved governance and security, disarmament of non-state actors, better access to justice, and the promotion of peace by local elders and religious figures. Economic growth has a positive effect on the livelihoods of local residents by reducing poverty and creating more peaceful opportunities for earning an income. By creating jobs, economic growth reduces the population of jobless youths who are most vulnerable to joining AOGs, militias, or criminal groups.

Agriculture remains the biggest source of employment in the province. Improvements to this sector, including the creation and reconstruction of irrigation infrastructure, can increase the productivity of arable land and reduce the vulnerability of farming communities to drought, floods and conflicts over water. Meanwhile, the creation of other infrastructure, such as electricity and transportation, can boost the local economy and create additional job opportunities. The construction of schools and health clinics and training of educators and health providers can likewise create short-term jobs while improving the quality of human capital in the province and laying the foundations for long-term economic growth. As noted earlier, education is also a potential source of peace because it improves awareness of civil rights and peaceful means of dispute resolution while reducing the susceptibility of youths to recruitment by radical ideological movements.\(^{95}\)

Improvements to governance and security are also a prerequisite for peace and stability. Many land, water, and other livelihood-related disputes are caused or exacerbated by poor rule of law and a lack of access to effective, fair, and timely mechanisms for dispute resolution. Efforts

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to strengthen the capacity and efficiency of state institutions, including the police, courts, and huqooq offices, are necessary to address local concerns and reduce anti-government sentiments. This includes increasing the ANP's ability to provide security and community policing, especially in rural areas of Kunduz where the formal government currently has little or no presence. In addition, this also means addressing the widespread corruption that has allowed powerful, government-linked actors to seize large amounts of public and private land in the province.

In the short term, shuras, jirgas and other informal actors can reduce conflict by providing local-level governance and access to justice in rural communities without easy or affordable access to government institutions. These traditional actors can represent and advocate for the development needs of their communities as well as resolve disputes before they lead to violence. Government officials in Kunduz City praised local shuras as an effective means of resolving civil disputes in local communities, while also emphasizing the need to refer criminal or more complex civil cases to government institutions. Efforts to improve the capacity of these informal institutions could include training in conflict mediation and greater knowledge of the Civil Law Code of Afghanistan (especially property and inheritance law) and the rights of women and minorities. Meanwhile, establishing linkages between formal and informal justice institutions can improve the capacity of both sectors, leading to improved governance and greater access to justice for Afghans living in rural areas of Kunduz. This includes increasing the referral of cases among local shuras, district huqooq offices, and the formal courts.

The disarmament of illegal militias is also an important potential source of peace in Kunduz. So far, programs to disarm the thousands of non-official arbakai in the province have been unsuccessful, due to the strong influence of powerful warlords and their political allies in the provincial and national governments. A more consistent and aggressive effort to disarm militias would be necessary to reduce the number of armed, non-state actors in the province. In order to be successful in the long-term, the disarmament of illegal militias would require support from key political actors as well as economic growth and the creation of other job opportunities for disarmed individuals.

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97 Interview - Chief Justice, Provincial Court. Kunduz City, Kunduz. 5 November 2012.
99 Ibid.
While all of the above factors can contribute to peace in Kunduz, ultimately the conflict trends in the province will also be determined in part by national and international factors. Kunduz is just one battlefield in the national Taliban struggle against the ISAF-supported Karzai government. A successful national peace and reconciliation process between the government and the Taliban leadership would go a long way towards reducing anti-government violence in Kunduz. On an international level, the actions and behavior of neighboring countries, especially Pakistan and to a lesser degree Iran, in Afghanistan's internal affairs will also have an ongoing impact on the levels of peace and stability in Kunduz Province.
District SCA: Ali Abad

Security Overview

Ali Abad is a small, rural district located to the south of Kunduz City on the edge of Baghlan and Takhar provinces. The district is least populated in Kunduz, with an estimated population of 45,800. Pashtuns comprise about half the population, while a third are Tajik, 12 percent are Hazara, and just under ten percent are Uzbek. Most of the residents of the district are employed in agriculture, although the district also contains the main highway that connects Kabul with Kunduz and the provinces of Takhar and Badakhshan to the east. Although the governance of the district is still poor, security has gradually improved since a low-point 2009 and 2010 when the Taliban and other militants were active in the district, especially the western areas. As of late 2012, while governance is still lacking, the district is relatively stable compared the rest of the province, although some anti-government elements and other armed groups are still present and occasionally cause trouble.

Like the rest of Kunduz, Ali Abad's security deteriorated during 2009 as Taliban began to expand their presence and activities in the province. A ISAF district assessment conducted in 2010 noted that the government had minimal influence in the western areas, which were under the influence of militant groups from neighboring Char Dara. The assessment also ranked the district government as 'dysfunctional', 'corrupt' and unable to "provide essential services and protect the population", which was leading the population to sympathize with insurgents. Since 2010, however, security has increased and the numbers of villages with a known Taliban presence has declined. Two former Taliban members interviewed by CPAU in the village of Lala Maidan-i-Sewam noted that they had been fighting for the Taliban as recently as mid-2012, but had since switched to government, which was now providing them with a salary to work as ALP.

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103 Ibid.
However, government corruption and the inability of official institutions to provide rule of law and basic services has been an ongoing source of discontent among local communities. Dispute over land, water and other livelihood issues are common, and local residents continue to rely on informal institutions such as shuras and jirgas to provide justice and resolve disputes.

**Actors, Interests, and Behaviors**

The key actors who influence peace and conflict in Kunduz Province include district government officials, ISAF-supported Afghan security forces, anti-government actors, local strongmen, militias, criminal gangs, local elders, and community members. On a district level, the main conflict lines are between the Afghan government, supported by ISAF, and the Taliban and other anti-government opposition groups.

The district government is based in Ali Abad Town in the district center, where the district governor and other key government offices are located. This includes a district court, ANP headquarters, a huqooq office, and an MRRD office, among other government ministries. Security in Ali Abad is provided by approximately 100 ANP stationed in the district. The district government is also supported by provincial ANSF and foreign ISAF troops based in Kunduz City to the north. Jamait-i-Islami and the political wing of Hezb-i-Islami have a significant influence in the district among the Tajik and Pashtun communities respectively. The district governor, Haji Hajibullah Muhtasim, was the target of roadside bombing by the Taliban, which injured two of his bodyguards in 2010. The government is seen as corrupt, ineffective, and unable to provide necessary services by many residents in the district. Since 2010, however, government security forces have gradually been able to regain control of most of the district, including the western and outlying areas that had a strong Taliban presence as of 2009 and 2010. There have also been some improvements in cooperation in recent years between

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district officials and local elders and *shuras*, leading to some modest increases in local governance.\(^{110}\)

On the anti-government side, the Taliban is the most active AOG in the district. After several years of calm following the 2001 invasion, Taliban fighters begin to re-emerge in the district in 2009. At the time, the neighboring district of Char Dara became a key hub for insurgent activity in the province. This influence extended into villages along the western edges of Ali Abad, where the Taliban took advantage of the population's growing resentment towards the government's perceived corruption and failure to provide rule of law and basic services. A former Taliban who had previously commanded 10 fighters in the western village of Lala Maidan #3 said that the lack of security and inability of the government to provide justice had lead his community to look to the Taliban.\(^{111}\) However, he claimed that Pakistan's strong influence and manipulation the organization had gradually alienated them, leading him and his men to switch allegiance and accept paid positions in the Afghan Local Police in mid-2012. He also praised the government for doing more now to provide security and solve local disputes. These stated reasons, which were repeated by another former Talib interviewed in the same village,\(^{112}\) suggest that financial and practical motivations are a greater factor for joining or leaving AOGs than ideological or religious factors.

In addition to formal government actors and AOGs, there are also other armed actors, including local strong men, militias, and criminal groups, who complicate the rule of law in Ali Abad. While the number of *arbakai* groups in Ali Abad is not as high as in neighboring Khanabad District, the presence of both official and non-officially recognized militia groups has been an occasional source of social tension and instability. While the ALP and other non-sanctioned *arbakai* have had some moderate successes in combating the Taliban, they have also been criticized by community members in Ali Abad for engaging in illegal behavior, such as drug-trafficking, theft, and illegal taxation, or simply functioning as the personal militias of local strongmen.\(^{113}\) The presence of these militias, along with other criminal actors, creates economic and social hardships for local residents and has a negative impact on security and governance.

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\(^{112}\) Interview - Former Talib #2. Lala Maidan-i-Sewam Village, Ali Abad, Kunduz. 14 November 2012.

Other groups with an impact on peace and conflict in Kunduz include local elders, religious leaders, and informal institutions. Given the limited ability of the district government to provide security and justice, community members have increasingly relied on *shuras, jirgas, and other traditional mechanisms* for settling disputes and resolving local conflicts. While an increasing number of residents of Ali Abad are now taking civil and criminal cases to the district government, including the district court and *huqooq* office, most residents continue to rely on informal institutions for dispute resolution. These informal institutions are especially used for addressing common livelihood disputes over issues such as land, water, and inheritance, while criminal cases and more complex civil cases are often referred to the government. Given the significant number of land and water-related disputes in the district, these community-based institutions are an essential tool for providing governance and preventing livelihood disputes from escalating into violence.

**Structures and Sources of Conflict**

The major causes and underlying structures that contribute to conflict include poverty, unemployment, poor governance, insecurity, a lack of education, and the proliferation of armed groups. Ali Abad is a primarily rural district with a majority of the population dependent on agriculture or livestock as their main source of income. Land and water are therefore important commodities that are essential to local community members' ability to earn an income and support their families. The importance of these resources has made them a common source of tension in the district. Land issues, including property ownership and inheritance disputes, are the most common issues taken to both informal and formal justice providers in the district. These land conflicts have been exacerbated by poor governance, including limited or nonexistent documentation of property ownership and the perceived corruption and inefficiencies of state justice mechanisms. The illegal seizure of land by powerful individuals has also been a problem in the district, although one local elder in Sayed

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118 Ibid.
Abad Village said such incidents had decreased due to an improvement in the security situation.\(^{119}\)

Likewise, water is an essential resource for local livelihoods, but one whose availability is inconsistent from year to year. The severe drought that has plagued much of northern Afghanistan during the last several years has reduced the supply of water in the district and contributed to a rise in water-related conflicts. The unequal distribution of this limited resource, including using ditches or canals to divert water away from one area of farm land and towards another, is a common topic of dispute within and between communities.\(^{120}\)

Meanwhile, the government's limited ability to provide rule of law and other basic services, including the provision of justice, education, and development, has also contributed to conflict trends in the district. Although local residents' views of the district government have improved since 2010, the government's previous failure to provide security and resolve disputes drove many community members to join or support the Taliban.\(^{121}\) Security has since improved and a growing number of individuals are taking disputes to formal institutions,\(^{122}\) but the district government is still often viewed as corrupt, biased, and inefficient.\(^{123}\) This lingering distrust between local communities and the government limits the latter's ability to be a source of stability and security in the district.

Community elders and district officials also mentioned the importance of schools and education program, noting that a lack of education and lack of awareness of individual legal rights had a negative impact on the livelihoods of local communities and increased the chance that residents would resort to violent solutions to solve economic and social problems.\(^{124}\) Meanwhile, the presence of armed, non-state actors, such as militias and criminal gangs, also undermines security and creates social tension by contributing to the economic and physical hardships of local communities.

\(^{121}\) Interviews - Former Taliban (x2). Lala Maidan-i-Sewam Village, Ali Abad, Kunduz. 14 November 2012.
\(^{122}\) Interview - Huqooq Office Manager. Ali Abad, Kunduz. 2 November 2012.
Potential Sources of Peace

Potential sources of peace in Ali Abad District include economic growth, improved governance and access to justice, education, improved security, and the promotion of peace by local elders and religious figures. By reducing poverty and providing greater opportunities for earning an income, it is possible to reduce the financial incentives for local youths to join armed groups and engage in illegal activities. Investments in irrigation, transportation, electricity, and other infrastructure can reduce future economic uncertainty caused by drought and other natural disasters while laying the foundations for more stable economic growth.

Along with improved irrigation, restoring and strengthening oversight over the distribution of water can reduce the number livelihood-related conflicts. Traditionally, residents in Ali Abad and elsewhere have relied on informal networks of water resource managers known as the mirabs to oversee the fair and equitable distribution of water in the absence of the government. 125 Meanwhile, local residents also often turn to local informal institutions such as shuras and jirgas as a means of resolving local disputes over water, land, and other issues. By strengthening these informal institutions, is possible to improve rule of law and reduce the likelihood that disputes over livelihood-related issues will lead to conflict. In the longer term, reducing corruption and strengthening the capacity of formal justice actors, including the police and courts, will also be necessary to provide stability and reduce the level of conflict.

District SCA: Char Dara

Security Overview

Char Dara is small, mostly rural district located to the southwest of Kunduz City that has been a hub of insurgent activity since the Taliban and other AOGs began to re-emerge in the province in 2008 and 2009. The district borders the districts of Qala-e-Zal, Kunduz, and Ali Abad as well as the provinces of Baghlan and Samangan. With a population of 71,400, Char Dara is one of the lesser populated districts of Kunduz. Most of the district’s majority-Pashtun population lives in villages along the southwest side of Kunduz River that separates the district from the provincial capital. While there have been some modest improvements in security since 2010, much of the district remains under the de facto control of the Taliban, who operate a separate shadow government, along with other insurgent or criminal actors.

The district government has limited control beyond the district center and has struggled in recent years to provide security and governance to much of the district’s population. According to a 2010 ISAF district assessment, the district was unable to provide essential services and protect the population, and that ”governance, development and security are such that the majority of the population rejects legitimacy of GIRoA, or aligns with anti-government elements." The assessment also noted that the large number of militants in Char Dara were also destabilizing nearby districts, such as the western areas of the neighboring Ali Abad. The Taliban currently operate a shadow government complete with a shadow governor, courts, and a system of tax collectors. The Taliban gained and have maintained control in the district through providing swift and effective, if brutal, justice in the absence of the governmental judicial system and through attacks and threats against government officials, ISAF, and those who cooperate with the government. This included a suicide attack that killed District Governor Wahid Omarkhel and seven others in February 2011.

In addition to the Taliban, other insurgents active in the district in recent years have included the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), Hezb-i-Islami Gulbuddin (HIG), and the Haqqani

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129 Ibid.
Network. The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan especially is closely integrated with the Taliban in the area and foreign IMU leaders and fighters from Uzbekistan and elsewhere have been known to operate in the district.\(^{130}\) Along with the Taliban, these groups occasionally carry out attacks against government and ISAF forces in Char Dara and nearby Kunduz City and against NATO supply lines that run through the province. The village of Haji Aman on the edge of Char Dara and Kunduz districts was the site of the deadly 2009 airstrike against two Taliban captured oil tankers that killed more than a hundred people, mostly civilians.\(^{131}\)

According to government officials interviewed by CPAU in November 2012, security has improved but the government still lacks control in many areas beyond the district capital. In particular, the district governor, police chief, and huqooq manager mentioned the villages of Tajkan, Naw Abad, Mosa Zai, Noor Zaye, and Qala Zay as completely under the control of AOGs.\(^{132}\)\(^{133}\)

### Actors, Interests, and Behaviors

The key actors who influence peace and conflict in Kunduz Province include government officials, formal security forces, anti-government actors, local strongmen, militias, criminal gangs, local elders, religious leaders, and community members. On a district level, the main conflict lines are between the district government, supported by provincial ANSF and ISAF forces, and the Taliban and other anti-government opposition groups who have a strong presence in Char Dara.

The district government is based in Char Dara Town, less than 10 kilometers from Kunduz City. The offices of the district governor, ANP, and other government officials are also located in Char Dara town, with very minimal presence outside of the district center. As of 2011, there were approximately 200 ANP stationed in Char Dara, primarily in or near the district center.\(^{134}\) These officials and security personnel have been the frequent target of attacks and threats, including

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132 Interview - District Governor. Char Dara, Kunduz. 3 November 2012.

133 Interview - Huqooq District Office Manager. Char Dara, Kunduz. 3 November 2012.

so-called 'night letters' that threaten violence against members of the government and those who cooperate with them unless they cease their relationship with the government. This insecurity and violence makes it more difficult for government officials and ANSF personnel to retain staff and to provide rule of law, development, and other services to the population. Meanwhile, the government has also been accused of corruption, bias, and an inattention to the needs of the population, which contributed the rise of anti-government sentiments in the district.

A few Char Dara officials interviewed by CPAU, including the also acknowledged that governmental corruption was a significant problem in the district. The district huqooq manager also noted that powerful individuals with close ties to the provincial and national government, including Vice President Fahim, have illegally seized land in the district with the support of government officials, who were preventing the victims' cases from being solved in the formal justice system. While government has made modest advances in providing security to some villages of Char Dara during the past year, this corrupt behavior and failure to address the concerns of residents is an ongoing obstacle to stabilization of the district.

On the anti-government side, the Taliban is the most powerful AOG in the district. Since 2008, the Taliban have taken advantage of the weak rule of law and significant anti-government sentiments in the district to establish a strong presence in the district. In addition to carrying out attacks against government and ISAF targets in Char Dara and neighboring Kunduz City, the Taliban strengthened their hold over the local population by filling the governance void left by the formal government. This includes setting up informal courts to quickly and effectively resolve local disputes. The Taliban have also closed down girls' schools and used threats of violence to prevent residents from accessing government services and interacting with formal institutions, such as the police and formal courts. These anti-government activities are financed in part by illegal taxes collected from residents living in Taliban-controlled villages. Although the leadership of the Taliban is largely based in Pakistan, the organization has successfully capitalized on the high unemployment, poor governance, and a lack of education in

136 Interview - District Governor. Char Dara, Kunduz. 3 November 2012.
137 Interview - Huqooq District Office Manager. Char Dara, Kunduz. 3 November 2012.
138 Interview - Head of District Court. Char Dara, Kunduz. 3 November 2012.
Char Dara to recruit and arm significant numbers of unemployed and uneducated young men in the district to participate in anti-government violence.

In the wake of the Taliban's rise, other AOGs have also used the lack of security to establish a foothold in the district. This has included the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, HIG, and the Haqqani Network.\(^{140}\) Of these, IMU has close links to both the Taliban and Al'Qaeda and has been involved in coordinated attacks with the Taliban against government and Western targets in the district and elsewhere in Kunduz. This includes a multiple suicide attack against a German guesthouse in Kunduz City that killed several Afghans in August 2011.\(^{141}\) The IMU remains closely integrated into the Taliban's network in the district, with IMU commanders from Uzbekistan and elsewhere serving as members of the Taliban shadow government.\(^{142}\)

In addition to AOGs, other armed groups are also active in the presence and have an impact on security and governance. This includes local commanders, militias, and criminal groups. The emergence of the Taliban in Char Dara since 2008 has been accompanied by government and ISAF-supported efforts to organize and train anti-Taliban militias. This has led to a proliferation of legal and illegal militia groups in the district. While some of these groups have fought against the Taliban, others have acted as the personal militias of local strongmen with no control or oversight by the government. Some of these groups have even been known to align themselves with the Taliban or to fight among themselves for control of territory, occasionally leading to civilian casualties.\(^{143}\) These *arbakai* and other criminal actors are often motivated by financial concerns, leading them to engage in a range of illegal activities, such as theft, land-grabbing, and bribe-seeking.\(^{144}\)

Non-armed actors that affect peace and conflict trends in Char Dara include local elders and religious leaders. Given the lack of security and governance in the district, many residents rely on informal institutions such as *shuras* or *jirgas* for resolving disputes or overseeing the distribution of development aid. These informal actors can also represent the needs of their communities to the government and other powerful groups such as the Taliban. However, the Taliban's insistence on providing justice in their own informal courts has had made it more

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\(^{140}\) Ibid.


\(^{142}\) Ibid.


\(^{144}\) Interview - Huqooq District Office Manager. Char Dara, Kunduz. 3 November 2012.
difficult for these local elders to resolve conflicts in areas where AOGs are active. Meanwhile, even in government-controlled areas, these institutions are vulnerable to coercion and corrupt or wrong practices. For example, one local religious leader accused the government-sanctioned shuras in his area abusing their positions to empower and enrich themselves at the expense of their communities. He also noted that powerful actors in the district regularly interfered in the work of local shuras. Other community elders and government officials in the district, however, praised the informal institutions for resolving disputes in a fair and effective way.

Structures and Sources of Conflict

The structures that contribute to conflict in Char Dara include poverty, unemployment, a lack of education, poor governance, insecurity, and the proliferation of armed, non-state actors. Char Dara is a predominantly rural district where a majority of the population is employed in agriculture or livestock. With high levels of poverty and few other options for employment, residents of Char Dara are highly dependent upon land and water to obtain their livelihoods. Although Char Dara is located along the fertile Kunduz River valley, access to these agricultural inputs is uneven and conflicts over land ownership and access to water are common in the district. This includes disputes between neighbors over property and between relatives over land inheritance. Land-grabbing by powerful individuals, including some with ties to the government, is also common. These land and water issues are aggravated by a lack of rule of law, including poor property documentation, limited access to justice providers, and government corruption, as well as by drought and a lack of irrigation infrastructure.

Failure to promote rural development and provide justice and rule of law has created resentment and social tensions. Meanwhile, high levels of poverty as well as a lack of education have made local residents, especially unemployed young men, more susceptible to recruitment by the Taliban or other radical organizations and armed groups. District officials and community members both mentioned illiteracy and a lack of education as contributing to violence and

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146 Interview - Community Elders (x4). Do Band-i-Araba Village, Char Dara, Kunduz. 2 November 2012.
147 Interview - District Governor. Char Dara, Kunduz. 3 November 2012.
148 Interview - Community Elders (x4). Do Band-i-Araba Village, Char Dara, Kunduz. 2 November 2012.
149 Interview - Huqooq District Office Manager. Char Dara, Kunduz. 3 November 2012.
conflict, especially among youths. The livelihoods of local residents are further undermined by the proliferation of armed, non-state actors who engage in criminal activities and negatively affect governance and development in the district.

Potential Sources of Peace

Potential sources of peace in Char Dara District include economic growth; improved governance, security, and access to justice; education and greater awareness of civil rights; and the promotion of peace by local authority figures, such as community elders and mullahs. Economic growth can reduce the possibility of conflict and violence by creating job opportunities for the unemployed men who are at the greatest chance of joining the Taliban or other radical organizations and armed groups. Improvements in basic infrastructure, especially irrigation, can strengthening the agricultural sector and reducing conflicts over water and other livelihood issues. These development projects can also generate short-term jobs while creating the infrastructure that is necessary for longer term growth.

Meanwhile, district officials and community elders in Char Dara also called for improvements in education and literacy as means of discouraging violence and creating economic opportunities. By improving public awareness of legal rights, including property and inheritance rights, and promoting the use of peaceful mechanisms for resolving conflict, it is possible to prevent petty disputes over livelihood issues from sparking violence or developing into more significant conflicts. This also means strengthening and improving access to formal and informal justice institutions so that local disputes can be resolved in a fair, effective, and timely manner. Meanwhile, the district governor called for greater training of both formal and informal justice actors to reduce corruption and improve their ability to provide justice and rule of law. Only by improving governance and security in Char Dara is it possible to discourage local residents from resorting to Taliban justice or armed conflict.

150 Interview - Community Elder / Peace Council Member #2. Do Band-i-Araba Village, Char Dara, Kunduz. 2 November 2012.
151 Interview - Community Elders (x4). Do Band-i-Araba Village, Char Dara, Kunduz. 2 November 2012.
152 Interview - Huqqoq District Office Manager. Char Dara, Kunduz. 3 November 2012.
153 Interview - District Governor. Char Dara, Kunduz. 3 November 2012.
District SCA: Imam Sahib

Security Overview

Imam Sahib is a predominantly agricultural district located in northern Kunduz along the border with Tajikistan. With an estimated population of 225,800, Imam Sahib is the second largest district in Kunduz, after the capital. Uzbek make up just under half the population, with Tajiks and Pasthuns each comprising 25 percent. The district has close economic and cultural ties to Central Asia and is an important transit point for the flourishing drug trade in Afghanistan. Imam Sahib also benefits from its location along the Amu Darya River, which provides local farmers with fertile land and water. The district has therefore escaped the worst of the drought that has ravaged much of northern Afghanistan over the last decade.

The security situation in Imam Sahib declined after the Taliban began to reassert themselves in the province in 2009. The government controls most of the district, but anti-government actors and other armed groups maintain a presence in the outlying areas of the district. Since 2009, the Taliban have actively recruited young men in the district and have carried out attacks against government and ISAF targets in Imam Sahib and in Kunduz City to the south. One of the provincial Taliban leaders responsible for transporting and distributing weapons to local fighters in the district was Nurullah Khan, who was killed by a joint ANSF-ISAF operation in Imam Sahib on December 31, 2012. This and other efforts to push back the Taliban have had some limited success, and the district was considered to be slightly more secure in 2012 than in the preceding years by community members and local officials.

Much of ongoing low-level conflict in the district resolves around land disputes. Many of the residents of Imam Sahib fled to Iran or Central Asia during the Taliban years, and their land was occupied by other residents. The return of thousands of refugees over the last decade has therefore led to numerous ongoing conflicts over land ownership. Meanwhile, government corruption and a lack of security has allowed powerful individuals and armed groups to illegally seize land from local residents. Many of these powerful groups and individuals also benefit from the lucrative opium trade, which has contributed to insecurity and government corruption in the district.

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156 Interview - MRRD District Office Manager. Imam Sahib, Kunduz. 15 October 2012.
157 Interview - Community Elders (x4). Hawa Shenase Village, Imam Sahib, Kunduz. 16 October 2012.
Actors, Interests, and Behaviors

The key actors who influence peace and conflict in Imam Sahib include government officials, formal security forces, anti-government actors, local strongmen, ALP and arbakai, criminal gangs, local elders, religious leaders, and community members. On a district level, the main conflict lines are between the Afghan government, supported by ISAF, and the Taliban and other anti-government opposition groups.

The district government is based in Imam Sahib Town in the district center, where the district governor and other key government offices are located. This includes a district court, ANP headquarters, a huqooq office, and an MRRD office, among other government ministries. Security in Imam Sahib is provided by approximately 200 ANP who are stationed in the central town and other locations throughout the district. The district government is also supported by provincial ANSF and foreign ISAF troops based in Kunduz City to the south. Within the district government, the parties of Junbish-i-Milli and Jamiat-i-Islami have a significant influence among the Uzbek and Tajik segments of the population respectively. As elsewhere in the province, the district police and officials are often viewed as corrupt by local elders and community members. Likewise, the government has regularly been criticized for failing to provide sufficient governance and security to the population of Imam Sahib.

On the anti-government side, the most powerful opposition group in the district is the Taliban, who began gaining a foothold in the district in 2009. Imam Sahib has been the site of numerous anti-government attacks, including bombs and IEDs, as well as a staging area for attacks elsewhere in Kunduz. Many of the local Taliban leaders came from Pakistan, and maintain close links with that country. However, the Taliban has successfully recruited numerous young males in the district. Former Taliban interviewed by CPAU in the district said that reasons for joining the group include corruption, discrimination, and abuse of power by government actors or powerful individuals linked to the government; the presence of foreign troops; financial incentives and religious reasons. Influence and support from Pakistan, including financial and military support, are also key factors that have contributed to the expansion of the Taliban's

159 Ibid.
160 Interview - MRRD District Office Manager. Imam Sahib, Kunduz. 15 October 2012.
162 Ibid.
presence in Imam Sahib.\textsuperscript{163} The Taliban have gained support among local communities in Imam Sahib in part by providing swift and effective, although brutal, justice to criminals and lawbreakers in areas where the government has failed to provide alternative means of resolving disputes and providing justice.\textsuperscript{164}

Other AOGs include the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and Hezb-i-Islami Gulbuddin (HIG). The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, an ally of the Taliban, has been active in the district and organized attacks against government and Western targets in Imam Sahib and Kunduz City, including a suicide bombing against a German guesthouse in Kunduz City in August 2011.\textsuperscript{165} Meanwhile, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the founder of Hezb-i-Islami and current leader of HIG, was originally born in Imam Sahib. However, the HIG presence in the district are currently minor compared to the more numerous and well-organized Taliban.

In addition, there are also a variety of other armed actors in the province, including militias and criminal groups. To combat the rise of the Taliban, the government has recruited approximately 300 ALP in Imam Sahib.\textsuperscript{166} Meanwhile, there is a large but unknown number of illegal militias active in the district. Both the officially sanctioned ALP and unofficial arbakai operate with little or no government oversight and are regularly accused of criminal activities, such as land-grabbing, drug-trafficking, theft, and illegal taxation.\textsuperscript{167} Unemployed young men are often driven to join these groups by financial concerns as well as a desire to protect themselves and their families or communities from other armed actors.

Finally, other groups with an impact on peace and conflict in Kunduz include local elders, religious leaders, and informal institutions such as shuras and jirgas. Due to the government's perceived corruption and inability to provide access to fair and efficient justice, many residents in rural and outlying areas of the district have continued to rely on traditional mechanisms of settling disputes and resolving local conflicts.\textsuperscript{168}

\textsuperscript{163} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{164} Interview - Community Elder #4. Hawa Shenase Village, Imam Sahib, Kunduz. 16 October 2012.
\textsuperscript{166} Interview - Government official. Imam Sahib Town, Imam Sahib, Kunduz. 15 October 2012.
\textsuperscript{167} Interview - Community Elder / Shura Member #2. Hawa Shenase Village, Imam Sahib, Kunduz. 16 October 2012.
\textsuperscript{168} Ibid. & Interview - Director of Hajj and Islamic Affairs Office. Imam Sahib, Kunduz. 15 October 2012.
Structures and Sources of Conflict

The major structures that contribute to conflict include poverty, unemployment, poor governance, illiteracy, a lack of awareness of civil rights, and the proliferation of armed groups. As in most of the districts of Kunduz, most of the residents of Imam Sahib depend on farming as a primary source of income. Although Imam Sahib has more fertile land and has not been as affected by drought as elsewhere in the province, livelihood issues remain a primary driver of conflict. Specifically, there are a large number of land disputes, which make up the bulk of civil cases brought to formal and informal justice providers in the district. These land-related problems include dispute over ownership and inheritance among relatives and neighbors. However, there are also a significant number of disputes involving returned refugees as well as land-grabbing by powerful individuals. As elsewhere in Afghanistan, these disputes are aggravated by the poor documentation of property ownership and weak governance institutions in the district.

Meanwhile, community members and district officials also cited a lack of education and awareness about their legal rights as negative factors that contribute to occasional outbreaks of violence over land and other issues. The head of the district court also complained that political parties often take advantage of the ignorance of residents to create artificial divisions along ethnic or tribal lines, leading to greater social tensions and the possibility of conflict.

The proliferation of armed, non-state actors also contributes to incidences of crime and violence in the district. Official and unofficial militias have been used a tool for containing the Taliban and other AOGs, but the lack of government oversight has allowed these armed groups to occasionally function as criminal gangs or as the personal militias of powerful individuals in the district and province. Young men are driven to join these armed groups by a lack of job and education opportunities. Once armed, many of these individuals rely on theft, drug-trafficking or the illegal taxation of local farmers as a source of income. This behavior undermines the rule of law, places additional economic burdens on local residents, and creates additional social tensions.

169 Interview - Huqooq District Office Manager. Imam Sahib, Kunduz. 15 October 2012.
170 Ibid.
171 Ibid.
172 Ibid. & Interview - Head of District Court. Imam Sahib, Kunduz. 15 October 2012.
173 Interview - Director of Hajj and Islamic Affairs Office. 15 October 2012.
Potential Sources of Peace

Potential sources of peace in Imam Sahib District include economic growth, improved governance and access to justice, education, improved security, and the promotion of peace by local elders and religious figures. Economic growth leads to additional job opportunities and reduces poverty, which is critical for reducing the incentives for local youths to join armed groups and engage in criminal activities. Investments in needed infrastructure, such as road and electricity, can contribute to poverty reduction by creating short-term job opportunities and by laying the physical foundations for future economic growth.

While violent conflicts over water are less common than in other districts, the large number of ongoing land-disputes is indicative of the importance of strengthening the rule of law and improving access to justice for local residents, especially those who live in rural and outlying areas of the district. Reducing corruption and strengthening the ability of the police, district and provincial courts, and huqooq office to resolve civil and criminals are necessary, long-term steps for improving governance and security. In the short term, however, the existence of shuras, jirgas can contribute to the rule of law and stability of the district by resolving existing disputes and preventing the emergence of new conflicts in rural areas where state institutions have a weak or non-existent presence.
District SCA: Khanabad

Security Overview

Khanabad is a rural district in eastern Kunduz Province along the border of Takhar Province. The district has been the site of considerable instability in recent years. Khanabad's security has deteriorated due to the presence of thousands of armed, non-state actors, including illegal and legal militias, anti-government fighters, and criminal groups since 2008. Although the exact number of illegal militias is unknown, Khanabad is believed to have the largest concentration of militia groups in Kunduz Province.\footnote{Rivera, Ray. (2011). "Afghanistan seeks to Disband Some Armed Militias." New York: The New York Times. 2 August 2011.} In 2011, the deputy provincial police commander estimated that there are three thousand \textit{arbakai} in the district.\footnote{Hewad, Gran (2012). "Legal, illegal: Militia recruitment and (failed) disarmament in Kunduz." Kabul: Afghanistan Analysts Network. 10 November 2012.} Meanwhile, the district ANP police chief told CPAU that the number of "armed irresponsible people" in Khanabad could be as high as 20,000.\footnote{Interview - ANP Manager. Khanabad, Kunduz. 13 October 2012.}

While the government has nominal control over most of the district, many areas are under the \textit{de facto} control of local warlords or other non-state actors. In particular, the area of Aqtash, located just 15 kilometers from Kunduz City, has no government presence and is the site of numerous armed groups, including \textit{arbakai} and anti-government groups.\footnote{Ibid.} Other areas under the control of non-state actors include Zarkamar, Eshan Toop, Mosa Zay, Mamfaly, and Char Toot.\footnote{Ibid.} Meanwhile, the head of the district \textit{huqooq} office told CPAU that there are currently 50 to 60 villages from the Aqtash to Zarkamar areas that cannot bring civil disputes to his office because they are outside of the control of the government.\footnote{Interview - Huqooq Office Manager. Khanabad, Kunduz. 13 October 2012.} Likewise, the police chief said that most crimes that occur in Aqtash, Zarkamar, and other problem areas cannot be prosecuted because the police lack the resources and power to arrest individuals in those areas.

Although some Taliban and other AOGs still exist in the district, the \textit{arbakai} are now seen as the biggest threat to stability and security by community members and district officials in Khanabad. Indeed, while the proliferation of legal and illegal militia has been successful at reducing the number of Taliban in Khanabad, they have created additional social and economic hardships for
residents in the rural areas where they operate. These groups often charge an informal tax on local residents, and regularly engage in criminal activities such as land-grabbing, theft, smuggling, and even murder and rape. Recent attempts by the government to disarm these groups have been almost entirely ineffective. Their ongoing presence has lead to a continuing deterioration of the rule of law in the district.

**Actors, Interests, and Behaviors**

The key actors who influence peace and conflict in Khanabad include district officials, government security forces, local warlords, militias, anti-government actors, local elders, religious leaders, and community members. On a district level, the main conflict lines are between the Afghan government, supported by ISAF, and the Taliban and other anti-government opposition groups. However, illegal and legal militia groups far outnumber the formal police and military in the district. Since Taliban began to re-emerge in the area in 2008, the government has relied on recruitment of the *arbakai* and ALP as its primary means of fighting the Taliban. These groups, which operate with virtually no government oversight, now have *de facto* control over much of the district. These militias, along with criminal gangs and other armed actors, adversely affect the overall security situation in the district by engaging in criminal behavior and undermining attempts to improve governance and rule of law.

As elsewhere in Kunduz, the district administration of Khanabad consists of several government offices, including a district court, police station, a huqooq office, and an MRRD office, among others. The district governor told CPAU that while the government previously had full control over the district from 2009 to 2011, the last year had seen a deterioration in the government’s ability to provide services and rule of law to areas such as Aqtash due to the proliferation of illegal militias. Currently, there are roughly 200 ANP stationed in the district, compared to thousands of armed *arbakai*. The district governor noted that insufficient district personnel and resources along with the political support and weapons that some of the larger militia groups allegedly receive from corrupt officials in the provincial and national government has made it

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increasingly difficult for the district government to provide basic government services. ¹⁸³ For example, it is not possible for the police to arrest individuals who commit crimes in areas controlled by the *arbakai*, some of whom are openly hostile to the district government. ¹⁸⁴ These means that crimes like land-grabbing and even murder often go unprosecuted and unresolved. This has created resentment towards the government among local communities, who view the government and foreigners as complicit in the growing lawlessness in the district. ¹⁸⁵

The most powerful warlords in the district are currently Meer Alam and Mohammad Omar, who each control wide swaths of the district. Meer Alam, an ethnic Tajik and former military commander in the Northern Alliance, is one of the most powerful individual in the province, with thousands of armed supporters in Khanabad and other districts of Kunduz. He is a member of *Jamiat-i-Islami* with close ties with the NDS, the provincial police chief, and members of the national government in Kabul, including Vice President Mohammad Fahim. ¹⁸⁶¹⁸⁷ In 2008, his former deputy in the Northern Alliance was the head of NDS in the province, and together they oversaw the rearming of thousands of his former supporters as part of the ISAF and government-sanctioned *arbakai* and ALP programs. ¹⁸⁸ Although he has the tentative support of the Afghan government and the US military, his network of militias operates largely outside of the law and is a major source of instability in Khanabad District and the province as a whole. He has been one of the biggest obstacles to recent attempts by the government to disarm illegal militias in the province. ¹⁸⁹

Meanwhile, Mohammad Omar is the brother of a former anti-Soviet mujahedeen commander who fought under Abdul Rasul Sayyaf. He was recruited by the NDS in 2008 to raise a militia to fight the Taliban's growing presence in and around Khanabad. ¹⁹⁰ He now controls an network of

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¹⁸⁴ Interview - ANP Manager. Khanabad, Kunduz. 13 October 2012.
¹⁸⁷ Ibid.
¹⁸⁸ Ibid.
¹⁹⁰ Ibid.
an estimated 4,000 or 5,000 unofficial *arbakai* in a string of villages along the southern bank of the Khanabad river in the Aqtash area.\textsuperscript{191,192}

These larger militia networks, along with smaller, non-aligned groups, engage in a variety of criminal behaviors that negatively affect the physical and financial livelihoods of local residents. This includes collecting illegal taxes from community members, and forcibly seizing land owned by local farmers, which they then occupy themselves or sell to other individuals.\textsuperscript{193} Meanwhile, the *arbakai* have also been known to engage in rape and forced marriage in the district.\textsuperscript{194} Community members who live in areas controlled by militias are often powerless to prevent these crimes, and the government lacks the resources to investigate or prosecute them.

In addition to the *arbakai*, some Taliban continue to live and operate in the district, despite numerous attempts by the government to dislodge them.\textsuperscript{195} The Taliban began to reestablish a presence in Khanabad after 2008. The recruitment of *arbakai* and ALP has been moderately successful at reducing their presence, but the Taliban have remained active in some outlying areas of the district. These individuals remain capable of engage in attacks against government security forces as well as pro-government militia groups, with whom they occasionally clash. Currently, however, the Taliban and other AOGs are less of a threat to governance and rule of law than local warlords and militia groups.

Finally, other groups with an impact on peace and conflict in the district include local elders and religious leaders. Given the deteriorating ability of the government to provide rule of law, many community members have increasingly relied on *shuras* and *jirgas* for settling disputes and resolving local conflicts.\textsuperscript{196} Meanwhile, the MRRD district office manager told CPAU that there are currently 114 NSP shuras in the district, which have been contributing to the development of rural communities. However, he claimed that insecurity and armed actors were hindering the work of the shuras, including 15 *shuras* that were being prevented from gathering by powerful people and five or six *shuras* in Aqtash that had ceased operations because of local conflicts. The *arbakai* also regularly interfere in the work of the *shuras* and the distribution of

\textsuperscript{191} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{192} Interview - Head of District Court. Khanabad, Kunduz. 14 October 2012.  
\textsuperscript{193} Interview - Head of NSP Shura & Deputy of Peace Shura. Yar Khan Village, Khanabad, Kunduz. 14 October 2012.  
\textsuperscript{194} Interview - Huqooq Office Manager. Khanabad, Kunduz. 13 October 2012.  
\textsuperscript{195} Interview - District Governor. Khanabad, Kunduz. 13 October 2012.  
\textsuperscript{196} Ibid.
development aid. This corruption and interference by militias has had a negative impact on the ability of shuras to improve the livelihoods of their respective communities.

**Structures and Sources of Conflict**

The major causes and underlying structures that contribute to conflict include poverty and unemployment, a lack of education, poor governance, and the proliferation of armed groups. A lack of irrigation and other infrastructure have also had a negative impact on security by limiting local residents’ options for income generation. Like most of Kunduz, Khanabad is primarily rural and agriculture, with most families reliant on the production of crops and livestock. Without options for generating income, young men are susceptible to recruitment by various armed groups, including the *arbakai* and the Taliban. Meanwhile, the government’s tentative support for various militia groups and their failure to provide rule of law and basic services has created resentment among residents.

As in the other districts, community elders and government officials regularly mentioned land disputes as well as a lack of employment and education as causes of conflict. The centrality of agriculture to the livelihoods of farmers has meant that land and water are essential resources for most residents. Land ownership and access to reliable sources of water, especially during the recent years of drought, are therefore common sources of conflict. Indeed, CPAU has previously found that disagreements over land ownership are the most common type of dispute brought to local *shuras* in Khanabad. If not addressed, these livelihood disputes can lead to violence and conflict. Furthermore, the poverty resulting from a lack of job and education opportunities has led many young males in the district to join armed groups, particularly the *arbakai*. Once armed, many of these individuals engage in criminal behavior as means of gaining an income. The resulting land-grabbing and illegal taxation has put an increased economic burden on local residents in Khanabad. This has exacerbated the poverty of local communities and created a growing potential for further conflict in the district.

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Potential Sources of Peace

Potential sources of peace in Khanabad District include economic growth, education, improved governance and security, disarmament of non-state actors, better access to justice, and the promotion of peace by local elders and religious figures. Improvements in the economy have a positive effect on the livelihoods of local residents by reducing unemployment and poverty, which in turn limits the population of jobless youths who are most likely to join militias or other armed groups and engage in criminal activities.

The agricultural sector is the biggest source of employment in the district. Improvements to this sector, including the creation and reconstruction of irrigation infrastructure, can increase the productivity of arable land and reduce the vulnerability of farming communities to drought, floods and conflicts over water. Meanwhile, the creation of other infrastructure can boost the local economy and create additional job opportunities. Likewise, improvements to education and the health sector can positively affect the available human capital in the district.

Peace and stability are also correlated with government’s ability to address the security and governance concerns of local communities. Greater attempts must therefore be made to disarm illegal militias and increase the government's ability to provide security and governance in the district. So far, programs to disarm the thousands of non-official *arbakai* in the district have been thwarted by powerful warlords and their political allies in the provincial and national governments. If implemented more thoroughly, a successful disarmament campaign could have positive consequences for peace in the district by reducing the number of armed individuals who are currently engaged in criminal activities. The success of such a program would be contingent upon the greater political cooperation of a number of prominent government actors, including members of the ANP, NDS, and Ministry of Interior on the provincial and national level, who have previously been complicit in the proliferation of the militias since 2008. To be effective, attempts at disarming non-state actors would need to be accompanied by the creation of alternative job opportunities for earning income.

Meanwhile, improvements to the capacity and efficiency of state institutions, including the ANSF and formal justice sector, are also necessary to address local concerns and reduce anti-government sentiments. This includes increasing the ANP's ability to provide security and community policing in areas currently dominated by illegal militias. In the short term, *shuras*, *jirgas* and other informal actors can reduce conflict by providing local-level governance and
access to justice. The district governor praised the ability of tribal elders to resolve disputes and prevent violence in villages where the government lacks access and/or resources. These actors can represent and advocate for the development needs of their communities as well as resolve disputes before they contribute to local conflict trends.

201 Interview - District Governor. Khanabad, Kunduz. 13 October 2012.
Recommendations

In this section, CPAU provides recommendations for foreign donors and international organizations seeking to contribute to development and stabilization efforts in Kunduz Province. The following recommendations for conflict-sensitive development aid are based on the drivers of peace and conflict identified in the previous sections:

- **Support Physical Infrastructure and Job Creation Projects:** Donors should continue to support development efforts to promote economic growth in Kunduz, such as through physical infrastructure projects in Kunduz. In particular, local residents have voiced an urgent need for irrigation, along with transportation, electricity, schools and clinics. With most residents employed in agriculture, the construction and restorations of preexisting irrigation systems and structures can protect communities of floods and droughts while creating jobs and improving agricultural output. Meanwhile, the construction of roads and electrical infrastructure can improve access to markets and expand opportunities for income-generating activities in other sectors of the economy. Likewise, the implementation of other types of infrastructure, such as drinking wells, schools and clinics, can have positive, long-term effects on education and public health while also providing short-term job creation. As with all infrastructure projects, proper monitoring and oversight will be necessary to ensure that these projects are constructed effectively and that their benefits reach the intended populations.

- **Expand Opportunities for Education:** Improved access to education was one of the most frequently cited community needs in Kunduz and was viewed as a solution to joblessness and the spread of violent ideologies. Constructing schools, training teachers and providing textbooks and other classroom materials can improve the quality and availability of education. Greater access to primary education is particularly necessary in rural areas. Meanwhile, expanding the opportunities for higher education in the population centers can have a positive effect on the generation of human capital. Girls’ education is particularly lacking in rural areas of Kunduz, and many female students would benefit from the construction of additional, gender-specific facilities. Likewise, literacy programs and vocational training for male and female residents can have a positive impact on expanding job opportunities for those individuals.

- **Support Local Governance and Rule of Law Initiatives:** Efforts should be made to strengthen the capacity of shuras, jirgas and other informal institutions to provide justice and rule of law to the members of their communities. Given the weakness and perceived corruption of the formal government, most community members in Kunduz rely on these
groups of respected elders to mediate disputes and provide justice. These informal institutions should be provided with additional training on conflict mediation techniques; knowledge of the Afghanistan legal system (including the areas of the Civil Law Code that relate the most common sources of local disputes, such as property law, inheritance law, and marriage and divorce law, etc); and awareness of the rights of women and other vulnerable groups. In doing so, it is possible to expand the capacity of these institutions to resolve local disputes in a manner that is more effective, conflict-sensitive and adherent to international human rights norms and the official laws of Afghanistan. Training should also emphasize keeping written records of successfully resolved cases in order to minimize the potential that the dispute will reemerge in the future. Finally, efforts should be made to create and strengthen linkages between these informal institutions and the formal justice system (police, courts, huqooq offices), including the greater referral of cases and sharing of information between the two systems.

For more recommendations on community peace-building and justice linkages in Kunduz, please see CPAU’s 2012 report: *Opportunities and Challenges for Justice Linkages: Case Studies from Kunduz and Takhar*.

- **Support long-term efforts to boost the capacity of Afghan Security Forces and Formal Justice Institutions:** Sustained training efforts and material support are necessary to improve the ability of the ANP, NDS, and ANA to provide security and governance in Kunduz. As ISAF forces begin to withdraw in advance of the 2014 deadline, Afghan forces will perform an increasingly important security role in preventing instability and the spread of AOGs. Given ongoing insecurity and the significant presence of AOGs and criminal actors in these areas, it is important that the member states of ISAF continue to provide long-term support to the capacity-building of the security sector. Training of the ANP should not be limited to combating insurgents, but to providing community policing in order to better address the law and order problems faced by local residents. Improved oversight by the Ministry of Interior is necessary to minimize police corruption and prevent abuses of power that can undermine local support for the government. To ensure conflict-sensitivity, police training should also include components on understanding the rights and addressing the needs of vulnerable groups, including women and minorities. Meanwhile, similar training and support should also be given to formal justice institutions, including the formal courts and huqooq offices, to improve their knowledge and capacity to provide fair and effective dispute resolution for local residents.
• **Promote Greater Oversight and Disarmament of Local Militias**: Previous US and ISAF-supported initiatives to promote security in rural communities through the recruitment of local militias (*arbakai*) have had a mixed to negative impact on security, governance and rule of law in Kunduz. The creation of the Afghan Local Police (ALP) was a necessary but insufficient step towards bringing the *arbakai* under greater oversight by the Ministry of Interior. In many cases, however, the designation of ALP has amounted to little more than a change of name, and many of these ALP/*arbakai* continue to function as *de facto* criminal gangs or the personal militias of local warlords. The recruitment of new ALP, *arbakai*, or similar militia groups should therefore be discouraged. Existing ALP units should be further integrated into the ANP command and control structure and provided with appropriate training on community policing. Screening procedures for ALP members should also be heightened to prevent criminals or other unsuitable individuals from receiving weapons and legal authority.

Meanwhile, illegal militia groups should be disarmed and provided with vocational training so that they can find alternative jobs in the civilian sphere. Unfortunately, recent disarmament campaigns in Kunduz have been unsuccessful due to the influence of political parties and powerful individuals in or close to the provincial government. Greater pressure will need to be placed on these actors to encourage them to cooperate with the disarmament of illegal militias in Kunduz.

• **Expand Outreach to Mullahs and Community Elders**: Foreign organizations and donors should consult and seek to more greatly involve local opinion-makers in the implementation of development and stabilization projects. In particular, community elders and local religious leaders can have a powerful impact on community attitudes regarding peace and conflict. By improving outreach to these individuals and involving them more substantially in discussions on development, security and governance, it is possible to promote the spread of positive messages regarding cooperation and peace. Often, these religious figures are members of *shuras* or *jirgas*, or at least are consulted by other elders or local residents when the community is deciding what action to take on a particular dispute or issue. Any efforts to strengthen local governance, such as trainings and workshops on conflict mediation and awareness of women’s rights and human rights norms, should include local *mullahs* and other influential community leaders. Building and maintaining positive relationships with these local opinion-makers is necessary for promoting peace and preventing the spread of radical and violent ideologies.
• **Encourage Greater Participation of Communities in Assessing Local Needs**: To ensure that development assistance has a positive and sustainable impact, it is important to consult local communities to identify their most urgent needs and to assess what potential projects would be most practical given local conditions. Foreign donors in Afghanistan have often failed to sufficiently involve local residents in the needs identification process, leading to the implementation of projects that are impractical, unsustainable and/or fail to address the actual needs of the target community. To promote effectiveness and sustainability, community representatives should ideally be involved in each stage of the development process, from planning to implementation to oversight and evaluation.

While it is often not practical or possible to have full community participation in this process, local elders often have a strong understanding of local conditions and needs in their areas and can serve as valuable representatives in this process. It is always necessary, however, to consider the motivations and interests of any local elites claiming to represent communities and to understand that the personal interests of these individuals may not necessarily reflect the wider needs of the population. In particular, it is important to ensure that the voices of a community’s most vulnerable members, such as women, ethnic minorities and the poor, are not ignored or overlooked in the planning and implementation of development and governance programs.
Conclusions

This CPAU report seeks to provide readers with a greater understanding of the causes of peace and conflict in Kunduz Province, with a specific focus on the districts of Ali Abad, Char Dara, Imam Sahib and Khanabad. The biggest structural causes of insecurity in the province include poverty, unemployment, lack of education, weak governance and rule of law, insecurity, and a lack of access to justice. These structures have contributed to many residents, especially unemployed young men, supporting or joining the Taliban, other AOGs, and criminal groups. The influence of larger political trends (e.g. the national-level conflict between the Taliban and the Karzai government) and geo-political forces (e.g. the negative interference of neighboring countries such as Pakistan) have also undermined peace and stability. Meanwhile, the security situation was also affected by a wide range of province, district and community-level actors, including government officials, formal security forces (ANP, NDS, and ANA), local commanders, militias, anti-government actors, and local elders and religious leaders.

The next couple of years will be a critical period for ensuring the long-term stability and security of Afghanistan. The current ISAF mission is scheduled to be completed by December 2014. During this transition period and the initial months and years that follow, the GIRoA will likely remain dependent on the continued economic and logistical support of foreign governments and international organizations to provide security, governance, and necessary services to its population. This report is meant to offer practical recommendations for conflict-sensitive development aid to those international donors and other actors seeking to improve the lives of residents living in Kunduz.
Bibliography


Annex: Research Tools

Included below is the English version of the questionnaire developed by CPAU's bilingual research staff for use in this Strategic Conflict Analysis. A version of this questionnaire was used in each of the 67 structured interviews conducted during the course of this research. A majority of the interviews were conducted in Dari by CPAU research staff.

Confidentiality and Security - I am requesting your participation in a research study that Cooperation for Peace and Unity (CPAU) is conducting across Kunduz province to explore local conflict. CPAU will carefully protect your identity and the information that you share. We will not use your name, the name of your village, or the name of your district on this questionnaire or in any reporting that we write. We will be careful to not reveal any information about you in any of our work. Also, if you agree to this interview, you do not have to answer any question that you are not comfortable with.

Conflict in Kunduz

1. What kinds of conflict do people have to deal with in your [village/district/province]? Please describe.

a. How/when/why did these conflicts start?

b. How have the conflicts changed in recent years?

c. What are some of the consequences of these conflicts?
2. Who are the main parties in the conflicts in your [village/district/province]? Please describe.

a. What are their positions, interests and capacities?

b. Do they have any alliances? With who?

c. How do these parties interact with and affect the civilian population?

d. Are the parties going to continue this conflict? Why?

3. What are the main roots/causes to these conflicts in your [village/district/province]? Please describe.

a. What factors contribute to
4. How can these conflicts be resolved peacefully in your [village/district/province]? Please describe.

a. Are there any initiatives or activities that contribute to peace? If so, what are they?

b. Which individuals/groups/organisations are able to help establish peace?

c. What successes and struggles have these peace initiatives had?

d. What factors contribute to peace?

e. How do provincial or national peace initiatives affect local communities?
f. What role can the international community play in helping create peace?

Date of Interview: ________________________

Site of Interview: _________________________

General Position #: _________________________

Organisation #: ____________________________