

# The Taliban and Organized Crime\*

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## Resumo

### Os Taliban e o Crime Organizado

Desde 2001 que o crime organizado tem tido um papel importante na desestabilização do Afeganistão. Este artigo analisa a participação dos Taliban afegãos (denominados por *Quetta Shura Taliban – QST*) em atividades criminais no sul e sudoeste do país, descrevendo a forma como este envolvimento está a ser aprofundado e como o grupo interage com organizações independentes de contrabandistas.

Mais recentemente começámos a assistir a uma erupção da rivalidade associada a disputas por uma maior fatia dos lucros, o que gerou vulnerabilidades estruturais profundas nos e entre os grupos de insurgentes e de terroristas na zona de conflito. A exploração destas rivalidades e o fomentar das desconfianças pode ser maximizada com vista a degradar o nível de cooperação dos militantes limitando seriamente os fundos obtidos por estes. No entanto, esta estratégia é arriscada pois poderá potenciar o eclodir de uma maior violência entre os grupos, aumentando o número de baixas civis.

## Abstract

*Organized crime has played an important destabilizing role in post-2001 Afghanistan. This article will mainly focus on how the Afghan Taliban, commonly referred to as the Quetta Shura Taliban (QST), engage in criminal activity in the south and southwest, track how their involvement in crime is deepening and look at how the group interacts with autonomous smuggling organizations.*

*More recently we saw an eruption of rivalries over criminal profits which appear to have created deep structural weaknesses within and between insurgent and terror groups in the conflict zone. Exploiting those rivalries and breeding distrust could serve to degrade levels of militant cooperation and disrupt funds reaching militant coffers. This strategy is risky, however, to the extent that it could spark internecine violence and contribute to an increase in civilian casualties.*

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## Introduction

Militant groups on either side of the Afghanistan/Pakistan frontier function like a broad network of criminal gangs, not just in terms of the activities in which they engage, but in the way the groups are organized, how funds flow through their command chains and how they interact with each other. Within this complex adaptive system, criminal profits fund the wider insurgency, while terrorist violence helps militants to coerce and exert a level of control over local communities. Within a realm of poor governance, widespread state corruption and predation by local power brokers, the *Taliban* and other belligerent groups engage in and protect organized crime – mainly smuggling, extortion and kidnapping.

Organized crime helps insurgents across the region to raise funds, and – whether by design or by accident – has effectively become a key element of their asymmetric warfare campaign, spreading fear and insecurity. Crime slows the pace of development and frustrates attempts to extend the rule of law and establish a sustainable licit economy. Insurgents find ways to justify criminal behavior as part of their jihad, claiming, for example, that they live off the alms of the people, or rationalizing that they deal in drugs in order to make addicts of infidels. As with Mafia clans and street gangs operating in the West, illicit insurgent behavior can be simultaneously protective and predatory towards the communities where insurgent entities operate. This paper will mainly focus on how the Afghan *Taliban*, commonly referred to as the *Quetta Shura Taliban* (QST), engage in criminal activity in the south and southwest, track how their involvement in crime is deepening and look at how the group interacts with autonomous smuggling organizations.<sup>1</sup> It will examine how the Code of Conduct promulgated by the *Taliban* in 2009 sought to limit harm caused to civilians, while also seeking to centralize control of illicit revenues.

The *Taliban's* involvement in organized crime broadens the Coalition's security challenge. However, the insurgency's financial reliance on predation also creates a strategic liability, limiting the group's popular appeal and sparking fierce internal rivalries. The Coalition and the wider community trying to stabilize Afghanistan could potentially exploit both these weaknesses, but only in an environment where the Afghan government was seen as a more reliable alternative.

Organized crime has played an important destabilizing role in post-2001 Afghanistan. Protecting and taxing the opium trade helped fund the *Taliban* resurgence,

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1 Two other factions of the insurgency in Afghanistan are widely referred to as the *Haqqani* network and the *Hizb-i-Islami Gulbuddin*. This paper focuses only on the *Quetta Shura Taliban*.

and has intensified the conflict in Afghanistan's south by bringing both militants and corrupt state actors significant wealth and access to explosives and weapons. Kidnapping, attacks on supply convoys and widespread protection rackets have also dramatically increased security and other costs for the Coalition, local governments and international organizations working in the region, slowing the pace of development and reconstruction and spreading the perception that the Afghan government is weak and ineffective. The cycle of development projects and businesses that pays protection to insurgents, whom then use the funds to buy explosives and attack Coalition troops, creates a moral hazard for the international community and contributes to a self-sustaining war. In districts where local communities earn from the opium trade, *Taliban* protection of illicit commerce can elicit various forms of cooperation and support from civilians.

Organized crime also fuels corruption, the single biggest obstacle to stabilizing Afghanistan. Corrupt state actors not only have a disincentive to improve governance, they also rob their governments of critical revenue. According to a January 2010 report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Afghans paid \$2.5 billion in bribes in 2009, equivalent to 23 percent of that country's GDP. Critics of the US-led plan to stabilize the region note that anti-corruption efforts typically must come from within in order to succeed, a vexing consideration for NATO military commanders trying to implement a counterinsurgency (COIN) strategy with often-unreliable local partners (Heineman, 2009).

Estimates of the *Taliban's* annual earnings from narcotics and other organized crime vary by hundreds of millions of dollars. Although most analysts agree it's not possible to determine precisely how much the QST earns from opium, nor estimate what portion of its total budget comes from narcotics, senior US military intelligence officials and members of the Afghan Threat Finance Cell, an interagency body tracking *Taliban* finance in Afghanistan and the U.S., believe the Afghan insurgency is now self-financed and that narcotics represents the largest portion of QST funding<sup>2</sup>. The *Taliban* profit from the opium trade in four main sectors: by taxing poppy farmers 10 percent (*ushr*) of their farm output, by charging fees to protect opium shipments and heroin refineries, by taxing and, increasingly, running their own drug labs, and in the form of large cash payments made to the *Quetta Majlis* by major trafficking groups. Of these

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2 Personal interviews by the author, Washington D.C. and see also: "Afghanistan's Narco-War," a report to the Committee on Foreign Relations, US Senate, August 10, 2009, p. 14. Available at [http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=111\\_cong\\_senate\\_committee\\_prints&docid=f:51521.pdf](http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=111_cong_senate_committee_prints&docid=f:51521.pdf)

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sums, tax collected from the farmers appears to represent the smallest portion of the insurgents' take, and these earnings by and large remain at the village level, where sub-commanders often sell off what they collect to local agents in order to cover operational costs. The QST also tax licit farm products as well as commodities that are traded or trafficked through Afghanistan. Insurgents across the country earn additional funds from a wide range of protection rackets, kidnapping schemes and by protecting smugglers of other "lootable" natural resources, mainly timber and gemstones. Organized crime is not the insurgent's only source of income, although most analysts agree that predation and other sources of funding bring the insurgents far more than they need to support their military operations.

Though crime brings financial advantages, the associated levels of violence caused by insurgents have also prompted growing numbers of civilians to question the purported religious, political and ideological motives of the militants. This creates an opportunity that the Coalition has barely begun to tap. Belligerents on both sides of the Durand Line have long portrayed themselves as impoverished *mujahidin*, battling under the flag of Islam and living off the alms of ordinary civilians who support them. A 2009 statement by the *Taliban's* number two, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, who was detained in Pakistan in February 2010, expresses the typical rhetoric heard from militants on both sides of the frontier: "This pious and patriotic people have offered tremendous material and soul sacrifices in the way of their sacred objectives. The *mujahidin* have not chosen this path of strife between the truth and the evil to obtain material goals. They have lofty Islamic and nationalist aims."<sup>3</sup>

Whatever legitimacy such claims may provide, there are growing indications that militant involvement in organized crime and high levels of terrorist violence have undermined public support, particularly since local communities – virtually all of them fellow Muslims – are the main victims. While militants may protect illicit economies – and in doing so gain cooperation from community members who seek to protect their income source – militants also prey on civilians, both through the taxes and protection fees the militants charge and by creating instability that hampers the development of licit alternatives.

Though, members of the local community may at times cooperate with the *Taliban* for economic reasons or out of fear, that cooperation appears not to indicate that the QST has been embraced as a popular force. Rather, recent public surveys

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3 For the full statement see: "Taliban Deputy Amir – Obama's New Strategy," 30 October 2009. Available at <http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/nefaAkhund1109.pdf>

indicate that approval ratings for the insurgents are dropping. Some 90 percent of Afghans surveyed in a January 2010 *ABC/BBC News* poll preferred the government of President Hamid Karzai to the *Taliban* – an increase of eight points over a figure provided a year earlier – while 69 percent, a new high, described the insurgents as the nation’s greatest threat.<sup>4</sup> Some analysts have questioned the high favorability rates that the Karzai government earned in the survey, but low and declining levels of public support for the insurgents could be tracked across several polls taken in 2009 in both Afghanistan and Pakistan (MacKenzie, 2010).<sup>5</sup> The Pakistani public’s growing hostility towards the militants was also palpable in dozens of interviews conducted for this paper. People routinely referred to them as *goonda*, meaning gangster in Urdu, rather than *mujahidin*, a historically reverential term for Islamic fighters.

The NATO Coalition – which also remains unpopular – stands to improve relative levels of community support and capitalize on public disgust towards the militants by developing strategies to protect civilians victimized by organized crime and violence.<sup>6</sup> The Afghan government, widely perceived as corrupt, could also improve its image by making concrete efforts to stamp out crime and reduce corruption. Separately, rivalries over criminal profits appear to have created deep structural weaknesses within and between insurgent and terror groups in the conflict zone. Exploiting those rivalries and breeding distrust could serve to degrade levels of militant cooperation and disrupt funds reaching militant coffers. This strategy is risky, however, to the extent that it could spark internecine violence and contribute to an increase in civilian casualties.

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4 “Views Improve Sharply in Afghanistan, Though Criticisms of the US Remain High,” *ABC News*, January 11, 2010. This poll was conducted with the BBC and ARD German TV. Poll results can be seen at: <http://abcnews.go.com/PollingUnit/afghanistan-abc-news-national-survey-poll-show-support/story?id=9511961>.

5 This article notes that there is little empirical evidence of optimism among many ordinary Afghans, suggesting that the numbers could reflect a sense of hope things will improve, rather than expectations. For more detail see: <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/afghanistan/100118/afghanistan-opinion-poll>. A 2009 survey by the Asia Foundation also found Afghans to be growing more optimistic, but by a smaller margin. That survey can be seen at: <http://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/2009AGpollKeyFindingsFINAL.pdf>. A 2009 survey by the same ABC/BBC/ARD conglomerate tracked dropping confidence levels. That data is found at: <http://abcnews.go.com/images/PollingUnit/1083a1Afghanistan2009.pdf>.

6 Six in 10 Afghans view the work of the US and the NATO Coalition poorly, according to the *ABC News* poll, although that reflects a 10 percent improvement over last year’s rate. Meanwhile, 64 percent of the Pakistani public regards the US as an enemy, according to an August 2009 Pew survey, while only nine percent describe it as a partner. The *Pew Survey* is available at: <http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=265>.

### Examining Motives: The Greed and Grievance Factors

Over the past decade, a growing body of academic literature has examined the role that organized crime has played in recent cases of insurgency and civil conflict, probing the various ways in which involvement in crime can alter the trajectory of belligerent groups, and considering the most effective countermeasures that governments and military planners can adopt in order to counter the phenomenon. There has been lively debate over the question of whether greed or grievance is more often the predictor of violence in such conflicts.<sup>7</sup> This paper does not aim to determine whether greed, grievance, nor some combination thereof sparked the post 2001 rebellion in Afghanistan. Rather, it is useful to consider the role that greed and grievance now play in affecting the insurgency's staying power. In a region where a broad range of actors profit from the drug trade and other illicit activities, there is no question that reducing levels of organized crime will be essential to rebuilding the Afghan state, improving governance, reviving licit economies and ensuring tax revenues enter federal coffers in both Pakistan and Afghanistan. The prevalence of organized crime, and the extent to which militant groups appear to be deepening their involvement in it, also suggests that certain factions and key leaders of the insurgency may be motivated more by profit – or in other words greed – than the political grievances for which they claim to fight.

No doubt the *Taliban* have capitalized on political, ethnic and economic grievances of members of the local community, and there is scant evidence that rank-and-file *Taliban* take up arms simply to enrich themselves, nor that they earn much once they do. At the same time, however, there is clear evidence that the continued state of insecurity richly benefits a small number of elites on both sides of the battlefield, giving both corrupt state actors and militant leaders a clear financial incentive to sustain disorder, regardless of whether their wider political and other goals have been achieved. For military planners, troops in the field, diplomats and others engaged in the effort to negotiate solutions to the conflict, it will be useful to assess which actors are motivated primarily or exclusively by profit, and which engage in crime as a means to further their political and ideological goals.

No doubt there will be a blend of motivations in some cases. Understanding them – and their relative weight in each case – will assist in making decisions about

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<sup>7</sup> See for example Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler (2002). "Greed and Grievance in Civil War," *Berkeley Electronic Press*. Collier and Hoeffler (1998). "On Economic Causes of Civil War," *Oxford Economic Papers*, volume 50, n.º 4. Mats Berdal and David M. Malone (eds) (2000). *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil War*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner.

how to co-opt power brokers, or whether to remove them from the playing field instead. Licit financial alternatives may prompt those motivated predominantly by avarice to put down their weapons.<sup>8</sup> People predominantly motivated by grievances about how their society is run or how they are treated will hold out until their political goals are met. Judging how to read key players, while simultaneously making efforts to improve the lot of ordinary civilians, could support stability operations. The interplay of greed and political grievance exists on both sides of the battlefield. Regional power brokers, warlords and corrupt state actors also protect and engage in illicit activities, and state corruption facilitates and strengthens organized crime generally.

Afghanistan is not the first conflict zone where organized crime has become a major destabilizing factor, and yet the wider phenomenon has received scant attention among military strategists in this and other recent conflicts. Wartime underground networks in Bosnia, for example, morphed into political criminal networks that were tied to smuggling, tax evasion, and human trafficking, according to a 2000 US government study (US General Accounting Office, 2000). Ties between the Kosovo Liberation Army and Balkan smuggling networks also slowed efforts to stabilize Kosovo.<sup>9</sup> In a more recent case, organized crime in post-*Ba'athist* Iraq became the "unrecognized joker in the pack," funding *al-Qa'ida*, *Jaish-al-Mahdi* as well as a number of Sunni tribes that initially fought US forces (Williams, 2009). There is good reason to give this issue close attention in Afghanistan: A 2002 Stanford University study that analyzed 122 civil wars since 1945 found that conflicts in which the actors engaged in organized crime lasted five times longer than the rest on average (Fearon, 2002: 13).

Information presented in this report has been compiled mainly from interviewing Afghans in insurgent-affected areas in order to gauge *their* perceptions of how their communities are victimized by insurgent criminal activity. There are advantages and drawbacks to field-based research in a conflict zone, and there are particular challenges associated with the Afghanistan-Pakistan border areas, many parts of which are inaccessible to foreign and local researchers alike. Members of the com-

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8 See Richard Snyder (2004). "Does Lutable Wealth Breed Disorder," June, pp. 17-20, for an analysis of how the military regime in Burma co-opted rebels who profited from the opium trade there, investing their narco-profits into legitimate businesses. As Snyder points out, this tactic succeeded in reducing levels of disorder but did nothing to reduce drug trafficking. Within the Afghan conflict, a number of power brokers tied to poppy cultivation and organized crime have agreed to change their ways in return for development aid and other support. There may be significant numbers of cases where co-option is a better alternative than interdiction.

9 For more detail see United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (2008). *Crime and its Impact on the Balkans and Affected Countries*, March. Available at [http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Balkan\\_study.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Balkan_study.pdf)



munity are able to provide a level of immediacy and intimacy that few outsiders would be able to attain on their own, but reliance on their largely anecdotal information also makes the data presented herein harder to corroborate. Complicating matters further, examining illicit activity is a challenging prospect in any environment, since most crime goes unreported and criminal actors tend to lie. There is no way to compensate for these issues entirely, but each case presented in this report has been corroborated by Afghan and Western officials, the media and other open source reporting, or was recounted by enough sources to be considered generally accurate. The US Military shared with the author a raft of declassified documents seized in Afghanistan, which also served to corroborate local reporting.

### **A Kinder, Gentler *Taliban*?**

In 2009, the *Quetta Shura Taliban* named new regional commanders and shuffled the lineup of its executive council. The QST also issued a new code of conduct in an apparent attempt to exert control over unruly *Taliban* sub-commanders, make strategic preparations for the surge of US troops, and improve relations with ordinary Afghans by establishing a civilian shadow government at the local level. Under the new structure, the *Taliban* broadened its shadow government and established provincial-level commissions where Afghans can present their requests or complaints to a local council of religious scholars, who answer back to the *Shura*.<sup>10</sup> “The reason they changed their tactics is that they want to prepare for a long-term fight, and for that they need support from the people; they need local sources of income,” said Wahid Mujda, a former *Taliban* official who now tracks the insurgency on the Internet (Rubin, 2010).

The *Taliban* Code of Conduct broadly paralleled US-led efforts to reshape NATO strategy in Afghanistan.<sup>11</sup> Mullah Mohammed Omar, the leader of the *Quetta Shura Taliban* (QST) ordered his commanders to avoid victimizing locals in what could

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10 The *Quetta Shura* is so named because the *Taliban* leadership is widely believed to take operate from the western Pakistani city of *Quetta*, in Baluchistan province. In recent months, there have been open source reports suggesting that the *Taliban* leadership has shifted to the southern port city Karachi out of fear that an intensive US-led drone campaign in the FATA would be extended to Baluchistan to target QST leaders. See for example: Imtiaz Ali (2010). “Karachi Becoming a *Taliban* Safe Haven?”. *CTC Sentinel*, January, p. 13. The QST number two, Mullah Baradar, was captured in Karachi in February 2010, followed shortly thereafter by as many as four other *Taliban* officials in other parts of the country.

11 In his 60-page initial assessment to Defense Secretary Robert Gates, Lt. Gen. Stanley McChrystal wrote that, “Our objective must be the population.” A redacted version of the assessment is available at [http://media.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/documents/Assessment\\_Redacted\\_092109.pdf](http://media.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/documents/Assessment_Redacted_092109.pdf)

be seen as a population-centric approach, *Taliban* style. These efforts were undermined by an increase in suicide bombings, Improvised Explosive Device (IED) attacks and targeted killings by insurgents to which the United Nations attributed 67 percent of the civilian deaths in Afghanistan in 2009, or twice the number of civilian deaths attributed to the Coalition and their Afghan government allies.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to attempting to reduce levels of violence against civilians, the strategy embodied in the *Taliban's* new Code of Conduct also centralizes power in the *Taliban's* 10-man ruling council, or *Shura Majlis* (referred to as the *Quetta Shura*), and permits lower-ranking insurgents fewer opportunities to earn money at the ground level. The Code of Conduct decreed that no one outside the *Quetta Shura* had the power to alter the new regulations, and listed the "provincial, district, and central military commissions [as] responsible for the dissemination and implementation of these rules."<sup>13</sup>

Various chapters of the decree appear aimed at limiting local commanders from taking their own decisions or earning funds at the local level, instead ceding all authority to the provincial commissions and the *Taliban* supreme leadership. Most significantly, the new system streamlines the way in which money raised by the *Taliban* at the local level is funneled back to the Pakistan-based QST leadership, in some cases bypassing the local *Taliban* commander entirely. Although the February and March 2010 arrests of key *Taliban* officials in Pakistan raises the possibility that the QST shadow government could be significantly disrupted, its influence and reach did spread dramatically in 2008 and 2009, with some 80 percent of Afghanistan witnessing at least some insurgent activity and as much as one-third of the country under tight *Taliban* control for much of 2009.<sup>14</sup>

Mullah Mohammad Omar, the reclusive one-eyed founder of the movement, has remained the *Amir-ul-Momineen*, or supreme leader of the Afghan *Taliban* movement.<sup>15</sup> He named his trusted lieutenant Mullah Baradar, who also chaired the *Shura*, to oversee the implementation of his 2009 code, and to appoint military commanders and provincial shadow governors.<sup>16</sup> Baradar's February 2010

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12 A January 2010 report by the U.N. Assistance Mission in Afghanistan said the *Taliban* killed 2.73 times more civilians in 2009 than pro-government forces. UNAMA blamed *Taliban* insurgents for 1,630 civilian deaths (67 percent of the total recorded deaths) in 2009 - a 41 percent increase on 2008, when 1,160 deaths, or 54 percent, were attributed to the insurgents. For details see: <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=87716>.

13 An English-language translation of the code can be found at [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov).

14 Personal interview by author with David Kilcullen, an advisor to LG McChrystal, October 27, 2009.

15 *Amir-ul-Momineen* literally translates "Commander of the Faithful."

16 Personal interviews by research assistant, Kabul August 2009 and see: Ron Moreau (2009). "America's New Nightmare". *Newsweek*, July 25.

capture in Pakistan, followed by the arrests of as many as four other QST officials, would appear to corroborate claims that Baradar oversaw the shadow leadership.

Another significant capture was that of Mullah Agha Jan Mutassim, a key *Taliban* strategist who, until his March 2010 arrest, chaired the powerful finance committee.<sup>17</sup> Afghan security and intelligence officials say Mutassim, a native of Panjway, convinced Mullah Omar of the need to reduce the financial exploitation of the local population by *Taliban* fighters, arguing that the insurgents risked losing their support. Afghan officials and tribal sources close to the *Taliban* say Mutassim also convinced Mullah Omar that internecine fighting between *Taliban* sub-commanders, particularly over money and resources, had become detrimental to the overall strength and unity of the movement.<sup>18</sup> Apparently, Mutassim feared a return of the kind of violence that occurred in the early 1990s, when rival *mujahidin* commanders turned their guns on each other and terrorized local communities across southern Afghanistan after the departure of Soviet forces.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps even more significantly, Mutassim implemented a series of reforms (discussed in greater detail below) that streamline how funds collected at the local level reach the *Taliban's* central coffers. "He is like the Ashraf Ghani of the *Taliban*," said an Afghan official who tracks the *Taliban* leadership, referring to the former Afghan finance minister who ran for president on a campaign to stamp out graft and who was instrumental, until he resigned from the Karzai government in 2004, in increasing the amount of tax revenue collected provincially that reached Kabul.<sup>20</sup>

The establishment of the provincial-level commissions represents another way in which the *Taliban* leadership seemed to be trying to reach out to civilians in 2009, in particular since the commissions were often headed by religious clerics, not just *Taliban* commanders. Civilians could go to the *Taliban's* shadow *Sharia* court system in order to settle local disputes, or could take their complaints to the commissions, which also dispensed justice. In particular, the provincial-level commissions became a venue where ordinary Afghans and local businessmen could file a complaint the local *Taliban* forces. The *Taliban's* willingness to punish their own is one of the main reasons many Afghans view the QST insurgents as being more fair - even if strict and ruthless - than the notoriously corrupt Afghan government. The 2009 code decreed that *Taliban* "who commit crimes should be referred to the provincial

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17 Personal interviews with Afghan officials by research assistant, Kabul July 2009.

18 Personal interviews with Afghan officials by research assistants, Kabul and Kandahar July 2009.

19 Personal interviews with Afghan officials by research assistants, Kabul and Kandahar July 2009.

20 Personal interview with Afghan official by research assistant, Kabul July 2009.

commission,” which had the right, along with the shadow governor, “to expel the perpetrator or to accept if the person repents.” As explained by a tribal elder in Ghazni: “They have been going to people in the mosques and saying any *Taliban* member who shows a sudden increase in wealth has to explain it.” He gave the example of Qari Wali, a *Taliban* sub-commander who suddenly showed up with a Toyota Corolla outside of Ghazni city. “The commission took his car. He was suspended, and he had to explain how they got the car,” said the elder. It turned out that Wali had agreed to kidnap a member of a rival tribe, using his 20-man fighting unit to carry out the abduction. The *Taliban* leadership responded by taking away his command, and reassigning Wali to Helmand province.<sup>21</sup>

In at least one reported case the *Taliban* commission in Helmand even castigated a judge in Musa Qala whom the *Taliban* had appointed. “One judge was found taking a bribe and the *Taliban* put black all over his face and tied him to a tree,” recounted businessman Eitadullah Khan (Gannon, 2009). “When he was released, he was fired.” (Gannon, 2009). Afghans interviewed for this paper in various parts of the country described the *Taliban* courts and commissions as impartial and less corrupt than the state justice system. Others, however, insisted that they used the *Taliban* justice system out of fear, apparently worried about the potential consequences of local *Taliban* finding they had turned to the local government.

The Provincial Commissions issued decrees using the stamp of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, the official title of the *Taliban* government.<sup>22</sup> They also helped the *Quetta Shura* maintain control over funds raised at and dispatched to the provinces. Each commission had a political and economic committee, according to locals who dealt with them, and each received a set budget, decided by and negotiable with the *Quetta Shura*. Wardak Province, for example, received a budget of about US\$36,000 while more active combat zones like Ghazni and Zabul received as much as US\$107,000 monthly.<sup>23</sup> The commission controlled how money was earned at the village level in each province, but the *Quetta* leadership appeared to shuffle commission members on a frequent basis, apparently to prevent any one individual or group from becoming too powerful.

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21 Interview by research assistant, Ghazni, August 2009.

22 Personal interviews with Afghan officials by research assistant, Kabul July 2009.

23 Interview with a senior Interior Ministry official in Kabul who has seen intercepted *Taliban* documents noting the quantities by research assistant, Kabul, August 2009. This information was corroborated in part by an Afghan military intelligence official in Ghazni who confirmed that *Taliban* commanders in his zone were receiving budgets worth millions of PKR monthly and by a provincial official of the NDS, who confirmed the PKR3 million budget for Wardak province.

The QST also attempted to end *Taliban* sub-commanders bickering among themselves over operational issues. An Afghan National Police officer who was abducted within the last year by *Taliban* fighters in Paghman province recalled three *Taliban* sub-commanders arguing over his fate. One wanted to ask a ransom from the policeman's family and commander, and pocket the money. A second commander had a cousin jailed in *Pul-e-Charki* prison outside Kabul, and wanted to try and trade the police officer for his relative. A third just wanted to kill the policeman simply because he worked for the Kabul government. In the end, the police official said, the provincial commission decided his fate and he was eventually freed for a ransom payment.<sup>24</sup>

Both in terms of financial matters and political decisions, the *Taliban* appeared in 2009 to be trying to centralize the decision-making process. While it is too early to draw firm conclusions, there are indications the effort may have backfired in some areas. Mullah Omar purged a number of commanders, most notably Mansoor Dadullah, who were not following orders sent down by the senior leadership, and – according to some sources – for skimming money meant to be sent to *Quetta*.<sup>25</sup> A spokesman for the *Taliban* called the media in late 2007 to announce that Mansoor Dadullah, who had assumed many of Mullah Dadullah's responsibilities, had been fired "because he disobeyed orders of the Islamic Emirate." (Agence France Press, 2007). Researchers for this paper heard of multiple cases where QST commanders across the south were disciplined, demoted and shifted to new regions, or even pushed out of the group entirely. In some zones, the *Taliban* also distanced themselves from local criminal gangs during 2009, although locals and government officials alike say that insurgents continued to subcontract local criminal gangs as needed in regions where the insurgents were less dominant or where they were attempting to establish wider control.

Efforts to reshuffle *Taliban* commanders and impose more control over their ability to earn funds independently may have partially backfired for the QST leadership, possibly exposing a strategic weakness for the organization. Sources close to the movement told researchers that some QST commanders had rebelled against efforts to rein them in, sometimes violently. In a December 2009 Kabul press conference, Afghanistan's National Security Council appeared to corroborate at least one report, saying the Kabul government had received intelligence indicating that Mullah Omar had sacked two more *Taliban* commanders in the poppy-rich districts of Arghandab in Kandahar and Gereshk in Helmand. Jamil Bahrami, director of

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24 Interview by research assistant, Paghman, August 2009.

25 Interview by research assistant, Kabul, August 2009.

strategy at the National Security Council said some of the command changes “have triggered differences and oppositions among local *Taliban* commanders,” according to a local news report (Arman-e Melli, 2009). The possibility that QST commanders were resisting or even revolting against efforts to cut them off from local funding sources would not only indicate those specific commanders were more driven by profit motives than ideology, but that the new streamlined system may have threatened, rather than strengthened, the *Shura's* control over its network.

Certain passages in the new Code of Conduct suggested that Mullah Omar wanted to reduce the ways in which fighters under his command victimized ordinary Afghans. “The *mujahidin* should strive to win the hearts and minds of Muslims by treating them with justice and good faith,” it said. “As representatives of the Islamic Emirates, the *mujahidin* should present themselves in such a manner that the whole nation would welcome and cooperate with them.” The code, which was spottily enforced, banned *Taliban* soldiers from “forcefully collecting alms, donations, and *ushr*,” an agricultural tithe that the *Taliban* levy on farmers. It also warned its fighters not to enter people’s homes without permission and instructed them to do “their best to avoid civilian casualties and refrain from inflicting damage on peoples’ vehicle and property.” Only *Taliban*-appointed judges could settle local disputes, the code dictated, calling their rulings final. It forbade kidnapping for ransom, saying that: “Criminals who kidnap in the name of the Islamic Emirate should be disarmed and introduced to the leadership.” Additionally, the decree banned *Taliban* fighters from smoking and from keeping young boys, traditionally exploited for sex, on their bases.

The release of the code was accompanied by a *Taliban* propaganda campaign that also appeared to direct insurgent fighters not to victimize the local population. According to Afghans who saw the message on the now defunct *Taliban* website, *Shahamat*, a statement by Mullah Mutassim advised *Taliban* forces not to attack schools, clinics, bridges and roads. It also directed commanders not to harass people on the highways. Meanwhile, Mullah Abdul Manan Niazi, the *Taliban* commander along the Kabul-Kandahar Highway, reportedly ordered his fighters to stop damaging bridges and collecting “tolls” on the busy interstate. In one 2009 message he urged insurgent fighters “to make sure there was no distance between the people and the *Taliban*.” According to locals interviewed for this paper who heard the broadcast, his radio message went onto say that if the *Taliban* accepted bribes, “then there will be no difference between us and the police.”<sup>26</sup>

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26 Interview by research assistant, Kabul, August 2009.

Despite such lofty statements, however, it's important to recognize that the *Taliban* was not been entirely successful in implementing its new Code of Conduct, nor entirely innocent on the charge of attacking civilians any more, indeed, than the Coalition has been. Many Afghans continued to face – or at least perceive – a tangible level of threat if they did not abide by *Taliban* decrees. There seemed to be no let up whatsoever, for example, in the vicious punishments handed out by the insurgents, with locals in the south saying QST commanders continued to hold public executions of anyone suspected of “spying” for the coalition.<sup>27</sup> “People cooperate with the *Taliban* out of fear,” said Abdul Ghani, director of the Afghan National Police’s anti-terrorism department in Ghazni province. “If the *Taliban* sense the slightest whiff of espionage by local individuals, they instantly kill those people without any mercy.”<sup>28</sup> When US Marines pushed into Mian Posteh in Helmand province, villagers initially refused to re-enter the bazaar the American troops cleared, saying the *Taliban* had threatened to chop off their heads if they did. “There are *Taliban* everywhere,” village elder Haji Fada Mohammed told the Marines. “If I tell you who they are, I will be in danger.” (Tyson, 2009).

The Code of Conduct also instructed field commanders on money matters, institutionalizing how profits earned from organized crime were to be shared within the command chain. The code specified that *Taliban* soldiers were permitted to keep up to 80 percent of whatever “booty” they captured from “an infidel combatant” or Coalition base, but one-fifth of the value or property seized must be transferred to the shadow provincial governor. The code permitted *Taliban* fighters to attack and destroy Coalition vehicles and convoys, but said capturing and then “releasing them in exchange for money is forbidden.” It decreed that any cash captured from the NATO coalition or the Karzai government must be transferred in its entirety to the *Taliban* treasury. The code also regulated shake-downs and extortion fees, banning provincial or district-level *Taliban* commanders from directly making deals with local businesses and companies. “Disputes on issues related to businesses and companies should be referred to the leadership,” the code stated. This would suggest the QST was evolving into an organization that openly functioned like a traditional mafia, with a strict code governing illicit earnings, and where the leaders have final say in all matters of collecting protection money. It also indicated a much higher level of internal discipline than the Afghan government could maintain.

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27 Personal interviews by research assistant, Lashkar Gah, Kandahar. July 2009.

28 Personal interview, by research assistant, Ghazni July 2009.

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The Code of Conduct laid down strict new rules concerning the treatment of prisoners, moving to limit *Taliban* fighters from accepting ransom payments on their own and stating that: "It is strictly forbidden to free Coalition prisoners in exchange for money." The same went for contractors working with the Coalition. The authority to execute, trade, or set free foreign prisoners in exchange for money came to rest entirely with Mullah Omar and his deputy, who had to personally approve the circumstances. The code additionally banned *Taliban* fighters from torturing prisoners, beheading or dismembering them, but stated that obtaining confession through promises of "money or position" was acceptable, as long as the insurgents were able to deliver on their promises. It banned "cash payment" as a form of disciplinary punishment and prevented sub-commanders from killing local government officials who offer to lay down their arms and not support the government. It also forbade *Taliban* commanders from taking on new fighters without prior consent of the insurgent leadership. The Code of Conduct thus struggled to reconcile competing priorities. On the one hand the *Taliban* claimed they wanted to improve relations with the local community, but the code explicitly permitted and regulated violent criminal activities that continue to harm civilians.

### ***Taliban* Moving up the Opium Value Chain**

Declining farm prices apparently motivated *Taliban* commanders to move up the value chain of the drug trade, shifting their focus from taxing farm output to the more lucrative processing and exporting end of the business. "To separate the drug smugglers from the insurgency in the south is now almost impossible," said a US officer who closely tracks the opium trade.<sup>29</sup> The smuggling rings collaborating with the insurgency operate from Pakistan, by and large out of reach of the coalition. In addition to their close ties to the *Taliban*, major traffickers pay off key government officials in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran, greatly complicating efforts to interdict them with the help of local security forces.

The smuggling group previously run by Haji Juma Khan has been the dominant trafficking organization since 2005 in Helmand province, where more than half of Afghanistan's poppy crop is cultivated. Khan ran a major opium market out of Marjah, a town in the Helmand River floodplains just 17 miles southwest of the provincial capital Lashkar Ghah where Coalition forces in February 2010 launched

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<sup>29</sup> Personal telephone interview by author, September 2009.



a major operation to clear out the *Taliban*. He also maintained multi-ton storage depots and drug refineries in Baram Chah, a dusty outpost that straddles the Afghan-Pakistan border. Despite the kingpin's arrest in October 2008 in Indonesia, from where he was swiftly extradited to the United States, the organization appears to have continued functioning without interruption under the command of Khan's nephew and former chief of operations, Haji Hafiz Akhtar.<sup>30</sup> The immense scale of the group's operations – and their close ties to the *Taliban* – became clear in May 2009, when NATO and Afghan troops launched an operation to disrupt militants in Marjah suspected of plotting to assassinate the Helmand governor.<sup>31</sup> After three days of intensive fighting, 60 *Taliban* lay dead and the Coalition had seized a staggering 92 metric tons of heroin, opium, hashish and poppy seeds, as well as hundreds of gallons of precursor chemicals, making it the second largest drug haul in global history. Indicating how closely opium merchants and insurgents now work, the market also housed a *Taliban* command center, complete with elaborate communications systems, suicide vests and a large weapons cache.<sup>32</sup>

Reliable local media reports have also indicated that due to the declining farm-gate price of raw opium, there has been a significant increase of refineries inside *Taliban*-held regions of Afghanistan capable of refining opium into crystal heroin, the high-value and most potent version of the drug. One lab worker in Marjah claimed there were more than 100 refineries operating in the district before the February 2010 offensive took place (Tassal, 2010). Separately, Western counternarcotics officials told *Time Magazine* there was evidence that traffickers operating there had packed up and fled with their goods before the February 2010 NATO operation began. Prior to the offensive, a squad of American and Afghan paramilitary troops raided a major opium bazaar, finding shop after shop stacked to the ceiling with bundles of opium, heroin, hashish, guns and improvised explosive devices used in roadside bombings. "If anybody needed proof that there was a nexus between the *Taliban* and drug traffickers, this was it," said a Western counternarcotics agent in Kabul (McGirk, 2010). Not only do *Taliban* commanders increasingly take on the role of running or managing heroin labs, but local and western official sources say there are indications that *Taliban* forces are increasingly getting

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30 Personal interview by author with US military official October 2009.

31 For a detailed account of the offensive, confirmed by military officials who took part in it, see: "Afghanistan's Narco-War," a report to the Committee on Foreign Relations, US Senate, August 10, 2009, p. 19. Available at [http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=111\\_cong\\_senate\\_committee\\_prints&docid=f:51521.pdf](http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=111_cong_senate_committee_prints&docid=f:51521.pdf).

32 Personal interviews by author and Heidi Vogt (2009). "Troops Make Large Drug Seizure in Afghanistan," *Associated Press*, May 23.

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into the business of moving drug shipments across Afghanistan's border into Pakistan and Iran, where the wholesale value of drugs more than doubles.<sup>33</sup> The shift in focus from farm-level taxation to the processing and exporting end of the drug trade indicates that the QST is increasingly taking on the characteristics of a drug trafficking organization itself, capable of purchasing locally, refining and then exporting narcotics.

Two other seizures in 2009 in southern Afghanistan indicate that the QST and the traffickers have developed and sustained a sophisticated supply chain for both drugs and explosives, despite the increased foreign troop presence and the lack of basic infrastructure in the south. An October 2009 drug raid on another *Taliban* base, also in Helmand, recovered 45 metric tons of opium, along with a stunning 1.8 metric tons of processed heroin, according to a press release from the Afghan Defense Ministry (Associated Press, 2009). The heroin alone would have been worth \$4.3 million on the local wholesale market, and more than double that if smuggled across the border into Pakistan or Iran.<sup>34</sup> And while there appears to be a shortage of military grade explosives among the insurgents, militants in the south have increasingly come to rely on fertilizer products, mainly ammonium nitrate, that can be mixed into explosives. Coalition troops in Kandahar in November 2009 seized an astonishing half-million pounds of ammonium nitrate from a *Taliban* base, indicating that they maintained a steady supply of chemicals that could be used to make bombs (Filkins, 2009). About 2,000 bomb-making devices like timers and triggers were also found at the insurgent hideout, indicating the fertilizer was not for farm use (Filkins, 2009).

A steady increase in seizures of refined heroin, according to Coalition officials and the DEA, indicates that more and more drug labs are capable of processing raw opium into crystal heroin, the most potent and high-value grade of the drug. The number of refineries south of the bend in the Helmand River (Garimser and Deshu districts) has reportedly climbed in recent years, although officials say it is hard to determine a precise number since the operations have become smaller and more mobile. Increasingly, according to US and Afghan officials, there are reports of *Taliban* commanders running their own drug labs, something almost unheard of just three years ago, and controlling drug shipments beyond the Afghan border into western Pakistan.<sup>35</sup> Because the labs are increasingly mobile and operate in

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33 Multiple interviews by author and research assistants with US, Afghan and Pakistani officials.

34 Using figures from the UNODC's 2009 World Drug Report. Available at [http://www.unodc.org/documents/wdr/WDR\\_2009/WDR2009\\_Statistical\\_annex\\_prices.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/wdr/WDR_2009/WDR2009_Statistical_annex_prices.pdf).

35 Personal interviews by author, Washington DC.

*Taliban*-dominated zones, it is difficult to assess how much control the *Quetta* leadership maintains over taxes collected at the refineries.

Village-level *Taliban* sub-commanders do not just tax poppy crops. They collect a portion of all farm output, whether licit or illicit, usually in the range of 10 percent, but negotiable depending on the wealth of the farmer and the level of influence the *Taliban* commands in a given area. Poor farmers tell of handing the local *Taliban* sub-commander as little as a bag of fruit from their annual harvest, and there were also reports that large landowners had to pay a significantly higher agricultural tithe, as much as 20 percent in certain districts of Farah province, for example. In some villages, the *Taliban* sub-commander has to split what he collects 50/50 with the local Mullah or village chief, and in most zones, he must send 10 percent of his take to his provincial-level commander. When village-level sub-commanders collect a commodity for which they and their troops have no use, they will often sell it to a local broker. Although this practice is not universal, in some areas the *Taliban* have begun handing out tax receipts to ensure that villagers and shopkeepers are not charged more than once. This practice has been implemented in northern Kunduz province, where the QST has made significant inroads in the past year.<sup>36</sup>

Shopkeepers and other small businesses, including pharmacies, teashops and automotive repair stations, are also required to hand over a portion of their monthly proceeds to the *Taliban* - usually in the range of 10 percent, although also dependent on total earnings. In some cases, *Taliban* will ask the shopkeepers for supplies in place of money. One grocer in Ghazni described having to supply local insurgents with cooking oil and rice in lieu of a monthly payment, and said he received a receipt.<sup>37</sup> Because the *Taliban* depend on communications, and change their phones regularly to avoid surveillance, the local shopkeeper who sells mobile phone handsets, top up cards for airtime credit and phone chips is likely to be visited routinely by the local *Taliban* unit, researchers for this paper found. Shopkeepers also reported that *Taliban* who have looted goods or confiscated them from trucks re-sell the commodities for money. "They will call up and say, we have some telephones or generators or whatever, if you want to buy them," said a local businessman.<sup>38</sup> Shopkeepers interviewed for this report also described having to on-pass messages for the *Taliban* as they moved through town. Some claimed they did not want to serve as messengers, but feared the consequences of not helping the insurgents.

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36 Information for this paragraph was compiled by various researchers across Afghanistan in July and August 2009.

37 Personal interview by research assistant, Ghazni, August 2009.

38 Telephone interview by author, November 2009.

Although QST sub-commanders continue to “tax” farmers and small-time businesses at the local level, there is also evidence that the *Shura Majlis* has moved to regulate how protection money is collected from larger businesses, aid and development projects, as well as the trucking firms that operate on the busy Kandahar-*Quetta* corridor and other southern highways. A half-dozen truck drivers and the owners of two large trucking firms interviewed for this paper said that QST forces in the south no longer collect payments on the *Quetta*-Kandahar highway, for example. Instead, under a system Mutassim developed, trucking firms now must deposit protection payments with specified moneychangers in *Quetta* and Kandahar. The moneychangers record the license plate numbers of the trucks, and details about what cargo they will carry, and the money is handed over directly to the Financial Council.<sup>39</sup> Drivers reported receiving a code that they could give if armed men stopped them on the road. “The tiger is wounded but alive,” was a code one driver gave as an example.

Trucks carrying goods for the local market, or transiting across Afghanistan, can expect to pay about 10 percent of the value of their shipment. Convoys carrying goods for the coalition get charged a higher rate, which can range from 25 to 40 percent of the total value being carried, according to truckers and officials at trucking firms.<sup>40</sup> A member of the Achakzai tribe, which has long dominated the transport business on the *Quetta*-Kandahar route, said he paid the *Taliban* between US\$95,000 and US\$130,000 every six months to protect convoys he sends to supply the Kandahar Air Field. “This is very organized between the [*Taliban*] fighters and the Shura,” he said. “You give the name of the driver and the license plate, and your truck is safe.” Low-ranking *Taliban* who ply the roads between Kandahar and the Pakistan border continue to hit up passenger cars for protection payments, but the large sums now go direct to *Quetta*.<sup>41</sup>

The Afghan *Taliban* appear to rely on an elaborate network of informants – the so-called village underground – to help them determine how much they can charge each trucking firm (as well as families, businesses and aid groups) they target. The informants get paid off for the information they provide, and local sources say they believe bus and taxi drivers and merchants who have excuses for leaving the village on a regular basis are routinely part of the information network. Those

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39 Personal interviews by research assistants in Kabul and Kandahar, August 2009.

40 Personal interview by research assistant, Kandahar, August 2009.

41 So far, this system seems to operate only in Kandahar and Helmand. In other parts of Afghanistan where there is a mix of insurgent factions and criminal gangs, truckers can expect to be hit up for cash on the roads.

trucking firms who try and avoid paying the *Taliban* end up paying a higher price. One trucker in Kandahar recalled the story of a trader who imported spare parts from Pakistan, and who made the mistake of bragging in a teashop at the border that he didn't plan to pay off the insurgents. His four vehicles barely made it outside the government-controlled border town of Spin Boldak before *Taliban* gunmen overtook the convoy, and it cost him close to US\$200,000 to buy his equipment back.<sup>42</sup> It's not always clear if such tales are actually true. What's more important is that they are widely believed among the trucking community, which is therefore persuaded not to take chances. There has been documented evidence that the *Taliban* has tried to regularize their tax collection system. In 2009, the *Taliban* in Helmand issued their local representative with a notice 'to all Kajaki shopkeepers and truck drivers': 'The bearer of this letter is our new representative. Please cooperate with him like ever before.'<sup>43</sup>

The *Quetta Shura* also collects protection money from larger businesses, notably the telecoms sector, and construction projects funded by international aid organizations and the Coalition. Sargon Heinrich, a Kabul-based businessman in construction and service industries was quoted in a September 2009 *Time Magazine* report as saying that 16 percent of his gross revenue went to paying 'facilitation fees', mostly to protect shipments of valuable equipment coming from the border (Baker, 2009). The report aptly describes the circular nature of the problem: the US government provides money to local contractors to build roads, schools and bridges as part of the counterinsurgency campaign, but the contractors must pay off insurgents to avoid having those projects attacked. The insurgents then spend the money they raise to purchase weapons and explosives, which in turn get used to kill American soldiers. "It becomes a self-sustaining war," says an adviser to the Afghan Ministry of Interior, "a self-licking ice cream." (Baker, 2009).

In parts of the country where there is little or no poppy grown, especially in districts where there is major construction work or central roadways pass through, extortion is believed to be the largest source of income for the insurgents. This creates a moral hazard for the international community, which seeks to stabilize Afghanistan but inadvertently ends up financing the insurgency and the explosives rebels use to kill western troops and Afghan civilians. The US Agency for International Development has opened an investigation into allegations that its funds for road and bridge construction in Afghanistan are ending up in the hands of the *Taliban*, with Congress set to hold hearings on the issue (MacKenzie, 2009). It will

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42 Personal interview by research assistant, Kandahar, August 2009.

43 This document was given to the author by the US military and a scan of it can be viewed on the Combating Terrorism Center's website, [www.ctc.usma.edu](http://www.ctc.usma.edu).

be challenging to investigate the problem since few contracting firms admit to making security payments in the first place. How to stop the phenomenon – and provide adequate protection for development projects around the country – is yet another challenge altogether.

The *Taliban* also targets Afghanistan's mobile phone network. The four main Afghan telecoms firms, which service about two million subscribers between them, must pay monthly protection fees in each province, or face having their transmission towers attacked. Payments are usually in the range of US\$2,000 dollars per tower, per month, but it depends on who controls the zone around each tower. "In the *Taliban* areas, you have to deal with their commissions," said a local businessman whose firm builds transmission towers, who estimates about a quarter of his company's budget goes to protection fees on the roads and at building sites. 'Most of them, they act just like businessmen in a way. They tell you: "We will make sure your people are not kidnapped and your sites are not burned." But they expect regular payments.' However, he said in Helmand and Kandahar, the QST had established a new system in which payments must go direct to *Quetta*. The businessman routinely sends a representative to Pakistan to pay off the *Taliban* leadership, he said, rather than dealing with the district-level commander.

### **Protecting Civilians from Crime will Enhance Rule of Law**

When US forces first arrived in Afghanistan in 2001 in the wake of the September 11 attacks, few military planners, policy-makers and intelligence analysts ever imagined the extent to which organized crime – and specifically the heroin trade – would dramatically aggravate, prolong and reshape the conflict there. The spread of organized crime on both sides of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, and among various factions of the insurgency, highlights the need for a holistic strategy in such environments that works simultaneously to foster security, development and the rule of law.

Evidence presented in this paper suggests that the QST is at once trying to regulate and restrain the behavior of its commanders, and that that effort has as much to do with streamlining illicit funds as with improving community relations. The *Taliban* seems to be taking on more characteristics of a criminal mafia group, having moved up the value chain of the opium trade to focus on refining and exporting narcotics, and expanding its activities into widespread extortion rackets. The fact that the insurgents are becoming increasingly criminalized should come as no surprise. In conflicts around the globe and throughout history, groups who engage in predation in order to support broad political goals often end up broadening their illicit activities in order to finance narrow self-interested ones.

The frustration and rage that ordinary civilians feel towards militant crime is palpable. The QST code of conduct indicates the *Taliban* are sensitive to widening public resentment and see it as a strategic liability. The Coalition could take advantage of this liability, which will continue as long as the *Taliban* remain dependent on profits from criminal activity. In the long run, trying to exploit the *Taliban's* ties to organized crime will only be effective insofar as the Kabul government is perceived as a preferable alternative.

While devising strategy to reduce violence, military commanders and western policy-makers ought to consider the central motivations for insurgent and extremist leaders in this conflict. Amid international efforts to persuade the *Taliban* to stop fighting, no political concessions will be sufficient for those motivated primarily by greed.

A final implication of this paper is that as much as drug trafficking and other organized crime have had debilitating effects on NATO's efforts to combat militancy and establish stability, the spread of criminality in Afghanistan has been even more deleterious for ordinary civilians there. Protecting local communities from organized crime represents a still largely untapped opportunity within the wider counterinsurgency strategy. If security providers (including foreign and local troops and police) were able and willing to provide adequate community-level security, Afghans would suffer far fewer shakedowns, abductions and thefts. Just as NATO soldiers expect relative security from crime for themselves and their families back home, Afghans also long for a safe atmosphere in their communities.

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