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CRIME, CORRUPTION & INSURGENCY IN AFGHANISTAN:

***An Introductory Retrospective from the Soviet Occupation
to the Current Counterinsurgency Campaign***

1979-2008

*The Soviet Occupation, Rise of the Mujahideen, Civil War,
Rise of the Taliban, U.S. Invasion & the fall of the Taliban,
Counterinsurgency, and the Reemergence of the Taliban*

By
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27 June 2008

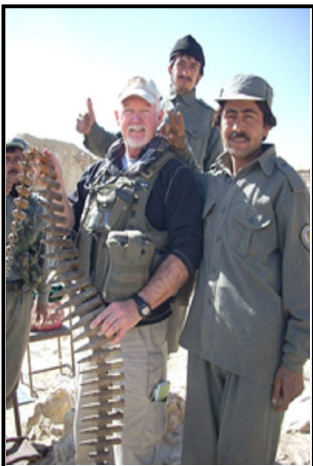
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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On a more academic level, Mark has authored nine books, over 60 articles, papers and reports, and been inducted into the Military Writers Society of America. In 1999, in his eighth book, titled “*ALPINE OPERATIONS – A Guide to Cold Weather Mountain Warfare*,” Mark had predicted that the next theater of operations would be Afghanistan and the target would be Osama bin Laden. As a lecturer, Mark has been invited to speak at various academic institutions to include UCLA, the US Army War College, Paris II University, Departement de Recherche sur les Menace Criminelle

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AUTHORS NOTE:

The following paper is an excerpt from a much larger paper detailing the insurgency and criminal components of the insurgency in Afghanistan.

1. HISTORICAL RETROSPECTIVE – A LAND of SMUGGLING, DRUGS & GUNS

During a six-hour visit to Kabul in December 2007 French President Nicolas Sarkozy told President Hamid Karzai that France has long-term political and military interest in Afghanistan and that “Afghanistan must not become a state that falls into the hands of terrorists”¹

When looking at criminal and insurgent activity in any region, particularly unstable conflict and post-conflict environments, these must be viewed in context with the history and culture of the region, and the events that led up to the current state of civil war or insurgency.

In Afghanistan’s case we are looking at a country that is essentially a failed state, propped up by the international community, emerging from over three decades of civil war and conflict, where criminal activity has become a basic tool for survival. In the absence of a stable economy, government infrastructure, a reliable justice system, constitutional law, social services or health care, the black market and smuggling became two viable and resilient necessities.

As with smuggling, guerrilla warfare and factional fighting are not new to the Afghans. Continuing in a long and proud history of battling invaders, most notably the slaughter of sixteen thousand British and Indian troops and their camp followers during the retreat from Kabul in the winter of 1842,² guerilla warfare has become an honored and respected way of life for many Afghan men and boys.

In more recent times, Afghans fought under the banners of a number of insurgent groups collectively known as the *Mujahideen*, first against the Russians from 1979 to 1989, then against the Taliban from 1994 to 2002. Between these periods they waged a civil war against each other for control of the government with the battle lines drawn between the Tajik dominated government of President Rabbini and his Defense Minister, Ahmed Shah Massoud, and the fighters loyal to Hekmatyar or General Dostum.

Today the Afghans continue to fight alongside the U.S and Coalition Forces as part of the Afghan National Army (ANA), the Afghan National Police (ANP), or with a number



¹ *Leaders Committed to Afghanistan* by Rahim Faiez, Associated Press 23 December 2007

² *Kabul Catastrophe: the invasion and retreat 1839-1842* – Patrick Macrory; Forward by General Sir Michael Rose, KCB. CBE. DSO. QGM (1966/2002)

of regional militia units. Unfortunately, some also fight against the Coalition and Afghan security forces in support of the Taliban or other tribal and criminal interests.

Afghanistan is clearly a tribal culture, particularly in the Pashtun areas of the east, southeast, and south, with complex ethnic and religious dynamics, where activities such as smuggling and the drug trade have become ingrained into the daily life of many villagers. Both smuggling and poppy cultivation have proven to be resilient enterprises propping up a failed economy in a country where poverty and unemployment are rampant and many have had to survive on the brink of starvation.

As with poppy cultivation and smuggling, corruption, which is also often interrelated, is a significant problem that has become institutionalized at all levels of government from the local sub-district level up through the police and military to provincial governors and senior ministers. Traditionally nothing could be done in Afghanistan without paying bribes to officials, many of whom were and still are involved in a number of other criminal enterprises. At all levels, corruption in the form of the favoritism, cronyism, and nepotism, is further fueled by familial bonds, tribal affiliations, and a long standing tradition of passing lucrative jobs and contracts to family members. Influential politicians and ministers feel obligated to put close family members into key positions immaterial of their experience or qualifications creating a hierarchy of incompetence and ineptitude.

Back in November 1997 Secretary-General Kofi Annan's report to the UN Security Council on Afghanistan stated: "*The Afghan leaders refuse to rise above their factional interests and start working together for national reconciliation. Too many groups in Afghanistan, warlords, terrorist, drug dealers and others, appear to have too much to gain from war and too much to lose from peace.*"³

As of 2008, ethnic, religious and tribal rivalries continue to hinder the stabilization process, as does the political and factional infighting of the various senior government officials. This is further compounded by the fact that highly placed officials are also benefiting from criminal activity, in particular the narcotics trade and smuggling.

To add to the viability of smuggling, and related difficulties in enforcement or interdiction, Afghanistan was a total land boundary of 5,529 kilometers with six countries to include: China 76 km, Iran 936 km, Pakistan 2,430 km, Tajikistan 1,206 km, Turkmenistan 744 km, and Uzbekistan 137 km.⁴ Transecting several sectors of the border with Pakistan there are literally hundreds of uncontrolled traditional crossing points that have been used by tribesmen and smugglers for generations.

While there are one or two official border crossing points on each frontier, for example Torkham Gate in the Khyber Pass to the east of Jalalabad, and Spin Boldak on the southeastern border in Kandahar province, there are also hundreds of unofficial tracks and routes used by tribesmen and smugglers on a daily basis.⁵ Foot, donkey, camel and vehicle traffic flows in both directions all but unhindered by Afghan or Pakistani border

³ Report of the Secretary-General, "The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security", 14 November 1997

⁴ *CIA World Fact Book – Afghanistan*

⁵ Spin Boldak is the nearest large town to the border in Afghanistan, but the actual crossing point is a few kilometers to the southeast in the small neighboring town of Wesh, opposite Chaman, Pakistan.

police. On the highway just west of Peshawar, Pakistan, there are soldiers and large signs clearly stating “FOREIGNERS PROHIBITED” into the tribal districts and the Khyber Pass. But the Pakistani military does little to stop the thousands of foreign fighters and *jihadis* from using this route into Afghanistan. This is partly a result of the Pakistani Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI) agency having actively used this highway to transport *Mujahideen* into Afghanistan to fight the Russians in the eighties; then using it again in the early nineties to move the Taliban. To this day, remnants of the ISI, influential Islamic fundamentalists, and militant *mullahs* continue to funnel insurgents and support along these same routes.

2. FROM SOVIET OCCUPATION TO CIVIL WAR

In December 1979 the Soviets invaded Afghanistan under the pretext that they were invited in for security reasons by the communist government, the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan, of Noor Muhammad Taraki and Hafizullah Amin.⁶ In reality they were extending the influence of the Soviet Union and bringing an end to *The Great Game* that mother Russia had been playing with Great Britain since the previous century.

Little did the Russians realize that they were embarking on a 10-year war of attrition that they would not only lose but would contribute to the bankruptcy and fall of the Soviet Union (USSR).

Violently opposed by the Afghans, supported first by various Islamic groups and ultimately Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United States, the Russians found themselves bogged down in a war of attrition as their conventional ground forces suffered “the death of a thousand cuts” and their once proud Air Force was knocked out of the sky by CIA and ISI trained *Mujahideen* armed with Stinger missiles. But when the last Soviet tanks and armored vehicles withdrew across the Amu Darya⁷ in 1989, this marked the beginning of an even bloodier period in Afghanistan’s already turbulent history.

Soon after the withdrawal of the last Soviet troops across the Freedom Bridge into Uzbekistan, the power struggle began. The communist government of Najibullah fell in 1992 passing the reigns of power to the Tajik-dominated government of President Burhanuddin Rabbani and his Defense Minister, Ahmed Shah Massoud.⁸ But Afghanistan quickly descended into civil war as Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and General Rashid Dostum both vied to topple the Tajik government. In the process they launched rocket and artillery attacks on Kabul causing massive damage to the infrastructure, something the Soviets had never done. Kabul began to resemble the major cities of

⁶ The Soviets had assassinated Amin putting Babrak Karmal and Sayid Mohammed Najibullah in power, with Najibullah assuming full control by 1986 and elected president in 1987.

⁷ The Amu Darya is the river bordering northern Afghanistan and Uzbekistan

⁸ Massoud was the famed “Lion of the Panjshir” and military leader of the Tajik dominated Northern Alliance

Europe after the blitzkrieg bombings of World War II,⁹ and Afghanistan became a failed state.

States that are racked with civil war and economic collapse are poor neighbors making Afghanistan a security and economic risk to Pakistan. After ten years of supporting the *Mujahideen* against the Soviets, Pakistan was hoping for better times and a stable trading partnership with Afghanistan. There were plans for gas pipelines across Afghanistan to connect gas fields in Turkmenistan to Pakistan and India, with companies such as Bidas taking a huge risk in 1991 to become the first western company to bid for leases in Turkmenistan.¹⁰ Pakistan was also concerned about India's influence in Afghanistan and did not want to have enemies on both frontiers.

3. THE RISE OF THE TALIBAN

As of 2008, the *Taliban*¹¹ has been struggling for over 14 years for control of Afghanistan, so there is no expectation that they will disappear any time soon. In fact, as long as they have sanctuary in Pakistan and popular support with militant fundamentalists they will continue to grow in power and influence. Funded by wealthy Arabs, Muslim charities, Islamic mosques, Pakistani madrassas, and the narcotics trade, the Taliban have become deeply entrenched in the tribal districts reemerged as a political force to challenge more moderate governors and tribal leaders. This was evidenced by the assassination of over one hundred Pakistani tribal leaders by Al Qaeda and Taliban militants between 2004 and 2006.¹²

The Taliban first emerged as a militant force in 1994 when Mullah Omar and thirty *talib* (students) reportedly executed corrupt commanders in Kandahar who had kidnapped and raped two girls. This was seen by the Afghans as a step towards security and stability garnering the Taliban some level of popular support in the south and southeast.

Trained and supported by Pakistan's powerful Inter Service Intelligence agency (ISI), the Pakistani government saw the large number of displaced Afghan young men, orphans living and studying in the madrassas of western Pakistan, as a viable force to stabilize her neighbor. Trapped in the throws of civil war since the withdrawal of the Soviets, Afghanistan had become a poor trading partner and the influx of millions of Afghan refugees was an unwanted burden for Pakistan.

Pakistan's solution was to arm and train these young students (*taliban*), already indoctrinated in Islamic fundamentalism, and send them back into Afghanistan to stabilize the country. This the Taliban did with a vengeance bringing the harshest form of Islamic law and oppression along with them. While the Afghans first praised the Taliban for taking on the corrupt politicians and warlords, they soon found their basic freedoms and traditional lifestyle under attack. The Taliban instituted new draconian rules such as

⁹ Kabul still shows evidence of the destruction from this period

¹⁰ *Taliban* – Ahmed Rashid

¹¹ Taliban is the plural of talib, a student

¹² *Return of the Taliban* – PBS.org documentary October, 2006

women having to be fully covered and escorted by a male member of the family, no music, television, movies or book reading (other than the *Koran*); and no kite flying, no cheering at soccer matches, no photos or pictures, no schooling for women, and men had to grow their beards.

When the Afghans, particularly in the north, resisted these harsh laws, the result was continued civil war and internal strife from 1996 to 2001. During this same period the Taliban had permitted Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda to set up training camps and operational bases in Afghanistan, who in turn trained and supported the militarily inept Taliban in their fight with Northern Alliance.

Unfortunately the Northern Alliance under Ahmed Shah Massoud, “the Lion of the Panjshir,” had neither the numbers nor adequate support to seriously challenge the Taliban. The Taliban also enjoyed the support and international recognition of Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

4. THE INFLUENCE OF PAKISTAN

When studying the current situation in Afghanistan, it is important to consider the influence that Pakistan has had on not only the insurgency but also crime and corruption. One obvious factor is the fact that the border between these two countries is considered arbitrary by the tribal groups that straddle the frontier. In fact the Pashtuns who inhabit the border region would like to see it declared *Pashtunistan*.¹³ It must also be understood that the tribes on both sides of the border have enjoyed a long history of smuggling, gun running, and economic dependence on the narcotics trade. They have smuggled for the *Mujahideen*, the ISI, the CIA, and for their own economic benefit, so it can be expected that smuggling continues to benefit the Taliban to this day.

As for a model in corruption, one only needs review the behavior of the last three democratically elected governments of Pakistan, first under Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (1971–1977), then his daughter Benazir, alternately with Nawaz Sharif (1988–1999). Bhutto’s 1977 re-election was marred by fraud, and after his unexplained death in a plane crash in 1988, his daughter Benazir Bhutto became Prime minister. Her husband, Asif Ali Zardari, was put in the position of Investment Minister where his large scale theft of public funds contributed to the ultimate discredit of her government. As then Prime Minister Sharif, with the help of his brother Shabaz, developed a reputation for taking large kickbacks, their financial malfeasance exceeded even that of Benazir’s cabinet. The Sharif and Bhutto administrations stood accused of stealing \$2 billion of the estimated \$30 billion smuggled out of the country during the period of democratic rule.¹⁴

The Pakistani parliamentary system with its endemic corruption ultimately bankrupted the country and led to military coup. On October 12, 1999, Sharif attempted to dismiss Army Chief Pervez Musharraf and replace him with ISI director Khwaja Ziauddin, but

¹³ The term *Pashtunistan* was used by tribal inhabitants on numerous occasions during research for this paper since all the other provinces of Pakistan are named after their inhabitants – Punjab, Baluchistan, Singh, etc

¹⁴ *Soldiers of God* by Robert D. Kaplan

this decision was resisted by senior generals. Musharraf, who was out of the country at the time, boarded a commercial airliner, returned to Pakistan and took control of the government.¹⁵

To firmly link all this to Afghanistan, and in addition to Pakistan's long history of government corruption, the situation was compounded by decades of conflict, war and drought in Afghanistan. The ensuing Afghan refugees flooding into Pakistan caused Quetta to become an Afghan town within Pakistan.¹⁶ In fact the *Achakzai* tribe's influence still extends from southeast Kandahar and Spin Boldak all the way to Quetta,¹⁷ just as *Mohmand* tribal influence extends across the border in the north.

Peshawar, between Islamabad and the Khyber Pass, is also heavily influenced by Afghan refugees and businessmen who fled Kabul rather than live under the Taliban. This has created a wide zone of influence where Afghan and Pakistani criminal activity, smuggling, and corruption have become ingrained in both tribal and business practices. Therefore any attempt today to change the status quo and interfere with licit or illicit commerce by either government is met with violent resistance.

Understanding all this, Pakistan must be one of the key players if the U.S. is to win the war on terrorism. To defeat the terrorist groups based in Pakistan will require more than just military aid. The United States will need to drastically increase economic aid to Pakistan in a manner that quantifiably improves the lives of the Pakistani people. To date there has been too much emphasis on the aid given to the Pakistani military and not enough on garnering the support of the people.

Pakistan has over 167 million people,¹⁸ many of whom are skeptical about the current U.S. involvement and interference in Pakistan's affairs. Substantial State aid must be committed to Pakistan in such a way that it is transparent and effective. Emphasis must be placed on the required end-state and accountability, not just an exercise in accounting and spending. The metrics must be on how much the aid improves the lives for the people and not simply on how much was spent.

Unfortunately the Pakistani government and business community have a long history of corruption so tend to abhor any conditionality placed on how U.S. aid funds are utilized. This has been seen in Pakistan's alleged misuse of the US\$6 billion in funds intended solely for military and security operations in the tribal border regions.

But there is still potential for a better working relationship with Pakistan since the Pakistani military is a highly professional organization even if it is lacking the technology, capacities, and training to effectively target and combat the Taliban and Al Qaeda. In conjunction with substantial civilian aid to win the support of the people, the

¹⁵ Wikipedia.com – History of Pakistan

¹⁶ CIA World Fact Book - Pakistan, with UN and other international assistance, repatriated 2.3 million Afghan refugees with less than a million still remaining, many at their own choosing; Pakistan has proposed and Afghanistan protests construction of a fence and laying of mines along portions of their border; Coalition and Pakistani forces continue to monitor remote tribal areas to control the border with Afghanistan and stem terrorist and other illegal activities

¹⁷ Confirmed in an interview with one of the Achakzai tribal leaders – February 2008

¹⁸ July 2008 estimate – CIA World Fact Book

U.S. should be supporting the Pak army with the appropriate technology and training to be more effective, with a particular focus on police and paramilitary capabilities and night fighting technology. Again, in funding the military and security efforts, the U.S. should not be distracted by dollar amounts and accounting but on accountability, capacity and end-state.

5. THE AFGHAN POPPY

For a country that has now become a welfare state dependent on U.S. and international support, there is one enterprise with which the Afghans require no assistance – the three to four billion dollar a year opium, heroin and hashish trade.

The Afghan narcotics issue is discussed in greater detail in other *Operational Studies* papers, but it is sufficient to state at this point that crime, insurgency and corruption in Afghanistan are all tied inexorably to the poppy cultivation, narcotics processing and distribution. It has also been expressed by Afghans and the U.S. State Department that the corruption, fueled by narcotics, at all levels of government and police is one of the single biggest problems delaying the advancement of good governance and return to the rule of law. They further agree that the Taliban insurgency is also financed and supported in part by the narcotics trade.

The Financial Times noted that 147 Islamic organizations, many of them with links to Osama bin Laden, can draw on funds estimated at between \$5 billion and \$16 billion, with an estimate of bin Laden's income from the Afghan drug trade at \$1 billion per year.¹⁹

Paul Williams' book *Al Qaeda- Brotherhood of Terror* also describes an FBI interview with a source, Ali Abul Nazzar, where he debunks the belief that al Qaeda funding came from bin Laden's legitimate business interests. He describes the *Emir* (bin Laden) as controlling the drug trade and processing in Afghanistan and being one of the world's largest suppliers.²⁰

6. U.S. INVASION & FALL OF THE TALIBAN (2001-2002)

Prior to the terrorist attacks on New York and the Pentagon, September 11 2001, and the resulting U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in October that same year, neither Al Qaeda nor the Taliban were considered insurgent groups. Al Qaeda was a militant Islamic terrorist organization using Afghanistan as a base of operations, but was not a unified and structured organization in the sense of other nationalistic groups

The IRA, for example, had a very specific organizational structure focused on a single goal in a defined geographic location, Northern Ireland and England. Al Qaeda, on the other hand, was an international movement supported by a number of widely scattered

¹⁹ Fareed Zakaria, Newsweek, December 6, 2001

²⁰ *Al Qaeda: Brotherhood of Terror* – Paul L. Williams, (Alpha 2002) Page 163-164

groups linked only by ideology, and with the unattainable aspiration for a global Islamic caliphate.

The Taliban was not a terrorist or insurgent group, even though they terrorized the people to maintain power, but the ruling regime in Afghanistan in 2001. Even though the Taliban was recognized as the legitimate government of Afghanistan by only three other countries – Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE – and was the target of severe criticism for human rights violations from the international community, these semi-literate thugs never-the-less held the reins of power.

Following a hard fought battle against the government of President Burhanuddin Rabbani, and while still battling with the Northern Alliance, by 1996 the Taliban controlled 80% of the country and had taken up residence as the official government in Kabul. From 1996 through 2001 the Northern Alliance under Ahmed Shah Massoud, in conjunction with other pockets of anti-Taliban insurgency around the country, was in fact the actual insurgent force in Afghanistan.

By October 7 2001, *Operation Enduring Freedom* (OEF) was officially “game on” when the U.S. bombing of Al Qaeda and Taliban (AQT) targets began in earnest. But these somewhat conventionally arrayed rag-tag forces proved to be more resilient than expected to U.S. and Coalition attrition warfare tactics. To direct precision air strikes against the AQT fighters, and after a few false starts and delays for bad weather, U.S. Army Special Forces (SF) entered the fray on October 19 to link up with the Northern Alliance, and their CIA liaison officers.

Even though the Taliban and foreign fighters had the advantage of numbers, their stubbornness and aggressive attacks were no match for nine SF operators from ODA 555,²¹ a couple of CIA paramilitaries, and one Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) combat controller directing close air support (CAS). Supported by the SF team and with the aid of an old Russian map, a GPS and a SOFLAM²² laser designator, Sergeant William Markham, a combat controller from the 23rd Special Tactics Squadron (STS), annihilated the Taliban and “schwacked them by the thousands”²³

When Kabul fell to the Northern Alliance 25 days later, on November 14, the Taliban fighters were forced to flee south to Kandahar, their “spiritual center” and the home of Mullah Omar. As groups of al Qaeda foreign fighters fled eastward towards Jalalabad, Tora Bora, and the Pakistan border region, U.S. military operations were about to take an unfortunate but predictable turn for the worse.

Even though a handful of CIA paramilitaries and U.S. special operations forces (SOF) were able to send the Taliban and Al Qaeda packing by the end of 2001, OEF quickly became a conventionally run and executed military operation. Even the SOF spear point became “blunt” when relegated to supporting purely conventional operations focused on attrition warfare – laser marking targets for precision-guided munitions or direct action hunter-killer missions. It should be noted that the traditional Special Forces mission, and

²¹ ODA 555 – Operational Detachment Alpha, a Special Forces Green Beret A-team also known as the “Triple Nickel”

²² SOFLAM – Special Operations Force Laser Aiming Marker

²³ Lonsdale’s interview with Air Force special operations operator William Markham at Bagram Air Field

what they do best (and had been doing in the opening days of OEF), is to operate in small teams with local indigenous forces as force multipliers. By training, equipping and coordinating the Northern Alliance, small 12-16 man teams were able to effectively mobilize a force of several thousand guerrilla fighters.

But when the 10th Mountain Division (TF Mountain), followed by the 18th Airborne Corps (CJTF-180), were given command of ground operations in early 2002, they brought a truly big army conventional mindset and things began to go down hill. SOF were put under the command of a conventional division headquarters at Bagram, they lost their direct link to CENTCOM, collateral damage and civilian deaths from the excessive use of strategic bombing missions increased alarmingly, and inexperienced, conventionally trained combat units began entering villages undoing much of the good work done by the Green Berets.²⁴

Fast forward six years to 2008 and the current lack of progress in Afghanistan can be attributed in part to the protracted nature of unconventional warfare which is inconsistent with the modern U.S. way of waging war. The Pentagon and the conventional military have a long-standing preoccupation with the rapidly achieved, measurable effects of attrition warfare²⁵ so have prosecuted the war in Afghanistan with little appreciation for the more tedious “winning hearts and minds” aspects of counterinsurgency.

Since military operations are doctrinally considered to be only 20% of the overall counterinsurgency effort, any shortcomings in the other 80% (political, social and judicial reform, governance, etc) have a significant impact on the ultimate success or failure of the campaign. The shortcomings that have been observed in recent years include lack of a comprehensive campaign plan built on the principles of unity of command, unity of effort, and international support; lack of military forces trained in counterinsurgency; insufficient ground forces to ensure the security of the population; inadequate commitment from civil-military and governmental organizations; a lack of competent Foreign Services officers willing to work in the field; poorly managed police recruitment and training; a lack of willingness to root out and punish official corruption; disagreement on how to handle criminal activity and counter-narcotics; uncoordinated and ineffective reconstruction efforts; and the lack of clearly stated goals, strong policy decisions, or social reforms by the rather weak and a notably inept Afghan government.

But we are getting ahead of ourselves. The point being made here is that the stage was set in early 2002 for the reemergence of the Taliban and Al Qaeda, and their continued dangerous and destabilizing presence in Afghanistan today.

²⁴ Green Beret is a term used exclusively for US Army Special Forces.

²⁵ An opinion reflected in the writings of Hy Rothstein *Afghanistan & the Troubled Future of Conventional Warfare* (NIP2006) 162, 175

7. REEMERGENCE OF THE TALIBAN & AL QAEDA (2003-2008)

The pursuit of Al Qaeda and the Taliban continued through 2002, but by 2003 AQ's focus was shifting to Iraq and the Taliban was reemerging as an insurgent force in Afghanistan. Since the Taliban fighters were a product of the Pakistani madrassas and the manipulations of the ISI, they found safe-haven in frontier cities such as Peshawar and Quetta, and the tribal areas of western Pakistan. They also continued to receive material support and funding from local mosques, madrassas, and Islamic charities.

The following news report is indicative of the acceptance that the Taliban and their fundamentalist belief system garnered in the NWFP and FATA.

29 May 2003 – Taliban re-emerging in NWFP²⁶

There are new plans to impose shari'ah (Islamic law) in Pakistan's North West Frontier Province (NWFP) by provincial government - dominated by religious hardliners. A bill outlining a wide range of Islamic reforms, and giving shari'ah priority over secular law was presented to the provincial legislature. Hundreds of activists from the ruling alliance went on a rampage through the streets of Peshawar on Friday, pulling down advertisements displaying women's faces. They also cut cable television connections.

The Taliban is now rooted in Pakistani religious and political parties that in turn have members who hold high office in many Pakistani governmental and municipal agencies. They also maintain many supporters and sympathizers in the ISI and Pak military. In fact, President Musharraf had to sack several senior ISI and military commanders, including the head of the ISI, because of their close affiliations with the Taliban, a direct result of past support and training.

When the Taliban came under pressure from the U.S. military, mosques and madrassas in Pakistan collected cash, gold and silver jewelry, and watches to help fund the insurgents. There has also been a steady flow of *jihadis* from Pakistan back into Afghanistan. During a news conference at the border crossing near Quetta in 2006, President Karzai made the accusation that, "*in the madrassas of Pakistan young boys are being told to go to Afghanistan to join the jihad.*"²⁷ This was as the Taliban in the south began using new and sophisticated tactics not seen before.²⁸

To further evidence this support coming from Pakistan, official or unofficial, in early 2008 Afghan Border Police commanders reported that the insurgents and Taliban that they were killing and capturing in the south between the border and the city of Kandahar were not Afghans but Pakistani, Punjabi and Baluchi.²⁹

²⁶ Yahoo Afghan news service – 29 May 2003

²⁷ Televised News conference – May 2006

²⁸ British military report – 2006

²⁹ Lonsdale's interviews with US military and Afghan commanders in the south, February 2008

If there were any doubts that the Taliban and their militant brothers were returning as a viable and dangerous military force, apart for the up-tick in attacks on Coalition Forces in the south in 2006, these were dispelled by several coordinated and well executed attacks in early 2008:

- The January coordinated violent attack on the five-star Serena Hotel in central Kabul by multiple gunmen and a suicide bomber.
- The 27 April attempted assassination of President Hamid Karzai by multiple militants during the Afghan national day military parade in central Kabul.
- Multiple successful bombings in Kandahar province in February 2008
- The highly successful 13 June attack on Sarposa Prison in Kandahar by over 30 militants using VBIEDs, RPGs, a suicide bomber, and small arms fire, which freed an estimated 870 of the 1,100 prisoners, approximately 350-400 of whom were suspected Taliban. The militants had even pre-positioned a fleet of minibuses and vehicles to spirit the escaping prisoners away.
- The 24 June coordinated attack on a Coalition supply convoy in Wardak Province, destroying 40 trucks

One of the more worrying aspects of these attacks is that the Taliban has always been considered militarily unsophisticated and not known for complex attacks, pointing to the possibility that Al Qaeda had a hand in organizing these attacks or at least in training the Taliban fighters.

Another sad fact from May and June 2008, is that U.S. and Coalition casualties in Afghanistan exceeded the casualty rates in Iraq. The Associated Press put the count at 45 international troops killed in June (including 27 U.S. and 13 British), while 30 had been killed in Iraq in the same period.

END

Note: A more detailed assessment of the insurgency and Taliban activities is covered in other *Operational Studies* papers.