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SPECIAL REPORT

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The U.S. Surge and Afghan Local Governance

Lessons for Transition

Summary

- The U.S. military and civilian surge into Afghanistan starting in late 2009 aimed to stabilize the country through interconnected security, governance, and development initiatives.
- Despite policymakers' claims that their goals for Afghan governance were "modest," the surge's stated objectives amounted to a transformation of the subnational governance landscape.
- Three years later, the surge has attained localized progress, but it has not achieved the strategic, sustainable "game change" in Afghan subnational governance it sought.
- The surge has not met these objectives because its success depended upon three initial U.S. assumptions that proved unrealistic.
- First, surge policy assumed that governance progress would accrue as quickly as security progress, with more governance-focused resources compensating for less time.
- Second, surge policy assumed that "bottom-up" progress in local governance would be reinforced by "top-down" Afghan government structures and reforms.
- Third, surge policy assumed that "absence of governance" was a key universal driver for the insurgency, whereas in some areas, presence of government became a fueling factor.
- Once the surge was in motion, other miscalculations emerged: the confusion of discrete successes with replicable progress, the mistaking of individuals' improvements with institution building, the confusion of "local" with "simple," and the overreliance on technological solutions to address problems that were fundamentally political in nature.
- As the surge draws down, the U.S-Afghan Enduring Strategic Partnership Agreement represents a promising opportunity for longer-term strategic planning.
- As the international community moves to transition, it should exert its remaining leverage to impact select systemic issues—such as by resolving district council makeup, improving

About the Report
This report focuses on both the U.S. military's localized governance, reconstruction, and development projects and U.S. civilian stabilization programming in Afghanistan from 2009 through 2012. Based on interviews with nearly sixty Afghan and international respondents in Kabul, Kandahar, Nangarhar, and Washington, this report finds that the surge has not met its transformative objectives due to three U.S. assumptions that proved unrealistic. It also examines lessons from the U.S. surge's impacts on local governance that can be applied toward Afghanistan's upcoming transition.

About the Author
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line ministries' recurring services, and bolstering provincial administrations—rather than tactical-level ones.

- The international community should also prioritize a few key, attainable efforts, such as providing training that is consistent with current Afghan government functions, while avoiding creating additional structures.

- Finally, all the usual Afghan local governance recommendations still apply: resolving Afghanistan's subnational challenges requires long-term commitment and systematic execution.

In 2009, Barack Obama's inauguration ushered in a renewed, bolstered U.S. engagement in Afghanistan. Upon completion of an interagency Afghanistan-Pakistan policy review during the first weeks of his administration, President Obama in March 2009 announced the United States' intensified military and civilian strategy. The overriding American objective remained "to disrupt, dismantle and defeat al Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and to prevent their return to either country in the future;"[1] in support of this, the United States would strive to "promote a more capable and accountable Afghan government."[2]

As the Obama administration articulated its Afghanistan objectives, it emphasized its focus on *local* Afghan government institutions. After widespread acknowledgment that the international community had concentrated its assistance too heavily on Kabul in the years after the 2001 Bonn Agreement, the new U.S. approach intensified a recently increased focus on provinces and districts, "where most Afghans encounter their government."[3] Following years of largely fruitless hopes for trickle-down governance from Kabul-level aid, the United States now aimed to connect local-level governance structures to national ones "from the bottom up."[4] A new military and civilian stabilization strategy endeavored to build governance and development in regions of the country recently "cleared" from a security perspective—largely in Regional Commands South and East. For the first time, U.S. personnel and resources would flow directly into the district level in some of Afghanistan's most volatile areas.

Over three years after President Obama's initial strategy announcement, and as the international community shifts to "transition" mode, what lasting impacts has the surge had on Afghan subnational governance? Examining both the U.S. military's localized "governance, reconstruction, and development" projects and civilian "stabilization" programming, this report argues that the U.S. surge aimed to profoundly transform Afghanistan's subnational governance landscape by establishing technical, accountable, and responsive local government.[5] Drawing from over sixty interviews with international and Afghan observers and officials involved in these efforts, mainly based at the local level, this report finds that the surge's impact has fallen short of this transformative intent because stabilization plans were based upon three unrealistic assumptions:

- U.S. policy overestimated the speed and extent to which specific types of intervention would make progress—assuming that the speed with which the counterinsurgency effort "amassed security effects" would be mirrored by the speed with which it "amassed governance effects."

- U.S. policy assumed that this marginal progress from the "bottom up" would be reinforced and consolidated by "top-down" national-level institutions—when, instead, centralized Afghan government interests systematically obstructed these advances.

- U.S. policy assumed that "lack of governance" was a universal driver of the insurgency, for which bolstering government was the cure—yet in some areas, *presence* of government became a fueling factor.

To truly achieve the transformational effects articulated before the U.S. surge would require a wholesale shift of Afghanistan's subnational incentive structures—a shift that could only be enabled by a mobilization of the Afghan government at the central level and altered

power dynamics at the periphery. Despite public proclamations, the Kabul-based government's fundamental interests in the realm of subnational governance were to maintain the status quo. As the United States views its Afghan engagement going forward, the lesson of the surge is that there is no exogenous, localized technical solution to a centralized political-will problem—and more broadly, that a state-building project in which the interests of the international community do not align with the Afghan government will fall short.

Background: Civilian Surge and Renewed Military Focus on District Governance

As President Obama took office in early 2009, his administration's new Afghanistan strategy acknowledged that the international community's largely "top-down," heavily centralized approach to governance assistance in the years following 2001 must be complemented by localized approaches more appropriate to Afghanistan's decentralized social makeup and history. After years of attempting to strengthen governance reforms from above, the United States would now attempt to bolster the Afghan state "from the bottom up."

Though the surge's primary military objective was to reverse the Taliban's momentum, the dramatic increase of U.S. troops and civilians marked this renewed focus on Afghan governance. President Obama authorized an additional 47,000 military personnel within his first year,[6] mainly deployed to southern and eastern Afghanistan. Meanwhile, after the Obama administration launched the "civilian surge" or "civilian uplift" over the next year, representatives from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Departments of State, Justice, and Agriculture roughly tripled the total U.S. government civilian presence in Afghanistan from 300 to 1,000,[7] overseeing additional thousands of contracted civilian implementing partners.

Once on the ground, both military and civilian personnel were increasingly deployed to local levels with a governance mandate. At the provincial level, American-led Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), which previously hosted one or two U.S. State Department or USAID officers, now became hubs of many more civilian personnel. And while U.S. civilians had previously not been based at the level of Afghanistan's 401 districts,[8] over the course of 2009 and 2010 civil-military District Support Teams (DSTs) sprang up. Meanwhile, U.S. military leaders, newly galvanized by counterinsurgency doctrine that underscored linkages between development and security, formally tasked increasing proportions of their troops to improve "governance, reconstruction, and development" through Commanders' Emergency Response Program (CERP) funds.

The Surge's Transformative Goals: U.S. Communication

Once deployed at the local level under the broad heading of "stabilization," what were all these U.S. military and civilian personnel aiming to achieve? As befits the murky world of U.S. interagency planning, no one unclassified document definitively represents the U.S. intent for the surge. Still, certain themes emerge from the proliferation of American "strategies" and "plans." The State Department's "Afghanistan Pakistan Regional Stabilization Strategy" noted that U.S. officials were to "increase our focus" on subnational institutions and officials with the "goal of making local government more visible, accountable, and capable."[9] The U.S. Government's "Joint Integrated Civilian-Military Campaign Plan," coauthored by U.S. ambassador Karl Eikenberry and International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) commander General Stanley McChrystal in August 2009, echoes that "from the bottom up" the U.S. effort should cultivate "increasingly responsive, capable, and accountable governance at all levels, reinforcing . . . connection and legitimacy."[10]

In public communications, President Obama underscored that his administration's goals for Afghan governance were feasible and measured, in pointed contrast to the Bush administration's overly lofty goals for Iraq: "I reject . . . [a] decades-long nation-building project."[11] His defense secretary, Robert Gates, emphasized that "we need to have modest, realistic goals. If we set ourselves the objective of creating some sort of Central Asian Valhalla over there, we will lose."[12]

But although policymakers stressed their goals' attainability, upon closer examination, the surge's stated goals implied a programming agenda attempting to fundamentally transform Afghan subnational governance. At first brush a focus on "local governance" may have appeared simple and feasible, but when viewed in aggregate, the surge actually aspired to a far more robust effort in state-building than publicly acknowledged. America's new focus centered on district-level administrations, among Afghanistan's smallest formal units; the notion of transforming these administrations into "accountable, capable, and visible" ones actually signified a dramatic shift from the historic baseline.

The surge's stated goals implied a programming agenda attempting to fundamentally transform Afghan subnational governance.

In particular, the American goal to improve district governments' "accountability" to the local population contrasted with existing incentive structures on the ground. Consistent with Afghanistan's long history of highly centralized formal executive authority, Afghanistan's district governors or *woleswals* are not elected; instead, they are appointed by the Kabul-based Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG). These officials' job security thus runs directly upward to Kabul. District governors traditionally represented a nexus of a "government of relationships" that pervaded Afghanistan's subnational structure.[13] Many observers have argued that their appointment through IDLG serves as a vehicle to enact the interests of the Afghan president.[14]

In contrast, the surge's programs envisioned a form of local legitimacy deriving from service delivery through line ministries, representation, and formal accountability structures. This tension between the notion of technical reform and Afghanistan's more fluid "government of relationships" has marked the international community's efforts in Afghanistan for years. However, the surge heightened this tension by increasing the resources at stake and pressure to quickly demonstrate results.

Finally, the sheer scale of U.S. stabilization policy's stated goals was ambitiously transformative. Though U.S. policymakers never claimed that all 401 districts were to be altered at once, even focusing on the ISAF-designated 94 key terrain districts and 44 area of interest districts represents an enormous undertaking.[15] Several documents discussed remaking an even more decentralized level of Afghan subnational landscape, "communities," which the Afghan government currently numbers at 31,700 nationwide, and other documents wanted to tackle "villages."[16]

Stabilization's Transformative Goals: Afghan Communication

If the U.S. surge aimed to fundamentally alter Afghan local governance, the Afghan government's own official Sub-National Governance Policy (SNGP) claimed to share this transformative ambition. Finalized in March 2010, the 415-page document's stated objectives and responsibilities for the state's provincial, district, village, municipal, and ministerial components spectacularly exceeded Afghan precedents. At once internally contradictory and internally redundant, the SNGP's prescriptions for government initiatives—ranging from the "Human Rights Based Approach in Sub-National Governance" to "Community Scorecard Accountability," from the "Right to Information Act" to "Customer Service Orientation in Public Service"[17]—bordered on the fantastical (and suggested a heavy donor influence in preparation and audience).

At the district level, the SNGP stipulated a transformational shift to a technical, systematic entity that echoed the U.S. vision of "accountable, visible, and capable" local

government. First, on accountability, the SNGP stated that constitutionally mandated, directly elected, representative district councils would provide a direct accountability link to the people. The district councils would hold the (still–appointed) district governor accountable through "oversight" and "monitoring and evaluation," formulating a District Development Plan, and requiring monthly testimony from the district governor. Line ministry representatives were to be "accountable to the district council and district governor," albeit with limited enforcement mechanisms.[18]

The SNGP also echoed the American vision of "capable" local governance by ordering an extremely robust list of district-provided services: "These services include Justice, Security, Safe passage of people and goods on Public Roads, Water and Sanitation, Health and Nutrition, Education, Electricity, Roads, Local Transportation, Infrastructure, Agriculture and Irrigation, Natural Resource Management, Land Registration, Social Protection, Identity Card, Private Sector Development, Civic Services such as Solid Waste Management, Traffic Management, Street Lighting, Recreational Facilities."[19] (The SNGP even envisions a district that will deliver Millennium Development Goals by 2020.) Finally, the SNGP shared with its American counterparts the vision of "visible" government, stating the importance of filling "*tashkeels*" (official civil servant slots) locally.

Assumption One: Governance and Development Timelines Would Mirror Security Progress

Although the surge yielded some distinct progress within discrete municipalities, communities, and districts, Afghan subnational governance has not shown the strategic transformation between 2009 and 2012 envisioned by U.S. and Afghan policymakers. Of course, the sheer, extraordinary ambition of the stated goals of the joint Afghan-American subnational stabilization project largely explains why implementation fell short. But more specifically, the surge has not met its strategic objectives because it rested on three key assumptions that proved unrealistic.

First, American plans overestimated the speed with which specific types of governance intervention would yield wider progress.

Steeped in the Amazon-bestselling *The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual* published in late 2006, American military and civilian officers overwhelmingly embraced governance and development efforts as crucial to the counterinsurgency campaign in southern and eastern Afghanistan from late 2009 onward. The military troop surge would clear insurgent areas of "anti-government elements," and then joint military and civilian efforts would "hold and build" through governance and development programs increasingly spearheaded by the actual Afghan government.

However, high-level plans often seemed to assume that these timelines for establishing effective governance and development would mirror (or closely approach) the speed of the security operations—that, in military parlance, "governance effects" would "amass" at the same rate at which "security effects amassed." They overestimated the speed with which, and extent to which, specific governance programs would yield wider progress and often incorrectly assumed that more governance and development-focused personnel and money could compensate for less time.

Speed to Establish Legitimate Government Representatives

As one example of this first unrealistic assumption, U.S. plans often hoped that timelines for establishing legitimate, locally supported government officials would approach the speed of the security operations. The early-2010 Marjah operation in Helmand was billed as a model

of the new, fully integrated counterinsurgency strategy: in preparation for a massive clearing operation that would drive out a huge Taliban cohort from the district, NATO and Afghan officials gathered Afghan administrators and an Afghan governor ready to "move into Marjah the moment the shooting stops."[20] ISAF commander General Stanley McChrystal's famous claim that "we've got a government in a box, ready to roll in" to Marjah was only the most high-profile example of this driving assumption that local officials could be almost literally carted in and take root.[21] The eventual outcome of the Marjah operation—the district governor "rolled in" to take charge, who had lived outside of Afghanistan for the previous 15 years, failed to instantly sprout legitimacy or gain local support[22] (and was revealed to be convicted for manslaughter in Germany)—is instructive. He was rolled right out of Marjah four months later in the same proverbial box in which he came.[23]

Even apart from the high-profile Marjah example, several other local surge efforts overestimated the speed with which local district governors would become locally viewed as "legitimate." Stabilization programming assumed that the insurgency stemmed from a lack of community connection with government officials, so attempted to rectify this gap by facilitating "linkages" between formal subnational officials (usually district governors) and remote communities. Common programs involved transporting district or provincial governors, usually by U.S. military lift or ground movement, to an outlying area to meet with constituents who had never seen a governor before. The official would hold a *shura* (council) or cut a ribbon and make strides toward gaining community support.

While these district governor visits to outlying constituents accomplished their mission of introducing the two groups for the first time, several locally based Americans and Afghans noted it was unlikely that these generally one-time endeavors could germinate lasting connections between an official and his population. Others worried that when certain district governors only seemed to arrive by American military helicopter, their local authenticity suffered; many observed that a key question was whether, when American lift was no longer available, the governor would choose and be able to perpetuate these visits.

Local support could not be fostered overnight, yet the scale of actually facilitating repeated contacts between communities and district governors would have been staggering. Roughly 13,000 to 14,000 villages fall within ISAF's 94 key terrain districts and 44 area of interest districts.[24] The time and resources required to introduce all of those communities outside the district center to a district governor—much less facilitate follow-up visits—raised serious questions of feasibility.

The surge's hopes that external programming could help establish local government representatives' legitimacy stemmed partially from beliefs about the effects of the National Solidarity Programme (NSP), a World Bank–designed, donor-funded community-driven development program launched in 2003. Against the famously challenging Afghan landscape, NSP achieved notable successes: a large-scale randomized field experiment demonstrated it had indeed yielded positive impact in improving citizens' attitude toward their government, as well as other positive effects.[25] As the new U.S. surge focused on connecting local government officials to their population, policymakers and think tanks endorsed expanding U.S. aid to NSP but also supported "programs like it."[26] Several ISAF stabilization initiatives incorporated "NSP-like" elements into their design in hopes of yielding NSP's positive impacts.

Transposing the NSP model into a stabilization context in hopes of bolstering local government officials' legitimacy rested on some flawed assumptions.

However, transposing the NSP model into a stabilization context in hopes of bolstering local government officials' legitimacy rested on some flawed assumptions. First, NSP demonstrated positive effects in the randomized field experiment only in more stable areas of Afghanistan; the program showed negligible positive impacts in more highly insecure areas on which the surge focused.[27] Second, NSP's ideal timeframe is around two and a half years from initial facilitating partner contact through the implementation of one project.[28] The

program requires a meticulous consultative process to gain community buy-in, determine a representative Community Development Council, settle upon a project, and oversee completion; it is this lengthy process, more than the single project that resulted from it, that seems most to convince NSP's participants of the program's legitimacy.[29] Stabilization programs—mandated to show results in a matter of weeks or months—simply did not afford the opportunity to gain this level of deep, widespread community buy-in. As a consequence, accelerated programs attempting to emulate NSP's success in building support for district-level officials fell short of their transformative intent.

Speed to Establish Vertical Line Ministry Linkages for Service Delivery

High-level officials often referred to the surge's goals for service delivery as "connecting the bottom up to the top down"—a shift from years of Kabul-driven line ministry reform. The "bottom-up approach" implied that if communities were empowered to organize and articulate priorities, they could "reach up" to their district-level line ministry representatives, who would in turn be empowered to "reach up" to the provincial level, and so on—and at some level, someone would be empowered and galvanized to respond. After an area had been "cleared," rather than continue to fruitlessly wait for trickle-down development, the surge would prompt grassroots mobilization for demand-driven service delivery. U.S. stabilization programs sought to meet these locally articulated service delivery requests on an interim basis while these vertical linkages up the line ministry chains developed.

Unfortunately, establishing these line ministry vertical linkages took much longer than the "bottom-up" model suggested and much longer than the military process that cleared contested areas and demanded immediate "hold and build." From 2009 onward, the international community and the Ministry of Finance made progress in increasingly incorporating provincially identified priorities in the budget process.[30] However, the fact that at first this was only a pilot project, combined with the realities of the Afghan budget cycle, and the slowness of the public procurement process, meant that national line ministry budgets are still in their nascent stages of reflecting provincial priorities. Incorporating *district*-level priorities into ministry budgets is inconsistent with ministerial systems and, despite general discussions, had never been seriously pursued.

Conversations around service delivery highlight a chasm between the views of locally based personnel (ISAF military, ISAF civilian, and Afghan) on one side, and Kabul-based individuals (ISAF and Afghan) on the other, on a realistic timeframe and process for how "bottom up" was actually to meet "top down." Locally based personnel believed their role was to encourage local groups to mobilize and submit their service delivery requests through district representatives, creating a demand for services at a level well beyond the Afghan historic precedent, and in so doing, inflating the role of the district governor in service delivery well beyond his traditional job. This process often increased communities' trust in their government officials in the short run—because in the short run, these district officials could count upon American money and muscle to actually fulfill these service delivery requests. However, in the long run, this process dramatically increased demand for services while improvements in the recurring supply side—the "top down" of service delivery—were measured in budgeting cycles and years.

While these misunderstandings provide yet another example of Afghanistan's centuries-old divide between Kabul and outlying rural areas, the result was frustration from both ends of the bottom-top spectrum.

Speed to Identify and Rectify "Sources of Instability"

From late 2009 onward, U.S. military and civilian leadership (largely) articulated a new direction for surge programming: CERP funds and civilian stabilization money should not aim to endlessly

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provide for the economic needs of Afghans in hopes of winning over "hearts and minds" but instead should prioritize interventions targeting the "sources of instability."[31] Shifting emphasis to addressing the drivers of conflict—usually political factors rather than economic ones—mirrored recommendations from research into best practice in Afghanistan aid.[32]

However, organizational factors and stabilization's accelerated time frame impeded execution of this improved approach. First, robust, accurate analysis of local actors was hard to get. With some exceptions, military and civilian personnel turnover was high.[33] Located "behind the wire," Americans' insights into local politics and dynamics were often conditioned by the views of local staff, local interpreters, and the few "key leaders" or community members willing to engage with international actors. Even with the much-touted layers of intelligence reform and intelligence personnel surge, many Americans worried their efforts to understand complex local conditions—often with backstories reaching back generations—made slow headway compared with their tours' length. With opportunities for triangulation limited, American CERP and civilian projects ran the risk of inadvertently triggering unintended consequences.

Second, even with accurate identification of sources of instability, actually delivering governance and development programs that ameliorated these factors faced deep obstacles. Almost every stabilization project required some combination of capable engineers, domestic supply procurement, international supply procurement, financial transfers, distributional logistics, cooperative weather, cooperative-enough security, military transportation, local transportation, local leader engagement, and local community engagement. This constellation of factors did not often align, meaning that even small stabilization projects intended to help the local Afghan government officials quickly respond to their population's grievances were often slower than hoped in implementation.

Discrete Governance Successes Would Quickly Spread, "Ink Blot" Style

Finally, U.S. policymakers hoped that the surge would prompt governance and development to extend like an "ink blot," in parallel to an increasingly large footprint of militarily secured territory. Communities would travel to the district center to request services, and when district officials—enabled by foreign muscle or money—met these needs, neighboring communities would envy the services received and go to the district center as well.

Afghan and U.S. observers cited many examples of this approach's success throughout Regional Commands South and East. However, several Americans noted that the progress of facilitating this ink blot approach was extremely labor intensive, halting, and fully dependent on the right local counterparts. Rather than the "ink blot" gathering momentum of its own, with Afghan government officials increasing service delivery to ever-wider swaths of a district's population as Americans stepped aside, the approach continued to require significant U.S. resources and engagement. For this approach to achieve a strategically transformative impact would likely require decades at this level of expenditure—if it would have worked at all.

Assumption Two: Bottom-Up Progress Would Be Reinforced by Top-Down Processes

Another cluster of reasons the U.S. surge has fallen short of its transformative governance goal stems from the assumption that any marginal "bottom-up" progress in encouraging local Afghan officials' accountability would be reinforced by the top levels of Afghan government incentivizing and reinforcing this improvement. In reality, attempts to increase local officials' downward accountability threatened Kabul's heavily centralized patronage system to ensure that district-level administrators maintained allegiance to the capital. In

the realm of three local governance priorities—increased accountability and responsiveness of local district governors, increased accountability and authority of district councils, and increased local authority over budgetary decision making—local "bottom-up" progress was not matched by central-level structural reforms. Though Kabul's communications lent rhetorical support to notions of decentralizing governance to increase local accountability, overall progress of the "bottom-up" endeavor was hindered by a lack of political will (or abundance of political obstruction) on top.

Local Accountability Clashed with Centralized Interests: The Role of District Governor

The surge deployed legions of civilians and uniformed personnel at the district level to encourage district governors to become more accountable to a broader spectrum of their population. By continual mentoring of the district governor, and by conditioning inputs of aid, U.S. officials pressed their counterpart district governor to respond to his constituents' requests registered at the district center, and to provide projects more equitably throughout the district.

These U.S.-induced incentive shifts for district governors altered the short-term behavior of many local officials, whom U.S. observers reported as more apt to endorse projects more evenly throughout their district and respond to their population. However, the practice did not shift very real accountability structures already in place for the district governor. Historically, Kabul has always used the post of the district governor to extend the "government of relationships" to the local level.[34] Whatever the conditions on the foreign-aid flow of the day, district governors remained appointees whose job security depended on Kabul rather than on being popularly elected.

How was this conundrum to be resolved? U.S. policy was unclear. Some military and civilian leadership acknowledged that district governors' behavior shifts might be short term when incentivized solely by U.S. money but hoped that in the long term, other factors would compel governors to be more sustainably accountable to their populace. One possibility: after U.S. mentoring of a particular governor for long enough, he would see the intrinsic benefits of his increased accountability to his entire population and continue this behavior on his own. In essence, it was hoped that Afghan officials would take on a very (idealized) American sense of "public service" rather than revert to emphasis on survival or tribal affiliation. Of course, governors' frequent reshuffling (or assassination) made long-term mentoring unlikely. To achieve any kind of nationally transformative impact, this approach would have depended on a tremendous amount of American personnel and time—if it would have worked at all.

Another hope—even more vaguely understood by those serving at the local levels—was that top-down systems were being reformed and would eventually shift *all* district governors' incentives to make them locally accountable. Directly electing district governors would deviate significantly from Afghan precedent and encounter myriad logistical and political hurdles. A more realistic approach to making district governors more accountable to their population was to empower and formalize elected district councils as a check on the governors, an idea discussed in the next section.

A final American hope for improving district governor accountability—or at least responsiveness and performance—rested on the Afghan government's formally announced move toward merit-based appointments. Instating a formal, merit-based system would increase the overall professionalism of the district governor corps, select for technical qualifications rather than *waseta* (connections), and institute a culture of "customer service," in the exact words of the SNGP.[35]

However, despite much rhetorical support, Kabul-based actors made limited headway on reforming this system as American officials hoped. At time of writing, the Independent

Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission and IDLG reported that, after a long halt, the merit-based process for district governor appointments was moving ahead,[36] with a formalized solicitation, recruitment, and exam process and codified minimum requirements for a district.[37] This process still faces the long-standing challenge of appropriately defining "merit" for the role of district governor,[38] though the exam process involves technical competencies, set educational requirements, and a personal interview.[39] Moreover, though this initiative was too new to fully evaluate, it had already been delayed significantly for political reasons, and early evidence suggests that in the final decisions on appointments, a murky web of decision makers within the Presidential Palace and IDLG still make the calls. As Martine van Biljert has noted before on the issue of reforming subnational appointments, new formal procedures "do not necessarily change the rules of the game, but rather provide a different vocabulary for power struggles."[40]

Whatever the official language or formal procedures, the Kabul-based executive's de facto authority over district governors seems unlikely to shift in the near term. With the IDLG increasingly viewed as a tool for the Kabul government's centralizing impulses,[41] and as an actor that reportedly played the role of political mobilization machine for President Hamid Karzai's reelection in 2009,[42] the IDLG and by extension the Presidential Palace will likely see little incentive to loosen their hold on appointments during the advent of the 2014 presidential election.

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Local Accountability Clashed with Centralized Interests: District Representative Councils

U.S. "bottom-up" efforts to encourage local accountability and authority also collided with the Kabul-based patronage system in the realm of district-based representative councils. The Afghan Constitution calls for elected district-level structures, intended to provide a check on the executive power of the district governor and to be directly accountable to the population. However, although the SNGP called for these elections to occur in 2010, they have been postponed indefinitely due to constraints including disputes over district-level boundaries and logistical and financial obstacles.[43]

In the absence of formalized, elected district councils, the international community and Afghan government created several ad hoc structures in attempts to fill the gap. Since 2002, with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) support, the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development's National Area Based Development Program (NABDP) empowered District Development Assemblies (DDAs) in 382 districts;[44] starting in 2010, with USAID support, the IDLG promoted the Afghan Social Outreach Program that created 115 District Community Councils (commonly known as "ASOP *shuras*") in key stabilization districts.[45] In addition, the international community sponsored or encouraged many additional "*shuras*" (consultative councils) in various districts, including "security *shuras*," "education *shuras*," "women's *shuras*," "agriculture *shuras*," and "peace *shuras*," among others.[46] The stated goal for these myriad district groups was generally to respond to local populations' concerns, monitor the performance of line ministry representatives, and monitor the performance of the district governor.[47]

Considerable American resources were spent in building the capacity of these various district bodies to do their duties. ASOP included a formal training component, and district-based American personnel reported devoting substantial time and effort encouraging these bodies to be more transparent in their operations and systematic in their response to popular requests.

But despite all this effort, these myriad councils had no legal authority to enforce their supposed mandate to hold district governors (much less line ministry employees) accountable. These councils lacked "teeth" for two principal reasons. First, the Subnational Governance Policy remained just a "policy"; most of its various statutes—including its portions

on the district councils' authority and elections—had not been promulgated and enacted as law. In addition, the sheer number of local-level district councils added up to a confusing district-level landscape that was prone to manipulation. District-level Afghan and U.S. observers reported that the multiplicity of district councils provided an opening for local actors to "go shopping" for a sympathetic district body and diluted any ability for a coherent district council to "represent the people's interests." Others believed that the largest nationwide shuras—the DCCs and DAAs—were proxies for their Kabul-level sponsors (IDLG and MRRD respectively) in their competition for resources.

If the multiple district councils actually undermined local-level accountability, and if lack of formalized powers for these district councils hobbled their effectiveness, the keys to reforming these weaknesses lay not in focusing on "bottom-up" processes, but in two key "top-down" initiatives: first, rationalizing competing district councils, and second, formalizing district councils' authorities. Here, Kabul-based Afghan authorities demonstrated little progress. Holding district-level elections was deemed unfeasible by the IEC and IDLG until at least 2014.[48] At time of writing, under considerable pressure from the international community, Cabinet-level officials were reportedly discussing ideas for rationalizing the councils—ideas included expansion of the formal authorities of DDAs, resuscitation of some form of ASOP *shuras*, and a makeshift, non-IEC election, which most argued would be technically unconstitutional.[49]

Even if elected district structures had been resolved, how effective could they be without reform of relevant laws? The experience of the (elected) provincial councils is instructive. Analysts note that without any power of the purse, "Rather than developing a system of representation that can truly bring a bottom-up dimension to provincial-level planning, it may be that the PCs remain mainly an instrument of potential and actual patronage."[50] Kabul-based Afghan government officials showed little progress in the task of formalizing district council authorities. The IDLG variously reported that district council authorities were clarified either in the district council law or the local administration law (IDLG communications are contradictory on this point), which would likely need to be discussed with the Ministry of Justice, before submission to Parliament, debate, approval, and enactment.[51] The process would likely require a minimum of twelve months from start until enactment. Observers suggested that formalizing district councils' authorities would leave Kabul-based actors with much to lose: either DDAs or DCCs would be marginalized and with them the influence of their sponsor ministry, or district governors' powers would be checked and with them the IDLG's local mobilization machine.

Whatever the complex reasons behind the lack of district council progress, the American surge's tireless efforts to build these bodies' capacity for "good governance" could not alter the basic truth that they had limited actual authority, and there was little top-down appetite for them to increase it.

Local Accountability Clashed with Centralized Interests: Fiscal Issues

Finally, the surge rested on the hope that localized improvements in budgeting skills and processes would be met with top-down reforms to give more budgeting authority to provincial, and eventually district, levels of government. Training of district and provincial officials to prioritize local resource requests would be met with increasing levels of fiscal decentralization or fiscal deconcentration,[52] so that local spending would reflect these local priorities. Though specific approaches varied from region to region, many U.S. officials expended significant effort trying to train local officials on budgetary prioritization.

These efforts faced three fundamental challenges. For one, public administration and finance experts disagree on the degree to which fiscal decentralization even *should* occur in Afghanistan.[53] Second, even if there had been widespread agreement on fiscal decentralization as the way forward, budgetary reforms largely did not happen, and realistically

could not have happened, during the life of the surge. Third, many training efforts were misplaced—they focused on executive offices of provincial governors and district governors, whereas Afghanistan's budget delivers services through line ministries.

At time of writing, a promising, but still nascent, provincial budget pilot was just getting under way with strong U.S. support.[54] The program provided training for provincial line ministry representatives to insert local priority requests into the budgets prepared by their parent ministries. How much the ultimate annual budgets would reflect these priorities was still an open question, and the pilot itself was limited to only five key ministries. Thus, though progress was being made, fiscal decentralization did not achieve any sort of long-term, sweeping transformation during the life of the surge.

In summary, in the realm of three priorities for local governance—increased accountability and responsiveness of local district governors, increased accountability and authority of district councils, and increased local authority over budgetary decisions—local progress was not matched by central-level structural reforms. Without the Kabul-based Afghan government's buy-in, the surge could not achieve the fundamental subnational transformation envisioned.

Assumption Three: "Lack of Government" as the Problem to Be Addressed

As a final operating assumption, the American surge policy derived from the premise that the Afghan struggle was a counterinsurgency in which a "contest for governance" was being waged between the Afghan government on one side and antigovernment elements on the other. On the local level, this analysis implied that the insurgency stemmed from a lack of government reach into rural areas; if government could be connected with these outlying communities and deliver services, the insurgency would abate. A primary purpose of stabilization programming was thus to "extend the reach of government" into the country's most remote, contested areas in order to help the government gain legitimacy.[55]

This analysis largely rang true for urban and peri-urban regions affected by the surge effort, but, consistent with Afghanistan's deep rural-urban divide, did not universally apply to remote areas. In municipalities such as Kandahar City and its surrounding districts, residents showed great appetite for government delivery of services, especially electricity.[56] But particularly in remote areas of Regional Command East, many Afghan and American observers suggested that the local insurgency was not driven by "lack of government," but the *intrusion* of the Afghan government, viewed as extortive and foreign. The presence of ISAF troops facilitating this extended Afghan government reach represented a further causus belli for historically independent areas that wanted above all to be left alone. Stabilization programs attempted to win popular support by providing services, but from the start, these initiatives were just atoning for the fact that outsiders—Western *and* Afghan alike—had shown up in the first place. Some ISAF respondents described areas stuck in a stage of "permanent clear," fueled by local protest of outside intervention. Afghan and American respondents alike noted that many areas simply did not want to invite the complications of outsider intrusion: "If you have lunch in the woods, the wolves will come."[57]

More broadly, there is genuine debate whether "more service delivery" is truly the appropriate prescription for the most contested areas of Afghanistan targeted by the surge.[58] Improved security is the number one "service" desired by the Afghan population, often followed closely by improved justice and decreased corruption.[59] But the surge's governance and development programs did not aim to *directly* improve the security situation. These initiatives did not assist or oversee Afghan security forces, which have the most immediate effect on security, and community-driven development programs such as NSP (upon which many of the surge's projects were modeled) have not been shown to decrease local security

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incidents in areas already experiencing a high level of violence.[60] The surge's development and governance initiatives also did not directly aim at the formal or informal justice sectors, leaving this realm to ongoing broader international community efforts. USAID's efforts here yielded some successes in the informal justice sector, but as one analyst noted, many of the broader international efforts ran up against cultural barriers: "We've approached 'justice' as a subset of the 'rule of law' sector, neither of which make sense to rural Afghans, since the rule of law as we describe and 'projectize' it is alien to them, whereas justice is primordial. Unfortunately, for the most part the formal government is not associated with the provision of justice."[61]

Beyond a local desire for security and justice, many other international offerings of "service delivery" found themselves abutting preexisting Afghan arrangements to locally manage everything from *karez* cleaning to equitable water distribution to dispute resolution. Other service delivery offerings targeted local requests that were never before expressed, thus creating, as noted earlier, newly inflated expectations or unsustainable demands. Meanwhile, the insertion or elevation of local government officials to administer these programs often facilitated corruption and extortion, further alienating the local community. If, as some analysts argue, in Afghanistan, legitimacy derives from nationalism and Islam,[62] other research adds that "the attempt to create legitimacy through service delivery and governance is both alien and problematic, as they imply expectations for tangible action."[63]

Explaining Why

In some ways, the stabilization's lessons from 2009 to 2012 merely reaffirm criticisms of the surge effort—from observers both inside and outside of the U.S. government—from the start: the stated ambitions for radically altering Afghan subnational governance were inappropriate for the time allotted and unsuited to an externally driven effort.

But if the surge reinforced lessons already learned about the challenges of state building and counterinsurgency, *why* did military and civilian leadership endorse it as feasible? Why did the strategy still unfold as it did? A cluster of explanations reside at the top level of Washington, DC, in early 2009. Getting the "good war" in Afghanistan right was a top campaign priority of the incoming Obama administration. Many argued that the United States had not fully resourced its Afghanistan effort since its diversion into Iraq in 2003. In addition, the successful surge leading to (or coinciding with) "turnaround" in Iraq boosted American confidence. Combined with the fervor surrounding the *Counterinsurgency Field Manual,* the Iraq experience fed optimism that with proper civilian and military resources, there was no limit to what American brain and brawn could accomplish in Afghanistan. Finally, while many civilian and military officials, both high- and low-ranking, worried quietly from the start that the stated goals were highly ambitious in the time allowed, realities of support on Capitol Hill and in the American electorate meant that asking for more time simply was not an option. So the collective effort charged in with gusto, resources, and hopes for the best.

Once the high-level policy was set in motion, this Washington-generated optimism was perpetuated inside Afghanistan and the United States through a few key ways:

- *Confusion of discrete successes with replicable progress.* As clearing operations moved across Regional Command South, previously volatile districts such as Helmand's Nawa demonstrated greatly improved security and governance and were repeatedly cited as "proofs of concept" that the surge could succeed more broadly. In reality, conditions in these showcase districts would be nearly impossible to replicate or sustain on a broader level because they relied upon vast American inputs, upon a homogenous dominant tribe that decided to accept American largesse, and upon the decision-making calculus of its particular district governor.[64] Though there was no evidence this outcome was generalizable throughout

all of Afghanistan's 401 districts without similarly lavish funding and similarly conducive local conditions, Nawa and a handful of other districts became "model districts," visited frequently by VIPs who took away the lesson that if stabilization could work there, it would work everywhere. As these VIPs repeated this observation to other VIPs—many of whom had visited the same "representative" district—an echo chamber effect emerged.

- *Confusion of individuals' progress with institution building.* Despite a stated commitment to building Afghan institutions, the mechanics of the U.S. mode of mentoring and aid distribution focused on a few key individuals (often district governors, who in many cases had three or four U.S. "counterparts" deployed at the district level). When these individuals demonstrated great strides, it was tempting to conflate this progress with headway in the *institution* of district governor. The unremitting stream of VIP visitors compounded this dynamic: impressed by these individuals, they would report back to Kabul and Washington that Afghan local governance was blooming. Particularly in a country in which district governors are regularly reshuffled or assassinated, tracking individuals' growth was a deceptive metric for measuring overall institutional progress.

- *Confusion of "local" with "simple."* The wide post-2009 embrace of "local, bottom-up" solutions in governance achieved a key insight in acknowledging Afghanistan's fundamentally decentralized politics and insurgency.[65] However, those translating this insight into programming often inferred that locally based governance programs would therefore be simple to implement and develop almost organically. Conversations around "local *shuras*" exemplified this trend: high-level policymakers and Washington's vigorous think tank chattering class advocated a broad strategy of entering villages to find "the *shura*" of legitimate local elders to ensure local ownership of projects. Those who had actually lived at the village level in Afghanistan noted that understanding murky village power structures is challenging on a seven- or twelve-month tour and risks unintentionally empowering malign actors. (The author's informal data collection suggests a direct correlation between a particular official's distance from the local level and how easy he believed it would be to cultivate sustainable, equitable "local solutions.")

- *Military predominance in interagency planning.* Despite the joint civil-military nature of the Afghanistan campaign, the sheer numbers of military representatives compared with civilians meant that civilians could not be seated at every relevant decision-making table. Governance and development initiatives often experienced pressure to "keep up" with predetermined military objectives on a military timeline. On the national level, military leadership designated key terrain districts in the insurgency's most volatile heartland; many civilian leaders agreed to focus here even though they were not necessarily where governance and development efforts would be most effective. On the local level, the frenetic "battle rhythm" at many forward operating bases meant civilians were under pressure to prove their own value to their military hosts, so they may have acquiesced to unrealistic governance and development expectations.

- *Belief in the power of technological and technical solutions.* The American surge attempted to address many problems that were fundamentally human capital, political, or sociological ones with technological or technical solutions. To make up for lack of knowledge of local tribal structures, for example, policymakers placed faith in the diagramming wizardry of Human Terrain Teams or the elaborate new infrastructure of intelligence outposts—though none of these technologies compensated for the fact that American engagement with actual Afghans was limited to their interpreter cohort, highly constrained ventures outside their bases, and the few "key leaders" who would choose to meet with them. The focus on a computerized recruitment process for district governors is another example: did an electronic tracking system alter the Presidential Palace's ultimate weight in personnel decisions?

> *In a country in which district governors are regularly reshuffled or assassinated, tracking individuals' growth was a deceptive metric for measuring overall institutional progress.*

Conclusions and Recommendations

The surge's governance and development initiatives yielded localized, discrete progress in many areas, but three years in, policymakers' goals to sustainably transform subnational governance nationwide have not been met. U.S. stabilization efforts essentially aspired to wholesale state building from the bottom up, transposing a decades-long process onto a months-long timetable. As many suspected from the start, American (and Afghan) stated goals for dramatically altering Afghan subnational governance were unrealistic for the time allotted and the tools available. As the surge continued, it became clear that one key ingredient—Afghan political will—was not malleable "from the bottom up." Any localized progress made, when not reinforced by structural changes to the Afghan government, is unlikely to be sustained after ISAF's drawdown.

While never explicitly stated, the surge may have represented a conscious U.S. effort to diversify its Afghan counterparts away from the Kabul executive and therefore increase its leverage in seeking reform. By cultivating direct interactions with other, more local partners rather than continuing to depend heavily on America's troubled relationship with President Karzai, the surge may have sought to alter the U.S.-Afghan leverage dynamics. If the surge indeed aimed to turn local governance into a "game changer" that would enable or even force reform, then another of its lessons was to underscore, yet again, the durability of the Afghan executive's power.

As the surge continued, it became clear that one key ingredient—Afghan political will—was not malleable "from the bottom up."

Policy Recommendations for Transition

As the United States' surge gives way to drawdown, its recently signed Strategic Partnership Agreement with Afghanistan represents positive signs of a longer-term commitment to consolidate progress. Still, as the international community moves into the era of transition, it should remain mindful of the stabilization period's primary warning: there is no technical, localized solution to a problem of centralized political will and power accumulation. In a resource-constrained environment, the international community should focus its dwindling governance-related leverage on issues it can hope to affect and its assistance on challenges that are manageable in scale. Recommendations to the international community:

- *Exert leverage to impact select systemic, rather than tactical-level, problems.*
  - *Focus on key structural issues with district councils.* In the short term, exert leverage to rationalize district councils; in the medium term, after the 2014 election, focus on formalizing district boundaries as a first step toward elected bodies. Focus parliamentary leverage on passing feasible laws based upon the Subnational Governance Policy Implementation Plan to formalize reasonable district council authorities.
  - *Focus on key structural issues with ministries' recurring service delivery.* Expand the provincial budgeting pilot as anticipated, and focus leverage on expanding the degree to which provincial budget requests are reflected in ministries' budgetary responses.

- *In a resource-constrained era, prioritize assistance to a few key efforts.*
  - *Avoid providing training and assistance that is out of step with actual Afghan government functions.* If the international community continues to pour resources into training myriad district councils, it will raise local expectations without improving these groups' authority to represent the population. If district governors continue to be elevated in the role of providing service delivery, local expectations will again raise and risk posttransition deflation. Focus on structural issues surrounding these entities first.

- ° *Focus at the province level.* Work to ensure that each of the 34 provinces is in passable shape, rather than attempting district-level reform.

- ° *Pilot new processes in easier, rather than harder, cases.* New systems for budgeting, representative governance, or other issues will inevitably encounter unforeseen obstacles; these should be worked through first in easier provinces or ministries. Civilian leadership may need to provide top cover when these priorities differ from the military's emphasis.

- ° *Enforce a moratorium on ad hoc solutions and new parallel structures.* The Afghan government is complicated enough without the proliferation of new international community working groups, liaisons, and initiatives. Improve structures that already exist rather than create new ones.

- • ***All the usual Afghanistan governance recommendations still apply.*** Assessments of Afghan subnational governance traditionally produce recommendations that, if they were truly to be implemented, would require radical organizational shifts on the part of the international community. "Deeper local knowledge and robust local buy-in" would require significantly longer—by several-fold—tours in-country. "Less short-sighted programmatic planning" would require reliable multiyear funding appropriations and profound contracting reform. To meaningfully "improve coordination" would require subsuming donor nations' priorities to an international consensus and identifying a way to enforce it—a near impossibility. And finally, a "robust long-term commitment to Afghanistan" would need to be measured in decades—and despite Strategic Partnership status, committing to programmatic details in any such arrangement would clash with the U.S. electoral calendar. Given the United States' political, economic, and bureaucratic realities, expecting such radical organizational shifts is wholly unrealistic. Expectations for what U.S. assistance can truly achieve should be calibrated accordingly.

Notes

1. President Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President on a New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan" (speech, White House, Washington, DC, March 27, 2009).

2. U.S. Government, "Integrated Civilian-Military Campaign Plan for Support to Afghanistan," August 10, 2009.

3. Office of the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, "Afghanistan and Pakistan Regional Stabilization Strategy," February 24, 2010, ii.

4. Ibid., 3.

5. This paper focuses on U.S. military and civilian surge programming because the United States was by far the largest actor overall in Regional Commands East, South, and Southwest, and because the vast majority of interviewees came from or commented upon U.S.-specific programs. Other ISAF partner nations such as the United Kingdom, Canada, the Netherlands, and Australia were active in RC-E, RC-S, and RC-SW and undertook some similar activities.

6. Including 17,000 authorized in February 2009, and 30,000 announced in December 2009. An additional 7,000 were sent in other installments. See the graphic published by the *Washington Post,* "Afghanistan War Strategy during the Surge," June 22, 2012, www.washingtonpost.com/national/afghanistan-war-strategy-during-the-surge/2012/06/22/gJQAd6eEwV_graphic.html.

7. Office of the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, "Afghanistan and Pakistan Regional Stabilization Strategy," 3.

8. The number of Afghanistan's "official" districts is disputed. The Ministry of Interior officially recognized 398 districts in 2005; subsequently, three further districts (including Marjah), were reportedly created to bring the total to 401. The MRRD cites 402.

9. Office of the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, "Afghanistan and Pakistan Regional Stabilization Strategy," 7.

10. U.S. Government, "Integrated Civilian-Military Campaign Plan," ii and 8.

11. President Barack Obama, "Address to the Nation on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan" (speech, U.S. Military Academy, West Point, West Point, New York, December 1, 2009).

12. Defense Secretary Robert Gates, in testimony to Senate Armed Services Committee, January 27, 2009.

13. Hamish Nixon, "Sub-national State Building in Afghanistan," Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, April 2008, 24.

14. See Martine van Bijlert, "Between Discipline and Description: Policies Surrounding Senior Subnational Appointments," Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, May 2009; also see Hamish Nixon, "The Subnational Governance Challenge and the Independent Directorate of Local Governance," in *Snapshots of an Intervention,* e-book, ed. Van Bijlert and Kouvo (Afghan Analysts Network, 2012).

15. See U.S. Department of Defense, "Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan and United States Plan for Sustaining the Afghanistan National Security Forces," April 2011, 37.

16. Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD), "NSP Operations Manual Version Six," 2012, 7; U.S. Government, "Integrated Civilian-Military Campaign Plan for Support to Afghanistan", 35.

17. Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG), "Sub-national Governance Policy," 39.

18. Ibid., p. 133 and 135. Presidential decree No. 2113, March 17, 2010, formally changed district governor to a civil service position; according to the SNGP, "Their recruitment of the will take place based on merit-based, competitive and transparent procedures and mechanisms that will be developed by the IARCSC and IDLG."

19. Ibid., 139.

20. Dexter Filkins, "Afghan Offensive is the New War Model," *New York Times,* February 12, 2010.

21. Ibid.

22. Frank James, "US General Still upbeat Despite Marjah, Afghanistan Government Shift," NPR, July 12, 2010.

23. Jean McKenzie, "The Enteqal Seven (3): Lashkargah—Southern Poster Child for Transition," Afghanistan Analysts Network Blog, May 27, 2011, www.aan-afghanistan.org/index.asp?id=1750.

24. Just over one-third of Afghanistan's districts are Key Terrain Districts or Area of Interest Districts. Because better data is unavailable, this rough estimate is based upon one-third of the total 40,000 government-recognized "villages."

25. Andrew Beath, Fotini Christia, and Ruben Enikolopov, "Winning Hearts and Minds through Development: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Afghanistan" (working paper, Massachusetts Institute of Technology Political Science Department, April 13, 2012), 1.

26. See, for example, John A. Nagl, "A Better War in Afghanistan," *Joint Forces Quarterly* 56, no. 1 (2010): 38; see also John A. Nagl, Andrew Exum, and Ahmed A. Humayun, "A Pathway to Success in Afghanistan: The National Solidarity Program," Center for a New American Security Policy Brief, March 16, 2009.

27. Beath et al., "Winning Hearts and Minds through Development," 1.

28. MRRD, "NSP Operations," 25.

29. Nixon, "Sub-national State Building in Afghanistan," 37–47.

30. Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Ministry of Finance, "Provincial Budgeting Policy Brief," October 9, 2011.

31. U.S. Government, "Integrated Civil-Military Campaign Plan for Support to Afghanistan, Revision 1," February 2011, 31.

32. Paul Fishstein and Andrew Wilder, "Winning Hearts and Minds? Examining the Relationship between Aid and Security in Afghanistan," Feinstein International Center, January 2012, 68.

33. Military tours ranged from six to twelve months. Civilians largely served a minimum of twelve months, but frequently moved to multiple sites during their tour.

34. Nixon, "Sub-national State Building in Afghanistan," 24.

35. IDLG, "Implementation of the SNGP: Progress and Prioritization" (unpublished working paper, November 2011), 39.

36. Ibid., 51. The IDLG notes that 70 district governors had been appointed on a merit basis through the competitive process, and that the merit-based process was put on hold because it was "too slow" and needed to be improved.

37. IDLG official, interview by author, Kabul, March 2012; USAID official, interview by author, Kabul, March 2012.

38. See Van Bijlert, "Between Discipline and Description," 1.

39. IDLG official, interview; IARCSC official, in communication with author, March 2012.

40. van Bijlert, "Between Discipline and Description," 3.

41. Hamish Nixon, "The Subnational Governance Challenge," 3.

42. International analyst, interview by author, Kabul, March 2012.

43. Douglas Saltmarshe and Abhilash Medhi, "Local Governance in Afghanistan: A View from the Ground," Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, June 2011, 44.

44. As of late 2011. UNDP, National Area-Based Development Programme, www.undp.org.af/whoweare/UNDPin Afghanistan/Projects/psl/prj_nabdp.htm.

45. USAID, Afghanistan Social Outreach Program, "ASOP Fact Sheet", June 2011.

46. Shahmahmood Miakhel and Noah Coburn, "Many Shuras Do Not a Government Make: International Community Engagement With Local Councils in Afghanistan," United States Institute of Peace, September 07, 2010.

47. USAID, Afghanistan Social Outreach Program, "ASOP Fact Sheet," June 2011.

48. IDLG, "Implementation of the SNGP," 45.

49. ASOP's provision of shura stipends ended in late 2011. Though this formally signaled the end of the ASOP program, USAID officials reported some continued to meet and discussed ways to continue to support them through training. USAID officials, in interviews by author, Kandahar, Kabul, and Washington, February, March, and May 2012.

50. Nixon, "Sub-national State Building in Afghanistan," 23.

51. IDLG, "Implementation of SNGP," 38.

52. For a discussion of decentralization and deconcentration in the Afghan context, see Sarah Lister, "Caught in Confusion: Local Governance Structures in Afghanistan," Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, March 2005.

53. Former World Bank Afghanistan official, interview by author, Washington, May 2012.

54. As befits the cyclical nature of Afghanistan assistance, this was actually not the first "provincial budgeting pilot" introduced—an earlier, UN-backed iteration occurred in 2006 in Balkh, Panshir, and Kandahar.

55. USAID/Afghanistan, "Stabilization," http://afghanistan.usaid.gov/en/programs/stabilization.

56. AIR Consulting, "Final Survey Report: Opinion Survey on Performance of Municipality in Kandahar City," March 2011.

57. ISAF official, interview by author, Kabul, February 2012.

58. Fishstein and Wilder, "Winning Hearts and Minds?"

59. Asia Foundation, "Afghanistan in 2011: A Survey of the Afghan People," 3.

60. Beath et al., "Winning Hearts and Minds through Development," 3.

61. International community analyst, in personal communication with author, June 2012.

62. Astri Suhrke, *When More Is Less: The International Project in Afghanistan* (London: C Hurst & Co, 2011), 191.

63. Fishstein and Wilder, "Winning Hearts and Minds?" 59.

64. In the case of Nawa, this included $300 in spending for every resident and employing over half of the district's working-age males through U.S.-sponsored cash-for-work projects. See Scott Dempsey, "The Fallacy of COIN: One Officer's Frustration," *Small Wars Journal,* March 13, 2011.

65. Seth G. Jones, "It Takes the Villages," *Foreign Affairs* (May/June 2010).

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- *Lessons from Afghanistan's History for the Current Transition and Beyond* by William Byrd (Special Report, September 2012)

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- *The Future of Afghanistan* by J. Alexander Thier, editor

- *How We Missed the Story: Osama bin Laden, the Taliban, and the Hijacking of Afghanistan* (USIP Press, 2008) by Roy Gutman