

Murghab District, Badghis District Narrative Assessment 5 May 2010



**By the Stability Operations Information Center (SOIC)
Camp Julien, Kabul**

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(U) Overhead view of Bala Murghab. The District center is the multi-story building left of center. The “Old Bridge” is seen towards the fore, and part of FOB Todd can be seen on the right across the Murghab River

(U) Key Findings

(U) *(Analyst’s note: This section, called “Key Findings”, is designed to provide decision-makers with important analytical insights culled from the overall document. In this sense, it is a form of executive summary, though it does not seek to summarize all the sections of this document, since the document is designed to be used as a reference.)*

(U) There is a latent fear of Tajik government officials in District Capital. The Murghab Pashtuns live on land that prior to the turn of the century belonged to Tajiks and Aimaqs. While the Pashtuns have been entrenched for over a century, there is a latent fear (however unrealistic) that Tajik authorities will reclaim the Murghab river valley. This perception is aided by the disproportionate influence Tajik officials have in the Badghis government and the Tajik militias that operate along the Tajik/Pashtun fault line that runs through Muqur and Qadis districts south of Murghab. The Tajiks’ integration into the Communist Party during the Soviet occupation further alienated the Tajik elites from the Pashtun population and stories of Tajik atrocities prior to and after the fall of the Taliban in 2001 (although somewhat apocryphal) still carry special resonance among the population. In this light any action taken by the provincial government, which is dominated by Tajiks, will be viewed not along governance lines, but rather along ethnic schisms. Therefore, special care must be given to obtaining Pashtun buy-in in any effort launched by the provincial government. Government actions must be perceived to be done *with* the population and not *to* the population.

(U) The population of Murghab is war-weary. After decades of ethnic & ideological attacks and reprisals, Murghabis are significantly weary of conflict. District leadership stated popular support for Coalition Forces is eroded by shows of force such as helicopter flights in the valley, searches, and raids by patrols. The result of this war-weariness is that rather than asserting any form of self-determination, the local population tends to side with whomever they perceive to be the strongest in their particular village. Those in Taliban controlled areas tend to support the Taliban and those in Coalition controlled areas tend to support the coalition/Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA). However, this support is moderated by a healthy skepticism and latent distrust. For example, the population of Ludina, a village which is under Coalition Forces control, is reportedly pro-GIROA, however upon questioning by the Human Terrain Team, they expressed significant apprehension of both GIROA and the Taliban. This suggests that in order to achieve a lasting stability in Murghab Valley, a tipping point will need to be reached where the majority of the population believes that Coalition Forces will sustainably wrest the upper hand from the Taliban.

(U) The population does not understand the aspirations of Coalition Forces. There is confusion among the population as to the goals of Coalition Forces. It is unclear to many locals what Coalition Forces hope to accomplish and how their lives will improve as a result. As a result, few associate kinetic activities with an increase in security. The population is acutely aware of innocent civilian deaths but is hesitant to attribute the blame to either Coalition Forces or the TB. Many in the district describe both ISAF and GIROA as “the government.” Given the population’s inherent distrust of the government, Coalition Forces will continue to be viewed in a negative light, complicating its efforts to win over the population.

(U) Separating the insurgent from the population in Murghab is a fallacy. The insurgency in the Murghab Valley is drawn from the local population. It consists of local Pashtuns who engage in violence primarily to secure economic interests. None of the current members of the Taliban were active in the movement prior to 2001 and there is only a modicum of ideological motivation. Murghabi insurgents employ (tactics, techniques and procedures) TTPs that differ significantly from TB in the rest of the country, despite prodding from Taliban Senior Leadership to engage in more traditional operations. The population views the Taliban as “their crazy uncle—you don’t always agree with him, but at the end of the day he is family.” The fact that the Taliban in Murghab is financially vice ideologically motivated suggests that they can be co-opted, especially if their economic interests can be legitimized or supplanted with licit trade options.

(U) Local government will be hard-pressed to keep up with any significant clear/hold operations. The district government of Bala Murghab is struggling to govern the 20km diameter security bubble effectively. From a security standpoint, the ANSF will struggle to hold secure ground as ISAF forces continue to spread their presence up and down the Murghab Valley. From a governance standpoint, decision-making, lack of local capacity and a reliance on less-than-responsive provincial government in Qala-e Now result in significant impairment in the provision of basic services.

(U) The strategic importance of Murghab District is based on its trade route. Anti-Coalition forces in Murghab are fighting to maintain their hegemony over the flow of trade (primarily opium-based) through the Murghab valley. Similarly, the value of Murghab to the Coalition relies on completing the Ring Road (or a suitable bypass) to connect the northern provinces with the south. However, there are currently no plans to improve the RTE 1, which passes through the Murghab Valley. Road-building efforts are currently being concentrated in improving RTE Lithium, which traverses uninhabited land

along the Turkmenistan border. Without improvement on RTE 1, the population of Murghab Valley (~100k pax) will experience little of the benefit of clearing operations, since legal trade through the Murghab Valley will continue to be stymied by the poor condition of the ring road. Until a legitimate trade option through Murghab is established, the local economy will continue to be dominated by the opium trade and hence the Taliban.

(U) There is a threat from increased processing of opium in the Murghab District. Economics may lead to an increase in opium refinement/processing in Badghis province. As Coalition Force anti-drug efforts take hold in the south, the risk premium associated with processing opium in Murghab increases. This may force Kandahar, Helmand, and Farah drug barons to move their processing activities north, where they would face less risk of Coalition Force interference. Such a move would increase the reliance of Murghab District on the drug trade and further entrench Taliban economic interests in the region.

(U) Background & Methodology

(U) This document is a district narrative assessment of MURGHAB DISTRICT, Badghis Province. A team of three analysts from the Stability Operations Information Center and a mentoring US Naval officer from International Security Assistance Forces, Headquarters (HQ, ISAF), spent seven days in April 2010 at Forward Operating Base (FOB) Todd (Bala Murghab) and Badghis Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) (Qala-e Now). The analysts spoke with approximately 30 American, Spanish, and Italian ISAF civilian and military personnel, as well as Afghan serviceman and civil servants. The goal of the paper was to capture “green and white” information (that is, information about the Afghan government and security forces, population) and to compile that “ground truth” information into a holistic narrative of interest to both civilian and military personnel at all echelons, and for the field unit itself. The goal of this document is to disseminate “ground truth” from the lowest to the highest echelons of decision-makers, leveling communication nationally and internationally, and diminishing the flow of redundant and general “Requests for Information” to the operating field units.

(U) Due to the brevity of the visit this document is far from comprehensive. This work is intended as a “living document”, which may be augmented, corrected, and steadily improved over time.

(U) These are some guiding principles for this and future district narrative assessments:

- The assessments shall be released in classified and unclassified versions.
- Sources or source-documents for the information in the reviews shall be cited thoroughly and clearly throughout. Citations shall indicate the date of the information and tell readers as much as possible about where they can find the source documents and additional relevant information.
- The assessments shall be updated and revised periodically with relevant information and analysis.
- The assessments shall be proactively disseminated to the widest audience.
- The assessments shall contain a section called “Key Considerations” up front that provides readers with important, “actionable” analytical insights culled from the overall district assessment.

(U) A final note: The authors firmly believe these district assessments demonstrate the importance of augmenting PRTs and maneuver units with roving or permanently stationed writers and analysts who are tasked with examining each district as a whole. The majority of the information contained in this report could not have been obtained without the authors personally visiting the operating units.

(U) Contrary to common belief, most forward-deployed personnel actually prefer speaking personally with analysts as opposed to receiving formal “Requests for Information” (RFIs). RFIs, which are often redundant, and always tedious, are more time-consuming for PRTs than talking directly to analysts. If the quality and flow of information is to increase sufficiently to support international efforts in Afghanistan, writers and analysts must be stationed at (or frequently travel to) where the information is, including PRTs and units in the districts themselves.

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(U) The authors would like to thank the staff of the Badghis PRT, the ISAF forces aboard FOB TODD, the Afghan personnel serving in the Bala Murghab area, and the staff of Regional Command (West).

(U) For more info or to provide feedback, contact the Stability Operations Information Center:

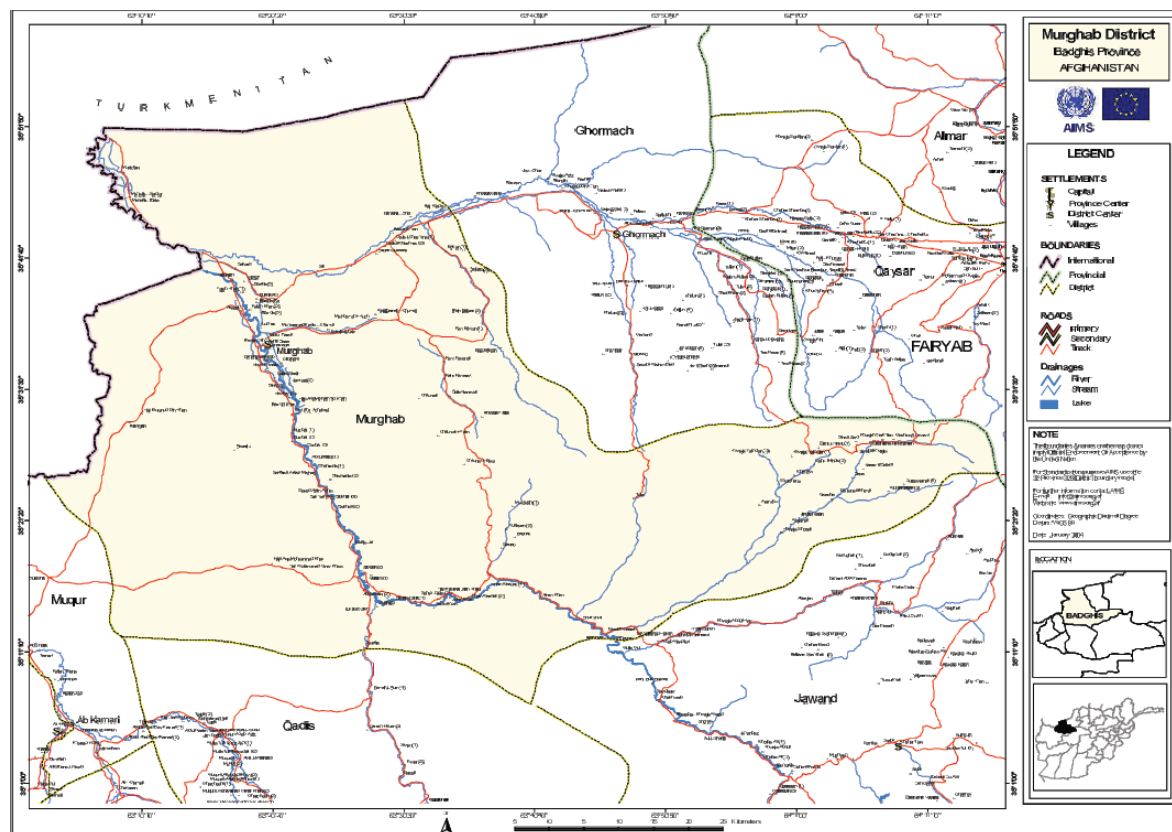
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(U) Geography

(U) Murghab District is situated in the north-central part of Badghis Province in the northwest of Afghanistan. It is bordered by Turkmenistan to the north and is surrounded by Muqur, Qadis, Jawand, Ghormach Districts of Badghis Province, and the Qaysar District of neighboring Faryab Province. The district capital is Bala Murghab.



(U) Demographics

(U) Most of the population in the district lives in the valley of the Murghab River. The district has 133 villages, which cover an area of 4,491 sq km. The estimated population of Murghab District in 2003 was 109,381.¹ The current population of the Murghab River Valley is estimated to be between 100 and 125,000.²

(U) Terrain

¹ (U) Internet, Badghis Province, 20091230, (U) [url: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Badghis_Province] based upon the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR) report.

² (U) Derived from conversation with U.S. Army soldier at FOB Todd, April 2010

(U) The prevailing elevations of mountains over most of the area are 600 to 1,000 meters, rising to 1,500 to 2,000 meters in the south (the Band-i-Turkestan Range). Mountain crests are generally broad, with rounded or flat peaks, and only a few are pointed. Slopes are predominantly moderate to steep (15 to 30°), heavily dissected by creek valleys and ravines. Mountain river valleys are deep, usually with narrow, rock-filled bottoms and steep sides. The valleys of the Murghab River and several of its tributaries have broad, flat bottoms. The terrain is difficult off-road for all types of motorized vehicles.³

(U) Hydrology

(U) The Murghab River is the primary water feature in Murghab District, entering from the east and running northwesterly through the district before entering Turkmenistan. It has a typical width of 50 to 100 meters, and a depth of 1.5 to 2 meters. The channel is very sinuous, dividing into arms and channels separated by alluvial islands. The banks are primarily low and flat with small cliffs (2 to 10 meters). Bottomlands are primarily dry, scrub meadows crisscrossed by networks of irrigation canals and ditches. The remaining rivers are small (under 10 meters wide and under 1 meter deep).⁴

(U) The current of the Murghab River is notoriously strong and has been responsible for many drowning deaths – most notably the deaths of two paratroopers from the 82nd Airborne Division who drowned on 4 November 2009 trying to recover airlifted supplies that accidentally landed in the river. Operation “Hero Recovery” was subsequently launched by Coalition Forces to rescue/recover the soldiers, sparking a four day gun battle with insurgents.⁵

³ (U) DIA, Badghis Province Overview, 20100113

⁴ (U) DIA, Badghis Province Overview, 20100113

⁵ (U) Internet, Coin Common Sense Vol 1, Issue 1, (U) [url: <http://isaf.nato.int/COIN/Feb10.pdf>]



(U) The Murghab River, photographed from the Old Bridge in Bala Murghab

(U) The rivers do not freeze. The highest water levels (1 to 2 meters above low water on these streams, 2 to 4 meters above low water on the Murghab River) occur from March to May. Low water lasts from July to December. During this time rivers silt up and some of the smaller ones, especially in their upper reaches, dry up. The water becomes heavily mineralized in many rivers and brackish in some. From December through February, several brief storm surges occur on the rivers, raising water levels 0.1 to 0.5 meter.⁶

(U) Vegetation

(U) Vegetation is predominantly high steppe in the mountains and semi-desert in the intermountain valleys. Mountainsides are covered with high steppe vegetation, consisting of drought-resistant grasses (needle grass, sheep's fescue, etc.) with occasional shrubs (locoweed, holy clover, etc.), as well as individual small patches of sparse juniper and wild pistachio woodland. Tree heights are 4 to 8 meters. In the southern mountains, there are small pine, spruce, oak, and beech stands at elevations of 1,500 to 2,000 meters. Prevailing tree heights are 10 to 30 meters. Areas covered by rocky placers are completely devoid of vegetation.⁷

(U) In the intermontane valleys, the ground cover is very sparse and consists of clumps of tough drought-resistant grasses, shrubs, and low shrubs (sagebrush, locoweed). The grass turns green from

⁶ (U) DIA, Badghis Province Overview, 20100113

⁷ (U) DIA, Badghis Province Overview, 20100113

March to April; by May it completely dies back, and the terrain takes on a lifeless appearance. Arable lands, concentrated in the major river valleys, are plowed and planted with grains (wheat, corn, barley) and oil crops (sesame). Gardens and vineyards are located near the towns.⁸

(U) Political History of Badghis

(U) The political history of Badghis Province over the past several decades lays the groundwork for much of the current ethnic animosity, particularly the divide between the Tajik-populated capital and southern districts, and the undeveloped and isolated “Pashtun Pocket” of the north. This divide has been shaped by a history of government-mandated ethnic resettlement, selective access to education and power under the Communist government, and by a violent history of ethno-political violence as disparate groups battled back and forth across the province in the 1990s.

(U) The initial divide dates back to the end of the 19th century when King Abdur Rahman resettled Pashtun tribes from the south into scattered pockets across northern Afghanistan to better maintain control of those areas for the Pashtun-based central government. This policy resulted in forced displacement of Turkmen and Uzbek groups living in those areas, limiting the political influence of those groups in the region. The Tajiks and Tajik-assimilated Aimaqs continued to play a role in Badghis governance, particularly the southern areas closer to Persian-dominated Herat.

(U) Under the Communist government in the late 1970s the ethnic divide became even more pronounced when many of the more urban, educated Tajiks sided with the Communists granting them greater access to higher education and government positions. For instance, the Tajik Firozkoyee tribe of Qades District gained a significant advantage during this period, and to this day their political and educational advantage has allowed them to hold more Badghis government positions than any other tribal group. The rural Badghis, particularly Pashtuns, largely detached themselves from the government and education system under Communist rule, and accordingly there are few local Pashtuns with the background to serve in government.⁹

(U) During the Afghan Civil War, following the 1992 collapse of the Soviet-backed government, Badghis fell under the control of Herat warlord Ismail Khan. Khan used Badghis, and particularly Bala Murghab, as a staging ground for feuding with his rival, Uzbek warlord Rashid Dostum. The Pashtun population in the area, not involved with either faction, was disturbed by the ongoing violence causing 60% of the population to flee to Herat, Helmand, and Kandahar.¹⁰ The warring between the factions eventually resolved in favor of Dostum’s Jumbesh-e-Milli party, with the remaining Jamiat supporters withdrawing to strongholds in the south of the province.

(U) In 1996, unable to hold the province, Dostum negotiated with the Pashtuns of Bala Murghab and Muqur to turn Badghis over to the Taliban government. During this period, Taliban leaders were brought in to govern from outside the province, and the Tajiks withdrew almost entirely from governance. Jamiat holdouts, with Herati support, continued to fight the Taliban in the Tajik areas of southern Badghis, while in the north remnants of Jamiat and Jumbush set aside their differences to

⁸ (U) DIA, Badghis Province Overview, 20100113

⁹ (U) Department of State draft of Badghis History

¹⁰ (U) Department of State draft of Badghis History

jointly fight the Taliban government. This period was marked by ever-changing alliances, bloody betrayals, and ongoing ethno-political violence. The wounds of these conflicts last to the present day, particularly as many of the figures involved in factional violence continue to hold government positions in the region despite their checkered pasts.

(U) Following the entry of the Coalition in 2001, Badghis was restored to Jamiat control with little bloodshed. The Taliban were rapidly pushed out of the south, finding sanctuary mainly in the Bala Murghab area. The US Department of State assesses that few of the current “Taliban” insurgents in Badghis were actively part of the original pre-2002 Taliban movement.¹¹

(U) The period following the fall of the Taliban was, like the chaotic period following the fall of the Communists, marked by vicious factional infighting and personal betrayals. A US Department of State officer attempts to summarize this extremely complex, and often very personal, struggle:

From 2002 to 2005, Jamiat again dominated the political scene. Mohammad Arifi became the Provincial Governor, serving until 2004. The brother of Mohammad Zahir Naibzada, Amir Shah Naibzada, became the police chief and Dost Mohammad returned to his former post as (National Directorate of Security) NDS Chief. However, there was an important change in the political landscape due to the falling out between Mohammad Zahir and Ismail Khan. In 2004, Ismail Khan's son was killed by Zahir Naibzada's forces. As a result, Ismail Khan became a deadly enemy of the Naibzada clan and, by extension of Badghis Province. Using his position of Minister of Energy and Water, he has successfully blocked any significant development projects in the province, vowing to “keep Badghis in the stone-age.”¹²

(U) These ongoing factional and ethnic struggles have shaped the political history of Badghis since the 1980s, and with surprisingly little change in the cast of characters, with the sons and protégés of earlier powerbrokers stepping in to take their place over time. The overall dynamic has changed little in recent years, with the most notable exception being the GIRoA appointment of governors, which has resulted in several Pashtun governors of Badghis, giving at least some counterbalance in the largely Tajik-dominated provincial government.

¹¹(U) Department of State draft of Badghis History

¹² (U) Department of State draft of Badghis History

(U) Popular Perceptions and Atmospherics



(U) Landscape of the town of Bala Murghab

(U) The people of Murghab District fall into a wide spectrum, ranging from support to opposition for the Taliban, with the majority (“fence sitters”) falling in the middle. Most of the population in Murghab is indifferent to the Taliban-GIRoA conflict; they are not fond of the government but they do not necessarily agree with Taliban actions. In the end, their lives will not change, because they have not changed thus far. “In some areas of Murghab the people are very receptive, in some places they are frozen through fear.”¹³

(U) The people of Murghab have two primary objections to the Taliban: the constant violence the Taliban perpetuate in the area, and the Taliban’s collection of “taxes”¹⁴ The Taliban’s taxation has historically been onerous, but recent reports indicate that the Taliban in many areas of Murghab have begun to re-label their extortion as a voluntary *zakat* (Islamic charity) payable in crops or money. The Taliban tend to most tax the areas they do not control, as then they are able to blame ISAF for the conditions making taxation necessary. The people know once security is established, legitimate

¹³ (U) Conversation with Department of State representative at the Badghis PRT in Qala-e Now, 17 April 2010

¹⁴ (U) Conversation with Department of State representative at the Badghis PRT in Qala-e Now, 17 April 2010

development will bring an end to the taxes; however the long precedent of instability has left them pessimistic for the future.¹⁵

(U) The Taliban have considerable influence in Murghab because they are largely locals, and an integrated part of society, making it difficult to separate the insurgent from the population. The ideology of the Taliban is not foreign to the population, whether they consent with it or not. Even among those who dislike the Taliban ideology, due to personal loyalty they may be reluctant to actually oppose them: "it's like your crazy uncle...sometimes things he says don't make sense, but he's family."¹⁶ The majority-Pashtun population in the Murghab valley will ultimately feel more comfortable with their own relatives than the coalition forces or members of the provincial government, who are Tajiks.

(U) The population in Murghab will never hesitate to turn down handouts such as money and development, but they ultimately want to take care of themselves. Since the people are mostly pragmatic, they will openly support whoever benefits them most, whether it is the Taliban or the coalition forces. It is a cultural norm for people to think of themselves as members of a tribe or village rather than "Afghans," making the connections between them and the government even more tenuous. This also makes it more difficult for coalition forces to connect with the population at a personal level. "We're not going to get these people to love America. We're just a source of money." The elders are the principal means for associating with the population, because the obedience and respect is built into the Afghan culture. The population is reluctant to give straight answers because they truly fear the Taliban, and they understand Coalition Forces will not be in Afghanistan forever.¹⁷

(U) In Qip-Chaq Village, an area "saturated" with Taliban, the population is very receptive and the elders have been asking coalition forces to clear out the insurgents. Coalition Forces currently control Ludina Village but the population there is tired of the fighting and still very afraid of the Taliban. Joy Khoga is an area where mostly Taliban reside, keeping coalition forces from knowing what is going on there, and the few non-Taliban are too intimidated to provide information. In the Taliban "saturated" areas where ISAF and GIRoA have never been before, such as Qip-Chaq and Joy Khoga, they have a chance to get it right the first time around.¹⁸

(U) While the population never turns down free handouts, few people do not like humanitarian assistance (HA), including the farmers. HA decreases the capabilities of the local natural economy. For example, when foodstuffs are handed out, the people will not buy these foods from the farmers that grow it or the Afghans that sell it in the bazaar.¹⁹ At the district center in Bala Murghab, locals bring up the issue of destroyed property, bringing in filled-out petitions to receive money or repairs for the damages. ISAF finds it necessary to carefully verify each claim, as the locals may exaggerate the claims. When coalition forces first arrived at Bala Murghab, the locals would only speak with ISAF about their problems, but now they are beginning to go to their local government.²⁰

(U) Land-use agreements are another issue the population frequently raised. Land-use agreements are normally negotiated when Coalition Forces are occupying local property. When Coalition Forces occupied Objective Corvette, a combat outpost (COP) in the Taliban "saturated" Joy Khoga area, the

¹⁵ (U) Conversation with Task Force Professional U.S. Army Soldier, 19 April 2010

¹⁶ (U) Conversation with Department of State representative at the Badghis PRT in Qala-e Now, 17 April 2010

¹⁷ (U) Conversation with Marines Special Operations Forces (MARSOFF) in Murghab District, 20 April 2010

¹⁸ (U) Conversation with Task Force Professional U.S. Army Soldier, 19 April 2010

¹⁹ (U) Conversation with Task Force Professional U.S. Army Soldier, 19 April 2010

²⁰ (U) Conversation with a soldier in Task Force Professional, 20 April 2010

owner of the property would not sign off on the land-use agreement because of Taliban intimidation. A contract, including a time frame and cost for occupying the property, will be signed by ISAF and the property owner, and then the owner gets paid for that said amount of time. This land-use agreement then goes to Herat for approval and record keeping. This also causes problems when disputing land-use agreements because they are stored in Herat where the official documentation is unobtainable for use in civil cases.²¹

(U) The locals will usually only report problems from areas under Coalition Forces control. In villages where there are a lot of Taliban, an elder or village representative will “relay” the messages.²²

(U) Badghis’ Tajik-Pashtun Divide

(U) At an April 2010 shura between Murghab District ministers and SOIC staff, the fundamental lack of support from Qala-e Now was demonstrated in a surprisingly simple way. The popular complaint addressed was initially confused by use of an unfamiliar Pashtun term, but a minister retrieved a Spanish AECID poster illustrating a local agricultural problem, which turned out to be “locusts.” The Badghis area is inclined to locust infestations which destroy crops. This is an issue of extreme local discontent as the pump-sprayed insecticides once used to control the locusts are available in Qala-e Now, but not disseminated up to Murghab. “We used to use the pump spray to kill the locusts while they were still gathered in one place, knock them all out at once, but Qala-e Now won’t send us our due pesticides.” When asked about the motive for this lack of support, the word *nazhodparasti* (“racism”) set off a flurry of response, with the ministers indicating that Tajik-dominated Qala-e Now is simply unwilling to support the Pashtun-populated Murghab District with its fair share of resources.²³

(U) Relationship with ISAF

(U) The locals’ relationship with ISAF, initially a relatively small aspect of their lives, has increased dramatically in the last six months due to increased ISAF presence in the area, beginning with the November 2009 “DUSTWUN” (Duty Status Whereabouts Unknown), or “Operation Hero Recovery,” when two paratroopers of the 82nd Airborne were swept away into the Murghab River while attempting to recover airdropped supplies which had landed in the water. A massive ISAF force turned out to recover the two soldiers, and the ensuing activity provoked a violent reaction from many anti-Coalition Murghabis who, prior to that point, had little motivation or opportunity to pick fights with ISAF. Opinions on the fallout of the DUSTWUN vary, with some ISAF considering it a regrettable unintended provocation of xenophobic and isolated Pashtun locals, and others considering it a catalyst which revealed the great need for increased ISAF presence in a previously ignored area, and “forced the hand” of many locals, both pro and anti ISAF.²⁴

²¹ (U) Conversation with a soldier in Task Force Professional, 20 April 2010

²² (U) Conversation with Task Force Professional U.S. Army Soldier, 19 April 2010

²³ (U) Derived from a meeting with Murghab District line ministers (held in Dari, paraphrased here), 21 April 2010

²⁴ (U) Conversation with personnel aboard FOB TODD, mid April 2010

(U//FOUO) ISAF's presence in the Murghab River valley is largely limited to the "security bubble" it has established around the village of Bala Murghab. The bubble has expanded over the last few months, often in bloody block-by-block fighting, but is still extremely limited.²⁵

(U//FOUO) The population of the bubble is generally appreciative of increased security, particularly when, in the case of ANSF, it has an "Afghan face." However, the public is war-weary and resentful of the disturbance to their lives caused by military operations. As they attempt to go about their farming and shopkeeping, the helicopters and jets overhead and armored vehicles barreling down their roads are a continual reminder of the occupation.²⁶

(U) Conversations with Bala Murghab line ministers

(U) On 21 April 2010, SOIC staff met with a variety of line ministers at the Murghab District Center, to discuss the SOIC mission. Offices represented included Education, Hajj and Endowments, Prosecutor's Office, Justice, and Agriculture. The SOIC team asked what problems persisted in Murghab due to a lack of ISAF understanding of the political, cultural, and economic situation in the area²⁷

(U) The first issue raised, surprisingly, was "being splashed with mud." The ministers explained that ISAF "tanks" (a term used to describe any tactical vehicle) tended to drive through the main part of town (RTE 1) and inadvertently splash the locals with mud from puddles in the road, as well as causing some damage, through impact or just through vibration, to the goods set up near the roadside by the bazaaris. "We don't even understand why you're driving around so much anyway, it's pretty safe here. Why don't you just go and walk around the town, go down to the bazaar and talk to people?"²⁸

(U) Building on that point, the ministers noted that, though searches are understandable given the security situation, the *manner* in which searches are conducted is upsetting. They described how ISAF tends to search roughly, demonstrating as they spoke by unwrapping their turbans and shaking them; they indicated that searches by ANSF are far less objectionable. They further noted that many checkpoints are redundant: "if I just passed through a checkpoint, why do I have to go through another one? Just set up some perimeter of checkpoints, and once you're in, you're good." The ministers, speaking for themselves, also objected to the searches at the District Center being conducted "out in front of the gate, where every passer-by and shopkeeper sees us being searched." They requested that those personnel who regularly work at the District Center and are recognized by the staff be searched more discretely inside the perimeter, respecting their societal position. Though the ministers understood ISAF's insistence on searches, they still find the overall security posture excessive. The minister of education quipped, drawing uproarious laughter from his peers: "Look, in Africa and Europe and wherever else, you've got people with bombs. You aren't searching them, but you have to come *here* and search everybody?"²⁹

²⁵ (U) Conversation with a soldier in Task Force Professional, 20 April 2010

²⁶ (U) Conversation with a soldier in Task Force Professional, 20 April 2010

²⁷ (U) Derived from a meeting with Murghab District line ministers (held in Dari, paraphrased here), 21 April 2010

²⁸ (U) Derived from a meeting with Murghab District line ministers (held in Dari, paraphrased here), 21 April 2010

²⁹ (U) Derived from a meeting with Murghab District line ministers (held in Dari, paraphrased here), 21 April 2010

(U) Tribal Dynamics

(U) Murghab District is composed primarily of Pashtuns, who were relocated from southern Afghanistan at the end of the 19th century by King Abdur Rahman, in a resettlement program intended to increase the Pashtun government's control over non-Pashtun areas. Today, the Durrani and Ghilzai are the most populous Pashtun tribes in the Murghab Valley with the majority being Durrani. Many of the tribes and tribal elders surrounding Bala Murghab have little cohesion with the Taliban or GIRoA, and the villagers and tribal elders are often torn between family members in the Taliban and supporting GIRoA. Each villager has a different opinion depending on which tribe they are from. There is a government in Murghab but tribe and village always come first.

(U) An example of how elders take advantage of their power over the villagers was shown through a recent medical civil affairs program (MEDCAP) hosted at FOB Todd. The field surgical team at FOB Todd attempted to provide free health care to the population but the event "turned into a disaster." The villagers ended up sitting outside the FOB for hours while the rich relatives of village elders received medical treatment. When the people from outside tried to enter the FOB they were beaten by the ANP guards. Debacles like this MEDCAP give reason for the locals to say, "you can't give anything to the elders because they'll sell it for their own good, or they'll sell it to the Taliban."³⁰

(U) Empowering the tribes in Murghab makes the elders more powerful, which can be counter-productive because most elders are involved with the Taliban. "The tribes aren't unimportant, but it's not the whole story. People think of tribes as units up here but in reality it is a whole lot messier."³¹

(U) In the Pashtun communities, there are fifteen key tribes in Murghab District, with five main tribes having strong influence. The Sini tribe is the largest (~5,000 families) scattered throughout the district but located primarily along the northeast border. There are 12 Sini sub-tribes: Larzai, Khoyzai, Norzai, Bandinzai, Barinzai, Biyanzai, Oryanzai, Kianzai, Dorzai, Saliman khel, Dawlatzai, and the Mizai.³²

(U) The Noorzai tribe (~2,000 families) is located in the central area of Murghab District, east of the district center, around the communities of Panerak and Ab-e-Torche. The Miranzai tribe (~1,500 families) is located north of the district center. The Achakzai and Barakzai tribes (both ~1,000 families) are located in the district center and southwards along the Murghab River Valley. The Barakzai and Miranzai tribes have strong links to the Taliban. Two Turkmen communities are also in Murghab, and although the Murichaq community is quite large, Turkmen are not influential in Murghab.³³

(U) There are many internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Murghab due to the heavy kinetic activity in the district, causing villagers to move frequently. Qip-Chaq village's population dynamic differs from other villages: while it is a Taliban "saturated" area, the inhabitants are mostly Aimaq and Tajik, creating tension between the village and most other villages. "That would be a prime area for the Village Stability Program."^{34,35}

³⁰ (U) Conversation with Marines Special Operations Forces (MARSOB) in Murghab District, 20 April 2010

³¹ (U) Conversation with Department of State representative at the Badghis PRT in Qala-e Now, 17 April 2010

³² (U) Conversation with Task Force Professional U.S. Army Soldier, 19 April 2010

³³ (U) Department of State draft of Badghis History

³⁴ (U) Conversation with Task Force Professional U.S. Army Soldier, 19 April 2010

³⁵ (U) Conversation with Task Force Professional U.S. Army Soldier, 19 April 2010

(U) Elders' Role

(U//FOUO) In Afghan tribal society, the elders play a fundamental role. A living repository of traditions and heritage, the elders have the influence necessary to solve conflicts inside the community but also to run the “foreign policy” for their village. The elders’ have authority and respect amongst the members of the community. However, their traditional power has been eroded by criminal organizations and insurgents who control the territory through violence and terror.³⁶

(U) Security and Insurgency

*Look, everybody knows who is Taliban and who is not. The problem is, we people in the village can't tell ISAF who is who, because it's too risky for us; there's just not any security. But these ANSF, these [Afghan] police and soldiers, they know who is who just as well as we villagers. Why aren't they going to ISAF and saying "it's this guy and that guy?" The ANSF have security, they have guns and fortified positions, why aren't they coming forward?*³⁷

(U) Murghab is the Taliban's hub for Badghis and possibly western Afghanistan. Reporting from Pakistan indicates that the Taliban are told to come to Murghab to fight. Murghab is a prime area for smuggling and for money because the Taliban have a history in Murghab. The Taliban are connected with the rest of the Pashtuns in the district. Many wounded fighters from Marjah (Helmand Province) come to recuperate in Dara-ye Bum, which is the logistics and travel hub for the Taliban in the area.³⁸

(U) Estimates of insurgents currently active in Badghis province range from 1000-2000; however, it is estimated that only a very small percentage are ideologically driven. The vast majority, are opportunists or involved in crime and drug smuggling. It appears that some insurgents may have been recruited while working in Helmand harvesting poppy.³⁹

(U) Hostile Forces in the Murghab Valley

(U//FOUO) “Taliban” is the standard definition for armed units that have engaged ISAF forces in the Murghab Valley. This definition is commonly used both by the ANSF and the local population but it is probably necessary to be more specific. Only a minority of fighters in the Murghab Valley can be considered full supporters of the Taliban ideological movement.

(U//FOUO) Using the word “Taliban” to describe these groups of power could be considered a legitimate attempt for local communities, and even ISAF forces, in order to give a political characteristic to actions directed basically to obtain criminal goals. Even the use of the title “Mullah” employed by many criminal leaders seems to reflect the need to find political legitimacy than a real agreement to the actual Taliban ideology.

³⁶ (U//FOUO) “The Murghab Valley – Area Assessment,” Afghanistan Fall 2009.

³⁷ (U) Derived from a meeting with Murghab District line ministers (held in Dari, paraphrased here), 21 April 2010

³⁸ (U) Conversation with Marines Special Operations Forces (MARSOFF) in Murghab District, 20 April 2010

³⁹ (SBU) Department of State draft of Badghis History

(U) Taliban Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures (TTPs) in Murghab

(U) The Taliban have unorthodox tactics in Murghab. The Taliban give themselves more legitimacy than the government there. They instill fear into the population, such as having videos of them caning people who worked on the base floating around the bazaar. They still have checkpoints where they stop and tax Afghans. They seem to have gotten more sympathetic towards the population. For instance, before the Taliban fight, they will warn the population from the area about the upcoming violence.⁴⁰ "This is not the typical Taliban, I've never seen this in Afghanistan, in Ghazni, or in Wardak. After the fighting in Don-e Pasab, the population simply moved right back into the village." This is different than the Taliban's typical practice of melting back into the population during fighting.⁴¹

(U) "The Taliban's TTP's out here are better than the typical drills to the kneecaps. Pakistan recognizes these changes and leadership is telling the Taliban out here that they need to resort to the usual guerilla tactics instead of what they're currently applying. However, the Taliban have owned this valley for so long, they really know the area."⁴²

(U) Ratlines, Bunkers, and TTP's against the population

(U) The Taliban use ratlines throughout the Murghab valley area, in some places running along eight feet deep trenches along the river, especially in the Qip-Choq and Joy Koja areas.⁴³ "What they have done to the structures here is interesting. They have bonafide bunkers. When you get inside the bunker and stand up the gun ports are at eye level. They have multiple target systems, concertina-wired defense systems, and significant survivable positions. Every house in Taliban controlled areas has gun ports. They'll shoot from a window, and then go beneath it to the gun-hole ports and fire from there."⁴⁴

(U) The Taliban are also known to cut off the water forcing the population to walk four hours to get water. Then, after ISAF kicked out the Taliban in these areas, the irrigation channels opened, and it ended up flooding the fields.⁴⁵ The Taliban often flood the canals, because they place IEDs along the river.⁴⁶

(U) Taliban Motivations

(U) The Taliban's motivation in Murghab is money. About 80% of their money comes from narcotics, the rest is from zakat (charity). Coalition Forces have not seen open fields of poppy, but they are still scratching the surface of the valley. The Taliban utilize this area mostly for transportation, and the key terrain access to Turkmenistan. They gather a lot of the opium, goes down south for processing, and then it gets smuggled back up and out of the Murghab Valley. "The Taliban here is more like a mafia, you have no option but to side with them in some cases. It's the mob here, we need the FBI to take care of this place."⁴⁷

⁴⁰ (U) Conversation with Marines Special Operations Forces (MARSOFF) in Murghab District, 20 April 2010

⁴¹ (U) Conversation with Task Force Professional U.S. Army Soldier, 19 April 2010

⁴² (U) Conversation with Marines Special Operations Forces (MARSOFF) in Murghab District, 20 April 2010

⁴³ (U) Conversation with Marines Special Operations Forces (MARSOFF) in Murghab District, 20 April 2010

⁴⁴ (U) Conversation with Task Force Professional U.S. Army Soldier, 19 April 2010

⁴⁵ (U) Conversation with Marines Special Operations Forces (MARSOFF) in Murghab District, 20 April 2010

⁴⁶ (U) Conversation with Marines Special Operations Forces (MARSOFF) in Murghab District, 20 April 2010

⁴⁷ (U) Conversation with Task Force Professional U.S. Army Soldier, 19 April 2010

(U) Areas of Taliban Control

(U) Recently, with 40 Americans and 100 commandos, ISAF cleared Joy Khoga. "Once the Taliban saw all of us leave, they started harassing fire the checkpoints we set up there. There's an easy 110 (Taliban) fighting just in Qip-Chaq and Joy Khoga areas. ISAF has not been too far north of the FOB. There may be 400-500 Taliban personnel up there, not counting their leadership. There is no body living in these areas. The Sini took the most amount of damage in the recent fighting in Joy Khoga."⁴⁸

(U) Taliban shortfalls

(U) The Taliban are currently experiencing logistical shortfalls. They are limited on funds and personnel, many are getting killed. They have the same logistical constraints that ISAF does in Murghab. Mullah Ismail's followers attempt to recruit 10 people from each village.⁴⁹ "The lack of ammo is a huge shortfall for the Taliban up here. Ammo comes from the ANP, ABP, and the ANA. The Taliban will set up mock ambushes at checkpoints on Route Lithium. They'll 'attack' the checkpoint, and the ANP there will exchange ammo for money. The ANP are able to write it off as an ambush."⁵⁰

(U//FOUO) ISAF recently killed the primary IED maker in Joy-Gange. Consequently, even the Taliban are unaware of current IED emplacements. ISAF was able to recover five IEDs in a 200 meter area.⁵¹

(U) Weapons

(U//FOUO) Taliban armaments include the AK-47, PKM medium machine-gun, RPK light machine-gun, 82mm recoilless rifles, 120mm rockets. The Bala Murghab insurgents also favor the 107mm rocket, and fired two-rocket salvos daily at FOB Todd over the three days the SOIC team was conducting research there.

(U) Official Governance

(U) Former District Governor Mohammad Amin (recently fired)

(U//FOUO) A member of the supportive Sini tribe, Mohammad Amin was appointed by Provincial Governor Delbar Jan Arman.

(U) He is accused of charging people for signing government documents, stealing from the humanitarian assistance warehouse to pay off his debts, and stealing gravel from public land and selling it to the Badghis PRT. Mohammad Amin was also second-in-command of the infamous Bala Murghab "mafia," under powerbroker Amir Shah.⁵²

⁴⁸ (U) Conversation with Marines Special Operations Forces (MARSOFF) in Murghab District, 20 April 2010

⁴⁹ (U) Conversation with Task Force Professional U.S. Army Soldier, 19 April 2010

⁵⁰ (U) Conversation with Marines Special Operations Forces (MARSOFF) in Murghab District, 20 April 2010

⁵¹ (U) Conversation with Task Force Professional U.S. Army Soldier, 19 April 2010

⁵² (U) Conversation with Department of State representative at the Badghis PRT in Qala-e Now, 17 April 2010

(U) Deputy Chief of Police Sultan Mohammad Lewall (Acting District Governor, Acting Chief of Police)

(U//FOUO) A Sini, Chief Lewall works with ISAF at the Murghab District Center on a day-to-day basis, and is known to have a strong working relationship with ISAF and ANA commander Ali. He commands a limited number of ANP over a large area. Lewall has wide influence throughout Bala Murghab and is well-known, especially among the Sinis, whom he treats favorably.

(U) Currently, Lewall is the acting district governor. The Taliban recently “exiled” Lewall from Sini Village because of his relationship with ISAF, now forcing him to reside outside the bazaar. “One good way to describe him is that he’s good [at] working against the Taliban, but against local criminals he’s not that good.”⁵³

(U) NDS Chief in Bala Murghab: COL Nurudin

(U//FOUO) Nurudin is from Kabul, and is of high stature amongst the central and provincial governments, the powerbrokers, and ISAF.

(U) Prosecutor: Abdul Qadier

(U//FOUO) Abdul Qadier was an LTC in the ANA, and has the most power in the District Center to compile evidence, imprison people and influence legal proceedings. Qadier is seen as a possible replacement for any corrupt district official removed from office, due to his knowledge of the local population, and his intellect.

(U) Prosecutor Qadier is pro-government and active in the district government. He is the key reason for charges brought up against former governor Mohammad Amin. Qadier was technically fired because of his past military service in the ANA during the Soviet invasion; it is also rumored that he was fired because he is “too good and not corrupt.”⁵⁴

(U) When a villager or elder is thought to be lying to Coalition Forces, the prosecutor is brought in to ensure the Afghan tells the truth. He also initiates cases by having locals fill out petitions and sending them to the chief prosecutor of Badghis in Qala-e Now. He is currently attempting to bring up a case against Mullah Ramazan (NFI).⁵⁵

(U) Education Minister: Gul Agha

(U//FOUO) A Pashtun teacher since before the Soviet invasion, Gul Agha is honest and avoids corruption. He works very hard toward improving the education system in Bala Murghab but has very limited support and supplies from the provincial education system.

⁵³ (U) Conversation with a soldier in Task Force Professional, 20 April 2010

⁵⁴ (U) Conversation with a soldier in Task Force Professional, 20 April 2010

⁵⁵ (U) Conversation with a soldier in Task Force Professional, 20 April 2010

(U) The Education Minister is the second strongest administrator behind the prosecutor. The department of education is one of the most important in the district. There are many schools in Murghab, ISAF only pays close attention to the schools inside the security bubble.⁵⁶

(U) Director of Agriculture (and Director of Records): Akdar Pamad

(U//FOUO) The simultaneous Director of Agriculture and Head of the Department of Records in Murghab, Akdar Pamad, is very familiar with Bala Murghab. Unfortunately, he has been known to forge signatures for land deeds, as long as there is a price in it for him, which is an outstanding issue. As someone familiar with the area stated, "The problem with the land around here is it has been owned for years and years, so there really aren't deeds for all of it."

(U) Bala Murghab City Mayor: Abdul Shakir

(U) A Durrani Ahmadzai Pashtun, Mayor Abdul Shakir is a complicated figure of Murghab District politics. While some suggest he is an honest politician others will say he is corrupt and ineffective. During former governor Amir's tenure, Mayor Shakir collected taxes from the people (in an official capacity) and handed them to Amir, who would take some for himself. Shakir is currently being considered as a replacement for the district governorship because of his qualifications as a mayor and understanding of Bala Murghab.⁵⁷

(U) When Governor Amin was fired, Shakir confirmed the allegations against him and signed official government documents on the matter. However, Coalition Forces recognized he is corrupt and has ties to Taliban through his son, Hayatullah. Due to this, Coalition Forces prefer to deal with acting District Governor Lewall. The prosecutor is attempting to build a case against Shakir for stealing and selling furniture intended for the district center.⁵⁸

(U) Current Political Scene in Badghis

(U) Almost all of the political figures who played a prominent role in the civil war of the 1990's are active today in the provincial political life. Mohammad Arifi, the former provincial governor, was the Director of the Line Ministry of Agriculture from 2008 to February 2010 and continues to control militia forces in Ab Kamari District. Dost Mohammad, the former NDS director in the mujahideen and post-Taliban eras, opposed the Karzai government for a time, but returned his support in 2009 after one of his sons, an Afghan Army officer, was killed in an IED attack. Although he is not in the government, he is an influential figure in the province who controls a militia south of Qala-e Now on the strategically important route to Herat. Abdul Ghani Saberi, released from the Taliban prison in 2001, was appointed Deputy Governor in 2007. He also controls militia forces in Qades District. Mohammad Rangin Moshkwani, who served as deputy chief of police in the mujahideen era, was a senator until 2010. Members of his "clan" are the only two Pashtun heads of line ministries in the provincial government.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ (U) Conversation with a soldier in Task Force Professional, 20 April 2010

⁵⁷ (U) Conversation with a soldier in Task Force Professional, 20 April 2010

⁵⁸ (U) Conversation with a soldier in Task Force Professional, 20 April 2010

⁵⁹ (SBU) Department of State draft of Badghis History

(U) Communists (or ex-Communists) remain a significant force in the provincial government. Often, they are the best-trained and best-qualified bureaucrats, as they had access to higher education during the 1980's and often studied abroad in the Soviet Union or Eastern Europe.⁶⁰

(U) One of the most controversial political figures in the province, Amir Shah Naibzada, is the commander of the Afghan Border Police kandak responsible for northern Herat and Badghis. He is rumored to be involved in narcotics trafficking; Amir Shah controls Tajik militias in Qades and has close relatives spread across the provincial government, particularly the security forces. His brother is the police chief of Moqur district, another brother, Wali Shah Naibzada is a senator, an uncle is the chief of the CID police unit, and another uncle heads the Ministry of Finance.⁶¹

(U) Badghis Provincial Government

(U) Extending the reach of the provincial government and strengthening district administrations are critical strategic priorities for governance in Badghis. Consistently engaging community leaders, religious leaders, and tribal elders in increasingly insecure districts such as Bala Murghab, Jawand, and Moqur is a major priority for the provincial government, and requires increased security support from ANSF and ISAF forces. The province faces overall shortages in qualified staff due to poor pay, unsafe working conditions, and lack of suitable facilities throughout the province. In addition to the significant need for ethics training and capacity building of government personnel, the province requires new facilities and office equipment to improve the provision of services to the people of Badghis.⁶²

(U) Provincial Governor Delbar Jan Arman was re-assigned to Badghis as Governor in March 2009 following four years as the Governor of Zabul Province. Arman is generally respected by the population for his strong stance regarding security and his efforts to improve efficiency within the provincial government office and Provincial Development Council (PDC). Arman has demonstrated a strong interest in traveling to the districts, and plans to make this a major aspect of his work in the coming months.⁶³

(U) The presidential and provincial council elections, held in August 2009, produced a significant change in the political landscape. Only three of the six council members running for re-election retained their seats. Of the nine council members, four are from Jawand. The President and Vice-President of the Council are both supporters of Dostum's Jumbesh party.⁶⁴

(U) The Provincial Development Council (PDC) has improved greatly over the past 12 months due to training efforts by the original Local Governance and Community Development program and the Capacity Development Programs of USAID. The 2009 Provincial Development Plan (PDP) was noted as one of the strongest ever in the western region by UNAMA. The PDC has also worked very hard to prepare a Badghis Development Forum (BDF) to attract GIRoA and donor representatives from Kabul and discuss development priorities for the coming year.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ (SBU) Department of State draft of Badghis History

⁶¹ (SBU) Department of State draft of Badghis History

⁶² (SBU) Department of State draft of Badghis History

⁶³ (SBU) Department of State draft of Badghis History

⁶⁴ (SBU) Department of State draft of Badghis History

⁶⁵ (SBU) Department of State draft of Badghis History

(U) Capacity building and infrastructure development in the area of rule of law go hand-in-hand with strengthening local governance. Extending training opportunities for local district and provincial officials working in the judicial sector would also improve the province's ability to implement the rule of law in outlying districts in a manner consistent with the principles of transparency and fairness.⁶⁶

(U) Governance in Murghab District

(U) Political life in Murghab is comprised of ethnic, tribal, and criminal elements.⁶⁷ Corruption in Murghab, is not so severe as to categorize district government officials "malign actors." As stated by someone familiar with Afghan governance, "governance here is better than I have seen it anywhere else."

(U) Presidential Elections Fiasco in 2009

(U) Prior to the presidential and provincial council election last year, the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG) sent a delegation to Badghis to "promote" the elections process. This delegation met with local leaders in Badghis to ensure the population was able to properly vote on election day. In doing this, they cut a deal with the local leaders who would have the insurgents in Badghis "allow" voting to proceed, as long as all the ANSF pulled back their checkpoints.

(U) A majority of polling centers remained closed in spite of the agreement between the IDLG and the elders who guaranteed free access to all the electoral sites. Only four voting stations in Bala Murghab were opened and none were subject to observation. Not only did this marginalize the "legitimate" provincial and district governments, but it also had the effect of shrinking the government-controlled areas, and there is also no representation of Pashtuns from Murghab in the provincial government.⁶⁸

(U) Because of the heavy influence of Tajiks in the provincial government, the Pashtuns are disenfranchised and receive little attention from Qala-e Now. Unless Pashtuns are included in the provincial government system, the provincial and district government will be unable to control Murghab. The current political leaders in Badghis are Tajik mujahideen who use militias to control areas of the district. "That's what they were doing in the 90's. It didn't work then and it won't work now."⁶⁹

(U) The real problem is there are not many qualified Pashtuns to take office. "The Governor of Badghis is considering hiring Pashtuns as short-term advisors, but the problem is if Pashtuns are included in the government, a better qualified Tajik will be pushed out."⁷⁰

(U) The line directors

(U) There are several line ministries in Bala Murghab, but ISAF only recognizes a handful because most are absent and ineffective. The effective line directors live close to the district center, such as the

⁶⁶ (SBU) Department of State draft of Badghis History

⁶⁷ (U//FOUO) "The Murghab Valley – Area Assessment," Afghanistan Fall 2009.

⁶⁸ (U) Conversation with Department of State representative at the Badghis PRT in Qala-e Now, 17 April 2010

⁶⁹ (U) Conversation with Department of State representative at the Badghis PRT in Qala-e Now, 17 April 2010

⁷⁰ (U) Conversation with Department of State representative at the Badghis PRT in Qala-e Now, 17 April 2010

prosecutor and the education minister. Meetings are scheduled with the ministers every day to discuss development projects and issues regarding the population, yet most of the ministers do not show up.⁷¹

(U) Information stove-piping between the district ministers and their superiors in Qala-e Now is problematic. The current structure obfuscates clear administrative communication throughout the district. The directors turn to the capital when they have questions or need assistance, but when they do not get paid, they turn to ISAF.⁷²

(U) Qala-e Now exercises great authority over the line directors in Murghab, which requires line directors to request permission and support from the provincial capital. The education minister has recently asked for desks, books, and school supplies for Murghab but has not received anything. The Minister of Agriculture refers to Qala-e Now for all land deeds, especially as Coalition Forces expands the “security bubble” occupying more land and thus necessitating more land-based transactions.⁷³

(U) Tribal Council Meetings

(U) Chief Lewall and ISAF host tribal council meetings with elders at the district center on a weekly basis. Haji Jalan Wakil runs the tribal council, powerbrokers Mullah Ramatullah and Mullah Ramazan participate along with mostly tribal elders from the Sini tribe. “The same individuals speak at all the meetings, and they always talk about the same things.”⁷⁴ Chief Lewall is able to gather the elders if he asks them, even from areas where ISAF is not in control.⁷⁵

(U) Humanitarian assistance (HA) is often discussed about during the tribal meetings. Elders compile lists or petitions of all the poor families in the respective villages who need HA. The tribal council will decide who deserves the money, and they call on the head of the household to come acquire the money.⁷⁶ “HA by design eases pain and suffering when used correctly, but it does not build capabilities.”⁷⁷

(U) Security Meetings

(U) Chief Lewall and ISAF also host security meetings daily meetings to discuss security and development in the district. Taliban sympathizers such as Mullah Ramazan and Mullah Ramatullah are known to attend these meetings. One topic of current discussion is a mosque being built for Mullah Ramazan.⁷⁸

⁷¹ (U) Conversation with a soldier in Task Force Professional, 20 April 2010

⁷² (U) Conversation with a soldier in Task Force Professional, 20 April 2010

⁷³ (U) Conversation with a soldier in Task Force Professional, 20 April 2010

⁷⁴ (U) Conversation with a soldier in Task Force Professional, 20 April 2010

⁷⁵ (U) Conversation with a soldier in Task Force Professional, 20 April 2010

⁷⁶ (U) Conversation with a soldier in Task Force Professional, 20 April 2010

⁷⁷ (U) Conversation with Task Force Professional U.S. Army Soldier, 19 April 2010

⁷⁸ (U) Conversation with Task Force Professional U.S. Army Soldier, 19 April 2010

(U) Unofficial Governance

(U) The Bala Murghab “Mafia”

(U) The Bala Murghab “mafia” operates as the shadow government of the District. They are separate, not mutually exclusive, from the Taliban. The mafia is involved in drug smuggling, selling, and “all-around corruption.” Further, they garnish legally collected taxes for their operations. Former district governor Amin was second-in-command of the mafia to its leader, Amir Shah. Shah Wali, the deputy chief of police under Lewall who was also recently arrested, was another member.⁷⁹

(U) Key Personalities

(U) Colonel Amir Shah Naibzada, Afghan Border Patrol

(U) One of the most controversial political figures in the province, Amir Shah Naibzada, is the commander of the ABP kandak responsible for northern Herat and Badghis. He is rumored to be involved in narcotics trafficking, Amir Shah controls Tajik militias in Qades and has close relatives spread across the provincial government and in particular the security forces. His brother is the police chief of Moqur district, another brother, Wali Shah Naibzada is a senator, an uncle is the chief of the Criminal Information Department (CID) police unit, and another uncle heads the Ministry of Finance.⁸⁰

(U) There are accounts of Naibzada committing atrocities in Pashtun communities throughout Badghis including the rape and murder of 20-40 Pashtun women in Akazai in 2002 when he was police chief.⁸¹ Not only is Amir Shah the commander of the Bala Murghab mafia, he is half-Pashtun on his mother’s side and he recently sponsored a benefit for the father of Mohammad Amin, the former district governor, connecting himself with the Pashtuns in Murghab District.⁸²

(U) Murder and corruption charges were brought against Amir Shah. However, once the word of the charges reached Kabul, Amir Shah used his power and personal connections in Parliament to nullify the allegations in Badghis. Around 50 elders from Bala Murghab waited months to speak with Karzai about Amir Shah’s severe corruption. Karzai’s alleged answer was, “I can’t change him.”⁸³

(U) Haji Mullah Ramatullah (Mullah Rahmat)

(U//FOUO) The district governor before Mohammad Amin, Mullah Ramatullah, is the spiritual leader in the Murghab River Valley and a very influential person. Mullah Ramatullah is such a powerful person, it is said that the youth will kiss his hand. Further, he has the ability to act as a facilitator between disparate groups. He is from Pa’in Panerak Village.

⁷⁹ (U) Conversation with a soldier in Task Force Professional, 20 April 2010

⁸⁰ (SBU) Department of State draft of Badghis History

⁸¹ (U) Conversation with Task Force Professional U.S. Army Soldier, 19 April 2010

⁸² (U) Conversation with Department of State representative at the Badghis PRT in Qala-e Now, 17 April 2010

⁸³ (U) Conversation with Task Force Professional U.S. Army Soldier, 19 April 2010

(U) Haji Mulawi Ramazan

(U//FOUO) From the Buzi tribe, the very influential Mulawi Ramazan does not openly support the Taliban. He is considered a spiritual leader in the Bala Murghab region. His village is Nowabad, of which he is the elder.

(U) Afghan National Security Forces

(U) Afghan National Army

(U) The Afghan National Army presence in and around Murghab District is provided by the 1st Kandak, 1st Brigade, 207th Corps (1/1/207), who transferred to the area in April 2010. Preceding 1/1/207, from September 2009 until April 2010, was 2/1/207, which was partnered with American units.⁸⁴

(U//FOUO) The ANA in Murghab is capable, but heavily dependent on ISAF support. The leadership is risk-averse, and has little incentive to press forward in this highly kinetic area unless part of a larger ISAF mission. The ethnically-mixed ANA, whose current Murghab kandak has a non-Pashtun majority, is disconnected from the populace, although looked upon favorably by many civilians as a rare example of an active GIRoA presence. Ethnic issues, almost entirely Pashtun-related, have caused the ANA trouble internally and externally, particularly in terms of interacting with the ANP, who are largely Pashtun and often locals enmeshed in local power dynamics.⁸⁵

(U) Local Perceptions of the ANA

(U) The transition from 2/1/207 to 1/1/207 caused little disruption to the area; “it’s all the same to the locals.” The 2/1 Kandak had maintained positive relationships with the local community, so the environment was generally supportive of ANA presence. The two units varied demographically: 2/1 was largely composed of Afghans from the east of the country, from Nangarhar, Konar, Paktika, Badakhshan. A large portion of 1/1 comes from western Afghanistan, including many from neighboring Faryab Province. Though the ANA come from a variety of areas, “ethnicity is bigger than location”; ANA ethnic dynamics, laid atop an already tense ethnic situation in northern Badghis, have caused friction in local affairs.⁸⁶

(U//FOUO) One of the most marked examples of ethnic conflict disrupting the mission was that of Colonel Ali, 2/1 commander. As he was Hazara, the local political figures and ANP were unwilling to deal with him or share information. Further, Pashtuns under Ali’s command were restive, chafing at being controlled by a Hazara. This dynamic persists in 1/1, though (or perhaps because) Pashtuns are in the minority in that kandak. The Coalition Embedded Training Team (ETT) working with the Afghans noted

⁸⁴ (U) Conversations with an American ETT unit mentoring the ANA in Murghab

⁸⁵ (U) Conversations with an American ETT unit mentoring the ANA in Murghab

⁸⁶ (U) Conversations with an American ETT unit mentoring the ANA in Murghab

rising tensions in the kandak during their tenure, and has made a concerted effort to break down ethnic barriers by ensuring that different groups live and work together without dividing into ethnic cliques. The ETT's experience shows that shared experience has brought the differing troops close together: "a lot of it evened itself out after the 3-day fight we had at the end of December; they all started getting along a lot better after that."⁸⁷

(U//FOUO) Though the ANA have, through shared struggle and encouragement to integrate from the Coalition, resolved many of their internal tensions, their relations with the ANP are still poor and marked by mistrust.⁸⁸

(U) Taliban involvement with the ANA

(U//FOUO) As with many other aspects of life in Murghab District, the Taliban are not so much hostile outsiders as much as an interwoven fixture in local society. In some cases, this extends even to the ANA, despite the Army's relative detachment from local issues. One of 2/1's company commanders was known to be old friends with a known Taliban leader, and continued to keep in touch with him while serving in the ANA. Like in many other situations in Murghab, this appears to be less an "infiltration" or counter-intelligence issue, and more simply a matter of traditional social networking.⁸⁹

(U) Training and competency

(U//FOUO) The ANA, when they do interact with the locals, get along generally well. The mentors state that, unlike the ANP, the ANA do not tax the local population, and this contributes to their positive reception.⁹⁰

(U) The mentors report that all the ANA in the area appear to be pure light infantry, without further specializations. One mentor mentioned "there might be a motorcycle squad, but that may be an informal thing where they're just using their own bikes for work."⁹¹

(U) Equipment and logistics

(U) The 1/1 Kandak has partially transitioned to NATO weaponry, having moved to the M-16 rifle and M-203 grenade launcher, though their remaining weapons are still Warsaw Pact weaponry. The preceding 2/1 had only Warsaw Pact gear.⁹² The 1/1 seems pleased with the M-16 overall, considering it better than the AK-47, though they still have some basic complaints due to lack of familiarity with the weapons system and its quirks, including complaining that "the plastic handguards get too hot."⁹³

(U) The ANA maintain their own vehicles, but lacking a supply of parts they are forced to trade fuel barrels for engine parts down at the bazaar. The Bala Murghab bazaar is extremely large, so they have had no trouble finding all the parts they need for sale.⁹⁴

⁸⁷ (U) Conversations with an American ETT unit mentoring the ANA in Murghab

⁸⁸ (U) Conversations with an American ETT unit mentoring the ANA in Murghab

⁸⁹ (U) Conversations with an American ETT unit mentoring the ANA in Murghab

⁹⁰ (U) Conversations with an American ETT unit mentoring the ANA in Murghab

⁹¹ (U) Conversations with an American ETT unit mentoring the ANA in Murghab

⁹² (U) Conversations with an American ETT unit mentoring the ANA in Murghab

⁹³ (U) Conversation in Dari with a 1/1 infantry private at FOB Todd

⁹⁴ (U) Conversations with an American ETT unit mentoring the ANA in Murghab

(U) Regarding logistics, the ETT granted that the local ANA face many of the same logistical challenges as the Coalition, but with even fewer resources. The corps headquarters in Herat is distant and aloof, and even with the best intentions would have trouble pushing supplies up into the remote north of Badghis, where limited and heavily kinetic roads greatly limit logistical transport. In contrast with other observed ANA units, the kandaks in Murghab District do not appear to have literacy training or religious instruction.⁹⁵

(U) ANA misconduct

(U) Discipline among the ANA in Murghab is shaky, partially due to a lack of respect for chain of command. One squad leader was known for beating his troops for failure to obey orders, as he was not able to influence them using his rank. This lack of appreciation for rank also causes managerial disorder: “once you get past the sergeant rank, it all falls apart. Anyone sergeant or up feels free to just walk up to the kandak commander and ask for things; there’s no going from sergeant to platoon sergeant to company first sergeant, they just go right to the commander.”⁹⁶

(U) An American mentor noted that out of 10 ANA at his position, three are known hashish smokers, “and there are probably more that aren’t saying, because they saw how we reacted to the other three. One only smoked at night, one only smoked after patrols, but one smokes 24-7.” The local ANA consume alcohol, but generally just as a special occasion once a month, when they drink to the point of severe inebriation.⁹⁷

(U) Interactions with ISAF

(U) The ANA generally get along well with their American mentors, though the ETT noted a few minor points of contention. There have been several points where the ANA have objected to some American cultural practices, such as walking within the joint compound in shorts and t-shirt, as inappropriate to their Afghan culture. The ETT, however, explained to them that, within the privacy of the joint compound, the ANA must be flexible with Americans as Americans are with ANA: “it’s not my culture to stop operations and pray five times a day, but I understand it’s your culture.”⁹⁸

(U) Afghan National Police

(U) The Afghan National Police in Murgab District are a relatively professional and competent, if very limited, law enforcement organization. With a force of just over 100 police (though they are technically allotted twice that) they have contributed to local security in the few areas they are able to patrol, particularly the Bala Murghab bazaar. The state of policing in Murghab was extremely poor until late

⁹⁵ (U) Conversations with an American ETT unit mentoring the ANA in Murghab

⁹⁶ (U) Conversations with an American ETT unit mentoring the ANA in Murghab

⁹⁷ (U) Conversations with an American ETT unit mentoring the ANA in Murghab

⁹⁸ (U) Conversations with an American ETT unit mentoring the ANA in Murghab

2009, when the District Sub-governor Amin was removed, leading to a purge of the corrupt police associated with him, and the remaining police have done much to recover from the damage to the ANP reputation of that chaotic period. The Murghab ANP are basically equipped, able to perform many basic tactical maneuvers such as VIP protection and overwatch, and are steadily improving their integration with the local ANA.⁹⁹

(U) Despite the relative successes of the Murghab ANP, they are extremely limited by a low *tashkil* (allotted personnel) and staffing shortages of unclear origin which reduces their numbers even further. The Murghab ANP, regardless of the quality of the individual patrolmen, will continue to be limited in their capabilities unless provided, at the very least, the men and equipment they officially rate.¹⁰⁰

(U) This conversation was held with a former US police officer serving as a contract police mentor, who has been working in Bala Murghab since September 2009, and previously mentored ANP in eastern Afghanistan. The commenter first arrived in Bala Murghab in September 2009, and the ANP situation in the area has changed dramatically since then, due primarily to two events: the extensive efforts to locate the bodies of two 82 Airborne paratroopers who drowned in the Murghab River (DUSTWUN) and the firing of District Sub-Governor Amin and subsequent purging of Amin's cronies and functionaries from the local ANP.¹⁰¹

(U) DUSTWUN

(U) From the ANP mentor perspective, the unintended consequences of the Badghis DUSTWUN mission were generally positive, as the intensity of the mission forged cohesion between ANA, ANP, and ISAF which was observed by the locals. During the DUSTWUN local ANP played a key role, informing ISAF about routes into areas accessible only on foot, pathfinding and guiding, serving as liaisons to the community, and gathering information to aid in the search. Though the event did spur kinetic activity, it brought underlying issues to a head, and served as a catalyst for further ANP progress.¹⁰²

(U) Police Disposition

(U//FOUO) Per the *taskhil*, Murghab District rates 208 ANP. However, they generally have less than half present-for-duty (PDY). The local mentor was unsure as to the exact reason for the shortage, but he suspects some of the shortage may be "ghost soldiers" who are counted in Qala-e Now, and/or personnel technically assigned to Murghab who refuse to leave the south, and either work or simply collect a paycheck without leaving the south.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ (U) Conversations with an American contractor and former police officer mentoring the ANP, held on 19 April 2010

¹⁰⁰ (U) Conversations with an American contractor and former police officer mentoring the ANP, held on 19 April 2010

¹⁰¹ (U) Conversations with an American contractor and former police officer mentoring the ANP, held on 19 April 2010

¹⁰² (U) Conversations with an American contractor and former police officer mentoring the ANP, held on 19 April 2010

¹⁰³ (U) Conversations with an American contractor and former police officer mentoring the ANP, held on 19 April 2010



(U) Gudam ANP checkpoint

(U) Ethnicity in the ANP

(U) Murghab ANP are ethnically mixed, with both Tajiks and Pashtuns from across the province in the local force. Local Pashtuns are somewhat under-represented, but this has improved since the sweeping changes of the November 2009 period. Many of the ANP come from the Qala-e Now area and are subsequently stationed in the north, and there is also a high representation of Tajiks from Qadis District.

(U//FOUO) One manifestation of the spillover of ethnic tension into ANP affairs is the November 2008 Akazai Massacre, south of Bala Murghab. In that event, the Taliban executed over 20 non-Pashtun ANA and ANP in an attack on a convoy of nearly 50 ANSF personnel.¹⁰⁴ (ANALYST COMMENT: The likely intent of this attack was to deliberately exacerbate ethnic tension. It also appears that the ongoing tensions between the largely-Pashtun Murghab ANP and the largely non-Pashtun ANA in the area may also be tied to these ethnic frictions.)

(U) ANP misconduct

¹⁰⁴ (U) “300 Insurgents Attack Convoy of Afghanistan Troops” *The Seattle Times*, 29 Nov 2008.

(U//FOUO) Some Murghab ANP are recreational smokers of opium and hashish, like many local Murghabis. Though this is not uncommon, only in a few cases is this habit negative enough to impact the mission, such as recently when an ANP officer's driver was re-tasked away from driving due to his being constantly stoned on hashish. (ANALYST COMMENT: Arriving at a SOIC meeting at the Murghab District Center April 2010, there was a distinct smell of smoked marijuana in the air, apparently coming from the ANP guarding the building.)

(U//FOUO) At a recent drug testing, 11 Murghab ANP came up positive, but since the district had not kept clear track of which samples were which, they simply sent randomly-selected ANP to drug rehabilitation. Alcohol abuse is generally not a problem; most of the lower-ranking ANP are relatively pious and abstain from drinking, though several of the more cosmopolitan officers are known to drink recreationally.¹⁰⁵

(U) Police pay

(U//FOUO) The police in Murghab rate AF 1200 (US \$240) per month, due to being a high-risk district. Technically the district is not recognized as high-risk, but due to unspecified administrative issues they are still able to draw the higher amount. Most of the police are paid in cash, though some of those who come from Qala-e Now are paid part in cash, and part of their pay is given to their families. It is unclear as to whether this is done by cell-phone M-PAISA payments, direct deposit, or some other methods. The mentor is not aware of any misappropriation of the salaries, which is remarkable for a cash-disbursing unit.¹⁰⁶

(U) November 2009 Sher Wali incident

(U) A late-2009 incident highlights the disorder in the ANP prior to the removal of District Governor Amin and his corrupt allies:

There was a sergeant named Sher Wali, who was one of Amin's little thugs and tax collectors, along with his brother Mirwais. We got rid of him on 30 November [2009] after he killed one of the ANA. At the time, the ANA didn't trust the ANP, so was searching them at all ANA checkpoints. They were searching the Taliban too [instead of letting them pass], which was upsetting them. Sher Wali had said that the next ANA to try and search him was going to get killed. We were over at The Castle, and noticed the ANA all grabbing their guns and taking off running, and then the ANP also heading for their vehicles. Around that time, an ANA vehicle pulled up and a wounded guy got out and was taken into the offices. Turns out he was shot in the arm and the chest, and he died later. Sher Wali had shot him for trying to search him, and he and Mirwais and their allies were holed up in the District Center, and the ANA had them surrounded. But the Coalition arrived and managed to talk everyone down, and arrested Sher Wali and his brother.¹⁰⁷

(U) Local crime

¹⁰⁵ (U) Conversations with an American contractor and former police officer mentoring the ANP, held on 19 April 2010

¹⁰⁶ (U) Conversations with an American contractor and former police officer mentoring the ANP, held on 19 April 2010

¹⁰⁷ (U) Conversations with an American contractor and former police officer mentoring the ANP, held on 19 April 2010

(U) The primary type of crime in the Murghab area is drug transport, which is omnipresent. The ANP have stopped trucks containing hundreds of kilos of opium. The city is a particular chokepoint for drug trafficking, as it has two main bridges over the Murghab River which allow traffic to flow down to Herat and on to Iran. The confiscated opium is generally in a raw state, rather than processed into heroin or other opiates.

(U//FOUO) Drug abuse overall is a small but continuing problem amongst the populace of Bala Murghab.¹⁰⁸ Most of the opiates consumed by local Murghabis appear to be raw opium, smoked in the traditional manner, rather than injected drugs; the mentor noted that unlike in some eastern Afghan cities he has not seen used needles in Bala Murghab.¹⁰⁹

(U) Other than drug trafficking and usage, there are few crimes reported in the district: “the people here are mostly well-behaved farmers.” What little crime occurs is generally resolved on the village level, with local shuras.¹¹⁰

(U) Facilities, supply and logistics

(U) The police facilities in Murghab are uniformly in poor condition, despite promises of new facilities during the Focused District Development program. Most stations only have power for four hours a day, and no running water, kitchen, or shower. Bala Murghab has some holding cells, which are the only detention facilities in the district.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ (U//FOUO) Derived from a Fall 2009 ISAF analysis product

¹⁰⁹ (U) Conversations with an American contractor and former police officer mentoring the ANP, held on 19 April 2010

¹¹⁰ (U) Conversations with an American contractor and former police officer mentoring the ANP, held on 19 April 2010

¹¹¹ (U) Conversations with an American contractor and former police officer mentoring the ANP, held on 19 April 2010



(U) Bala Murghab Jail

(U) The Murghab ANP are administratively competent, and maintain solid monthly personnel records. In early 2010 the local ANP were also registered for ID cards, further solidifying their administrative compliance. Logistically, though the ANP are efficient at using what assets are available to them, they receive little support from their higher headquarters, with provincial ANP commander General Samin responding to requests with “get it from the Americans.” The ISAF police mentor has encouraged the Murghab ANP to scrupulously follow logistical requisition procedures, so as “not to give Qala-e Now an excuse” for not supporting Murghab. “There are workarounds to get paid, to get fed; they’re lucky to have uniforms. Why should they have to go without propane?”¹¹²

(U) INFRASTRUCTURE

(U) Highway 1 (“Ring Road”)

(U) The primary transportation artery of Murghab District is Highway 1 that connects the provincial capital of Qala-e Now to Bala Murghab. This 111 kilometer stretch of road represents one of the last

¹¹² (U) Conversations with an American contractor and former police officer mentoring the ANP, held on 19 April 2010

unpaved sections of Afghanistan's "Ring Road," a highway that loops the rugged mountain terrain and sparsely populated countryside to connect its major cities.¹¹³

(U) The 1,900 mile ring road—the Afghanistan's main roadway, intended to link its largest cities—was begun in the 1960s with US AID financing parts of the project, and Soviet Russia building other parts. The Soviet invasion in 1979 and the resistance by Afghan fighters prevented its completion, however, and flash floods and harsh winters degraded what had been built. Once the road is completed it will connect western China and Central Asian countries through Afghanistan with Iranian seaports and world markets. Additionally, it will likely provide much needed economic opportunities to small villages along the route in rural Murghab District.¹¹⁴



(U) *The Ring Road winding across rural Badghis*

(U) Niklas Swanstrom, a specialist on Central Asia and director of the Institute for Security and Development Policy, opines that a completed ring road could serve as an economic catalyst “increasing Afghanistan's exports by 54 percent over the next five years, mostly through agriculture”. He also predicts substantial job creation: “an increase in freight...cotton going from Uzbekistan into Afghanistan and shipped all over the world...and, of course, if you can have oil and gas transit through Afghanistan, that's where the major gains will be made for Afghanistan in particular.”¹¹⁵

(U//FOUO) Highway 1, in its current configuration is constructed of gravel and clay and becomes difficult to traverse after any rain and is all but impassable during winter months. Along the route there are six bridges and 98 culverts and in some places the gradient exceeds 14%. The the trip from Qala-e Now to Bala Murghab takes 11 hours at an average transit speed of 10 mph.

¹¹³ (U) Open Source Center, Afghanistan: Nationwide Ring Road Nears Completion,

¹¹⁴ (U) Miami Herald, On Afghanistan's Road To Somewhere, Taliban Block The Way, 21 June 2009

¹¹⁵ (U) Open Source Center, Nationwide Ring Road Nears Completion, 10 Oct 2007

(U) A Chinese railway construction firm is under contract to pave the road, but the Provincial Governor and Asian Development Bank, which are facilitating and funding the project, respectively, have complained about poor quality of the work in other provinces. Though scheduled to be completed in mid-2010, production is 2 years behind schedule, due to security concerns. The Asian Development Bank has asked ISAF and the Afghan National Army for protection, so that the road could be built.¹¹⁶



(U) Highway 1 as it passes through downtown Bala Murghab. The gate of the District Center is visible on the right

(U//FOUO) As of April 2010 road paving operations in Murghab District were at a standstill. The Taliban and criminal syndicates enjoy near complete freedom of movement along Highway 1, except for a small security bubble recently carved out in the heart of Bala Murghab.¹¹⁷

(U) It is assessed that the Taliban's aim is to keep instability high in the Murghab Valley to prevent the paving of the northern Ring Road from being completed in order to further isolate Murghab District and Badghis Province. By doing so they are able to maintain safe havens from where they could launch attacks against neighboring Faryab Province and eventually Mazar-i-Sharif. The Kandahar "Transport

¹¹⁶ (U) DIA, Badghis Province Overview, 20100113

¹¹⁷ (U) Derived from conversations with U.S. Army soldier at FOB Todd, April 2010

Mafia” likely aligns itself with the insurgents in a bid to maintain the freedom of movement it currently enjoys along Highway 1.¹¹⁸

(U) While the insurgents and transport mafia are determined to prevent the Ring Road from being paved, Afghan drug lords are probably anxious to see it completed. Tying together the highway networks of neighboring countries with the Ring Road will strengthen organized criminal groups in Afghanistan and Central Asia. "With this new infrastructure development, it will be much easier for the Afghan drug lords to transport heroin and opium from Afghanistan to the rest of the region."¹¹⁹

(U) Route Lithium

(U) The other overland route in Murghab District is “Route Lithium” which serves as a western bypass to circumvent the insurgent held Murghab River Valley. RTE Lithium runs from Qala-e-Now through the Sang Atesh area of Moqur District and up to Bala Murghab. This road, described as a “goat path”, is also heavily influenced by enemy forces. The checkpoints along RTE Lithium have been overrun frequently only to be retaken by ANSF/ISAF. This is due to the isolation of these checkpoints and limited manning.¹²⁰

(U) RTE Lithium is particularly difficult for heavily laden trucks which cannot easily traverse uneven terrain and reports of landslides are not uncommon. The Spanish PRT in Qala-e Now has allocated funds and let a contract to pave RTE Lithium in order to increase mobility along this route. Once security conditions permit, work will begin and it is estimated to take one to two months to complete.¹²¹ (For more information on RTE Lithium improvements see the Development section.)

(U) Airports

(U) The closest airport to Murghab District is the the Qala-e Now Airport (QAQN) located in the provincial capital which is capable of handling light aircraft.¹²²

(U) Railroad

(U) There is no railroad infrastructure in Murghab District.

(U) Public Utilities

(U) Electricity

¹¹⁸ (U) Long War Journal, Afghan Army and Taliban Battle in Badghis, 30 May 2009

¹¹⁹ (U) Open Source Center, Nationwide Ring Road Nears Completion, 10 Oct 2007

¹²⁰ (U) Task Force Professional Overview Briefing, April 2010

¹²¹ (U) Derived from conversations with a Spanish military officer at Badghis PRT, April 2010

¹²² (U) Internet, (U) [url: <http://www.caa-af.org/airports/qalainaw.htm>]

(U) The residents of Murghab District do not have access to a centralized power grid. Those that do have electricity rely on generators. Even when locals do have access to electricity, such as GIRoA officials who work at the District Center, lights and fans often go unused as most are not in the habit of using them.¹²³

(U) Water

(U) Murghab District has no major water facilities. Several small dams and barrages are used for flood control and irrigation throughout the district. However, inefficient operation, management, and maintenance have caused many structures to become inoperable.¹²⁴

(U) The Murghab River is the major water source for the district but is used for irrigation on a limited basis. There is the potential for increased water use with the construction of larger dams and irrigation canals. There is no good quality underground water in Murghab. Inefficient agricultural management and a lack of sound irrigation structures have exacerbated the pervasive seasonal drought conditions affecting water quantities.¹²⁵

(U) Water quality and quantity are major problems throughout the entire province. Approximately 15 percent of the population claims to have access to potable water and less than 1 percent claims to have sanitary toilet facilities.¹²⁶

(U) Flooding is common during the spring rainy season even during years with average or below-average precipitation. Surface water availability is seasonal, and streams that contain large amounts of fresh water during the high-flow period may be virtually dry during the low-flow months. Drought has been a major factor since 1998, with the rural population suffering from shortages of potable water and falling groundwater levels.¹²⁷

(U) Health Services

(U) A basic infrastructure of health services exists in Murghab District. As of 2008 there were four basic health centers and one hospital with a total of 30 beds. There were also five doctors and eight nurses employed by the Ministry of Health working in the district. There is no ambulance service available in the district.¹²⁸

¹²³ (U) Derived from conversations with U.S. Army soldier at FOB Todd, April 2010

¹²⁴ (U) DIA, Badghis Province Overview, 20100113

¹²⁵ (U) DIA, Badghis Province Overview, 20100113

¹²⁶ (U) DIA, Badghis Province Overview, 20100113

¹²⁷ (U) DIA, Badghis Province Overview, 20100113

¹²⁸ (U) UNDSS, UNDSS Provincial Assessment Badghis Province, Western Region, 20080401

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Village	Type	# of Beds	# of Doctors	# of Nurses	# of Ambulances	Services
Bala Murghab	DH	30	3	4	0	4 MW, 3 VC, 2 Lab & 1PH
Morichaq	BHC	0	0	2	0	2 VC & 1 Lab
Samiri Panirak	BHC	0	0	1	0	2 VC & 1 Lab
Chapchal	BHC	0	0	0	0	2 VC
Akhtar - Panjab	BHC	0	0	1	0	2 VC & 1 Lab
Total		30	3	8	0	4 MW, 11 VC, 5 Lab, 1 PH

MW = Midwife, VC = Vaccinator, Lab = Lab tech, PH = Pharmacist, D = Dentist, X-ray = X-ray technician
DH = District Hospital, BHC = Basic Health Center



(U) Bala Murghab District Health Center

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(U) Schools

(U) There are two high schools, three secondary schools, and 24 primary schools in the district. In the past few years, schools in Murghab District have routinely been closed as a result of skirmishes between Coalition Forces and insurgents.¹²⁹

(U) There is no university or higher education in the district.



(U) Adjoining boys' and girls' schools in Bala Murghab

(U) Communications & Media

(U) The media and communications infrastructure of Badghis is centered in Qala-e Now, to include the province's primary local radio and television stations, and printed periodicals. However, Murghab District and the remainder of the Pashtun areas are generally unaffected by the Qala-e Now based media, due to the limited broadcasting and distributions radii from the capital. Foreign television and radio broadcasts also play a role province-wide (particularly in the isolated Pashtun areas), though the

¹²⁹ (U) SOCOM/J239, Afghanistan's Badghis Province, 20100115

extent of that role is unclear. Due to the low literacy rates (10%) and low television ownership (10%), radio is the dominant form of mass media, with 80% of the population tuning in.¹³⁰

(U) Radio

(U) Qala-e Now has two primary local broadcasters: Radio Murghab (government-run) and Radio Hanzala (private). Of the two stations, Hanzala is the more popular, and the more professionally-run. The PRT is able to broadcast messages on Radio Murghab, and also contracts broadcast time from Hanzala at \$300 per month. Both stations currently broadcast on FM, limiting their radius to 10-15km from the city. A Canadian NGO (NFI) has donated AM antennae, which are on the ISAF installations, but due to technical errors are not operational. Once the AM antennae become functional, they will be able to broadcast an AM signal throughout the province.¹³¹

(U) In Murghab District and the wider Pashtun areas, shortwave is the primary radio medium. In the town of Bala Murghab, communications analysts were able to pick up around a dozen foreign shortwave signals, largely from Iran, Russia, and China, as well as Voice of America. Of the shortwave stations, the most popular in Bala Murghab is Radio Azade ("Radio Freedom") an Afghanistan-wide pro-GIRoA station.¹³²

(U) Television

(U) Television plays a minor role in Badghis media, as only 10-12% of the province watches television. Due to limited availability and limited programming, broadcast television has little popularity in Badghis, with satellite being the preferred form of television. Via satellite, which seems to be relatively affordable, locals are able to watch programming from around the world. Little information is available as to what programming is preferred, but Iran programming appears popular.¹³³

(U) The only broadcast television presence within Badghis is Radio Badghis, which branched out into local television in April 2007 (Radio-Television Badghis), and currently broadcasts television 3.5 hours per day. From 18:30-19:30 it broadcasts local news and events, and from 19:30-22:00 broadcasts syndicated programs from Kabul.¹³⁴ This station's broadcasting does not reach the northern Pashtun areas such as Murghab District, so the northern regions do not have access to any local broadcast station.

(U) Internet

(U//FOUO) Direct internet availability is limited to Qala-e Now, and though small, there appears quite popular. There is an internet café downtown, and posters advertise private paid internet classes in town.¹³⁵ In Bala Murghab, a small percentage of the population accesses the internet via the cellular phone system.¹³⁶

¹³⁰ (U) Conversations with members of the Badghis PRT involved in Badghis media issues, 17 April 2010

¹³¹ (U) Conversations with members of the Badghis PRT involved in Badghis media issues, 17 April 2010

¹³² (U) Conversations with members of the Badghis PRT involved in Badghis media issues, 17 April 2010

¹³³ (U) Conversations with members of the Badghis PRT involved in Badghis media issues, 17 April 2010

¹³⁴ (U) Conversations with members of the Badghis PRT involved in Badghis media issues, 17 April 2010

¹³⁵ (U) Conversations with members of the Badghis PRT involved in Badghis media issues, 17 April 2010

¹³⁶ Derived from a Fall 2009 ISAF analysis product

(U) Cellular phones



(U) A cellular repeater tower looms over the Murghab Valley above FOB Todd

(U) Cellular phones are extremely popular in the province; Badghis PRT staff estimate that more than half the population has some access to cellular phones.¹³⁷ In the vicinity of the town of Bala Murghab there are two large cellular repeaters, one for Roshan, another for a different service provider. However, each evening at approximately 1900 the cellular signal disappears: ISAF personnel are unsure as to whether this is due to ISAF guidance, Taliban orders, or simply economic considerations of the phone companies turning off their generators to save power during less-popular calling hours.¹³⁸

(U) Print media

(U) Due to extremely low literacy rates province-wide (10%), print media plays a very small role in Badghis, and is primarily confined to Qala-e Now. The province has two periodicals: Voice of Badghis (government-run), and Sadai Azadi (a PRT publication). There is no notable presence of printed publications from outside Badghis.¹³⁹

- **(U) Voice of Badghis** is theoretically published monthly, though is often delayed. It is a government-run paper, but due to lack of infrastructure the publication is physically printed by

¹³⁷ (U) Conversations with members of the Badghis PRT involved in Badghis media issues, 17 April 2010

¹³⁸ (U) Conversations with ISAF personnel aboard FOB TODD, mid-April 2010

¹³⁹ (U) Conversations with members of the Badghis PRT involved in Badghis media issues, 17 April 2010

the PRT. The paper runs 20-24 pages, of which four are given to the PRT for ISAF messaging. The distribution is limited to 600-800 copies per issue, and has limited influence.¹⁴⁰

- (U) **Sadai Azadi** is an ISAF PRT publication, full color, illustrated, and with portions in Dari and Pashto. It is published every 15 days in runs of 1000 copies. The paper is distributed during PRT missions, with the area varying by wherever missions happen to be ongoing at the time of publication. The locals are willing to accept the paper whenever it is offered them, but given the low literacy rate its influence is likely minimal.¹⁴¹

(U) There are several other small publications in the Qala-e Now area, but these are generally low circulation, internally distributed documents, such as the newsletter for the Girls' high school.¹⁴²

(U) Night letters (*shabnama*, traditional threatening letters) are employed by the Taliban in Badghis, but to far less a degree than in other kinetic areas of Afghanistan. Compared to RC-South and RC-East, the night letters are low volume, and generally crude and hand-written.¹⁴³

(U) Economy

(U) The economy of Murghab communities, like many rural areas in Afghanistan, lacks industry and generates only a modicum of trade. Locals rely upon agriculture, animal husbandry, forest nuts, commerce generated by bazaar merchants, and illicit drug trade to provide for their families. Additionally, due to widespread unemployment in the region, many working-age males are forced to seek employment in Herat and across the border in Iran in order to sustain their families.

(U) Agriculture

(U) Agriculture is the main source of local income and the existence of the Murghab River makes the majority of available land suitable for cultivation. Wheat, corn, barley, melons, grapes, potatoes, cumin, and sesame are the primary crops cultivated, although little is exported out of the valley. Most of the area is rain-fed hills with good soil characteristics that reach more than 4 meters underground. The introduction of drought resistant crops, rain fed seeding, and the improvement of pasture land and introduction of water harvesting techniques are activities that could potentially assist in improving the livelihood of families in the district.¹⁴⁴

(U) In the past Murghab District was a center for cotton production in the province, due in large part to the presence of a processing factory used for oil production from cotton seed and the processing of seed cotton. This factory, which today is a bombed-out shell housing FOB Todd, was destroyed during the Civil War leaving local farmers with no mechanism for cotton processing. Additionally, sesame seeds are

¹⁴⁰ (U) Conversations with members of the Badghis PRT involved in Badghis media issues, 17 April 2010

¹⁴¹ (U) Conversations with members of the Badghis PRT involved in Badghis media issues, 17 April 2010

¹⁴² (U) Conversations with members of the Badghis PRT involved in Badghis media issues, 17 April 2010

¹⁴³ (U) Conversations with members of the Badghis PRT involved in Badghis media issues, 17 April 2010

¹⁴⁴ (U) Internet, Provincial Profile for Badghis Province, [url:
<http://www.aisa.org.af/Download/ProvincialProfiles/Badghis.pdf>

harvested to extract oil but most of it is used for local consumption. There is a potential to produce more oil seed crops to sell.¹⁴⁵

(U) There are local markets for agricultural output, but the lack of proper stores and no credit system forces the farmers to sell their products at a very low price. During harvest season, supply outweighs demand, which drives the price down significantly. During the winter, scarcity causes prices go up.¹⁴⁶

(U) Pistachio forests in the district are also a source of revenue for local farmers. But according to the provincial Director of Agriculture, almost half the forests have been destroyed in the past 20 years for firewood. With an insignificant budget to protect the forests, depletion continues. Generally the following factors have also contributed to the neglect of the natural forest and pasture land in the Murghab Valley and surrounding districts.

- deficiency of fuel
- no controlled grazing by the nomads
- the lack of planning by the Government
- the change of pistachio and pasture land in to tilled land

(U) Despite these problems, the extension of the pistachio forest is a good opportunity as an economic potential to the area. The protection of existing pistachio from excess cutting and overgrazing will let the forest area re-generate and fill the gap naturally and increase the potential for more production.¹⁴⁷

(U) The Badghis Ministry for Rural Reconstruction and Development (MRRD) has estimated that the drought of 2009 decreased crop yield by as as much as 85% in the province. This has likely been a major cause of the internal displacement over the winter months in Murghab District, forcing more than 50% of local youth to travel to Iran in search of work due a lack of jobs during the harvest season.¹⁴⁸

(U) Bazaar Economy

(U) The bazaar in Bala Murghab is the primary center of commerce for district residents. Merchants there sell a variety of foodstuffs and handicrafts, housewares, electronic goods, cigarettes, livestock and petrol. The selection of merchandise at the bazaar is so comprehensive: “you can find everything from spare parts for a Ford Ranger... a Roshan phone... last week I got the battery replaced in my Casio G-Shock [wristwatch].” While there is routine patronage by locals during the week, it comes to life on Saturday and Sunday when shoppers come in from adjoining villages and it becomes “standing room only.”¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁵ (U) Internet, Provincial Profile for Badghis Province, [url: <http://www.aisa.org.af/Download/ProvincialProfiles/Badghis.pdf>

¹⁴⁶ (U) Internet, Provincial Profile for Badghis Province, [url: <http://www.aisa.org.af/Download/ProvincialProfiles/Badghis.pdf>

¹⁴⁷ (U) Internet, Provincial Profile for Badghis Province, [url: <http://www.aisa.org.af/Download/ProvincialProfiles/Badghis.pdf>

¹⁴⁸ (U) DIA, Provincial profile for Badghis Province, 20090715

¹⁴⁹ (U) Derived from conversations with U.S. Army soldier at FOB Prius, April 2010



(U) Local shopkeeper in Bala Murghab bazaar

(U) Bazaar merchants typically accept Afghanis, Euros, and US dollars for payment, with the dollar trading less favorably than the other two currencies. This is attributed to the fact that when currencies are transported through Taliban-controlled checkpoints dollars are “taxed” at a higher rate due to the presumption of US involvement.¹⁵⁰

(U) Most of the goods for the bazaar are brought in by *jingle* truck drivers from Herat and Maymanah in Faryab Province. According to interviews conducted by a Human Terrain Team (HTT) in Bala Murghab in late-April 2010, the round-trip journey for a jingle truck driver to Herat along Highway 1, a distance of 111 km, can take anywhere between one to three months. The duration of this journey is largely influenced by perilous road conditions along Highway 1, time spent negotiating Taliban checkpoints, and the amount of time needed to source the products they will be transporting back to Bala Murghab.¹⁵¹

(U//FOUO) In the village of Qip-Chak, south of Bala Murghab, there is a “weapons bazaar” that offers a vast assortment of military and military-related hardware. The shop-keepers in the bazaar are said to provide a discount to Taliban fighters.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ (U) Derived from conversations with U.S. Army soldier at FOB Prius, April 2010

¹⁵¹ (U) Derived from conversations with Human Terrain Team member at FOB Todd, April 2010

¹⁵² (U) Derived from conversation with U.S. Army soldier at FOB Prius, April 2010

(U) Remittances

(U) Due to a lack of economic opportunity in the Murghab Valley it is estimated that 50 – 75% of young males have left home to pursue jobs in Iran. Most are employed as unskilled laborers, but their salaries are said to be five to six times what they can expect to earn in Murghab. The remittances sent home by workers are an important part of the local economy and allow many families to make ends meet.¹⁵³

(U) A local elder characterized the lack of job opportunities in the following way:

*Six dollars a day isn't bad for a man, but when he's got to support a huge extended family it doesn't go far. There's just no way to make enough money around here, so people are forced to leave to work in Iran or other areas. We need to have some way to make money for the people who are here.*¹⁵⁴

(U) Illicit Economy

(U//FOUO) Murghab District is a significant poppy cultivation and opiate trafficking region, largely due to its poor, agriculture-based economy and the presence of Taliban forces encouraging cultivation.¹⁵⁵

(U) According to a 2010 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) opium survey, Badghis Province emerged as a major poppy cultivation area in 2009, growing 5,411 hectares of poppy. This marks an 822% increase in opium cultivation over the previous year. The study specifically cites neighboring Jawand district and Murghab as being the main poppy growing districts in the province. While Badghis cultivated less than 10% of Helmand's overall output (69,833 hectares), it was the fifth-most productive poppy cultivating province in the country. The UNODC survey conflicts with observations made by Coalition Forces who report noticing very little, if any, poppy cultivation in the Murghab River Valley.¹⁵⁶

(U) In addition to cultivation, refined opium products including morphine and heroin are smuggled from Murghab into Turkmenistan, primarily at the crossing at Murichaq, as well as into neighboring provinces, such as Herat. In addition, opium cultivated in Murghab is transported to other regions of Afghanistan for processing.¹⁵⁷

(U//FOUO) The drug trade could potentially complicate stability operations the most. Due to increased pressure in the south, some narcotics barons have moved not only their smuggling operations into Badghis, but some of the actual heroin processing. Doing so in the much calmer northwestern provinces brings both increased security and much greater profit margins. The allure of making a lot of money in criminal ventures has the potential to unite the drug syndicates, insurgents, and certain segments of the population at the expense of governance building and stability.

¹⁵³ (U) Derived from conversation with Human Terrain Team member at FOB Todd, April 2010

¹⁵⁴ (U) Derived from a meeting with Murghab District line ministers (held in Dari, paraphrased here), 21 April 2010

¹⁵⁵ (U) DIA, Badghis Province Overview, 20100113

¹⁵⁶ (U) Internet, Afghanistan Winter Opium Assessment 2010, (U) [url: http://www.unodc.org/documents/frontpage/Afghanistan_Opium_Survey_2010_Final.pdf]

¹⁵⁷ (U) DIA, Badghis Province Overview, 20100113

(U) Development

(U) One of the poorest districts in Afghanistan, Murghab's development priorities include potable water, water storage and irrigation systems, electricity and completion of the Ring Road. Efforts to boost district economic activity have been hampered by the poor security situation in the region. Donor funds are being distributed towards improving the security situation and on developing the Afghan National Army (ANA) along with unit headquarters. Until improvements are made in the security arena, a bulk of international aid will go towards this effort thus limiting infrastructure development in Murghab District.¹⁵⁸

(U) Badghis PRT

(U//FOUO) A description of ongoing Badghis PRT development projects in Murghab District, current as of March 2010, is provided in the table below:

Project Name	Project Location	Project Goal
Murghab Medical Tng	Qal-I-Now	Improve the operational capabilities of Murghab District health providers by coordinating training for doctors, nurses and administrators. This TNG will be held in QEN through AECID funding.
Bala Murghab School Renovation	Bala Murghab	Renovate existing school to improve the structural integrity of the building and provide school equipment, to include 160 desks.
Bala Murghab Bazaar Road Improvement	Bala Murghab	Improve road for villagers and shopkeepers to travel around the bazaar.
Ludina Village School Construction	Ludina Village	Purchase land and build new school to provide education to the children of Ludina Village.

(U) The paving of RTE Lithium remains a high priority for the Badghis PRT, but security along the route remains tenuous. On 4 April 2010 a shura was convened in the Bala Murghab District Center to discuss development issues with 26 key leaders. During the shura, the PRT Colonel stated that "Spain has already granted the necessary credits to start the construction of the Bala Murghab – Qala-e Now road" and pleaded with the local leaders to "guarantee the necessary security" so that paving operations can occur in the spring. One local elder spoke of the desperate need for schools, hospitals and roads in, but stated that they were unable to do anything about the security problem in Murghab District. Another elder, speaking in an agitated tone, avowed the importance of "keeping up with our projects" and concluded by saying that "Allah will provide security."¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ (U) DIA, Badghis Province Overview, 20100113

¹⁵⁹ (U) Derived from conversations with Spanish military officer assigned to the Badghis PRT, April 2010

(U) USAID

(U) USAID is active in Murghab District, managing a variety of development projects aimed to increase GIRoA capacity to provide additional services to residents. A description of ongoing USAID development projects in Murghab District, current as of March 2010, is provided in the table below:¹⁶⁰

Project Name	Project Location	Project Goal
Bala Murghab Clinic Renovation	Bala Murghab	Improve the appearance and integrity of clinic with plastering, minor repairs, and repainting to provide local residents with an improved facility with a cleaner atmosphere.
Bala Murghab School Improvements	Bala Murghab	Provide an outdoor area for the children to conduct sport activities. Construct a boundary wall to provide female students a sense of security from outside observers.
Bala Murghab Youth Center	Bala Murghab	Provide local youth with a community center to participate in crafts and sporting activities.
Bala Murghab Bazaar Solar Light Installation	Bala Murghab	Installation of 40 solar powered lights to extend bazaar hours of operation.
Canal Drainage and Irrigation	Bala Murghab	Improve drain water flow from bazaar to Murghab River.

(U) US CERP Projects

(U//FOUO) Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP) funds are also being allocated by Task Force Professional (TF Pro) at FOB Todd to address Murghab District's most pressing infrastructure development needs. Once contracts are awarded to local contracting firms and construction begins, Non-Commissioned Officers and Company Grade Officers assigned to TF-Pro are often required to perform quality assurance visits to the construction sites with no formal training in such matters. A description of ongoing CERP funded development projects in Murghab District, current as of March 2010, is provided in the table below:¹⁶¹

Project Name	Project Location	Project Goal
Bala Murghab Mosque Construction	Bala Murghab	To provide a central mosque for the locals to worship and pray. Mosque will also serve as central location for elders to meet and disseminate information to the people of BMG.
Marsot Road Improvement	Bala Murghab	To provide greater access to the Bala Murghab bazaar by villagers from the north and south of FOB Todd in order to boost the local economy.

¹⁶⁰ (U) Derived from conversations with American military officer assigned to FOB Todd, April 2010

¹⁶¹ (U) Derived from conversations with American military officer assigned to FOB Todd, April 2010

(U) Ring Road Completion

(U//FOUO) Completing the Ring Road is critical to the economic development and security of Murghab District and has implications for inter-regional trade. Construction in the north reaching to Bala Murghab stalled in the Gormach District of Faryab (formerly a district of Badghis) due to security problems. In early November, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) fired the contractor for nonperformance. The longest stretch of the Ring Road in the province, from south of Qala-e-Now to Bala Murghab, has yet to be contracted for construction. The proposed route would run through the Bala Murghab valley, where most of the population lives but which is largely insurgent-controlled. The ADB is discussing with the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) the possibility of sole sourcing the construction of this last stretch (as well as the uncompleted portion in Faryab). The ADB/USACE project is estimated to cost approximately \$340 million and may take up to four years to complete, given the rough terrain and security problems along much of the route.¹⁶²

(U) Development Blunder

(U//FOUO) One past project that has led to increased skepticism among a population already weary of the GIRoA and international community's development and security efforts is the ISAF/Italian bridge in Bala Murghab. Structurally, the bridge was not built to the original design and HESCO barriers on the western side of the bridge have been washed out by flooding. From a security standpoint, the Taliban have had free reign to use the bridge due to the lack of checkpoints to protect those using the bridge. From a public relations standpoint, the local community perceives the bridge as ISAF's installation of a bridge for the Taliban to use so as not to suffer attacks to the FOB, located where the old bridge used to egress.¹⁶³

¹⁶² (SBU) Department of State, Badghis: Seizing an Opportunity in Bala Murghab District, 25 Mar 2009

¹⁶³ (SBU) Department of State, Badghis: Seizing an Opportunity in Bala Murghab District, 25 Mar 2009

(U) Appendix A: Afghanistan Ring Road Construction



(U) Appendix B: Overview of major Murghab District villages¹⁶⁴

(U) Akazai

(U//FOUO) Akazai Village sits at the end of RTE Lithium, the road that connects Bala Murghab to Qala-e Now. There are approximately 1,500 homes, with around 8,000 inhabitants.¹⁶⁵

(U) Village Elder: Haji Agha Ghoul

(U//FOUO) Haji Agha Ghoul is very personable and open to ISAF patrolling in Akazai. He is very honest about the situation in Akazai and very positive about what the government is trying to accomplish.¹⁶⁶

(U//FOUO) (ANALYST COMMENT: It is unclear which village elder is the head elder of Akazai Village. Haji Agha Ghoul said they work as a committee and address the needs of the village together. It may be that each one handles different departments or that Haji Amin ul-Haq is the face of the village and the voice at government meetings since he is usually the one that appears at shuras and meetings.)¹⁶⁷

(U) Infrastructure

(U//FOUO) There is a boys and girls school in Akazai but neither are being used for their primary purpose. There are up to 22 mosques in Akazai Village. Currently there are no clinics in the village. If the villagers need medical attention they travel to Herat for minor injuries and for medical emergencies they will use the Bala Murghab Clinic. There have been two wells observed in Akazai but it is likely that there are several more throughout the village. There is a shop in Akazai that sells common items such as cigarettes, candy, and chips. The main bazaar is located farther North.¹⁶⁸

(U) Security

(U//FOUO) In 2003 and 2004 Akazai was involved in the political factional violence in Badghis. Mohammad Zahir Naibzada was reportedly involved in a [March 2003] clash in the village in which a number of civilians were killed as well 26 Taliban.¹⁶⁹

(U) Atmospherics

(U//FOUO) The villagers welcome to ISAF and ANSF patrols. The village elders are also open to patrols and appear to be very honest with the situation in the village. However, they cannot guarantee security or that there is no Taliban. The elders say it is hard for them to keep the Taliban from coming into the village if they want to, due to the fact they are armed and generally come and go as they please.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁴ (U) Not all villages are represented in this section due to lack of information and importance.

¹⁶⁵ (U//FOUO) MARSOB Akazai village assessment

¹⁶⁶ (U//FOUO) MARSOB Akazai village assessment

¹⁶⁷ (U//FOUO) MARSOB Akazai village assessment

¹⁶⁸ (U//FOUO) MARSOB Akazai village assessment

¹⁶⁹ (SBU) Department of State draft of Badghis History

¹⁷⁰ (U//FOUO) MARSOB Akazai village assessment

(U) Bala Murghab

(U//FOUO) About 1,600 families (8,000 inhabitants) live in Bala Murghab Village. The primary ethnicity of this area is Akazai Pashtun, with 70% of the people speaking Dari and Pashto, and 30% speaking only Pashto.

(U) Infrastructure

(U//FOUO) There are two schools, one male and a smaller female that are close to each other which close in the winter. The two schools are technically primary schools but are often used for grades past primary. In late 2009, the female school was closed due to the insurgent's imposition to the families, when possible, female children take private lessons in their homes. All roads in the village are unpaved.

(U) Atmospherics

(U//FOUO) The population's perceptions of the ANA are generally positive when they are present. Their perceptions of the ANP are assessed as neutral to negative. In past months, the villagers' consideration of ANP is increasing. The perceptions of ISAF are assessed in the village from neutral to positive. Security, corruption, unemployment, and the absence of a court of justice are conditions that afflict the credibility and sustainability of the local authorities.

(U//FOUO) The main sources of income are: cattle-breeding, grapevine and wheat cultivation. Many farmers suffer more from poverty due to damages to the main irrigation channel. Literacy is very low in Bala Murghab.

(U) Security

(U//FOUO) The Taliban have influence over the population by their threats and extortion. Security is the most important and primary need of the village. The population has mentioned many times they need security, which they say is the real first step to increase the quality of life.

(U) Daneh Pasab

(U//FOUO) The Village of Daneh Pasab is within the larger Joy Khoga region. It is reported that many of the villagers moved out of the area due to Taliban propaganda stating the government is going to come there and kill them.

(U) Village Elder: Haji Jalan Wakil

(U//FOUO) A member of the Sini tribe, Haji Jalan Wakil is the chief of the rural development department for district reconstruction projects offered by the PRT in Badghis. Haji Jalan Wakil was selected for this position as the district tribal leader due to his relationship with the former district governor Mohammad Amin. Haji Jalan Wakil claims that he is Amin's uncle. Because Haji Jalan Wakil serves as a senior authority figure in Murghab, the Taliban and GIRoA consult with him before decisions are made in the district.