

THE CANADIAN ARMY IN AFGHANISTAN

VOLUME II, PART 1: COUNTER-INSURGENCY IN KANDAHAR

Sean M. Maloney, PhD



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A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

During the review process for Volume I, concerns were raised about the ratio of pages in the narrative afforded to one rotation or another and that the number of pages afforded to rotations or activities should reflect some form of “measurement of importance.” This reasoning should not apply to either Volumes I or II.

As you will see, Volume II differs from Volume I in that the focus of Canadian Army operations from 2007 to 2009 was almost solely on Kandahar Province with occasional forays into Helmand Province. In the 2001–2006 period, the Canadian Army was in Kandahar, then in Kabul, then both and finally in Kandahar and Helmand Provinces. After 2009, Canadian efforts were focused even further on two districts in Kandahar Province, and by 2011, a single district. Depicting this decline from strategic- and operational-level involvement to tactical-level engagement over the course of five years is no easy task. At some points in the narrative, there are more “moving parts” than at others.

For example, the concurrent operations of a Canadian-led Regional Command (South) headquarters and Joint Task Force Afghanistan in 2008 produced more Canadian activity than, say, a JTF Afghanistan dealing solely with Panjwayi and Dand Districts in 2011. Similarly, the types of operational-level issues the Canadian Army were involved in during 2007–2009 ceased by 2010 with the American influx of several brigades into the province. This accounts for the disproportionate attention paid in space to certain time frames. This disproportion should in no way be taken as a slight on any organization or unit and is solely a product of narrative realities.

The story of the Canadian Army in Afghanistan is very different from the traditional Second World War narrative, which tends to be battle-focused and linear. A battle-focused history of the Canadian Army in Afghanistan would be heavily weighted toward describing the actions of some battle groups and to some extent the Operational Mentor and Liaison Team (OMLT). This type of narrative would produce a distorted depiction of what the Canadian Army did in Afghanistan. As the Canadian Army was engaged in a counter-insurgency war involving a variety of capacity-building and other activities, this history cannot be battle group centric. As JTF Afghanistan evolved, it eventually included the battle group, the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT), the OMLT, the Police OMLT, the Air Wing, and the National Support Element (NSE). The OMLT grew to mentor an Afghan army brigade, while the PRT’s infantry company, civil-military cooperation and psychological operations teams fused into specialized deployable stabilization companies,

for example. The Air Wing's tactical helicopter and unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) organizations were intimately and inextricably part of Army operations in the districts. Consequently, this volume's examination of the 2007–2009 period must affect a balance between TF Kandahar's constituent elements.

Another difference between the Afghan conflict and the participation of the Canadian Army in previous wars was the substantial involvement of army formations, units and their leaders with national, provincial and district-level domestic politics in Kandahar Province. This was historically unprecedented but given the fact that this was a counterinsurgency war, wholly understandable. Kandahari provincial power politics were intricate and the Canadian Army started off knowing little about how they worked. Over time, its understanding evolved as much as it could, given the circumstances. The intersection of those political realities and their effects on Canadian Army operations and activities was profound. As we move through the narrative, it is crucial for the reader to understand that, as the war progressed, Canadians were up against these entities almost as much as they were up against the insurgents. In time, recognition that there were serious and irreconcilable problems with the provincial government in Kandahar led to the withdrawal of Canadian forces from Kandahar. Consequently, to fully appreciate the Canadian Army's endgame in the south in 2011, it is necessary to understand the nature of this environment. Again, this state of affairs has no parallel in the Canadian Army's Second World War or Korean War history, so some patience is required on the part of the reader, so that they may fully comprehend the complexity of what was happening during this period.

It is tempting and would be far easier to produce battle history, laud our valour and tactical accomplishments on the battlefield, search for and identify a new Vimy or Normandy, be done with it and move on having institutionally wrapped ourselves in new glory. That would not be true to the Canadian Army's experience in Afghanistan and would do a disservice to the bulk of the Army personnel who were involved in activities outside of those battles in the districts west of Kandahar City. Yes, there was valour. Yes, combat was a daily fact of life, particularly to the Canadian men and women operating from isolated combat outposts, manoeuvring in the grape fields or working alongside the Afghan police and army. Balance is necessary and Volume II strives for that ideal.

A Note on Special Operations Forces

Initially, there was to be a separate volume dealing with Canadian SOF in Afghanistan written by a member of Canadian Special Operations Forces Command. In many cases, the Canadian SOF story is independent of the Canadian Army's story, and in some cases, it is not. At this time, it appears as though the Canadian Army in Afghanistan (in this case

TF Kandahar and its subordinate units) had closer and more frequent contact with allied SOF in Kandahar. In most cases, these allies were more receptive to their actions being depicted in history than Canadian SOF was. As a result, their activity appears to be excised from history in the early chapters of this volume. I can assure you that Canadian SOF operations in southern Afghanistan and elsewhere were a crucial and fascinating component of the war but unfortunately, their earlier actions cannot be depicted in any relevant detail herein. It remains an irony that the leadership and personnel of some of the allied SOF organizations confided with the author so that the context of their activities could be understood in relation to Canadian operations and they had no issue with my depiction of what they were doing within operational security limitations. The exceptions were certain aspects of the operations of Canadian Special Operations Task Force 58, which the author was permitted to depict.

INTRODUCTION

The decision to commit the Canadian Army to southern Afghanistan and the subsequent series of battles west of Kandahar City in the summer and fall of 2006 established a situation whereby the insurgency's momentum was dissipated by early 2007. By this time the insurgency's southern leadership in Quetta ascertained that there were two main fronts in the south: Helmand and Kandahar, with supporting efforts in Oruzgan and Zabol Provinces. British operations in Helmand aggravated the population and their power brokers to the extent that the province exhibited levels of anti-government violence almost on par with Kandahar. That said, the collapse of Kandahar would have resulted in a collapse of the coalition effort in southern Afghanistan. Operations in the more mountainous Oruzgan and Zabol Provinces were supportive in nature: they were transit points to get resources into Helmand and Kandahar using the northern routes, or they were used to shift insurgent forces as required. In effect, the Quetta leadership could prod either Helmand, Kandahar, or both to elicit a response from ISAF. In any event, it was crucial for ISAF to maintain the momentum gained by the events of late 2006.

In past conflicts, Kandahar City had been seized by what theorists in the West called *focoism*, a term that emerged in Latin American revolutionary thinking in the 1960s. Foco Theory suggests that a relatively small group of mobile, agile, well-armed, well-organized (and sometimes well-funded) revolutionaries develop physical and psychological momentum as they victoriously move toward the capital city:

A small revolutionary force, by using violence, can mobilize popular support much more quickly; instead of political mobilization leading eventually to violence, violence transforms the political situation. Awakened and excited by foco attacks, angered and encouraged by the brutality and ineptitude of the government response, alienated if the government seeks help from a foreign power, people will be mobilized for revolution in a process in which violence is itself a catalyst.¹

This psychological momentum generates social momentum as more and more people come off the fence or change sides to flock to the apparently victorious cause and its leaders. The combination of physical and social momentum results in the overthrow of the capital from inside, perhaps without direct engagement of the security forces in a destructive *Götterdämmerung*-like decisive battle. It is unlikely that those who took Kandahar City

in the past used this terminology or specific theoretical basis for their actions. They likely knew what worked within the cultural construct of Kandahar power politics and applied resources to achieve their aims.

It is not completely clear what happened in Kandahar with the collapse of the Najibullah regime in 1992. One view is that control of the city by Communist forces basically disintegrated and was replaced with multiple small insurgent groups who were unable to assert any form of unified control—or were uninterested in doing so.² In another view, Mullah Naqib and the Alikozais co-opted the Communist leadership in Kandahar after 1989 and worked with them to eject several groups of unwelcome Mujahideen. During this process, a key Barakzai Mujahideen leader was assassinated. This led to a *foco*-like group of Barakzais led by Gul Agha Sherzai moving on the city and staging a campaign of psychological pressure and deception in 1992–1993. The purpose of this campaign was to convince the now ex-Communist governor (who happened to be Barakzai) to change sides and work with them in order to edge out the Alikozais and other Mujahideen groups for commercial benefits.³

The Taliban movement was itself *foco*-like. This initially small group of religious students supported by Quetta merchants and elements from the Pakistani security services developed enough momentum, as they moved north along Highway 4 from Spin Boldak, to convince the Alikozai leader, Mullah Naqib from Arghandab, to assist with the overthrow of Gul Agha Sherzai's Barakzais in 1994. From Kandahar City, the Taliban moved *foco*-like from victory to victory throughout Afghanistan and even allied itself with Hekmatyar's Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin (HiG) organization, which initially opposed them. In time, the momentum dissipated and the lines stabilized into a more traditional civil war in northern Afghanistan against the Northern Alliance.⁴

Similarly, in 2001, Operation ENDURING FREEDOM deposited American SOF to work with both the Popalzai and Barakzai power brokers to do the same thing; operations which convinced Alikozai leader Mullah Naqib to change sides and assist with taking Kandahar City away from the Taliban.⁵ In all of these cases, one should note that Kandahar City was never really sacked or subjected to the same sort of highly destructive bombardment that Kabul was. It was important for all players that business as usual could continue under such circumstances.

It is not surprising that the Taliban insurgency continued its attempts to take Kandahar City in similar fashion. These efforts consisted of building a ring of supporting networks in outlying districts, using those support networks to take control of “strong point” districts on key routes to and from the city, and then destabilize districts directly adjacent to the city in order to generate collapse of the central government. And, when thwarted by coalition operations as well as Naqib's intransigence, the insurgency was forced to adapt its methods.

By late 2007, the insurgency's attempts to regain the initiative once again failed, specifically in Arghandab District. From 2007 to 2009, the insurgency adapted as best it could but the disruption caused by coalition efforts almost forced it to relent by early 2010.

The bogged-down nature of the war on the "second front" unfortunately reinvigorated the insurgency into adopting a particularly hideous methodology difficult to counter. That "second front" was the development and capacity-building efforts undertaken by ISAF and the rest of the so-called international community. Opportunism by Afghan power brokers and the negative relationship between that opportunism and government legitimacy caused severe damage to the counter-insurgency effort as a whole. The weak attempts to stabilize Afghanistan enshrined by the Bonn Agreement meant that the structures necessary to generate strong governance failed to materialize in southern Afghanistan. Power broker opportunism at the provincial and even district levels also undermined the Canadian-mentored Afghan National Development Strategy (ANDS).

Thus, by 2007, Canada was almost starting over in Kandahar, half a decade after the Bonn Agreement. Worse, Canada was starting over with a civilian structure that was not optimized in terms of people, organization or purpose to deal with the immense challenges that the situation dictated. As a result, the Canadian Army in the form of Joint Task Force Afghanistan was forced to take the lead in the security, governance, development and reconstruction lines of operations. And in many cases, this response was ad hoc and involved creating structures, organizations and operational approaches that had no doctrinal or experiential basis in what the Canadian Army had been doing for the past 50 years. In doing so, several Canadian bureaucratic power brokers were offended by TF Kandahar's approach, which in turn led to decreased unity in the Canadian effort in southern Afghanistan.

The Canadian military leadership in southern Afghanistan was also hampered by an increasingly incoherent Canadian strategic approach in Kabul. This resulted in the removal of key influence mechanisms and reduced Canadian influence to the extent that it was difficult to maintain a partnered approach with the Afghan government. Canada was forced to fall back on province-level influence which itself became increasingly problematic.

The fact that the Canadian Army was able to adapt to all of these circumstances in such a harsh operational and political environment, and then thwart enemy designs in southern Afghanistan, is, in retrospect, breathtaking.

It never looked pretty, and it certainly never ever looked exact. The ultimate effect of the Canadian Army effort in Kandahar from 2007 to 2009 was to act as an operational-level holding action until the American administrations could reprioritize their strategic efforts to focus on Afghanistan and Pakistan. When that took place in 2009–2010, pressure was gradually relieved on the Canadian effort and this set the stage for Canada's withdrawal from the south after six years of war. It must be emphasized, however, that this state of

affairs was not an intentional Canadian plan in 2007 by any means. It evolved from the incremental coalition approach to the situation in Afghanistan between 2007 and 2009. Canadians did what they thought was best at the time to keep the enemy disrupted while governance and development efforts continued. There was no real hope for decisive American reinforcement prior to mid- to late-2009.

The Canadian Army in Afghanistan, Volume II is the story of those efforts. The central mechanism was JTF Afghanistan and its various units and sub-units. Indeed, the expansion of JTF Afghanistan is a story unto itself. What started as a battle group, a PRT, a small OMLT, and an NSE in 2007, moved to an organization that eventually encompassed a battle group, an OMLT mentoring an Afghan army brigade and its units, a PRT deeply involved in governance and policing, an NSE, and an entire Air Wing with helicopters and UAVs. As well, this formation had tactical control of American battalions and drew upon American airpower as required. At the same time, Canadian command of the superior NATO ISAF Headquarters, Regional Command (South) in 2008, was also significant. Having a Canadian-led multinational division available with its resources was something that had not occurred since 2001 in Bosnia during the NATO Stabilization Force days.

The TF Kandahar and Regional Command (South) headquarters rotations were on different nine-month rotations, but the subordinate units were on a six-month rotation. As a result, Volume II, Part 1 is chronologically structured to depict the actions and activities of TF Kandahar and the Canadian-led Regional Command (South) from 2007 to 2009. Each chapter covers approximately six months of activity and generally attempts to centre on the rotational rhythm of the Canadian task force units, given that they produced the bulk of the operational and tactical activities on the ground. Every effort has been made to seamlessly and succinctly provide the higher military and Afghan political context.

ENDNOTES

1. John Shy and Thomas W. Collier, "Revolutionary War," *The Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, Peter Paret, Ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 850.
2. Ahmed Rashid visited the area in 1993 and that is what he reports in *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil, and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (New Haven: Yale Nota Bene Publications, 2001), Ch. 1.
3. See Peter Tomsen, *The Wars of Afghanistan* (New York: Public Affairs, 2013), pp. 330–334.
4. Kamal Matinuddin, *The Taliban Phenomenon, Afghanistan 1994–1997* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 68–69; Neamatollah Nojumi, *The Rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), Ch. 13; Roy Gutman, *How We Missed the Story* (Dulles VA: Potomac Books, 2008), Ch. 4.
5. Interview with Colonel Don Bolduc (Carlisle, 26 May 2009). Gul Agha Sherzai, then Governor of Kandahar and his brother Raziq related their version of the events of 2001–2002 to the author in March 2003.

SETTLING IN: FEBRUARY–JULY 2007

Canadian Army operations in southern Afghanistan during the first half of 2007 settled into a pattern that was remarkably different from 2006 but presaged activities over the next five years. The insurgency had been mauled by the coalition's efforts in the summer and fall of 2006, and its leaders were forced to modify their approach to the conflict. The Kandahar political, social and economic landscape, always in a state of flux, responded voraciously to the sudden availability of development and other monies on a scale not previously seen. The JTF Afghanistan's force structure expanded to incorporate new capabilities; it evolved as the Army adapted to the new environment. Additionally, TF Kandahar, its leadership, and its units were subjected to five forces as they struggled to grip the problems of Kandahar Province: ISAF headquarters; Regional Command (South) headquarters; Canadian Expeditionary Force Command (CEFCOM); the Canadian government; and the insurgency. It was during 2007 that these five forces started to pull the command in multiple and, in many cases, opposing directions. That state of affairs was exacerbated during the rest of the Army's stay in Afghanistan, but for the time being, Canada was confronted with the mechanics of implementing development and reconstruction in Kandahar Province while under fire. It was crucial that the successes of 2006 not be thrown away and the new Canadian units coming into theatre set out to ensure that did not happen. Others attempted to formulate and implement a new and better strategic approach to the problem. Combined Task Force Aegis, TF Orion and the 1 RCR battle group identified and disrupted enemy designs on Kandahar Province. The new JTF Afghanistan had to maintain that disruptive effect while working to define the Afghan Development Zone (ADZ) in the province through capacity-building and development aid—and respond to pressures from Kabul to expand the zone itself.

The Higher Direction of the War into 2007

There was a respite in December 2006–January 2007 as coalition planners at a number of levels sought to divine the effects of Operations MEDUSA and BAAZ TSUKA on the situation in Kandahar Province. The main issue that dogged Canadians at TF Kandahar was the command turbulence in ISAF. Lt.-Gen. David Richards handed off to American Lt.-Gen. Dan McNeill in February 2007, while command of Regional Command (South) changed from the Dutch under Maj.-Gen. Ton van Loon to the British under

Maj.-Gen. Jacko Page in May. Two higher headquarters commanded by strong personalities from three different countries over the course of four months was sub-optimal for long-term planning, let alone medium-term implementation of plans at the provincial level. The saving grace for Canada was relative command continuity within TF Kandahar. There was one Canadian commander in Afghanistan for this entire period, BGen Tim Grant. The incoming 2nd Battalion, The Royal Canadian Regiment (2 RCR) Battle Group under LCol Rob Walker was scheduled to deploy in February while the PRT came under the command of LCol Bob Chamberlain, who was emplaced at Camp Nathan Smith for a year-long tour. It should be noted here that, in late 2006, CEFCOM in Ottawa was directed by LGen Mike Gauthier and tasked to develop a long-term Canadian campaign plan to replace the CTF Aegis plan. The CEFCOM planners kept trying to adjust their plans to what ISAF HQ and Regional Command (South) thought they were doing, but it would take time to come up with a full-blown replacement for the CTF Aegis campaign plan.¹ What did this mean for Canadian commanders on the ground? The ADZ strategy, championed by Richards and so assiduously adhered to in summer and fall 2006, was suddenly in limbo when McNeill took over in February 2007. From then until June, there was no express direction from ISAF HQ to continue with ADZs, yet, under van Loon, Regional Command (South) continued with the construct, at least until the spring when he left. For the most part, the Canadians in Afghanistan worked from the original CTF Aegis Campaign Plan in the absence of any clear direction from either ISAF HQ or Regional Command (South).²

Indeed, by the summer, TF Kandahar seemed to be getting more verbal direction from Regional Command (South) than written direction. Regional Command (South) was working on a baseline operation plan called SATYR PERSEUS, the NATO headquarters in Brunssum was revising its Operation Plan 30302, but there was still nothing coherent established from January to August 2007. There was a single page letter of intent from McNeill's headquarters and little else. By March, ISAF headquarters seemed to move away from the ADZ strategy in a document called NOW RUZ ("New Year"), but even then, it was not effective guidance at the provincial level.³

In the absence of anything specific coming out of ISAF HQ and given the changed nature of the situation in Kandahar vis-à-vis the 2006 CTF Aegis campaign plan, BGen Grant issued his "Commander's Direction: Operational Plan for Winter 2007" in January 2007. The enemy, the planners agreed, would continue with the direction taken in 2006 but there would be an "increase in severity as insurgents capitalize on perceived operational gains." They would "continue to expand their influence at the district and provincial level" and "undermine the authority of the Government of Afghanistan and ISAF through intimidation, violence, and effective local-level information operations."⁴

To combat this, TF Kandahar wanted to “solidify its gains by building upon the success of previous operations and must continue to encourage support of the Afghan people for their government.” Crucially, “the importance of Kandahar City has been evident throughout history and most recently as a wellspring of the Taliban.” Canadian operations had to focus on establishing “a better understanding of Kandahar Province, in particular Kandahar City, and the mechanisms to positively influence and promote the Government of Afghanistan as represented by the Governor of Kandahar Province.”

The primary mechanism to do this was through the ADZ approach, detailed in the previous volume. The TF Kandahar planners believed that the ADZ was the best way to “achieve tangible improvements for the population.” It would remain centred on Kandahar City and everything possible was to be done to “establish freedom of movement along Highway 1 and Highway 4 within boundaries.”

Additionally, Commander CEFCOM directed TF Kandahar to strengthen the connections between several critical components in this effort. First, battle group, PRT, and OMLT operations had to become better coordinated. Second, the Afghan provincial- and national-level connections in all areas had to be improved. Third, Commander CEFCOM was under pressure to unleash the power of the Canadian “whole of government” approach to facilitate both of these collections of connections, so better intergovernmental cooperation was expected.

For the early part of 2007, then, TF Kandahar saw the campaign plan slightly differently than CTF Aegis had, and, unlike the CTF Aegis plan, TF Kandahar had an end date: 2009. The three lines of operation remained security, governance and development and infrastructure. Rather than have all three moving along abreast, however, the planners believed that the effort was weighted toward shaping through security, with the decisive factor being governance, and development sustaining the effort over time. The ADZ was integrated into this thinking and what went on within it became a measurement of effectiveness of sorts:

Security operations objectives

Maintain sufficient forces in Zharey-Panjwayi while we firmly establish an ANA presence partnered with the OMLT to retain key terrain in the Pashmul region (Route Summit) and secure the key corridor into Kandahar City along Highway 1...we will build Afghan National Auxiliary Police capacity in local villages and make elders responsible for maintaining security in their own areas.

Objectives in the governance sphere

We will reinforce the mentoring of the Government of Kandahar through the KPRT.... We must isolate the population from competing illicit authorities.... Aggressive IO to undermine and discredit these competitors while reinforcing Government of Kandahar authority is key to ensuring that the legitimate Government of Kandahar is seen to offer a more appealing system of governance than the Taliban or other illicit groups.

Development objectives

Immediate developmental effects are required to promote the notion that [Afghan government] authorities can offer a brighter future along with progress that is perceptible to the people of Kandahar Province.... However, long-term projects aimed at long-term stability will not be compromised for short-term Information Operations victories through immediate impact operations.

A crucial difference in the 2007 campaign plan was the addition of “Mission Credibility” as a factor:

The critical vulnerability of JTF Afghanistan is the will of the Canadian people....Casualties among Canadians is the key parameter, being a sufficient factor in determining the net value of the mission to Canadians. Afghan civilian and NATO casualties also have [an] effect. The potential negative effects of perceived mistreatment of detainees are also noted as a factor.⁵

While TF Kandahar implemented its Winter Campaign in February–March 2007, Regional Command (South) focused on two items. The first was to come up with a means to extricate itself psychologically from Zharey District and look at a broader regional command picture. The decision was made between JTF Afghanistan and Regional Command (South) that operations in the Zharey-Panjwayi area would be dubbed “Operation BAAZ TSUKA Phase Three Charlie” with reference to the stability portion of the BAAZ TSUKA plan. Whatever went on in those districts was given this unwieldy moniker. Regional Command (South) under van Loon then became beguiled with Operation ACHILLES over in Helmand. The reasons for this included the need for a clear information operations success or the need to prop up a potential British policy disaster in Helmand Province. Or it could have been the belief that there was linkage between what the Taliban leadership was doing in Kandahar Province, what they were now doing in Helmand Province, and the possibility that sophisticated leadership targeting could have an impact in both provinces. The details of Canadian involvement in Operation ACHILLES, which was more peripheral and supportive in nature, are examined later on. What is important about ACHILLES in one respect was the integration of leadership targeting into the campaign as a whole.

What van Loon and crew wanted to do in Operation BAAZ TSUKA in December 2006, they now could do with Operation ACHILLES. Van Loon wanted to, once again, drive a wedge between what Regional Command (South) believed were “Tier I” and “Tier II” Taliban: the first being hard-core dedicated jihadists and the latter local hired guns with little or no ideology. ISAF was also looking for some form of decisive action for public consumption to demonstrate success to constituent populations. Operation ACHILLES was, according to some planners, oversold and expectations rose, which in turn drew more scarce resources away from the efforts in Kandahar Province.⁶

Ground manoeuvre during Operation ACHILLES essentially involved shaping operations for special operations forces’ enemy leadership targeting on a regional scale. Mullah Dadullah Lang, the Quetta Shura’s primary commander for southern Afghanistan, emerged in the jihadist media and then in the Western media in late 2006 as the Erwin Rommel of the Taliban: if one can envision an Erwin Rommel that also slit captured informants’ throats in living colour for DVD distribution in Kandahar City. Operation ACHILLES, with its conventional force manoeuvres in Helmand, created significant pressure on the Taliban leadership. Those efforts eventually forced Mullah Dadullah Lang into the open where he was made to dance to the tune of repeated HIMARS missile attacks and was then corralled and killed by TF 42’s Special Boat Squadron operators sometime on the night of 12 May 2007.⁷

A number of issues pertinent to Canada’s position in the south fell out of Operation ACHILLES. First, there was the accelerating debate over which province was more important to the coalition effort, which should get scarce resources, and in what order. Second, Operation ACHILLES used the revitalization of the Kajaki Dam as a key development objective in its planning documents. This contributed, to some extent, to the parallel interest that emerged in the Dahla Dam, a 1950s-era facility that was located in lower Shah Wali Kot District in Kandahar. Interest in the Dahla Dam gained momentum in Canadian policy circles in spring 2007. Third, the elimination of Mullah Dadullah Lang had spin-off effects on the security situation in Kandahar which, in turn, had inadvertent negative effects on reconstruction and development in two areas. The decision by Governor Asadullah Khalid to put on public display the corpse of the slain enemy commander triggered a kidnapping campaign against aid workers. This resulted in severe degradation in development operations. Mullah Dadullah Lang’s killing also removed the most vocal member of the Quetta Shura when it came to near-conventional operations of the style conducted in 2006 and made way for those who were inclined toward more complex asymmetric solutions to the insurgency’s operational and tactical problems.

The situation also evolved significantly at the Kabul level. Col Mike Capstick and the staff of the Strategic Advisory Team–Afghanistan (SAT-A) could bask in the fact that their efforts alongside their Afghan counterparts produced a coherent reconstruction strategy

for the country that was acceptable to everyone except the insurgents. In January 2007, the final draft of the strategic work plan of the Afghan National Development Strategy (ANDS) was delivered.⁸ The ANDS had a direct bearing on Canadian operations in Kandahar. Recall that the gross linkages between the federal government in Kabul with the provinces for reconstruction and development generally and temporarily focused on the role of the PRT in assisting the rural development ministry and the provincial governors. As seen in Volume I, the fighting throughout 2006 disrupted the specific means by which aid was to be dispersed to the population and the ISAF ADZ strategy was geared to provide a security framework to facilitate this.

The ANDS, now in its 2007 form, provided a slightly more coherent model to link all elements together. The Governor, supported by a Provincial Development Committee Secretariat and the Ministry of Rural Reconstruction and Development, would have a Provincial Development Committee with several working groups, that in turn would draw on the PRT, District Development Assemblies and Community Development Councils, and non-governmental organization donors. This was the new “spout” that was supposed to disperse a portion of the estimated \$11 billion (with a follow-on \$11 billion more) that was about to be put in the “hopper” in Kabul over a 10- to 15-year period.⁹ The facilitation and implementation of this “spout” became one of the PRT’s primary tasks throughout 2007 and will be examined in detail later.

With the ANDS completed and Afghan Cabinet approval pending in March 2007, SAT-A, itself, had to evolve. SAT-A had strategic leverage and credibility and delivered significant effects, but it possibly could be used as a mechanism to influence developments in Kabul as they related to Canadian objectives in Kandahar Province specifically. This was one view that emerged in CEFCOM in early 2007. Col Mike Capstick and his SAT-A crew were being replaced after more than a year’s hard work and now it was time to alter course. Col Don Dixon took the reins in early 2007 with a mandate to “Shape and assist the delivery of Afghan/Canadian effects in Kandahar Province” and to “make every effort to relay any relevant information on Afghan government initiatives that may impact Canada’s efforts in Afghanistan.” Key organizations that SAT-A was to maintain informal involvement with included the Special Economic Advisor to the President; the Chief of Staff to the President; Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development; Justice; Education; Transport; Aviation; Communications; and the Independent Civil Service Reform Commission. One of the key pieces of information SAT-A was to keep an eye out for was the “likelihood of democratic transition in 2009.”¹⁰

At least, that is what it looked like on paper. Issues with the implementation of SAT-A activities throughout 2007 related to the new interest that the Canadian government was showing in the wake of Operation MEDUSA. This was in part a response to vociferous

domestic criticism over why Canada was fighting rather than rebuilding and developing in the country, and to criticism over why the efforts of various Canadian government departments were not as coordinated as they should be.¹¹

The tri-departmental agreement between the Department of National Defence (DND), Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) and Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) that produced the original PRT construct was moribund by late 2006. Though there were dedicated people from CIDA, DFAIT, and CIVPOL on the ground in Kandahar, the Glyn Berry assassination had long-lasting effects on their ability to carry out tasks outside of Camp Nathan Smith because their parent departments insisted on security measures that made movement difficult, if not impossible, in some cases. Until the Force Protection Company arrived in November–December 2006, the PRT personnel simply could not get “out and about” and do business in the volume that was required by an ever-evolving situation. When the means were available, the situation improved. However, the relationship between SAT-A and the embassy seriously deteriorated.

Canadian Ambassador David Sproule was a contributor to the Policy Action Group, which was established in Kabul during 2006 as a crucial advisory mechanism to coordinate the Afghan government’s approach to the war and to development with its international partners. This high-level group within the Afghan government emerged from a process that SAT-A subtly encouraged to respond to President Karzai’s concern about information sharing on the state of the insurgency. Karzai needed quick answers to three questions: Who is fighting us and why? Why is there such a disconnect between Kabul and the population? How do we increase development and security in southern Afghanistan? The Policy Action Group consisted of representatives from ISAF, Combined Forces Command–Afghanistan (CFC–A), the United Nations Special Representative, three Afghan ministries (Interior, Education, and Rural Development) and selected ambassadors. “The main card,” as a SAT-A staffer explained, “was the 2,300 troops [Canada] had in Regional Command (South).” In theory, DFAIT should have been looking for opportunities to assert Canadian influence, but after Chris Alexander ceased to be ambassador, DFAIT was “not switched on” in the Kabul environment and according to SAT-A, opportunities were lost to leverage Canadian input.¹²

SAT-A members had the impression that there was a personality clash between Sproule and Commander ISAF, Lt.-Gen. Richards, and as a result, the Canadian ambassador was no longer welcome at ISAF headquarters and in other circles. However, Col Dixon from SAT-A was made welcome in those circles. This, combined with the SAT-A’s coup on getting Canada included in the Policy Action Group, generated a certain amount of angst in DFAIT circles back in Ottawa, as did the elevation of former Canadian ambassador Chris Alexander to senior deputy in the United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan

(UNAMA) after his departure from DFAIT. Alexander retained a strong and positive relationship with SAT-A. Indeed, when Lt.-Gen. McNeill took over from Richards in February 2007, one of his first moves was to call SAT-A for a briefing, which was done directly and not through the Canadian embassy. There were other inefficiencies, including juvenile behaviour directed toward SAT-A personnel by elements in the embassy over who could use embassy amenities. Sproule was increasingly seen as ineffective by elements in Ottawa seeking better interdepartmental cooperation.¹³ Col Dixon and the SAT-A quietly continued on in the tradition of the Capstick SAT-A.

The issues with Sproule and Richards confirmed to the Clerk of the Privy Council Kevin Lynch what he suspected back in November 2006: the civilian-military relationship was not working in Afghanistan. There were also internal problems at DFAIT: the International Branch and the Bilateral Branch were at odds with each other over who handled Afghanistan. This competition interfered with prioritizing security issues. Consequently, the idea of an Associate Deputy Minister for Afghanistan within DFAIT emerged. Lynch selected David Mulroneu as the man to sort this internal DFAIT problem out.¹⁴ Mulroneu's education included a bachelor's degree in English literature. He had never served in the armed forces or in a non-governmental organization. His professional experience was in complex Asian-Pacific trade issues but he had no experience with the Middle East or Southwest Asian affairs or personal experience with conflict zones.¹⁵ He had, however, visited Afghanistan in the 1970s.

Mulroneu was appointed to lead the Afghanistan Task Force within DFAIT in April 2007, which was supposed to be an interdepartmental body to coordinate Canadian government departments involved in Afghanistan.¹⁶ The Afghanistan Task Force ran into substantial bureaucratic opposition from the other fiefdoms in DFAIT, particularly International Security. Mulroneu forced the issue and by early 2007, he started to coordinate with LGen Mike Gauthier at CEFCOM and Stephen Wallace at CIDA. The objective, according to Mulroneu, was to develop a "common narrative" and gain agreement on the interdepartmental issues. CIDA was a "cheque writing effort" while the military "saw Afghanistan as counter-insurgency enabled through civilian tools." Mulroneu believed that in Afghanistan the civilian entities were underpowered and understaffed which was in part due to the Martin government's preoccupation with Haiti and the Sudan. Mulroneu strove to make Afghanistan the number one priority in the DFAIT bureaucracy and to protect it.¹⁷

The first thing that Mulroneu could influence was who was ambassador in Kabul. He chose Arif Lalani and this change was implemented in April-May 2007. Though he had been ambassador in Jordan for a year and brought some Ottawa-based bureaucratic experience to bear, Lalani had no military experience or significant experience working

in conflict zones, nor did he possess other qualifications related to such operations. Even the Afghan Kandahar leadership expressed skepticism regarding Lalani's credibility. After a meeting involving Qayyum Karzai, Ahmad Wali Karzai, Asadullah Khalid and the Kandahar Provincial Council, a senior power broker remarked to one Canadian present, "This one has a lot to learn."¹⁸

Lalani did not have a good working relationship with SAT-A, to put it mildly. Some believed that SAT-A was an affront to DFAIT and Lalani was perceived by those in SAT-A to be leaning in that direction. This led to continued friction, some of which veered into the juvenile lane. SAT-A tried to maintain the level of influence it had in Afghan circles after 2007 but was decreasingly able to influence a common Canadian approach in Kabul. Lalani and Mulrone wanted SAT-A removed or replaced with a DFAIT-controlled organization. That fight continued over the next two years.¹⁹

Canada seemed to have all the tools it needed to wield influence in Kabul to support the effort in the south, but it did not appear to be able to use them to full effect. This had negative consequences during the course of Canada's time in Kandahar as it forced Canada to focus on the operational level and shy away from the hard-won strategic influence scene in Kabul.

Joint Task Force Afghanistan and Task Force Kandahar

The changes in the command structure in late 2006 produced a situation where the same personnel manned two organizations: Joint Task Force Afghanistan Headquarters and Task Force Kandahar. JTF-A HQ was the Canadian national headquarters, while TF Kandahar was the designation for the units and capabilities assigned to NATO ISAF Regional Command (South) headquarters but were still commanded by the JTF Afghanistan Headquarters' staff. (For style and clarity, TF Kandahar will be used from here for both JTF-A HQ and Task Force Kandahar. See also Appendix A.)

TF Kandahar, for all intents and purposes, commanded a brigade. This was not a traditional, Second World War- or Cold War-like brigade by any means. In 2002 and 2006, almost all of the attention was focused on the battle group as the central generator of Canadian activity with everything else supporting it. By 2007, this was no longer the case. The PRT was enhanced by then and the OMLT was about to be; both were commanded by lieutenant-colonels and were quasi battalion-sized or equivalent structures. More and more "enablers" needed coordinating: psychological operations (PSYOPS), civil-military cooperation (CIMIC), UAVs, electronic warfare and counter-IED operations. The National Support Element (or Logistics Battalion in Cold War terms) was about to grow. There was theatre airlift in the form of a couple of CC-130 Hercules transports, and there was the Theatre Support Element in Dubai. The need to create synergistic effects from all of these elements assumed greater importance in Canadian circles.

TF Kandahar, in late 2006, struggled to identify where those synergies could take place. TF Kandahar, as discussed in the previous volume, was not manned for these activities and therefore had to be augmented and structurally altered. By February 2007, however, it was better positioned to carry out its tasks. The Provincial Operations Centre was up and running under LCol Tom Bradley, who previously served as Recce Squadron commander in 2002 and knew the environment. All Canadian units declared to Regional Command (South) were grouped on the NATO organizational chart as TF Kandahar but in reality, JTF Afghanistan and TF Kandahar became interchangeable terms.

With the greater number and variety of units rotating in and out, it was difficult to line them all up for relief in place at once. The TF 1-07 Battle Group arrived in February 2007. Based on 2 RCR, and led by LCol Walker, TF 1-07 was structurally similar to its predecessors, with three infantry companies, a tank squadron, a recce squadron, a combat engineer squadron and an artillery battery. TF 1-07 had two RCR companies, I and H, led by Maj David Quick and Maj Alex Ruff, respectively; C Company from the 2nd Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (2PPCLI), led by Maj Chris Henderson; and D Battery, a M-777 battery, led by Maj Dan Bobbitt. 42 Field Squadron was led by Maj Jake Galuga. Commanded by Maj Steve Graham from the Royal Canadian Dragoons, the Reconnaissance Squadron replaced 1 RCR's ISTAR squadron. The Leopard tank squadron, which arrived in fall 2006, and became offset in its deployment with the infantry companies, had its arrival rationalized into the new rotation system. Maj Dave Broomfield and C Squadron replaced Maj Trevor Cadieu's A Squadron. The Operation Mentor and Liaison Team also rotated in by late-February. Under the command of LCol Wayne Eyre, the OMLT was expanded to accommodate its new tasks (see below).

The decision was made in higher circles to have the Commanding Officer of the Kandahar PRT stay for a year-long tour to attain some level of continuity in the reconstruction, development and governance areas. LCol Chamberlain moved into Camp Nathan Smith in February. The PRT retained its own mechanized infantry company and "enablers." All of the CIMIC personnel in the task force were now concentrated at the PRT.

What about the "enablers"? Most of these were ISTAR-oriented. The All Source Intelligence Centre was commanded by Major Steve Desjardins. There was the Tactical Unmanned Aerial Vehicle organization and the Mobile Electronic Warfare Teams from 2 Electronic Warfare (EW) Squadron: the TUAV fed into the battlegroup Tactical Operations Centre and the TF Kandahar Provincial Operations Centre, while the Mobile Electronic Warfare Teams were deployed in detachments with Recce Squadron or the rest of the battle group as required. In time, a Surveillance and Target Acquisition Battery was formed to deal with force protection issues at Forward Operating Base Ma'Sum Ghar.

Another new organization was the Military Police Company, led by Maj Bernard Hudson, who took over from Maj Jeff Harvey. In the previous rotations, a Military Police platoon shuttlecocked between the battle group and the PRT. With the new requirements related to police training expansion and to the detainee issue in 2007, the decision was made to have two Military Police platoons: one at the PRT and another at KAF. There was also an increased protective requirement as the Canadian Forces National Investigative Service was now responsible for detailed investigations into any Canadian death. This was done partly to offset political liability back in Canada. Each Canadian combat death was now to be treated as a murder would be back in Canada, so the Canadian Forces National Investigative Service detachment had to be escorted when deployed.²⁰

TF Kandahar itself underwent changes. The headquarters now had to keep better track of developments in the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) as well as reconstruction issues and then act as an advisor or link between Ottawa policy makers and operations in the field. CTF Aegis had the same functions in the past, as it was an Operation ENDURING FREEDOM headquarters led by a Canadian. When it was replaced with a NATO headquarters led by a Dutchman, Canada had to have a repository for national assessment and input. Where was the delineation between what the PRT did in these areas and what TF Kandahar was supposed to do? And how did that relate to national priorities or coalition priorities? That drama played out continuously in 2007–2008.

One new development was the relationship between TF Kandahar and the Canadian SOF in the south. Up to now, Canadian SOF organizations remained somewhat aloof from the Canadian command structure in the country and preferred to work as part of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM's Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force. An increasingly crowded battle space demanded more and better coordination. After some debate between the Canadian SOF leadership and Generals Hillier, Leslie, Gauthier and Grant, a line on the organizational chart was re-drawn and paperwork rewritten so that TF Kandahar ostensibly had increased input into Canadian SOF activities in the TF Kandahar battle space. The relationship between Canadian SOF and TF Kandahar improved marginally in the first half of 2007.²¹

The TF Kandahar structure of 2007 outwardly resembled the structures of TF Kandahar in later years. However, each headquarters rotation should be seen as a unique entity, specifically because of the composition of the personalities involved and the differing pressures on each headquarters given the operational situation extant at the time. There was a learning curve on all areas of interest each time a new headquarters rotated in, and those rotations were not set at nine months until 2007–2008. As a result, it was difficult to attain a steady state at the best of times—and these were not the best of times. The intent was to attain a deep coordination of Canadian efforts, but that intent was not realized during the first half of 2007.

Development Matters and the Provincial Reconstruction Team, February–April 2007

The Kandahar PRT and its operations achieved a high profile in 2007. Those in Ottawa, Washington, Brussels and Kabul who wanted a more “developmental” public face on the mission worked to enable the PRTs to show to critics that Afghanistan was not all about combat. By necessity, LCol Simon Hetherington’s PRT had been focused on supporting efforts related to Operation MEDUSA but had by dint of their improved mobility and the reduced level of enemy activity started to branch out by January 2007. LCol Chamberlain and the new PRT took stock on arrival in accordance with new pressures from Ottawa and NATO to get visible reconstruction and development programmes moving. At the same time, TF Kandahar’s new structure had a J5 cell devoted to reconstruction, development and governance issues, while Regional Command (South) also carried on with its attempts to rationalize these aspects across all southern provinces. The PRT was not the sole clearing house for the province any longer, but it would take some time to draw the boundaries. Getting the J5 and PRT to communicate was comparatively easy. Dealing with Regional Command (South) was something else and as time went on, TF Kandahar and the PRT more or less paid lip service to what Regional Command (South) thought it was doing while it was commanded by Maj.-Gen. van Loon. In a general sense, J5 kept abreast of the KAF and Kabul axis in military, policing and information operations matters, while the PRT handled the development community and the Kandahar City and district axis. TF Kandahar retained a Development Advisor from CIDA and a Political Advisor from DFAIT, but they were there to advise the commander, not run programmes at the PRT or act as the command and control conduit to Ottawa through the ambassador in Kabul.²²

The ANDS “operationalization” process was still underway in spring 2007 so in its early weeks, the new PRT looked at the previous strategy and what had been wrought in Kandahar Province. The original 2001 Bonn Agreement pillars that acted as the strategic framework for development were all in varying states of collapse. There were no Italian judicial training personnel to be seen in Kandahar, nor was there a single German police trainer: neither country’s personnel had been to the province since Canadians deployed in 2005, four years after Bonn. The Disbandment of Illegally Armed Groups (DIAG) process had completely fizzled out the previous year. What about the counternarcotics pillar led by the United Kingdom? There was no visible, let alone viable, alternative livelihoods programme in operation to wean farmers away from poppy farming in Kandahar Province; counternarcotics was all eradication-based. There was no sequencing, no coordination. There may have been a counternarcotics strategy, but nobody seemed to know what it was.²³

As a result, LCol Chamberlain, his deputy Maj Chip Madic and their staff looked for as many linkages as they could in an attempt to connect what Kabul thought it wanted with what was actually going on in Kandahar. There were few to be found. The one area that the PRT could be effective lay in matters of police coordination. There were disparate elements involved in this activity: the Canadian civilian police officers at the PRT, led by Superintendent David Fudge; the DynCorp contract trainers at the Regional Training Center; and the TF Kandahar Military Police Company. Maj Hudson worked up a Mobile Mentor Teams concept based on his experiences as an exchange officer with the Royal Military Police in Iraq. LCol Hetherington's staff had already advanced ideas on the need for better Kandahar City security measures when Regional Command (South) was looking for alternatives to Zharey operations. These ideas eventually coalesced as Operation PORTCULLIS.²⁴

PORTCULLIS was the security plan for Kandahar City and as such, it had numerous interlocking objectives. The first was to establish a grid of movement control points to generate observation, surveillance and security on vital routes. Second, PORTCULLIS would take these temporary checkpoints and convert them to permanent checkpoints. Third, certain checkpoints would transition into permanent police sub-stations. The most important aspect of PORTCULLIS outside of this was to enable chief of police General Alizai and his organization, such as it was. Another part of PORTCULLIS was finding enough manpower to implement the plan and hold them in one place to train them, as there was constant demand in the districts for partially-trained "warm bodies" to act as militia.²⁵

Operation PORTCULLIS allowed the new PRT to "shake out" and get all of its moving parts working. Land had to be selected and acquired or bargained for. The sites had to be cleared of unexploded ordnance. Architects and engineers needed to plan each site. Contracts had to be let. The city and provincial leadership had to be engaged. The police needed to be trained and mentored. Consequently, the Force Protection Company focussed on delivering PRT personnel to meetings all over the city. In other words, everyone from the Specialist Engineer Team to the DFAIT representative, Gavin Buchan, became involved in PORTCULLIS. Why DFAIT? Institutionally, CIDA did not like getting its hands dirty by supporting coercive structures like police and DFAIT possessed a Global Peace and Security fund that could be tapped. PORTCULLIS would chug along throughout 2007 and eventually deliver a significantly higher level of security, particularly on the vital and exposed Highway 4 "IED Alley" artery southeast of the city.²⁶ Enemy activity would, over the course of the year, drop off completely in this area and that state of affairs continued until 2010.

The PRT continued to be the CIMIC operations repository as in the past, and, as before, the tension between short-term reconstruction and long-term development continued to play itself out in 2007. Under Hetherington's PRT, the CIMIC teams were tactically controlled by the infantry companies in the battle group they were assigned to but still drew on PRT funding and projects. In Chamberlain's organization, seven teams specialized in the districts where Canadians were operating. As before, the CIMIC teams remained the "eyes and ears" of reconstruction and development in the province.²⁷

The teams were more operational than tactical as the PRT tried to move away from battle-damage infrastructure payouts toward projects that had more of an impact on the districts as a whole. This was not always possible, as the PRT discovered with the Route Summit irrigation issues. This bureaucratic morass involved compensation for damage to the fragile water supply situation in eastern Zharey when the road was initially put in. The Governor, Asadullah Khalid, announced back in early October 2006 that "lands lost as a result of Route Summit will not be compensated until the security declaration is given,"²⁸ that is, until the elders gave their word to Khalid that they would take responsibility for the security situation in Pashmul. This never took place and the PRT was drawn in, in an attempt to find a solution to this "chicken-egg" problem. Another factor that underpinned this dispute was that the Pashmul bazaar was owned by Habibullah Jan in Senjaray and he did not get along with district leader Khairuddin, who, in turn, was appointed by Jan's antagonist, Governor Asadullah Khalid. As with everything in Kandahar, there were multiple layers of local disputes that the Taliban could exploit at any given time—and did.²⁹ The United Arab Emirates' initiative regarding PRT contributions and a possible battle group deployment to Spin Boldak died sometime in the first half of 2007. The reasons for the initiative's demise remain unclear but no Emirates troops were coming to relieve the pressure on TF Kandahar.³⁰

One hallmark of this particular PRT rotation was its initial attempts at leveraging religious engagement. Padre Suleyman Demiray once again arrived in Kandahar to help map out the religious terrain. There were two organizations of interest: the Kandahar Ulema Shura and the Hajj/Awqaf (also called Ministry of Hajj and Islamic Affairs). The Ulema Shura was the central body of religious scholars in southern Afghanistan while the Hajj/Awqaf was technically the government agency responsible for arranging transport for the Hajj to Mecca. Both organizations wanted assistance in expanding their influence in order to counter Taliban ideology, but both encountered problems with the Kandahar government. The Governor refused to allocate protective resources to the Ulema Shura, while the Hajj/Awqaf could not tap into development monies because the Provincial Development Committee was not functioning. The situation was aggravated by the fact that the Taliban

continued with its assassination campaign against moderate members of the Ulema Shura in January and February 2007. Both organizations communicated their needs to the PRT through Padre Demiray: these were duly passed on. The PRT, however, could only handle limited mosque refurbishment. CIDA was not structured to handle programming for what amounted to religious information operations, while Gavin Buchan passed the requests through the DFAIT chain to the embassy. He was given a negative reply.³¹

This was extremely frustrating, especially for experienced Canadian personnel in the PRT and J5 who understood that the insurgents co-opted the mosques to get their message to the population and “wandering mullahs” moved unhindered with their messaging throughout the province. Padre Demiray himself was subjected to what amounted to petty internal branch politics as some padres objected to being “used” as “effects weapons.” Padre Demiray was disinclined to continue his involvement with religious engagement in Kandahar after 2007. With some frustration, the whole religious engagement file was tacitly handed over to the U.S. Special Forces PSYOPS organizations. The Government of Canada ceded control of this crucial element of the war to others and essentially refused to fight the Taliban on this field of battle.³² The failure to address religious engagement in a coordinated and meaningful fashion at this crucial juncture and later should rate as one of Canada’s main failures of the Kandahar campaign, with equal and proportionate blame across the departments. This permitted the enemy to attain a level of credibility with the population unhindered, and that influence grew over the next four years, particularly in the rural districts.

The “operationalization” of the ANDS slid sideways into events in the early months of spring. Development money for projects decided upon at the community level (Community Development Council), prioritized at the district level (District Development Assembly) and then approved and prioritized at the provincial level (Provincial Development Committee) was not flowing as planned. The Community Development Councils were supposed to be created and mentored by UN HABITAT, while the District Development Assemblies were supposed to be set up by the National Area Based Development Programme. There was no official mentor for the Provincial Development Committee, which was essentially moribund in the wake of Operation MEDUSA.³³

The whole system was not working. First, the Governor was not interested in the development council: he had no staff, lacked motivation on development issues and was focused on the security situation. Second, UN leadership in the south was at this point non-existent. This slowed down UN HABITAT’s Community Development Council programming as there was nobody to fall in behind UN HABITAT after they set up each community council to connect them to the district assemblies. As for the National Area

Based programme, it was dysfunctional as well, so not all of the district assemblies were up and running. None of the entities were comfortable establishing Community Development Councils and District Development Assemblies in districts where the security situation was uncertain, let alone violent.³⁴

It was left up to the PRT to jump-start the whole system and try to connect the moving parts. The first thing was to “mentor” the Governor on the Provincial Development Committee: CIDA funded two people to act as the Provincial Development Committee Secretariat, with a PRT senior advisor. Unreliable data suggested that 532 communities in nine of the province’s districts had Community Development Councils, but the critical districts to the west were under-represented. UN HABITAT was not getting any contract money from the province, so CIDA funded 40 of those community council projects. The province did not disperse any block grants at all to the communities. There were active programmes in Dand, Khakrez and Spin Boldak, however, and the linkages between Community Development Councils and their respective District Development Assemblies appeared functional to the PRT.³⁵ CIMIC played a role in working with the Community Development Council and District Development Assembly in Zharey to assist with the teardown of the Route Summit strong points as a test case. It was a slow start and it would take time.

A project that would occupy central importance for the Canadian effort in Afghanistan was the Dahla Dam and its associated irrigation system rehabilitation project. The importance of the Arghandab River in Kandahar’s economic life is self-evident but the economic and employment benefits of a large-scale project attracted President Hamid Karzai and Minister of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, Ehsan Zia, for political as well as economic reasons. They put a formal request in to Canada for assistance with the project, and CIDA rapidly contracted for an expert assessment team in February 2007. By April, and not coincident to the Mullah Naqib assassination attempt and Operation ADALAT, Governor Asadullah Khalid jumped on the band wagon and, with a million dollars of advertising, promoted Dahla Dam as the biggest “soon to come” project in the media. High expectations with the public were raised right from the beginning. It is important to understand this state of affairs, given what occurred later in the campaign. The Dahla Dam project was an issue long before Canada seriously committed to its rehabilitation and there was significant Afghan political context to that decision.³⁶

What was not understood in Canadian circles at the time was that the Popalzai power structure’s domination of the Dahla Dam project would lead to Popalzai domination of the Arghandab district, the home of the Alikozais. Arghandab district controlled water to all of the other down-river districts and to the city. Water was crucial for economic activity.

Whoever controlled Arghandab controlled the water and thus had influence over agricultural activity (both licit and illicit).³⁷ The Alikozais would likely take exception to Popalzai domination in some form. For the most part, Canadian representatives on the ground at the time and in Ottawa had no idea what they were getting involved with, and particularly what the larger security implications might be. Canada was focused simplistically on supporting “the government” to help “the people” and would continue to do so for many years after. By supporting the Dahla Dam project, Canada was seen to be siding with the Popalzai power structure or were seen to be naive by others in Kandahar’s political arena. Both perceptions left Canada vulnerable on several fronts.

However, there were more important issues for the Canadian media to focus on. In March 2007, *The Globe and Mail* published an article claiming that persons detained by Canadian forces in the field and handed over to Afghan security forces were subsequently abused in various holding facilities. The Opposition later used this article for their purposes in the House of Commons. The Taliban’s information operations organization then latched on to the controversy and twisted it through its particular ideological lens for consumption by Afghans and jihadist supporters around the world. The Canadian government was forced to react to these allegations and this had serious consequences for TF Kandahar and its units, especially the PRT, which was involved in assisting the Afghans in improving conditions at Sarposa Prison and mentoring the police.

The most important aspect of the detainee controversy was not just in the specifics of what was allegedly perpetrated on the supposed victims, or how culpable Canada was in the eyes of the human rights industry, nor did it really lie in the possible destabilization of a minority government in Canada. The controversy’s importance laid in exposing the complete lack of a functional judicial system in Kandahar Province. Subsequently, significant PRT effort was expended in assessing the nature of the judicial system; CIDA was focused elsewhere, DFAIT had some funding for police, Corrections Canada was involved in prison rehabilitation, and that was about it. LCol Chamberlain tasked his Legal Advisor, LCdr Gina Connor, with figuring out how the judicial system was supposed to work, while Corrections Canada personnel at the PRT collaterally gained insight into the prison system. Public agitation in Canada over incarceration matters certainly put the cart before the horse. Without a functional police force, let alone a judiciary, Western-style law and order was simply not possible in Kandahar.

This all diverted significant resources from other activities, though it definitely laid bare the complete failure of Italy to do what it pledged six years before in 2001. Certainly, Canadian prisoner of war handling would not have made the news, let alone led to questioning the war effort, during the Second World War. In the post-Somalia Inquiry

world, however, any hint of improper behaviour toward prisoners was political dynamite in Canada. Any insurgent specializing in information operations could easily pick up on this vulnerability through online research and exploit it to the fullest. When the Canadian detainee facility was up and running in 2008 some prisoners exhibited specialized training on how to play to these vulnerabilities.³⁸

Expanding the Operational Mentor Liaison Team

The work done by LCol Lanthier and his original OMLT in late 2006 paid dividends when LCol Eyre and his team arrived in February 2007. On arrival, they learned that each Afghan Corps had several associated brigades, not divisions. Each brigade consisted of several battalion-sized organizations called *kandaks*. Usually there were three “Rifle” kandaks, designated 1st through 3rd Kandak; a Combat Support Kandak (4th Kandak) that grouped artillery, engineers and reconnaissance companies; and a Combat Service Support Kandak (5th Kandak) for logistics. For 1-205 Brigade in Kandahar, these units were properly named 1st through 5th Kandak, 1st Brigade, 205 Corps but Canadian shorthand occasionally tossed back and forth between “Kandak 1” and “1st Kandak” and so on.³⁹

At this point, the Afghan National Army organization for 1-205 Brigade had the 1st and 3rd Kandak in the Brigade mentored by the Dutch, with 2nd Kandak still mentored by Canadians. One of the Dutch-mentored kandaks was deployed in Oruzgan Province. The brigade headquarters was American-mentored as were the Combat Support and Combat Service Support Kandaks. 2nd Kandak from 1-209 Brigade was also in the area but mentored by U.S. Special Forces. Not all kandaks were deployed at full strength.⁴⁰

Lt.-Col. Sherin Shah’s 2nd Kandak had deployed elements on Canadian operations alongside 2 RCR Battle Group, but had not really been included in the Canadian planning process. For the most part, the kandaks were able to operate at the platoon-level but had not been given the opportunity to plan and work cohesively at the company and kandak levels yet. One of the reasons for this was that the American special forces regularly hived off companies “so that they could get an “Afghan face” for their operations.”⁴¹ In that sense, they were levies of a sort but the Canadian approach set out to change that perception.

BGen Tim Grant endorsed the view that mentoring the Afghan National Army was part of the larger and long-term NATO exit strategy and was prepared to allocate resources to support almost any task that assisted 1-205 Brigade and 205 Corps. ISAF and Operation ENDURING FREEDOM were shielding the Afghan reconstruction effort—and that included the security forces. Once again, however, the tension between short-term employment for tactical or operational response versus long-term self-sufficient capacity building came to the fore, especially when Regional Command (South) under van Loon and his successors regularly shifted forces to Helmand at the expense of operations in Kandahar.⁴²

1-205 Brigade was a brigade in name only. To move the brigade beyond the “levy” stage, it was crucial that its ability to independently plan and then be able to sustain its operations be significantly strengthened. That meant robustly mentoring the brigade headquarters and especially the combat service support (logistic) kandak in a systematic fashion, moving far beyond the ad hoc support provided by the NSE in 2006. The existing tension between NATO, the U.S. SOF community and the National Guard brigade at the Afghan National Training Center in Kabul over who got Afghan kandaks was subsequently exploited by TF Kandahar. When the American ETT at the 1-205 Brigade headquarters was ready to rotate home, TF Kandahar offered to take on the mentoring task. Similarly, the combat service support kandak mentoring task came up for rotation and TF Kandahar cut away troops from the NSE, the PRT, and the battle group to the OMLT so they could mentor the combat service support kandak. This produced some tension at CEFCOM, as LGen Gauthier believed that partnering kandaks with Canadian battle groups and NSEs was the path to take instead of mentoring with smaller sub-units. TF Kandahar did not receive a troop level increase to do the partnering task, so they augmented the OMLT from existing forces in Afghanistan. The Canadian contingent at the Afghan National Training Center in Kabul was withdrawn as a result of these changes, which reduced Canadian saliency in Kabul.⁴³

The Afghan National Army also altered its deployment in the south, took Oruzgan away from 1-205 Brigade, and re-numbered some kandaks. In its relatively steady state, the Afghan National Army could deploy two infantry kandaks (rotating between each other) mentored by Canada, a combat support kandak mentored by Americans, and a combat service support kandak mentored by Canadians. The three fighting kandaks were “fed” by American Logistical Support Teams connected to the combat service support kandak, while the brigade headquarters for 1-205 Brigade was Canadian-mentored.

When all was said and done, the new OMLT structure had mentors at corps, brigade and kandak levels. The kandak mentor team was led by Maj James Price. Each Afghan company in the kandak had a Canadian company mentoring team of six people, led by a captain mounted in RG-31 Nyalas. An OMLT Security Force (SECFOR) and a small logistics structure made up the OMLT Support Element. SECFOR consisted of an RG-31 platoon and their crews, and a forward observation officer/forward air controller who handled fire support, resupply, extraction and protection for the mentors. SECFOR permitted the Afghan kandaks access to ISAF close air support and artillery.⁴⁴

Mentoring at the non-commissioned officers level, where the Afghan National Army was weak, played right to the Canadian Army’s strengths. The highly-experienced and mature Canadian NCO culture was a crucial element in the relationship building and training process, which contributed dramatically to the OMLT successes in 2007 and in later years.

Moving the yardsticks forward on Afghan National Army development was a slow and painstaking process. LCol Eyre and his men were confronted with a new army that had constantly shifting internal dynamics:

ANA leadership come from a variety of backgrounds—former national Army, various Mujahideen factions or both—and various tribal and ethnic groupings. Although their loyalty to the Government of Afghanistan is considered primary, political turmoil could result in old loyalties resurfacing.⁴⁵

To drive the point home, Canadian mentors were confronted with assisting an army where pay was irregular, death and disability benefits were non-existent, and leave policy was flexible. This led to an absentee rate of 10%–20%, and sometimes higher. It was an uphill struggle to assist the Afghans in building a professional army but the OMLT seized the opportunities and moved forward.⁴⁶ The OMLT had to give the Afghans an opportunity to learn from their mistakes—even when it affected Canadian operations. The Afghan soldiers were not Canadian levies; they were partners fighting for and in their own country. There were some Canadians, unfortunately, who forgot these important points in later years, but in 2007 the spirit of partnership and mentoring was alive and well, especially after LCol Walker and LCol Eyre had a meeting of minds and the relationship between Maj Price and Lt.-Col. Sherin Shah was forged under the fire of the first operations.

Battle Group Dispositions and Actions, February 2007

The 2 RCR Battle Group initially fell in on 1 RCR Battle Group's positions in Zharey and Panjwayi. Patrol Base Wilson and FOB Ma'Sum Ghar were the primary "anchors" for the strong points located along Route Summit. At this time, LTC Don Bolduc's TF 31 with associated Afghan National Army companies from 2nd Kandak and 1-205 Brigade were set up in patrol bases in Mushan, Talukan, Zangabad, and co-located with Canadian forces at FOB Sperwan Ghar. (See Figure 1-1.)

LCol Walker and his task force arrived to find the Arghandab River in full flood, with no means to cross it at FOB Zettelmeyer. As a result, the battle group had to track back along Route Fosters East to Highway 1 and then to Patrol Base Wilson for some weeks. That was not all: 2 RCR Battle Group was greeted with a pair of suicide vehicle-borne IEDs which, fortunately, produced no casualties except for the bombers. More insidiously, however, was the enemy's deployment of a mentally-challenged man as a false suicide bomber. This unfortunate individual, equipped with wiring inside a vest but no explosives, was gunned down by LCol Walker when he approached his Tactical Headquarters convoy and ignored instructions to stay away. The following day, a Canadian convoy proceeding

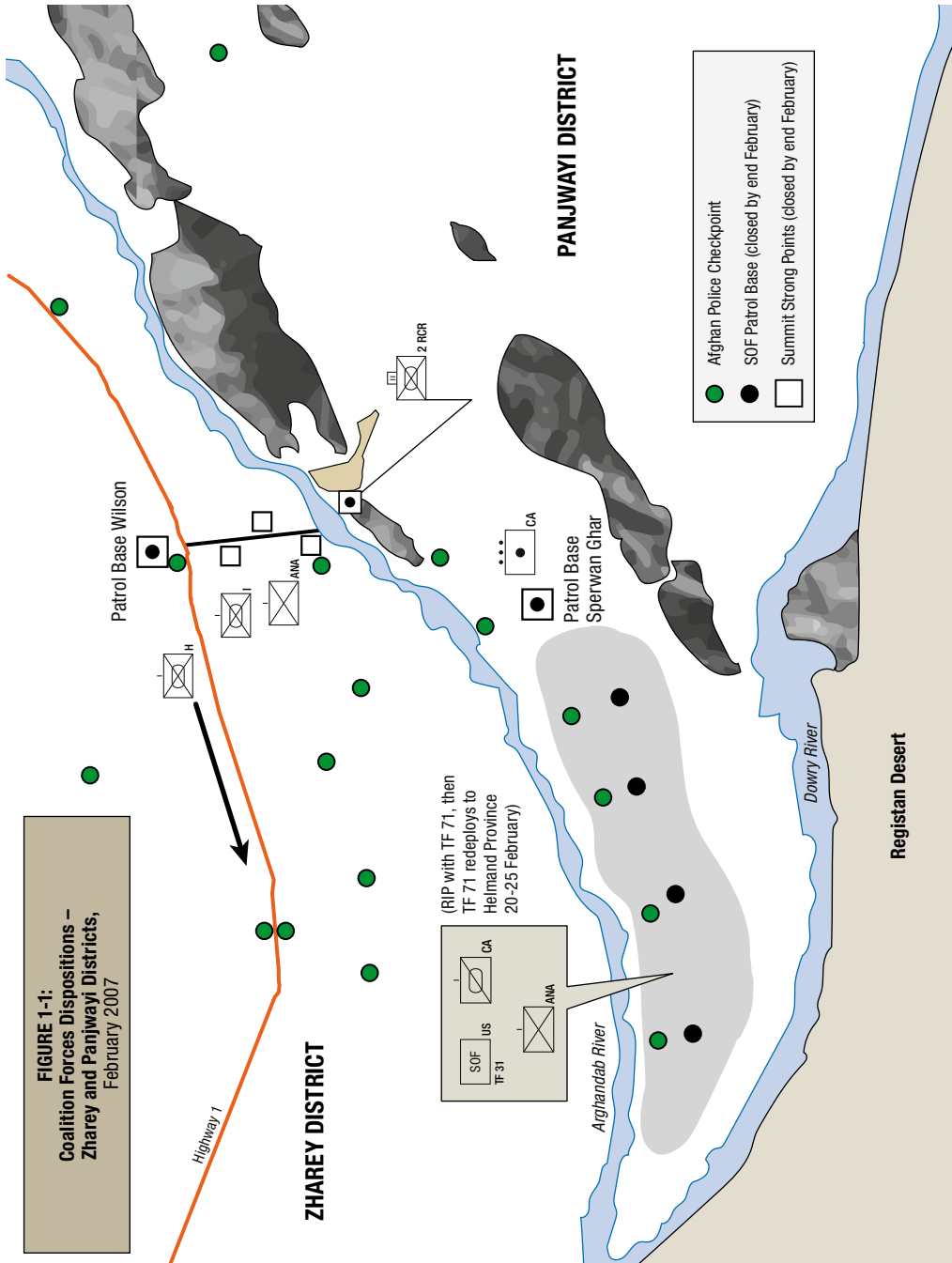


Figure 1-1: Coalition Forces Dispositions – Zharey and Panjwayi Districts, February 2007

down Highway 4 into the city was engaged with small-arms fire and then with RPG fire in two separate locations. Blowing through the ambush, the convoy made its way to the Governor's Palace where they mistakenly engaged an Afghan policeman who was guarding the Joint Provincial Coordination Centre (JPCC). While 2 RCR Battle Group was unsnarling itself from these incidents, the enemy launched an attack on the Afghan police positions at Kolk in Zharey District and Maj Ruff and H Company got into a contact near Howz-e Madad. That was all within one week of transfer of command authority.⁴⁷

LCol Walker and his staff were skeptical of the existing 1 RCR Battle Group dispositions. They believed that the previous battle group had adopted a "bunker mentality" that was compounded by their losses, particularly the death of their regimental sergeant major. Furthermore, the perception was that the battle group was psychologically tied to Route Summit and its strong points, and were not conducting counterinsurgency operations. The existing plan, BAAZ TSUKA Phase 3C, was not specific in these dispositions, so 2 RCR battle group planners quickly set out to re-assess the situation. This took about a month before it was fully implemented, but the first thing the battle group did was to tear down the Route Summit strong points and implement an aggressive patrolling plan in Zharey District.⁴⁸

Maj Graham and Recce Squadron were initially based in Sperwan Ghar where they worked with TF 31 and its Afghan National Army charges. It took some time for Recce Squadron to flow in and, in any event, it now consisted of two eight-car Coyote troops instead of one, thus altering operating procedures established during previous rotations. Recce Squadron sortied out of Sperwan Ghar and supported TF 31 efforts in the communities to the west: Zangabad, Talukan, and Mushan. The U.S. Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha worked with locals to improve the road system and brought in contractors to connect the three communities. In time, LCol Walker attached Recce Platoon to Recce Squadron but while it was deploying through Kandahar City Recce got into a firefight that damaged almost all of its RG-31 vehicles.⁴⁹

Within three weeks, TF 31 was relieved with LTC Pat Mahaney's TF 71 and part of a kandak from 1-209 Brigade. TF 71 and this kandak were subsequently withdrawn and sent to Helmand as part of Operation ACHILLES. This left a huge vacuum in western Panjwayi District and all of the projects there stopped. When BGen Grant complained to Maj.-Gen. van Loon, he was told to man the vacated checkpoints with his clerks and cooks. Needless to say, BGen Grant was not impressed.⁵⁰

Regional Command (South) changed its mind on this issue once again: its objective was now to "render the Taliban ineffective" within the ADZ and keep the lines of communications open, while at the same time enabling the international community

and the non-governmental organizations to deploy reconstruction and development aid. TF Kandahar's interpretation of Regional Command (South)'s intent was to "isolate the Kandahar ADZ from insurgent influence" and focus "within the Kandahar ADZ" in order to "promote Government of Afghanistan and Government of Kandahar authority." Notably, and given the political climate back in Canada, TF Kandahar reminded its units that it was vital to "defend our nation's support for this vital mission."⁵¹

Initially I Company would handle Route Summit area then would move to western Zharey District and Maywand while the Afghan security forces would secure central and eastern Zharey. C Company would operate from FOB Ma'Sum Ghar and in western Zharey as well. H Company was designated a power projection company but the removal of TF 71 altered the original plan. In a general sense, I Company focused on Zharey, while C Company looked toward Bazaar-e Panjwayi and the Sperwan Ghar areas, with the hope that the Afghan forces would continue to handle western Panjwayi.⁵²

LCol Walker and the 2 RCR Battle Group staff believed that partnered operations with the Afghan National Army should be a central aspect of any task force operations and wanted to establish their credentials immediately both with the Afghans and the enemy. Over the course of the next month, LCol Walker and LCol Eyre and his OMLT worked with 1-205 Brigade to make this happen. One of the first operations was Operation MINOTAUR, mounted on 13 February. I Company and an Afghan National Army company received information on the location of a weapons cache located east of Route Summit. It was a good "shake out" with no contact. Exploitation of the cache site revealed the stockpiling of Canadian "junk" for reuse by the insurgents, including a 155mm carrier shell about to be modified as an IED. Insight into the enemy's medical system came to light. The insurgents used Mirwais Hospital as one of their primary care facilities and relied particularly on their X-ray department.⁵³

H Company, plus part of an Afghan National Army company with Canadian mentors from the OMLT deployed down Highway 1 to Howz-e Madad on a disruption patrol during the relief in place on 23 February. The Afghan National Army uncovered information that the Taliban commander for Zharey District, Mullah Manan, had a compound south of the bazaar. Probing south from Highway 1, the force encountered substantial small-arms and RPG fire from three positions and responded in kind. The M-777 guns from D Battery and close air support from a B-1B bomber and two F-16s were brought to bear. There was an estimated nine enemy killed, many, of note, by the Afghan National Army. Tanks from B Squadron linked up and the force leaguered for the night and returned to base.⁵⁴

The Character of the Insurgency in 2007

As operations progressed in the first half of 2007, it was increasingly evident that the insurgency's character had changed even though the Quetta Shura leadership remained the same. Afghan security personnel told Canadians that they believed the insurgency was weaker now because the Taliban rarely stood and fought as they had in 2006 and shifted to "suicide bombers and mined roads." In any place there was ISAF and Afghan National Army presence, the enemy generally kept a low profile. As a result, it was not necessarily clear who controlled what.⁵⁵

Other analysis involving local views correctly noted that "although insurgents may be responsible in numerous cases, it is believed that commercial, political, factional, and personal interests may also be responsible"⁵⁶ for attacks against the aid community. Indeed, it appeared as though the insurgents shifted their IED targeting against heavily armoured ISAF vehicles to the unprotected Afghan National Army and Afghan police Ford Ranger pickup trucks, as well as the aid community's unarmoured commercial logistics vehicles. Moderate mullahs were assassinated to shape the insurgent's message in the mosques. In effect, the whole vulnerable Afghan reconstruction and governance system was under attack, not just its security forces. Experienced foreign fighters were heard to complain on their means of communication that "This Jihad is hard!" after they spent time in the Canadian area of operation up against 2 RCR Battle Group.⁵⁷

In March 2007, TF Kandahar became aware that there was a Taliban campaign plan, dubbed "The Akhund Plan" after one of its authors, Mullah Obaidullah Akhund. The Akhund Plan was strategically focused on "fixing ISAF to their bases and cutting off the major lines of communications to Kandahar City" in order to isolate the south of the country from Kabul both physically and psychologically; force ISAF and Operation ENDURING FREEDOM forces out; and then realize a Taliban state for the whole country. Operationally, this translated to limiting the expansion of the Afghan security forces and government; limiting the coalition's freedom of movement; and generating casualties to get domestic political pressure in NATO countries to withdraw from ISAF.⁵⁸ (See Figure 1-2.)

During Operation ACHILLES, ISAF forces seized documents that laid out the changing doctrinal basis for enemy action in the south. According to the material, "An insurgent needs five things":⁵⁹

1. a main goal: freedom from infidels for Muslims in the name of Allah;
2. global support: support of Muslim nations. We need [compact discs] of [battle against infidels] to inform people of our struggle;

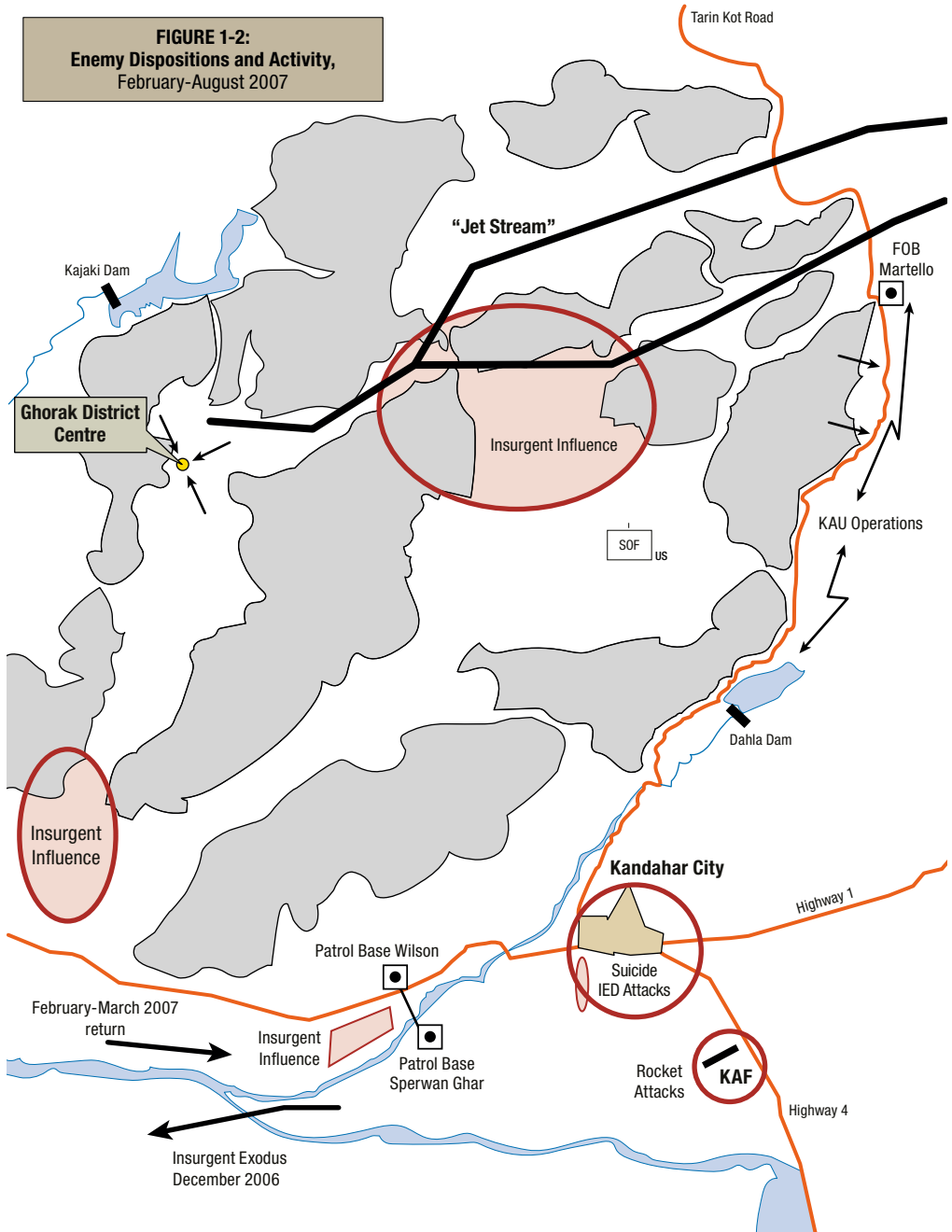


Figure 1-2: Enemy Dispositions and Activity, February-August 2007

3. regional support: treat the population with morality, honesty, and friendship in order to gain the needed assistance;
4. difficult terrain [to fight from/in]; and
5. national support: bond with a country, operate in secrecy in order to gain acceptance.

Additional material suggested that the Taliban doctrine accepted that there were several types of warfare:

1. military: conventional and well-organized war;
2. non-military: a guerilla-type hit and run war that weakens the enemy;
3. a war with *Rawayat Prasti*: a war using heavy weapons to destroy the enemy; or
4. a war without *Rawayat Prasti*: use bombs to weaken the enemy.

Clearly, the number of mining and IED incidents in Kandahar Province dramatically surged upwards in the first half of 2007. There was, however, the “dog that did not bark.” The weapons employed by the insurgents remained the same as they had for years: PKM machine guns, AK-series assault rifles, RPG rocket launchers, 82mm recoilless rifles, and 82mm mortars. There were no thermobaric munitions, no anti-tank guided missiles, no man-portable anti-aircraft missile systems. There was specialized suicide IED terrorism, but there were also Pakistani-made anti-tank mines. The RPG launchers fired Chinese fragmentation and Pakistani High Explosive Anti Tank (HEAT) rounds. The 82mm recoilless rifle rounds were Chinese in origin. The free-flight 107mm rockets, always fired singly or in pairs, were Iranian, Chinese, and Pakistani, and no insurgent ever thought to piece together one multiple rocket launcher from the hundreds left over from the 1980s and 1990s for a “stonk” on KAF. It was as if some entity was keeping the technology level of the insurgents deliberately low and relatively deniable. Later it was learned that the main Taliban contact with the Iranian weapons supply pipeline, Mullah Osmani, had been killed in a December 2006 airstrike and this disrupted the logistics flow for some months.⁶⁰

CHAPTER ONE



Photo Credit: Author



Photo Credit: Author

More and more enemy fighters arrived in the Canadian area of operations toting 82mm recoilless rifles equipped with Chinese 82mm anti-tank ammunition in an attempt to counter Canadian armoured vehicles.

At the same time, there was significant insurgent leadership from Afghanistan at the regional and local levels, and there were foreign fighters pouring into the south from all over the Muslim world. To what extent did Regional Command (South)'s theory that there were two separate tiers of Taliban hold? Was there, in fact, a less ideologically inclined Tier II Taliban fighter that could be "separated" from his hard-core Tier I? This was not clear. What was increasingly clear, however, was that the Director of Tribal Affairs in Kandahar Province believed that "many of the problems in Kandahar Province stem from the Panjpai tribes and that Ahmad Wali [Karzai]'s practice of offering a majority of political posts to Popalzai [tribal leaders] is creating a gap between the government and the people."⁶¹

Of course, that did not explain the existence of the Quetta Shura, nor did it explain the motives behind Al Qaeda's support for the insurgency's command body. Canadian analysts in Afghanistan generally stayed in the Afghan "lane" and did not get into the more strategic aspects of the global or regional conflicts. There was, however, consensus at TF Kandahar and Regional Command (South) that the Quetta Shura wanted to cut off all four major roads into Kandahar City, keep ISAF busy on the periphery, infiltrate the city and then destabilize it with the objective of swinging the population or otherwise intimidating it onto its side throughout the south. The Quetta Shura and its external allies were prepared to use all of these tribal disputes and local grievances as weapons in this assault.⁶²

What could be said in 2007 was that there were steadily building community-level grievances against the district and provincial governments and particularly their security force protectors. There was also competition between power brokers in the province, some of whom were tribal leaders, and some that were not. Some of this economic competition was narcotics-oriented, some of it involved other activities, and all of it involved prestige and pride. These problems all overlapped. At the same time, there were entities in Pakistan that were willing to provide aggrieved parties in Afghanistan with weapons, training and other support—and to facilitate the intervention of outside allies in assisting them to play out their grievances. A veneer of religiosity was injected into this mix at the community level to legitimize action. This concoction was about to explode in everyone's faces in a hitherto quiet district called Arghandab.

New Fronts: The Origins of Operation ADALAT, March 2007

In January 2007, Mullah Naqib of Arghandab District looked at MEDUSA operations and, after some deliberation, decided that he would openly side with the Government of Afghanistan. The Canadians had by all accounts demonstrated strength and there was, according to Naqib's sources, serious division inside the insurgency, a significant indicator of weakness. Up to this point, Naqib and his militia permitted limited transit of insurgents through the district but would not permit them to stockpile weapons, recruit

or openly operate from bases there.⁶³ Now Naqib publicly encouraged the young men in the district to join the Afghan security forces or otherwise resist Taliban recruitment.⁶⁴ Naqib also accepted, again very publicly, reconstruction aid facilitated by the PRT, especially infrastructure upgrades.

Arghandab was vital ground. Fertile, prosperous, and sitting astride the Arghandab River, this district was the northwest gateway to Kandahar City. Arghandab's greenness contrasted with the drab wastes of Khakrez District, and the rocky hills of Shah Wali Kot to the north. The district was the city's "connective tissue" through Senjaray to Zharey District. In historical terms, those who controlled Arghandab became the kingmakers in Kandahar City. These facts were well known among the Afghans but not necessarily by all Western "players."

In late February, abnormally high water levels in the Arghandab River caused flooding and affected crops all along the river. The cause was traced by the PRT through its sources and resources to the Dahla Dam north of Arghandab. As soon as the PRT expressed interest in the dam, reports came in during early March that the insurgents were going to move into the area, believing that they would not be attacked by coalition forces out of fear the dam might be damaged or destroyed. Word also filtered out that the insurgents were interested in controlling irrigation for their purposes.⁶⁵

From 8 to 10 March, reports flowed in that the Taliban were blocking the Tarinkot Road and were going to seize control of the former FOB Martello. Then word came in to the JPCC that the Afghan police fled the area after a number of contacts, which killed five to ten personnel on either side.⁶⁶

9 Platoon from C Company was tasked to escort a combined intelligence and engineer team through Arghandab to the Dahla Dam. The purpose of the move was to "demonstrate coalition presence in Arghandab and Shah Wali Kot" and to assess the Dahla Dam from a security perspective. The team concluded that the insurgents could not materially affect the dam, as it was too robust.⁶⁷

On 10 March 2007, Mullah Naqib and his family attended a ribbon-cutting ceremony at a bridge construction project. While departing the scene, the three-vehicle convoy of Corollas and Land Cruisers was attacked with IEDs, killing four and wounding ten. Two of Mullah Naqib's sons were killed outright, and the others wounded. Naqib himself was critically injured, taken to Mirwais Hospital and then medically evacuated to India.⁶⁸

It was not readily obvious to all observers that the Taliban's moves in Shah Wali Kot and the Naqib "hit" were connected. Arghandab was not uniformly Alikozai and there were anti-Naqib factions in certain quarters. The idea that the attack was related to selective poppy eradication was mooted by PRT sources. Almost all Afghan security organizations independently believed that Naqib was targeted because of who he was and what he now represented.⁶⁹ Circumstantial evidence developed later pointed toward an Al Qaeda

linked or facilitated operation done on behalf of those in the Quetta Shura who viewed Naqib as a traitor.⁷⁰ The near elimination of Naqib's family in one fell swoop produced the possibility of a huge power vacuum that could have province-wide, possibly regional, implications if the insurgency got into Arghandab and took root. As Naqib's life hung from a thread, so did Kandahar's.

At first, it looked like the Afghans were handling the FOB Martello/Tarinkot Road problem on their own. Afghan police from Kandahar City, police from Mianishin, and even some mercenaries from Oruzgan called the "Kandak Amnianta Uruzgan" (or KAU Security Battalion), closed in on FOB Martello and re-took it on 14 March. Then the road was cut again by insurgents operating from Mianishin District. It looked like "see-saw" action between the antagonists, but then information came in that the Oruzgan Highway Police were deliberately generating "drama" because they were competing with a U.S.-funded convoy security organization. The insurgent cells in the area were exploiting all of this for their benefit. The Shah Wali Kot police did not want to get dragged into what looked like a three-way fight so they stayed in the southern part of the district. The Canadian JPCC representative, Maj Craig Gardner, correctly asserted that "It remains unclear who is paying whom and for what exactly. Ground truth could prove to be the only manner to sort the Martello issue out."⁷¹

TF Kandahar undertook precautionary measures and sent Sperwer UAVs into the area regularly after 20 March.⁷² Regional Command (South), meanwhile, formulated Operation ADALAT and issued it on 25 March. ADALAT's creators understood the key role of Naqib and Arghandab, but were forced to situate and justify the plan in the context of ISAF HQ's over-arching plans NOW RUZ and OQAB, and then laud the success of ACHILLES and BAAZ TSUKA as part of the self-congratulatory lead-in. Regional Command (South) seemed to believe that what was going on in Arghandab and Shah Wali Kot was related to the enemy's inability to do anything else in other districts.⁷³ Canadian planners at TF Kandahar were more circumspect and wanted to know more about what was going on before committing to anything.

Operation ADALAT was hastily put together and not necessarily coherent, as Phase I operations had eight or more stages and the sequencing was unclear. Essentially, there was to be an information operations campaign while ISAF built a better picture of what was happening in the area. Then there would be a series of reconstruction and development operations in Shah Wali Kot and Arghandab supported by ISAF and the international community: one of these would be the Dahla Dam project. U.S. special operations TF 71 would disrupt enemy forces outside of those two districts, while the British special operations TF 42 would hunt leadership targets as they appeared.⁷⁴

At this juncture, Canadian involvement was limited to the PRT and its efforts. Technically, Arghandab and Shah Wali Kot lay outside the ADZ in Kandahar. Yet it was unclear whether the ADZ strategy was still in play. As the situation deteriorated in spring 2007, Operation ADALAT would draw in more and scarcer Canadian resources while at the same time Canadian forces were dealing with increasingly complex operations in Zharey, Panjwayi and Maywand Districts. When he assumed command in May, Maj.-Gen. Jacko Page and Regional Command (South) essentially pushed Operation ADALAT to TF Kandahar.⁷⁵ TF Kandahar was then forced to examine ADALAT in light of its depleted resources.

Fortunately, a long-standing professional relationship between LCol Eyre and LTC Pat Mahaney dating back many years to a common Special Forces “Q” course brought TF 71 to the TF Kandahar table for Operation ADALAT. BGen Grant approved and planning commenced on a “just-in-case” basis.⁷⁶

Canadian Involvement in Operation ACHILLES: March–April 2007

At the same time, 2 RCR Battle Group was warned that it would have to contribute forces for Operation ACHILLES. BGen Grant vehemently and quite correctly opposed the request for the deployment of a Leopard tank-LAV III combat team to the Sangin Valley, as it would open up Zharey and Panjwayi to the enemy again if the pressure in those districts was reduced.⁷⁷ The Canadian role in Operation ACHILLES, therefore, was to move into Maywand District and manoeuvre around it. This manoeuvring had two purposes: generate disruption to keep enemy leaders moving so special operations forces could target them as an adjunct part of the larger Helmand Province-wide operation, and to make contact with the rural population and district leadership for possible future operations there. LCol Walker, not happy with the possible reduction of combat power, formed a combat team from H Company and A Squadron for this purpose – and then was instructed to cut a pair of M-777 guns from D Battery to deploy all the way to FOB Robinson in Sangin. Canada had six M-777 155mm guns in Afghanistan and one third of them were cut away to support British operations in Helmand. At this time, the British army maintained seven regiments of artillery. Why the Royal Air Force could not have flown in a battery of artillery, let alone a pair of guns, boggles the imagination. Why TF Kandahar agreed to deploy scarce Canadian resources in such a fashion given the stressed Canadian situation in Kandahar is unclear but it was probably better to give up a pair of guns rather than a whole combat team.

The divergent approach taken by Regional Command (South) remains troubling. On one hand, Canada was responsible for handling the Kandahar ADZ. On the other hand, Canada was instructed to deploy forces to Maywand and Sangin, one in an area adjacent to the Kandahar ADZ, not in it, and the other in a different province.

Deploying combat logistics patrols to support operations in far-flung areas placed stresses on an already strained NSE, and, without access to helicopters, that placed each combat logistics patrol at risk of IED attack every time it made the trip to and from Helmand. The NSE noted that “The pace of operations combined with the op tempo continues to challenge us. Morale is high but soldiers are beginning to show signs of tiredness.”⁷⁸ In time, TF Kandahar was able to acquire space on a CC-130 Hercules to move supplies to FOB Bastion in Helmand, where British logisticians ensured the Canadian guns were resupplied.⁷⁹

That said, LCol Walker moved the “Hotel Desert Rats” combat team, led by Maj Ruff, out to Maywand District on 6 March where they linked up with Afghan National Army forces. (See Figure 1-3.)

Both groups would move their operations boxes for the next month. Maywand District is best characterized as a transit route on three axes. Highway 1 runs through the district, east to west, through the city of Hutsal. The southern boundary of the district is the Arghandab River, with the Reg Desert south of that. An extended series of fertile communities called Band-e Timor runs along the north side of the river. North of Hutsal is a south-to-north route through the Garmabak Pass, the site of the Battle of Maywand in 1880. The pass is the entryway into Ghorak District, which is the “back door” to the Kajaki/Sangin region of Helmand Province. Disruptive movements in the “box” were believed to generate enemy movement elsewhere given Maywand’s “connective tissue” function between Helmand and Kandahar Provinces.

The combat team initially held a key leadership engagement at the Maywand District centre: over time, Maj Ruff learned that the main power broker they were trying to work with, Haji Saifullah, epitomized the complexities of the Afghan socio-political situation. Saifullah took money from poppy producers to shield them from Governor-led poppy eradication operations. Some of these producers were affiliated with the Taliban, others were not. The district chief of police’s movements were leaked to the Taliban by the district leader with the hope that he would be assassinated and, as it turned out, every time the combat team moved in to conduct a sweep or cordon and search, the insurgents were warned ahead of time—by the district leader.⁸⁰

Maj Ruff later learned that the Maywand District shura was staged and only included Taliban sympathizers or even Taliban leaders themselves. Once the combat team moved in, the Taliban established checkpoints and checked the cell phones of locals to ensure that they were not sending information to the police.⁸¹ As a result, Operations HAMMER in the Band-e Timor area (17 March) and HOGAN (20 March) in the Sangbor area turned up little. When the combat team moved unannounced to an “ops box” near the Maywand–Zharey border during Operation HAROLD, however, the tank and LAV III leaguer took rocket fire for five straight nights, a sure indication that they were near some target of interest.⁸²

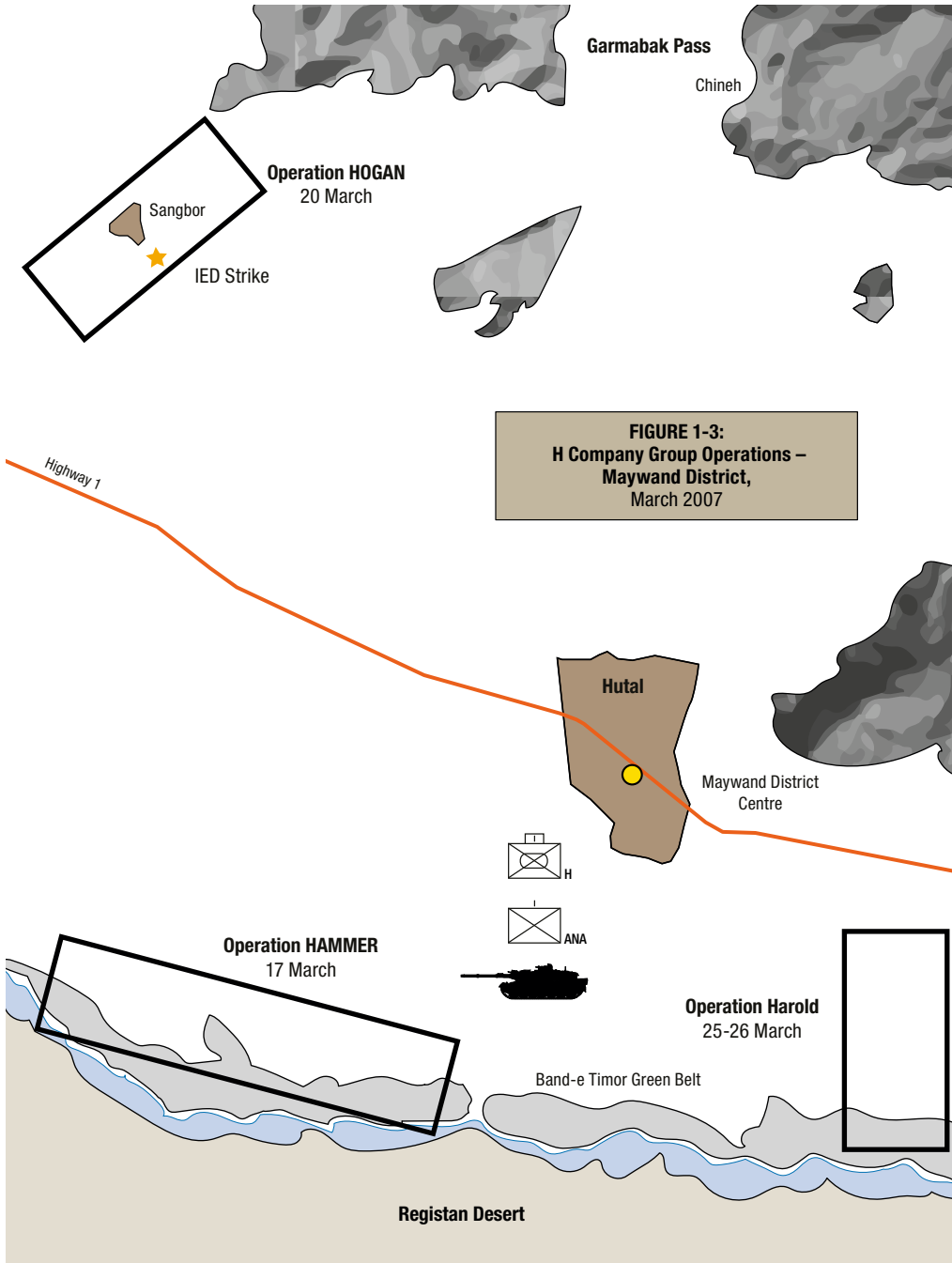


FIGURE 1-3:
H Company Group Operations –
Maywand District,
March 2007

Figure 1-3: H Company Group Operations – Maywand District, March 2007

The battle group was pulled into more local politics when Afghan police that were engaged in poppy eradication near Sangbor took fire; one was killed and five were wounded. The provincial chief of police requested assistance from TF Kandahar, which then ordered the battle group to assist. Two groups of people engaged the police with small arms fire but were dispersed with an artillery show-of-force mission. Moving into the village of Baba, the police detained two people.⁸³ Like the diversion of Canadians to support British interests in Helmand, the decision by TF Kandahar to be involved with supporting poppy eradication, even to this limited extent, had the potential to cause problems between the local population and ISAF. Even though this was *in extremis* support, it could appear to local Afghans that Canadian tanks and LAVs were part of the eradication effort, which was taking away their livelihood. The fine distinctions Westerners placed on such things were not operable in this environment. What if these were corrupted police carrying out selective eradication on behalf of Haji Saifullah and the people firing back refused to pay bribes and were not, in fact, Taliban?

While Prime Minister Stephen Harper attended ceremonies in France commemorating the Vimy Ridge battle on Easter Sunday, 8 April 2007, a LAV III from 5 Platoon drove over a pressure plate IED southeast of Sangbor. The IED was set up to detonate under the troop compartment of the LAV when the front wheels contacted the pressure plate. The explosion killed Sgt Donald Lucas, Cpl Aaron Williams, Cpl Brent Poland, Pte David Greenslade and Pte Kevin Kennedy, all from 2 RCR, and MCpl Chris Stannix from the Princess Louise's Fusiliers. Four more soldiers were wounded. This attack was the largest loss of Canadian life in a single IED attack up to this point in the war. The sophistication of the attack, coupled with its timing, meant that the perpetrators were likely not "narcos" protecting their grow op.

The important take from the combat team's presence in Maywand was not the number of weapons seized or Taliban engaged. Maywand was a known staging and logistics area for the enemy. The more key leader engagements and shuras that coalition forces attended in remote areas, the more chatter there would be, and it was more likely that the higher level coalition kill-capture system could take those pieces of the puzzle and fill in the larger picture.⁸⁴ Knowing a particular target was not in a particular location allowed resources to be focused elsewhere. It is likely that, in some small way, H Company's and A Squadron's manoeuvres through the villages in the prairie-like Dasht in Maywand District contributed to the demise of Mullah Dadullah Lang and other primary enemy commanders. At the very least, the actions in Maywand provided a disruptive function *vis-à-vis* the enemy's logistics system feeding Zharey District. It also provided insight into the political dynamics of Highway 1 that influenced events in Zharey District.

Operations in Zharey District, March–April 2007

LCol Walker's planning for Zharey District focused on three areas. First, there was the removal of the Route Summit strong points. Second, any geographical analysis of the district demonstrated that the Gundy Ghar feature to the west was crucial for over-watch. Third, some means had to be found to garrison the district with police in order to establish security for the development effort. LCol Walker launched the first two initiatives in late February and then discovered that a Dutch infantry company would be joining the battle group for a limited time. He decided to place them in Strong Point West for the time being with the idea that this position offset enemy movements in the Sia Choy area. Recce Squadron and 42 Field Squadron checked out Gundy Ghar with the intent of establishing a patrol base there.⁸⁵ (See Figure 1-4.)

The idea that Afghan National Police would move in and occupy prepared checkpoints in the district appears to have come from the district chief of police Col Akka and the Zharey District leadership. As they explained to the Canadian commanders, a series of interlocking checkpoints at key intersections were an economy of effort tool as, they claimed, they did not have enough policemen for presence patrolling. The checkpoint plan, in the district leadership's view, demonstrated strength and resolve.⁸⁶ Having a grid of checkpoints would be disruptive to enemy movement and would facilitate coalition movement. Most importantly from a Canadian view, it put the Afghans in the forefront of the counterinsurgency effort.

The first test case was Gundy Ghar in March. After the engineers from 42 Field Squadron cleared it, the Afghan police established a compound there with a 20-man detachment. Coyotes and snipers from Maj Graham's Recce Squadron, on their way to moving in, were engaged in a complex ambush east of Howz-e Madad: small-arms and RPG fire from positions south of the highway were supported by a machine gun mounted like a Somali "technical" in the back of a Toyota pickup truck. Broken-down Jingle trucks were used to canalize the convoy's movement into a kill zone. The Dragoons shot their way out of the trap with their 25mm cannons and carried on to Gundy Ghar.⁸⁷

Once established on Gundy Ghar, Maj Graham and his men worked with the Afghan police to establish a presence in the area. Two checkpoints were established: one at Routes Ottawa and Langley, and the other at Highway 1 and Route Edmonton. About 50 police manned these three sites and initiated patrol operations. In time, a Canadian Military Police detachment arrived and worked with the Afghan police for about a month and mentored them on how to handle vehicle searches and checkpoints. Within a month, contact with the population through key leader engagements led by the police produced a flow of local information on the location of enemy IEDs as they were emplaced.⁸⁸

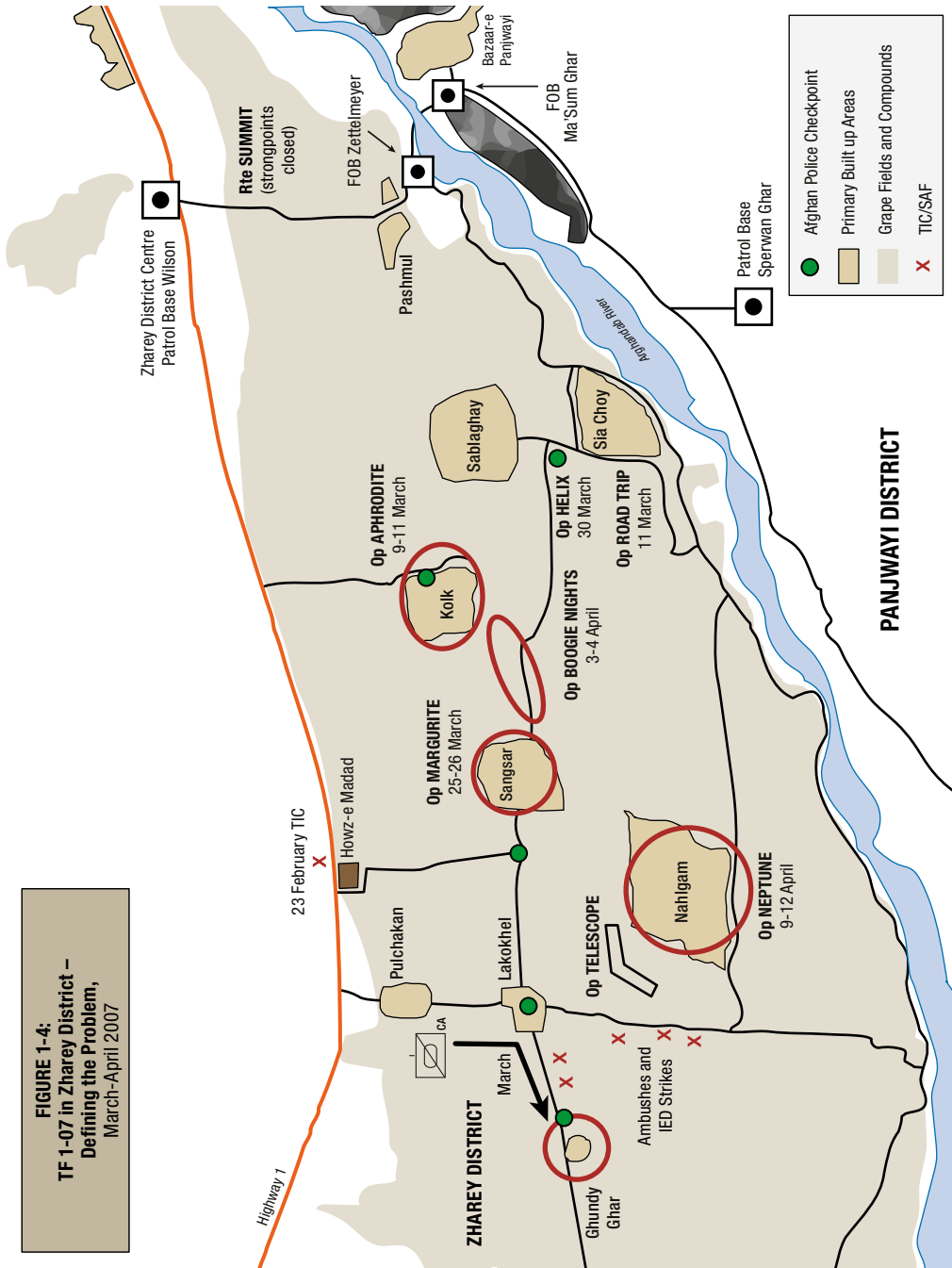


Figure 1-4: TF 1-07 in Zharey District – Defining the Problem, March-April 2007

Maj Quick's I Company initiated the patrol programme, working with the Afghan National Army and the OMLT while assisting with strong point removal. While patrolling around Musa Khan, an Afghan National Army vehicle struck an explosive device, which severed the legs of a young Afghan lieutenant. That night, a huge firefight erupted near Howz-e Madad, which drew in an estimated 100 or more Afghan police. Maj Quick, who was rapidly learning how business was conducted in Zharey District, reported that those shooting at Akka's police were "in fact civilians who had taken up arms due to their opposition to poppy eradication." Quick recommended that the battle group not intervene.⁸⁹



Photo Credit: Author

This Coyote recce vehicle belonging to Recce Squadron struck a stack of TC-6 anti-tank mines (not an improvised explosive device) while on patrol in Zharey District. The vehicle flipped end over end, throwing the turret off and killing two Canadian soldiers. Medics and engineers who worked on and around the burning vehicle took heroic measures to extricate the crew.

The next checkpoint scheduled to go in was at Kolk. A deliberate operation consisting of I Company, 42 Field Squadron, Afghan National Army and mentors, plus Afghan police and CIVPOL from the PRT would move in, clear the ground, establish the checkpoint, bring in the police, and withdraw. Operation APHRODITE lasted from 9 to 11 March without incident—almost. Right after the Canadians and the Afghan National Army withdrew, the police came under contact west of the Kolk checkpoint. When the police

arrived to withdraw their wounded, they were ambushed. A LAV III from Maj Quick's tactical headquarters returned 25mm fire and then the enemy escalated and manoeuvred to flank the position. The rest of the platoon arrived and deployed as the population of Kolk fled to the east. The enemy withdrew.⁹⁰ Clearly, the insurgents found the checkpoint concept an impediment to their endeavours.

Operation ROAD TRIP was designed to establish a police presence in Sia Choy and was structured like APHRODITE using Canadian infantry from I Company, an Afghan company from 2nd Kandak with Canadian mentors, and police from Zharey District. The Afghans cleared the objective, the Canadian infantry provided a security cordon, and the police with Canadian CIVPOL from the PRT accompanied by a psychological operations team talked with the local leadership. 42 Field Squadron cleared the ground and established the checkpoint. In the middle of ROAD TRIP, however, Akka redeployed the police on poppy eradication duties elsewhere, which threw off events.⁹¹

Working alongside Akka and his lieutenants gave the Canadians better insight into what was happening in the district. Akka did not in fact get along with the district leader, Haji Khairuddin. Khairuddin was related to, it seemed, everybody in the district and that included several Taliban commanders. Akka was afraid of Khairuddin.⁹² Although Akka outwardly favoured establishing the district's interior checkpoints, he remained focused on Highway 1 checkpoints where the bulk of his manpower was located. This was by no means altruistic though it was collaterally supportive of ISAF efforts to keep the road open: Akka, like Haji Saifullah and others, used Highway 1 as a revenue generator. Police loyal to local power brokers commonly extracted a "toll" from civilian vehicular traffic and split the proceeds with those allied to them.

Habibullah Jan, Member of Parliament and the power broker in Senjaray just down the road did the same thing. Jan and Akka were not on good terms, however, because Akka's patron, Ahmad Wali Karzai, did not get along with Habibullah Jan. Jan's patron was Yunis Qanuni, a Hamid Karzai rival in the Kabul arena (see Volume I). When insurgents arrived and operated out of Senjaray later in the tour and nearly shut down Highway 1, it was unclear whether they did it with Habibullah Jan's consent or not.

Then Akka disappeared for a time, leaving a deputy in charge. As it turned out, Akka and many of his men went off to participate in poppy harvesting elsewhere. This led to a power play by Khairuddin, who "in essence hijacked the Afghan police as his personal bodyguard and is using this as a tool to gain superiority over the regional elders." Khairuddin then started leading poppy eradication missions with "his" police. It was "possible that he is involving himself in the extortion of poppy farmers in exchange for sparing their crops."⁹³

That was not all. LCol Chamberlain was pushing out CIMIC patrols from the PRT in order to provide remediation for battle damage caused during Operation MEDUSA. The plan was to continue with quick impact projects and cash for work whereby locals would be paid to fix their own dwellings and facilities, while larger infrastructure projects would be handled through the District Development Assembly and tendered out. In a shura conducted by Governor Asadullah Khalid, Zharey people complained that Khairuddin was “corrupt and biased in distributing food aid and rehabilitation assistance and that outsiders were receiving some of the contracts or cash for work intended for the people of Zharey.”⁹⁴ Khalid outwardly mouthed support for the people but did not remove Khairuddin.

Right after closing the window on remediation for damage caused to land and buildings, the PRT was inundated with claims for damage to the local irrigation system caused by the construction of Route Summit in 2006.⁹⁵ LCol Chamberlain and the PRT CIMIC teams worked tirelessly on the problem and over time convinced/forced the district shura to formulate a solution with the local people. Not all were satisfied but it became difficult to determine who was skimming and double-dipping and who was not. CIMIC was sent back time and time again to verify who received funds, who did not, what work had been done and so on, but the upshot was that legitimate and illegitimate grievances continued to build in and around Route Summit—and Khairuddin’s corruption and Akka’s “policing” on Highway 1 aggravated the situation.⁹⁶ When Route Summit was cratered with explosives later in the season, it was not clear exactly who was doing it but many suspected it was a money-making scheme to get the CIMIC teams to pay out cash for work to fill in the holes using local labour who would, in turn, kick back to the power brokers.⁹⁷

At the same time, the security situation on Highway 1 seriously deteriorated in the vicinity of Zharey District all the way to the western suburbs of Kandahar City. There were two convoy ambushes on Highway 1 on 6 and 17 March, while there were five additional IED attacks on combat logistics patrols, British convoys, and even LCol Walker’s tactical headquarters over the course of a week: one of these resulted in the loss of a Heavy Equipment Trailer which had a disabled LAV III on it. A suicide attack against the counter-IED team’s Bison on the 17th killed two young Afghan girls.⁹⁸ A Canadian disposal team also found a hoax IED on Route Summit, which was likely a warning from locals, as opposed to Taliban action.⁹⁹

Recce Squadron, meanwhile, was operating from the Gundy Ghar feature with the Afghan police. Disturbingly, the police kept uncovering radio-controlled IEDs on Route Langley. Then Recce Squadron took a hit when a Coyote traveling down Langley hit an IED, blowing its wheels off. The engineer LAV coming in to assist rolled while manoeuvring,

so the members from 42 Squadron dismounted with a K-9 team to clear the area. The dog then triggered an anti-personnel mine and died, while the handler and a combat engineer were wounded and had to be evacuated by air.¹⁰⁰

Maj Graham and his men tried to use local pattern of life to see which routes the locals avoided, but it was evident that “the impact of children being killed in the manner in which they were does not have the same impact here as it would back home in Canada.”¹⁰¹ Despite the mine threat, Recce Squadron continued to roll out and conduct vehicle checkpoints with the Afghan police in and around Gundy Ghar and on Highway 1. Snipers were set up at night to try and catch mine layers, but another Coyote hit an IED on Route Langley on the 20th. The explosion was massive and threw the vehicle onto its side, knocking the whole crew unconscious.¹⁰²

Maj Graham and LCol Walker had intelligence that the problem lay in Nahlgam, to the east of Gundy Ghar, but it was nestled amongst irrigation ditches, walled roads, grape field trenches and compound complexes. Instead of just blasting their way in, the battle group established Operation TELESCOPE to target the IED makers and clear Route Langley. The battle group requested additional Predator, TUAV and other ISTAR coverage. Recce deployed four observation posts, then the next day a route clearance package rolled down Langley. At the same time, I Company focused its efforts on dismounted insertions, feints, and layback patrols in Siah Choy, Pashmul, Kolk and Sablaghay.¹⁰³ C Company was also brought in: it had a separate but supporting operation, MARGURITE. That task was to work with the Afghan National Army to establish a police checkpoint in Sangsar, similar to the earlier operations.¹⁰⁴ Having all three organizations moving simultaneously in Zharey District would not only act as a large “manoeuvre-to-collect” operation, it was also large enough that it might force the insurgent’s hand.

The Afghan police refused to remain in Sangsar, however, even after C Company and the Afghan National Army cleared the area. The additional UAV coverage, however, netted the locations of mines and IEDs on Route Edmonton—including the location of an anti-tank mine stack.¹⁰⁵ When exploited, the combat engineers discovered that these were “[anti-tank] mines of Pakistani origin.”¹⁰⁶ These were not “improvised explosive devices”: these were purpose-built weapons, employed in a conventional fashion and emplaced by trained personnel.

Operation TELESCOPE’s observation posts engaged an enemy early warning spotter and a four-man team equipped with RPGs with sniper and 25mm fire on the night of 28 March while D Battery fired illumination. The American route clearance package then made its way down Langley the next day but was subjected to a complex ambush including six RPGs and more Pakistani anti-tank mines. Artillery was called in.

LAVs and Coyotes returned fire with their 25mm cannons, and the snipers up on Ghundy Ghar started taking out targets with their Timberwolf rifles. An estimated 25 enemy were killed in this engagement, but other reportage suggested 11 enemy dead.¹⁰⁷

The Sperwer TUAVs were by now observing considerable activity in Recce Squadron's area of operations and the other systems were collecting more and more data. Over in Diwar, I Company discovered that the Afghan police checkpoint was abandoned and had been destroyed by the Taliban. This was, in Maj Quick's view, a serious challenge and had to be rectified. I Company worked up a plan to re-establish control of the Kolk area.¹⁰⁸

Recce Squadron continued with Operation TELESCOPE II. Another ambush against Recce Squadron's observation post near Nahlgam produced four more enemy dead with no casualties to Recce. Within 24 hours, another ambush on Langley resulted in seven enemy dead, with no casualties or damage to Recce. Maj Graham pushed into Nahlgam with the Afghan police and detained two men. ISTAR reportage confirmed that one of them was a Taliban commander, Abdullah Akim, and the other was a known bomb maker. In the days after their seizure, local leaders from Nahlgam made their way to Ghundy Ghar to discuss having more government security in their community. The situation in the Gundy Ghar/Nahlgam area calmed down for a time.¹⁰⁹

H Company was brought into the action in Zharey from Maywand on 30 March. The target of Operation HELIX was a compound complex north of Sia Choy. With the Leopard tank squadron on the periphery, H Company went in with an Afghan National Army company and a platoon's-worth of uncoordinated Afghan police. The Afghans hit a pressure-plate IED on the way out, but gunshot residue tests conducted on two suspects came up positive. The Afghans identified one as a Taliban leader and packed him off to the National Directorate of Security.¹¹⁰

The I Company operation to get back into Kolk-Sangsar area was Operation BOOGIE NIGHTS, conducted on 3-4 April. After much planning, however, there was no contact so Maj Quick mounted several platoon-level presence-and-clearance patrols in the area.¹¹¹

The 2 RCR Battle Group staff then assembled Operation NEPTUNE. This time the target was Nahlgam, where the Afghan police were to establish a checkpoint. This involved route clearance down Route Ottawa, followed by Recce Squadron deploying to the east, while the main effort based around I Company started from the north. This time, however, 42 Field Squadron had to improve the routes from other points on the periphery of Nahlgam before the forces could even deploy to get into the area. Bridge construction and culvert improvement, done with local input and cash for work labour, smoothed the path in. Recce Squadron left a patrol behind to watch Route Langley.

This was followed up with I Company night patrolling, which proved hazardous as there were uncovered wells in the area. One soldier fell in and had to be extricated. The patrols had a noticeable psychological effect on the population. While dealing with local leadership, I Company uncovered economic and political linkages between Nahlgam and Sangsar and determined that the people in Nahlgam believed that their shura representative lived in Kandahar City. There was what amounted to a whole parallel power structure in Nahlgam unconnected to the district structures. Unlike other areas of the district, Nahlgam was fastidiously clean and “heavily fortified.” An excavator had been used to develop positions and create obstacles to limit vehicle movement.¹¹²

The Afghan police were delayed, so the decision was made to rotate the Recce Squadron patrol on Langley on 10 April. The deploying replacement patrol then hit a multiple-stack anti-tank mine on Route Ottawa. A QRF consisting of engineers and medics deployed. Then the returning patrol’s lead Coyote hit another mine stack. This flipped the vehicle end over end, throwing the turret off, with the crew inside. The engine landed on the driver’s hatch and the whole mess erupted in flame. The engineers, directed by MWO Richards, moved a Badger armoured engineer vehicle in to remove the engine and other debris off the top of the vehicle, while Cpl Dave Gionet, Pte Shane Dolmovic and Pte James Renaud worked valiantly to save the lives of the seriously wounded crew. Cpl Gionet nearly expired from inhaling fumes while inside the burning vehicle. Unfortunately, MCpl Allan Stewart and Tpr Patrick Pentland succumbed to their injuries.¹¹³ It was later determined by the counter-IED team that the attack employed non-metallic TC-6 mines, double-stacked. A nearly undetectable purpose-built conventional weapon provided to the insurgents by an outside party killed them, not an IED.¹¹⁴

During the course of the operations that evening, Recce Squadron discovered that the Afghan police checkpoint at Routes Ottawa and Banff near Sangsar was destroyed after its patrol had been engaged with the mines. The police fled. To make matters worse, LCol Walker’s tactical headquarters was struck by a suicide vehicle-borne IED in almost exactly the same location west of Kandahar City that the TF Orion tactical headquarters had been hit in July 2006.

I Company prepared another operation into Nahlgam called MULLAROUGE with battle procedure initiated on 15 April. MULLAROUGE was postponed, however. Canadian SOF developed a target and I Company was shifted to support Operation GRIZZLY, conducted near Route Saskatoon. A LAV III struck a mine while returning to Patrol Base Wilson, disabling it.¹¹⁵

MULLAROUGE transformed into HURRICANE. LCol Walker desperately wanted to get back into Nahlgam and shake the place up after the attacks on Recce Squadron. Recce Squadron was, by this time, relieved of the Gundy Ghar feature task and preparations

were made to redeploy on new taskings. Contingency operation HURRICANE was postponed on 30 April, because there was no route clearance package available for the operation—and Canada did not yet possess one.¹¹⁶ The 2 RCR Battle Group, however, recocked to seize the initiative in early May.

What did all of this mean in a larger sense? LCol Walker's battle group was, quite correctly, working alongside the Afghan National Army and police to establish sustained presence at key locations in the heart of Zharey District and moving away from being pinned into fortifications in the eastern part of the district. Ideally, each of those presence "nodes" should have transformed into small security zones that, when connected, would permit the deployment of PRT projects into those communities and the connection of those communities with the Zharey governance system. As the battle group progressively learned, however, the police were unable to do more than hold some of their checkpoints. The Zharey governance system was completely ineffective and actually generated more grievances than it solved. The 2 RCR Battle Group was able to sustain a disruptive presence in Zharey District, but until the population was connected with a government that worked for them, nothing would change. Zharey District in early 2007 was, in effect, a microcosm of the entire coalition effort in southern Afghanistan.

Operation ROCKETEER

Recce Squadron was on the receiving end of a 107mm rocket attack on the Gundy Ghar feature in March and by early April there had been three such attacks against FOB Ma'Sum Ghar. The rocket problem in Zharey District mimicked the rocket problem around KAF. The enemy rocketeers essentially set up a portable self-launching, self-targeting stand-alone attack system and walked away from it. Unless they were interrupted in the act of transporting or deploying the system, they were not going to be apprehended or otherwise neutralized. There was also an insurgent mortar team sporadically operating in the district: it lobbed rounds at FOB Ma'Sum Ghar in late March. Without accurate flight data, it was next to impossible to target the baseplate with D Battery's M-777 guns.

Maj Jake Galuga's 42 Field Squadron set out to reinforce accommodation facilities in the forward operating bases and shore up defences as an interim measure. On 17 April, a Surveillance and Targeting battery was formed to address the threat in a more systematic fashion. Led by Maj Kyle Little, STA Battery grouped several Lightweight Counter-Mortar Radar detachments with a Hostile Artillery Locating (HALO) sound-ranging system, and eventually the small UAV system that had been discarded by Recce Squadron.

In effect, STA Battery tried to create a web of sensors over Zharey District so that enemy indirect fire units could be targeted with systems that confirmed the enemy's location, in order to reduce collateral damage from the 155mm artillery. This system of

systems worked actively against mortars, and passively against rockets in that data could be built up on point of launch origins and then those areas placed under surveillance either by patrols, snipers, Coyotes or Leopards.¹¹⁷

There were limitations, however sensitive HALO's microphones were. The terrain was mountainous which reduced the number of sensors that could be deployed: each sensor had a battery and could be useful to an IED maker if seized. The system was so sensitive that it recorded every explosion, including IEDs and artillery rounds.



Photo Credit: Author

The hostile artillery locating or HALO system was deployed to Forward Operating Base Ma'Sum Ghar as part of a web of sensors. The system, which employed sensor posts and a processing system mounted in an armoured command post vehicle, proved so sensitive that it was able to confirm the locations of improvised explosive device detonations. Below is a heavy equipment transporter rented from the Dutch Army.

Two days after STA Battery arrived, the battle group mounted Operation ROCKETEER. This four-day operation brought STA Battery, part of Recce Squadron, and the TUAV unit together to monitor likely rocket launch positions. The operation netted no insurgents but likely had a deterrent effect as no rockets were fired at Ma'Sum Ghar. The only casualty was a TUAV that was "pillaged" by the local population when the machine inadvertently auto-recovered. All was quiet until 14 May when an incoming 107mm rocket struck the shower area at Ma'Sum Ghar, killing an interpreter during his ablutions. After a series of patrols, there were no more rockets until June when a cluster of three struck the camp with no damage.¹¹⁸

Like the situation at KAF, rockets were a nuisance, but they could be a deadly nuisance. Despite its limitations, STA Battery was a prototype for a much more involved and more effective surveillance system later in the war.

Panjwayi District, March–April 2007

The situation in Panjwayi District remained relatively stable compared with Zharey. Maj Henderson's C Company tended to patrol in and around Bazaar-e Panjwayi when it was not deployed over in Zharey supporting one of the named contingency operations putting in Afghan police checkpoints.¹¹⁹ In late March, American special forces and their associated Afghans redeployed out of Panjwayi District, which altered coalition operations there drastically. C Company moved to FOB Sperwan Ghar, which already boasted a pair of D Battery's M-777s, to take over from the American SOF on 28 March. The main problem now revolved around the already established security force checkpoints along Route Fosters, extending from Bazaar-e Panjwayi west to Mushan. The police did not want to man them because they did not have enough heavy weapons. The soldiers of part of an Afghan National Army kandak, who manned some of the positions, were tired of being used as point security and were itching to operate alongside the Canadian battle group as the other Afghan National Army forces were. As a result, C Company took up residence in some of the checkpoints in early April.¹²⁰ From here on in, a substantial amount of Canadian energy went into finding Afghan forces to occupy and maintain the Fosters checkpoint line. As it stood mid-month, a Canadian platoon occupied checkpoints 5 and 10, the Afghan National Army held 1, 1A, 3 and 3A, and the Afghan National Police handled 6, 7 and 8 (see Figure 1-5). Companies from 1-209 Kandak at this time tended to be the primary Afghan National Army force in Panjwayi District with a company in the Bazaar-e Panjwayi area, one in Ma'Sum Ghar, and another spread out along Route Fosters.

In time, Patrol Base Sperwan Ghar housed a Canadian infantry company, an Afghan infantry company and Canadian mentors, part of a Canadian artillery battery, a detachment of Afghan National Army artillery and part of Recce Squadron.

C Company had additional problems. Whenever Canadian SOF came into Sperwan Ghar to conduct an operation, C Company had to pull back forces for forward operating base security and to act as a QRF if the special operators were "Blackhawk Downed."¹²¹ A high vehicle off road rate for its RG-31s meant that the company was increasingly footborne, which limited its reach along Fosters, let alone the rest of the far-flung district. Then "police" of some variety initiated poppy eradication in the district. The JPCC was unaware who they belonged to or who initiated the operation. Patrols into the Talukan area confirmed this—and also that the locals were not happy.¹²² At the same time, the commanding officer of the Afghan National Army in Panjwayi District informed

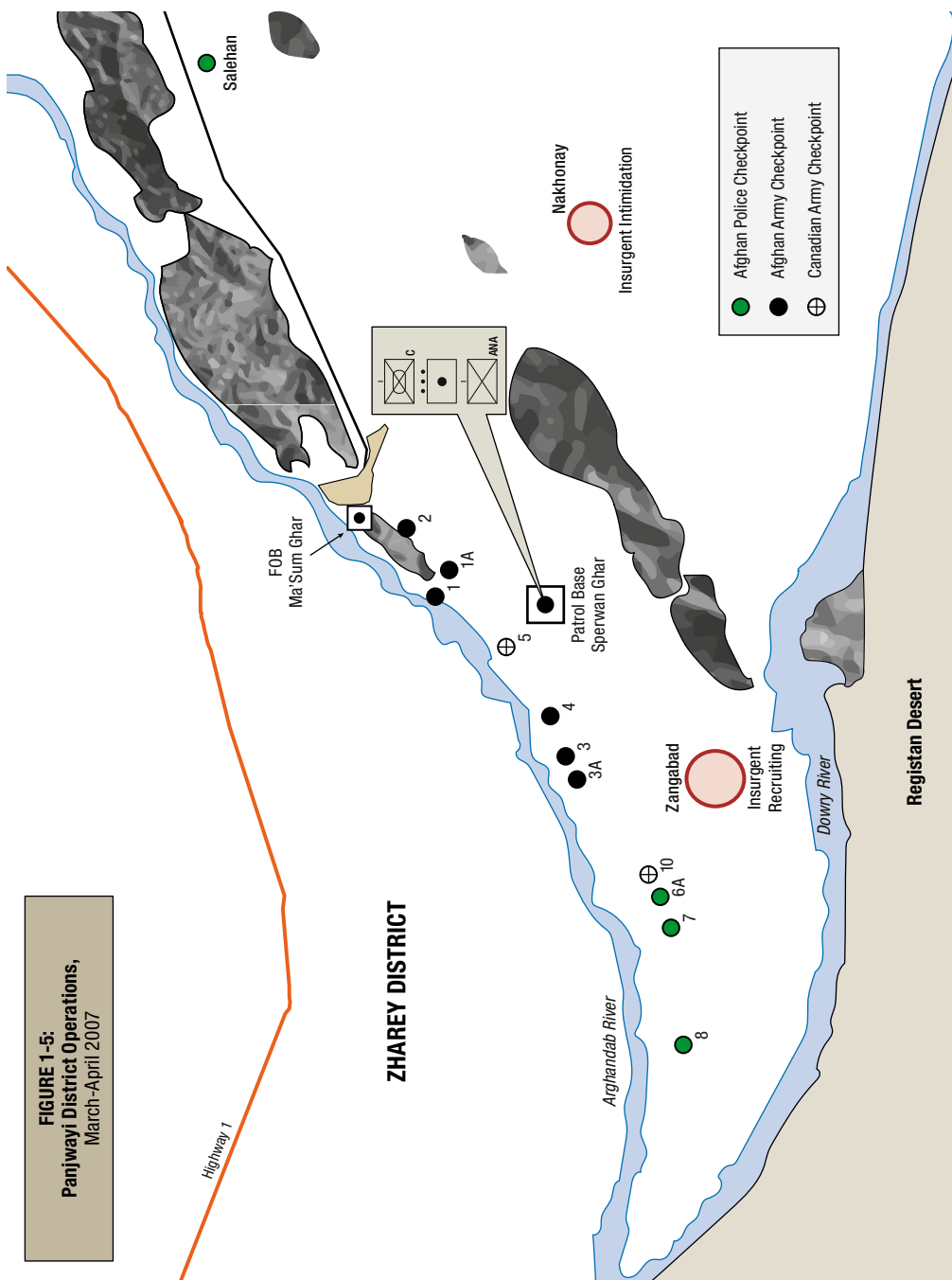


Figure 1-5: Panjwayi District Operations, March-April 2007



Photo Credit: Author

In time, Patrol Base Sperwan Ghar housed a Canadian infantry company, an Afghan infantry company and Canadian mentors, part of a Canadian artillery battery, a detachment of Afghan National Army artillery and part of Recce Squadron.

LCol Eyre at the OMLT that “the local population in Panjwayi is frightened of Canadian soldiers occupying check-points” and that “they were going to leave the district and return to Kandahar City.” Moreover, the local population apparently “have more trust in the ANA as they can talk directly with them... and fear being caught in the crossfire as the Taliban attack the Canadians. They have recent memories of collateral damage caused by excessive CF firepower. They are also upset with the ANP stealing from them.”¹²³

Maj Henderson and his soldiers were, however, able to make limited contact and conduct key leader engagements in the population centres around Sperwan Ghar, which, in turn, brought increased PRT CIMIC coverage. One issue that caused local distress was the improvements to the Routes Brown–Fosters intersection. In the run-up to poppy season, people in Zangabad believed that the road construction diverted water away from their crops with a subsequent loss of livelihood. They wanted compensation similar to the Route Summit compensation they heard about. Then an individual named Haji Baran approached the PRT about implementing a similar situation in Sperwan, claiming to represent displaced Noorzais who wanted to come home. He helpfully pointed out that Route Brown should also be paved as soon as possible so that IEDs could not be emplaced on it. The Taliban, he said, were moving back into Talukan and Mushan.¹²⁴



Photo Credit: Author

Bazaar-e Panjwayi facing east from Forward Operating Base Ma'Sum Ghar. Once the insurgents were pushed back and disrupted by Operation MEDUSA, development efforts undertaken by the Provincial Reconstruction Team took root in Panjwayi District's primary market town. The school to the right was a particularly successful project.

C Company's district challenges produced some creative thinking, but, unfortunately, little action. Maj Henderson suggested deploying Military Police from the PRT to work with Afghan police on Route Fosters checkpoints, or, at the very least, garrison Sperwan Ghar so his men could patrol and hold the two checkpoints. He even tried to establish some kind of training between C Company and the police. As Maj Henderson's soldiers were increasingly aware, the "police" were shaking down local people using the roads and if some kind of joint training could take place, it could "reduce rampant unethical and rogue ANP practices within the Peninsula."¹²⁵ That is, until concerns were expressed that it was out of C Company's purview to do so and the nascent programme was terminated.¹²⁶ There were still no replacements for the non-serviceable RG-31s and the crews of the observation systems saw people digging on the roads at night.¹²⁷ The Taliban were now reported to be recruiting in Zangabad itself. At the same time, night letters appeared in Nakhonay, in the eastern part of Panjwayi District and there was nothing that could be done as C Company was overtasked in the west.¹²⁸

Attempts were made by TF Kandahar to get more police into Panjwayi. After much cajoling, Kabul pledged up to 400 special police to man checkpoints specifically “in order to free up [the battle group] and kandak elements for operations.”¹²⁹ However, word came through OMLT sources that these policemen were going to be sent by Kabul to Lashkar Gah in Helmand.¹³⁰ Once again, a decision taken in Kabul directed resources away from Kandahar while Canadian and Afghan forces were hard pressed to protect Afghanistan’s Second City. That decision might have been influenced by a concerted Canadian diplomatic-military effort, had the Canadian entities in Kabul been more willing to work together more effectively as a team.¹³¹

Operation SATYR NYX: The View from Spin Boldak

The problem of Spin Boldak, firmly pushed to the backseat of all burners during fall 2006, re-emerged in spring 2007. Highway 4 remained a vital regional trade route with thousands of trucks a day passing along its mostly unpaved and pitted surface to meet up with Highway 1 in Kandahar and then either northeast to Kabul or west to Herat and points beyond. Recall that disagreements regarding tolls along Highway 4 back in the 1990s produced the Taliban militia in the first place when they were funded by Quetta merchants who were tired of having Afghans interfere with their trade.

In the most general sense, three things propelled renewed interest in having ISAF forces in the border city. First there was the need to intercept or otherwise interfere with Taliban supply lines from Quetta. Second the Government of Afghanistan was interested in tapping into the customs revenue stream from the Highway 4 border crossing and, finally, Canada was pursuing a possible UAE contingent Spin Boldak under ISAF’s umbrella. This, in turn, would theoretically relieve the pressure on TF Kandahar’s already over-stretched forces.

The UAE initiative had chugged along since summer 2006 but by April 2007, the situation was in some doubt. Regional Command (South) wanted forces in Spin Boldak but had virtually no idea what was happening in the area. Operation SATYR NYX was the product of this need. It was as if previous Canadian missions there had not existed: as we will recall, the PRT developed a relationship with Spin Boldak back in 2005, and TF Orion moved in a platoon temporarily in July 2006. There was sporadic CIMIC coverage during that period. 1 RCR Battle Group also sent a small recce team down with a PRT CIMIC patrol. However, TF Kandahar in 2007 essentially started from scratch.

Maj Graham was ordered to redeploy his squadron to Spin Boldak after Operation TELESCOPE and by 4 May, their initial recce reports were flowing in. Spin Boldak was unlike any other district in Kandahar. Some of the troops called it “Mos Eisley,” after the rugged desert spaceport in the *Star Wars* film series.¹³²

On arrival, Recce Squadron found a “Tower of Babel” of security forces. There was the Recon Company of 4th Kandak, operating with no logistic support from its parent organization. The Afghan National Police more or less wandered around the city of Spin Boldak but did not venture into the district communities. There, a Cheshire Cat-like National Directorate of Security commander told Maj Graham that “I am the intelligence chief: I know everything!” but did not cooperate with any other Afghan security force. Then there were two militias that had, during the DIAG process, transformed into the Afghan Border Police (4th Border Brigade) and the Afghan Highway Police, respectively. The Afghan Border Police was led by the legendary, some say infamous, Col Abdul Raziq, an Achakzai power broker, while the Afghan Highway Police consisted of Noorzai, led by Lal Jan. Raziq and Lal Jan reserved an unfathomable depth of hatred for each other. In essence, a U.S. Army ETT, a U.S. Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha, and DynCorp police trainers tried to work with all of these elements but had no coordination whatsoever.¹³³



Photo Credit: Author

Recce Squadron moved to establish a presence at Spin Boldak and on the vital Highway 4 in 2007. Plans to replace Recce Squadron with a battalion-sized contingent from the United Arab Emirates failed to materialize and Canadian forces remained stretched thin in Kandahar Province.

Maj Graham's explanation to his successors remains a cogent piece of analysis: "Before we went we tried to learn the tribal lists and some of the historical background to Kandahar but it did not prepare me for what I encountered. The web of personalities within the district I worked was like a bad soap opera." The Afghan security forces each had official commanders, but they were mere frontmen as Raziq and Lal Jan actually ran the Border and Highway Police, respectively. The Raziq-Jan feud was family-based and went back far into the distant past. Capt. Azera represented the Afghan National Army; he was a Dari speaker from northern Afghanistan who hated all of the police and referred to them as corrupt Taliban sympathizers. All of the police forces hated him and the Afghan National Army and called them outsiders who did not understand the area. The National Directorate of Security commander, Gulam Rabbani, was a "fence-sitter" and played all sides. A Hazara from Logar Province, he remained aloof from the proceedings.¹³⁴

On the political front, Graham and his men dealt with Obaidullah, who was Achakzai, and Haji Fida Mohammad, who was Noorzai. Haji Khaliq was a Popalzai brought in to mediate between them as the district leader, but as it turned out, Khaliq and Fida were friends who both hated Obaidullah. Obaidullah hated them and, being Achakzai, he was aligned with his friend Raziq. The security and political aspects of Spin Boldak were, in a sense, balanced—until entities introduced destabilizing elements. For example, a drug lord named Lalai started to make inroads in the drug trade in northern Spin Boldak, which prompted a response by the Highway Police; he was trespassing on their drug turf. District leader Khaliq provided Lalai and his forces with permits so they could be armed, which meant that the Highway Police had to back off.¹³⁵

And there was the enemy, just to keep things interesting when the Afghan Border Police and Highway Police were not causing problems for each other. As it turned out, the Noorzais tended to look the other way when Taliban moved through the area. Kidnappings, night letters, and beatings occurred nocturnally in the outlying border communities, but it was extremely difficult to determine what was Taliban activity and what was Achakzai/ Noorzai tribalism. ISTAR resources were able to localize authentic insurgent activity to the Lowy Kariz and Robot areas (see Figure 1-6) while a suicide IED cell kept feeding bombers into the city in order to kill Abdul Raziq, who had lost count of how many times he had nearly been killed.¹³⁶ According to Maj Graham's reports, the Pakistani ISI was "stirring the pot in all these rivalries."¹³⁷

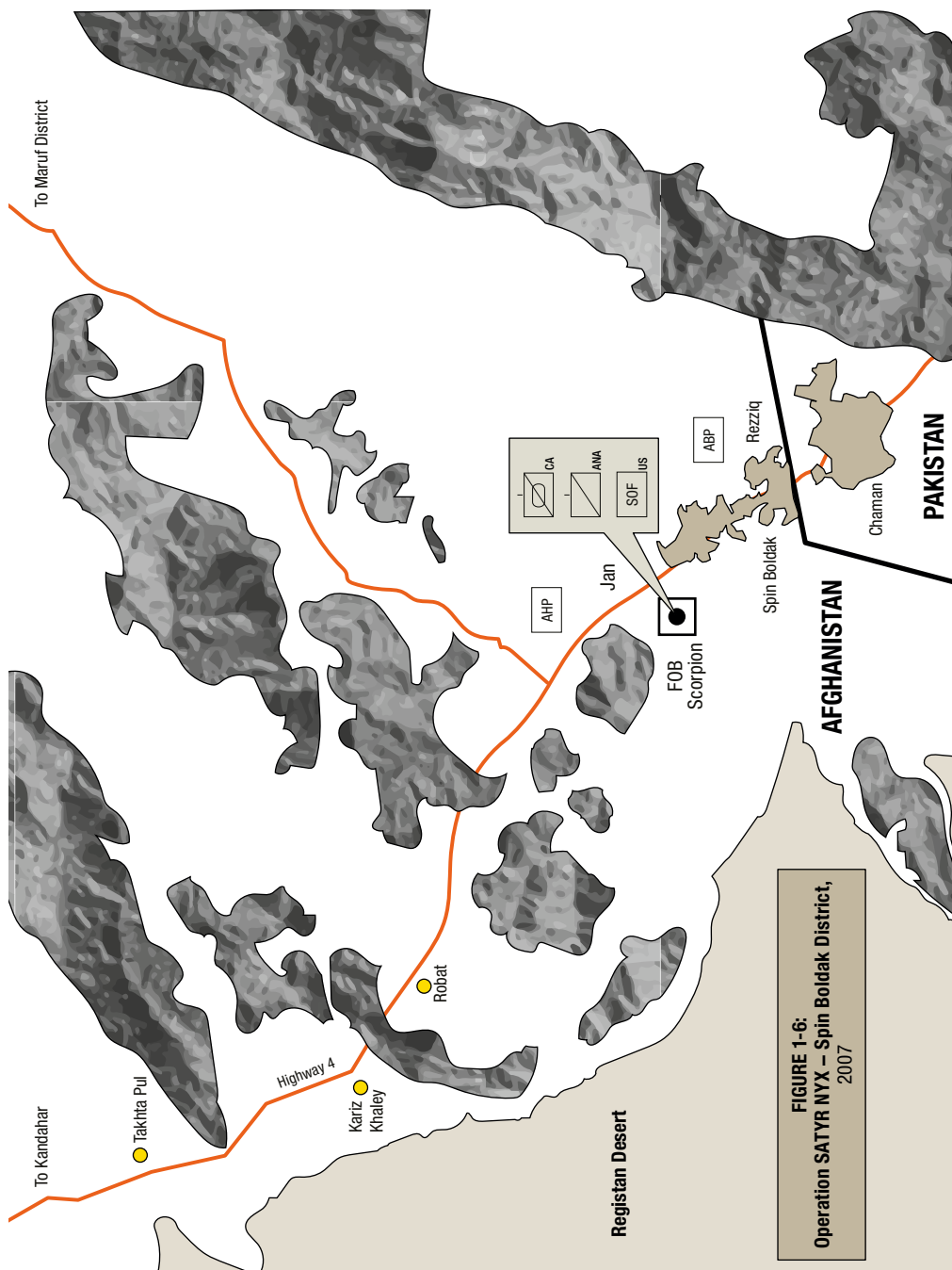


FIGURE 1-6:
Operation SATYR NYX – Spin Boldak District,
2007

Figure 1-6: Operation SATYR NYX – Spin Boldak District, 2007

Maj Graham and his armoured soldiers were under no illusions as to the complexity of the situation and allocated over a month to figure out who was who. Recce Squadron divided the district up into six operations boxes and surged in with a CIMIC operator, Capt Geoff Marshall from the PRT and a PSYOPS team in tow for five-day periods to assess, collect, and conduct key leader engagements. Maj Graham wanted to shift to vehicle checkpoints and presence patrols in areas not covered by the Border Police but was forced to reduce this coverage when one full Coyote troop was pulled back to operate in Zharey.¹³⁸ The Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha tended to work in Maruf District but did not want Recce Squadron operating from its forward operating base: after some cajoling, they changed their minds. The Afghan National Army Reconnaissance Company was hard pressed to do anything, so Recce Squadron enabled it with food and fuel as best it could. The main issue was getting any two organizations to work together. Canada had focused ISTAR resources in the area so there was actionable intelligence. In some cases, it was acted upon. Recce Squadron also learned that the Border Police did conduct independent operations and these proved to be successful. In time, joint Canadian–Afghan National Army operations did take place in Shorabak District.¹³⁹

Overall, Spin Boldak was a prosperous district and had little need for aid programmes. There was, however, tension between Raziq and the district leader: “My feeling is that every one of them is simply out for themselves and every one of them, with the exception of the ANA, will fight any change to the status quo, which has made them all wealthy.”¹⁴⁰ And, with the relatively low level of violence in the district, that was not necessarily a bad thing in the broader schema.

Indeed, the Taliban did not want to make too much trouble in Spin Boldak because it would draw attention to its logistical routes and methodology. For the most part, insurgents could enter Afghanistan singly or even in small groups embedded as refugees, seasonal workers, or truckers. Weapons were smuggled into the country separately and married with their users much later on. Thousands of trucks moved through Spin Boldak per day and there were simply not enough resources available to search them all, and, when the heat was on in Spin Boldak, routes through Maruf, Registan and Shorabak Districts were used. For those who were more familiar with traditional war, the idea that a main service route could simultaneously coexist for the government and the insurgency could be a bit mind bending, but that was the uniqueness of Spin Boldak.¹⁴¹

From a TF Kandahar standpoint, however, Spin Boldak was a logistical problem. Re-supplying Recce Squadron spread the NSE thin, especially with concurrent operations in Helmand, Ghorak, Zharey, Arghandab and Panjwayi. Highway 4 was problematic, as only part of it was paved. This severely reduced combat logistics patrol speeds, which

“further expos[ed] the vehicles to greater danger” because it was easier to seed an unpaved road with IEDs than a paved one.¹⁴² Once again, the lack of Canadian helicopters forced increased use of ground mobility, which increased risk. Recce Squadron started keeping track of IED statistics on Highway 4.

Why at this late date was Highway 4 not completely paved? It was, after all, a main service route and a regional trade route. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) was funding road paving projects all over Afghanistan at this time. There was some debate, however, between CIDA and USAID as to who would fund Highway 4. In the end, CIDA wanted to pay for it and, with the USAID representative departing the PRT, they won out. CIDA used the Asian Development Bank as the implementing partner and allocated nearly \$15 million to the project. On 22 April, a shura and ceremony was held in Spin Boldak, “marking the start of construction of the final 42 kilometer segment” of Highway 4.¹⁴³ Spin Boldak looked like a success story, with limited coalition input. Then a suicide bomber walked into Highway Police headquarters and detonated the explosives strapped to his chest. Lal Jan, the Highway Police commander and Noorzai power broker, was slain along with his son and 15 other government employees and security personnel. The planned deployment of troops from the UAE by this time failed to materialize.

This left Recce Squadron in Spin Boldak to work with the polyglot of U.S. Army and DynCorp police mentors, all four segments of Afghan police, and the Afghan National Army Recon Company with American embedded trainers stationed there. Of the four phases of Operation SATYR NYX, only the first, Shaping, could be accomplished with these resources, and there was no singular security force commander in Spin Boldak. The best that could be done was to mount ad hoc operations based on personal relationships. Maj Graham was a catalyst and once Col Raziq was identified as the key player in the district, combined operations centered on working with the Border Police. Similarly, the Afghan army Recon Company had a good relationship with Recce Squadron, so combining all three elements to work together was possible while the other police organizations conducted their financially-motivated framework operations on Highway 4. Numerous “manoeuvre-to-collect” operations successfully mapped the nature of illicit activity in the district.¹⁴⁴ The enemy and their allies in the Spin Boldak arena never tried to take on Recce Squadron and Recon Company. For the most part, they did not want to draw attention to ratlines that avoided the border observation posts. Instead, they laid IEDs to kill Afghans employed at the forward operating base. A 15-year-old biking to his cleaning job was blown in half by such a device in order to discourage people from working there.¹⁴⁵

The Canadian Strategic Dimension

As we will recall, the Canadian government and the opposition parties voted in May 2006 to maintain Canadian troops in Kandahar until 2009. In April 2007, however, the political landscape in Canada changed. The New Democratic Party, led by Jack Layton, was against the Afghanistan endeavour from the beginning and had in the past advocated peace talks with the Taliban. The alleged movement of Canada away from its supposedly historic “peacekeeping” heritage ostensibly prompted Layton to demand on 16 April the immediate withdrawal of Canadian forces from Afghanistan. He once again demanded that the Karzai government initiate peace talks with the Taliban. As the Canadian government was a minority government, the possibility that Layton might achieve his aim of pulling Canada out of the war was very real. At the same time, the Dutch parliament was once again wavering and might lose its resolve if Canada withdrew. On 19 April, a motion was tabled in the House of Commons calling on the Harper government to confirm February 2009 as the withdrawal date. This motion was rejected at 150 to 134 votes. Layton was unable to force an early withdrawal, let alone confirm that Canada would withdraw in 2009. On 30 April, Layton then attempted to have the House of Commons “immediately notify NATO that we would withdraw from the war in Afghanistan.” This was also narrowly rejected.¹⁴⁶

The timing of this debate should be examined in light of concurrent enemy activity. For nearly two weeks (16–30 April), Canada openly debated continuing on in Afghanistan. This debate was available on the Internet as much as through other more traditional mediums. While in progress, there were no noticeable different enemy actions seeking to exploit the sensitivities of that debate; indeed, enemy activity dropped off.¹⁴⁷ However, the loss of eight Canadian soldiers killed and ten wounded earlier in the month (8 April and 11 April) apparently had some cumulative effect on Layton’s decision when combined with the detainee allegations of late March. It remains a possibility that the mass casualty event on Easter Sunday 2007 was deliberately timed to influence Canadian policy as it related to Afghanistan. It is equally clear that “exposé” journalism on the detainee issue, based on what might have been information shaped or provided by Taliban sympathizers, also played a role in nearly ending Canada’s war. It is equally possible that both events were part of a larger Taliban or Al Qaeda supported information operations campaign to knock Canada out of the war, much in the same way Spain was convinced to pull its forces out of Iraq.¹⁴⁸

Taliban spokesman Qari Yousuf Ahmadi’s comments are worth noting as he timed an interview to coincide with Canadian parliamentary debate over continuing the mission back in 2006:

The Taliban feel confident Canadians are not resolved to see this mission through. As a campaign of suicide attacks and fatal roadside blasts intensify, the public will grow weary... We think that when we kill enough Canadians they will quit the war and return home.¹⁴⁹

There is no reason to assume or believe that Taliban policy changed during the intervening 12 months.

A non-Canadian analysis of the situation encapsulated the domestic dimensions of support for the war in Canada at that time:

The volatility in public opinion appears to stem from the positive and negative images that emerge from Afghanistan daily. Many Canadians are aware of some of the good news stories coming out of Afghanistan these days: school attendance (especially for girls) is up, refugees have returned in the millions, medical care is better and more available, GDP has doubled and infant mortality has dropped by a quarter, all against the haunting spectre of a strengthening Taliban. They are proud that Canada is part of these successes. There also appears to be a growing understanding in many circles that these types of missions are messy by nature and require patience... there is also a pride about Canada taking on a robust role in Afghanistan consistent with the idea that “Canada is back” on the world stage. But the negatives are hitting hard. The biggest and most persistent negatives are incurring casualties... each of which hits Canadians three times—when the death occurs, when the body returns, and when the funeral takes place.... Many Canadians wedded to popular mythology, have expressed the notion that the current Afghan mission is simply “un-Canadian” and gets away from the classic Canadian mission of post-conflict peacekeeping.... There is also a sense among many that Canada’s share of the burden is too high and that there will be nothing dishonorable about pressing other NATO allies to step up to the plate.¹⁵⁰

Counter-IED Operations

The evolution of Canadian counter-IED operations accelerated throughout 2007 as the problems encountered during operations MEDUSA and BAAZ TSUKA were progressively addressed. Initially there were several counter-IED activities that were not necessarily synchronized. There was a “long-term” six-man technical assistance visit that acted essentially as a Technical Exploitation Team dubbed TF IED Defeat. There were a handful of Canadians working with the American TF Paladin counter-IED intelligence organization and the Combined Explosives Exploitation Cell, both of which were transitioning from Operation ENDURING FREEDOM to ISAF. There were three Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) teams and their Bison-transported robotic team members that belonged to the battle group who were embroiled in “tribal” issues between the NSE, the PRT, and the battle group over who owned and could task them.¹⁵¹

In other words, there were several moving parts that were not meshing yet. TF IED Defeat was a “lessons-learned” organization that supported Canadian units in-theatre by collecting post-blast analysis data and recommending changes to tactics, techniques and procedures. The EOD teams could render safe devices. The “lab rats” were a Canadian contribution to an American organization. Counter-IED was seen at this point in time as a set of tactical and technical responses to an enemy technique.

When BGen Grant’s TF Kandahar headquarters stood up and started operating, the decision was made to group most of the counter-IED resources under the Chief of Operations (in this case, LCol Tom Bradley): it was basically labeled “C-IED.” The former technical assistance visit transitioned into several Technical Exploitation Teams and the EOD teams were taken away from the battle group and redistributed under brigade-level command. A pair of Canadians working with the Combined Explosives Exploitation Cell and the American counter-IED laboratory in Bagram Airfield remained detached, however, but the effect was that by 2007 there was a dedicated, and no longer ad hoc, counter-IED operations at the Canadian headquarters in Kandahar. A concurrent process back in Canada to consolidate counter-IED expertise was also in play to ensure deploying units were as up to date as possible.

And they had to be. The counter-IED war was an arms race, a war within a war, characterized by constant adaptation by an extremely agile and creative enemy. By 2007, the enemy employed a plethora of IED types. There were radio-controlled devices, which were command-detonated by a “button man.” There were pressure-plate or crush-plate devices, which were essentially mines lying in wait for a victim to operate it. There were trip-wire devices, which were victim-operated, and command-wire devices, which were detonated by a “wire man.” Suicide bombers came in two varieties: on foot or, when in cars, they became suicide vehicle-borne IEDs. That was in addition to purpose-built PMN anti-personnel mines and TC-6 anti-tank mines.¹⁵²

The debate about how best to go after the enemy IED organizations was in full swing in 2007 but there was no consensus on an approach. For example, not all IEDs were created equally. Suicide IED activity was highly specialized, particularly because of the centrality of religion to it. It required a specialized network that essentially turned a human being into a cruise missile. Recruiting was conducted in madrassas in Pakistan, where fervent individuals were identified and indoctrinated. They proceeded after training to Kandahar where they were met by a facilitator, in some cases a religious figure, who ensured that the “weapon” was spiritually and mentally prepared, while another facilitator ensured that a bomb vest or car was prepared by an engineer. Man and bomb were mated and then deployed as the situation required it. It was the enemy’s equivalent of a precision-guided attack.¹⁵³



Photo Credit: Author

The enemy continued to use improvised explosive devices against Canadian vehicles and personnel. This is the remains of a LAV III destroyed by such a device in the process of being shipped back to Canada for analysis.

Other IEDs were more tactical in nature. The “roadside bombs” used in Zharey and Panjwayi Districts were harassment and route denial weapons. In some cases, they were laid like a traditional minefield to channel forces or deter them from entering key areas. On occasion, they could be deliberately employed for mass casualty generation when the enemy wanted to inflict psychological effects on Canada and her allies during crucial periods of political instability. A specialist bomb maker manufactured and emplaced these devices; they required secure “factory” space to build and procurers to bring material to them. In many cases, they scrounged the battlefield for unexploded bombs and shells. Illumination casings were converted for use against their previous owners. The enemy forces heavily infiltrated the non-governmental organization demining community to obtain military-grade explosives, while ISAF garbage dumps were rifled for batteries and electronic components. Car door fobs were a preferred detonator at one point, cell phones later on.¹⁵⁴

To provide more insight into the problem, there had to be better connectivity between the counter-IED structure and the intelligence community. By summer 2007, improved links were established between the JTF Afghanistan counter-IED, the All Source Intelligence Centre and TF Paladin to move information. EOD rendered unexploded devices safe, while the Tactical Exploitation Teams collected the pieces of detonated weapons, analyzed them and conducted lessons-learned activities for units in-theatre and in Canada. EOD and Tactical Exploitation Team members were then combined and by late 2007, five counter-IED teams were formed.¹⁵⁵ The counter-IED war continued.

The Provincial Reconstruction Team and Development, April–July 2007

The PRT continued with its varied development activities, focusing particularly on improving the National Solidarity Programme organizations in the communities and districts. CIMIC remained deeply involved in divining just what was going on in each district and facilitated development programming to match new information as it emerged.

Finally, on 6 May 2007, ISAF headquarters ordered its subordinate commands to assist the Government of Afghanistan with the implementation of the ANDS. This was a major turn around given earlier NATO ISAF opposition to the creation of the ANDS in the first place back in 2004. It was probably the most important decision taken by Lt.-Gen. McNeill while he was Commander ISAF. The chasm between development and security efforts in Afghanistan was narrowed slightly, but enough so that the semblance of coordination at the Regional Command (South) level could occur. A Regional Reconstruction and Development Steering Group was established at Regional Command (South), which included the TF Kandahar Development advisor, the PRT Commander, the TF Kandahar CIMIC desk officer, and the TF Kandahar Engineer Cell. There they were lectured at length by USAID and informed that 95% of the effort should be non-kinetic and only 5% kinetic. Better messaging was important so that target audiences would know what was being accomplished, especially when anything was coordinated with the Afghans. The discussion was less than useful and the establishment of coordinated development at Regional Command (South) appeared to be just another layer of bureaucracy that had to be fed with data without any resources being provided downwards.¹⁵⁶

The CIDA-mentored Provincial Development Committee organization was instructed to produce a provincial development plan so that money could flow from Kabul to the district and community development bodies. After some months, the development plan was examined by the PRT who acknowledged that it was probably the first such plan in Afghanistan but it remained “a non-costed and underdeveloped ‘wish list’ of projects which has little chance of coordinating or leveraging investments in the donor community.”

There was no implementation plan and was, in effect, a “glorified projects list.”¹⁵⁷ It was, however, a start, though it was dependent on other organizations to assist the Afghans at the district and community level. Those organizations themselves were in disarray throughout summer 2007.

The role of the PRT in “effects mitigation” for inadvertent civilian deaths, injuries and damage increased in 2007. This was, of course, CIMIC’s traditional role in past conflicts but it took on new dimensions in Kandahar. Any accidental deaths could lead to serious grievances in the population against the coalition forces and Afghan government, which, in turn, would be exploited by the insurgency to gain recruits in the Pashtunwali-laden tribal environment. Each incident had to be handled quickly and expeditiously to avoid larger repercussions and this placed a premium on all influence means: public affairs, CIMIC and PSYOPS. An example was an incident in early May when TF 71 operators engaged what they thought was a suicide bomber trying to target their convoy in Maruf District. Thirteen Afghans died as a result. Supported by TF Kandahar, the PRT swung into action and arranged shuras between the Governor, the families, and local leadership—secured by TF 71 forces. A spirit of reconciliation was successfully generated, which completely defused the situation.¹⁵⁸

Three days later, unfortunately, an American convoy moving through the city engaged and wounded six civilians. Then there was the “Phantom Convoy” incident where a convoy that no one could identify, not belonging to the blackest of the special operations forces nor any of the private military corporations, gunned down five people one night. No one knew who was responsible. Then a special operations forces operation on 16 June resulted in nine detainees and one civilian killed. This particular action finally put the population on edge when the family prepared a large-scale protest and the PRT, working with the Governor, was forced to intervene and prioritize a number of projects in the affected neighbourhood. The situation escalated again on 3 July when a British convoy, led by inexperienced personnel, shot 15 people out of fear of ambush. There was a general mobilization of the population by the city’s religious leaders, so TF Kandahar and 205 Corps moved 250 Afghan troops and police into the city and brought in attack helicopters for over-watch which diverted troops from ongoing operations. Clearly, “escalations of force” could have disproportionate effects if not dealt with so the PRT was at the front line when it came to compensatory measures.¹⁵⁹

Another important operation involving the PRT was Operation BISSEL. In a remote area northeast of the city was the ammunition depot for the former 15th Division of the Soviet-era Afghan Army. This huge facility consisted of numerous bunkers, and was surrounded by an estimated 10 000 anti-tank mines. Contracted deminers failed to do the

job properly, so, in 2004, the decision was made to bomb the facility. This merely spread the munitions around or buried them in the bunkers. The UN Mine Awareness Centre for Afghanistan (UNMACA) wanted to spend money and employ local deminers to get the job done, so the PRT got involved. The local organizations included the Demining Agency for Afghanistan and the Mine Detection Centre.¹⁶⁰

Information came in through the PRT that the Taliban were either infiltrating the 15 Division site to remove buried explosives, or they were co-opting the deminers to hand over defused mines. This produced a larger collection operation involving Canadian resources, including Sperwer UAVs, to monitor the site. Sure enough, people were seen to be moving through the minefields but it was unclear what they were doing exactly. At the same time, the Demining Agency and Mine Detection Centre offices were placed under observation. PRT engineers and special operations forces moved on the 15 Division site to assess it, while the Demining Agency and Mine Detection Centre offices were raided. Nine Demining Agency and two Mine Detection employees were implicated in selling ammunition to the insurgents: one person had links to a prominent Taliban commander in the city who frequented Loy Wala District and was involved in IED terrorism.¹⁶¹

At the same time, the UNMACA acted as a CIDA-implementing partner for demining activities in Zharey District and subcontracted their demining operations out to other organizations. When the Canadian engineers tried to develop a relationship and information exchange with UNMACA, UNMACA complained to CIDA, who complained to TF Kandahar. UNMACA personnel thought that contact with the Canadians compromised what they believed to be some form of neutrality and they refused to coordinate their movements with the 2 RCR Battle Group. The concept that their activities were in support of the Government of Afghanistan and paid for by the Government of Canada eluded them. This was but one example of a non-governmental organization undermining government authority by behaving as if it were neutral.¹⁶² The more sinister conclusion here is that the Demining Agency for Afghanistan and Mine Detection Centre were doing the work for UNMACA, and this resulted in re-purposing unexploded ordnance and mines to be used against Canadian soldiers, with CIDA paying part of the bill. After the investigation was completed and this pipeline shut down, the Taliban kidnapped three Mine Detection Centre deminers in retaliation; the deminers were found murdered in early August.¹⁶³ These murders effectively shut down UNMACA operations in Zharey and Panjwayi.

The PRT was also involved with supporting special operations forces. One example involved Operation AQUA ORANGE, which included cooperation with the Polish GROM special operations unit that was operating in Arghistan and Maruf Districts. The PRT deployed an outreach team of CIMIC, PSYOPS and force protection to assess

the areas that the Polish SOF were operating in, much in the same way the 2005 iteration of the PRT worked with the French SOF in the same area. Attempts were made to get some development programming into Maruf to support the beleaguered population.¹⁶⁴

Another aspect of the war in Kandahar was the increased number of kidnapping incidents in 2007 relative to previous years. In March, three Italians were kidnapped in Kandahar City. A special operations forces recovery operation handed the hostages over to the PRT Police, led by Col Tor Jan, and a PRT support team who assisted with medical care.¹⁶⁵ The Taliban then kidnapped medical personnel in Zharey District and transported them all the way to Sangin in Helmand for “trial” by a Taliban “judge.” One of the hostages, a French citizen, was eventually released in Maywand to the Red Cross. Governor Asadullah Khalid decried the exchange policy, asserting that appeasement would lead to more kidnappings.¹⁶⁶

When special operations forces in Helmand killed Mullah Dadullah Lang in May, the unusual decision to display his body for media scrutiny in Kandahar was taken by Asadullah Khalid. This resulted in severe public outrage. The Taliban kidnapped four Ministry of Health employees on 4 June, demanding that the body be released to the family. Khalid went on “medical leave” and handed this hot potato to his deputy, who declined to make a decision, which led to the beheading of one of the hostages. He then made an exchange deal.¹⁶⁷

Mullah Dadullah Lang’s body aside, this was part of a larger Taliban strategy to cripple the Afghan government’s medical system. In the two weeks after the CIDA-funded polio eradication initiative was launched in July, 39 medical personnel were killed by the Taliban, followed by another wave of kidnappings.¹⁶⁸ Note that no Canadian media outlet or opposition critic made any reference whatsoever to the systematic murder of unarmed doctors, nurses and health care providers: more column inches in Canadian newspapers were devoted to the detainee issue instead of these heinous acts. Canadian SOF, their British and American counterparts and the intelligence apparatus were kept busy during this time looking for opportunities to recover any hostages, which, in turn, attenuated counter leadership operations against the insurgency.

UNAMA also found itself under attack. A UN vehicle was hit with a radio-controlled IED 1 kilometre south of the PRT, killing five.¹⁶⁹ The PRT’s Quick Reaction Force responded to the incident, and, as the summer went by, PRT vehicles were targeted on three occasions, including LCol Chamberlain’s RG-31. One attack involved a ball-bearing-laden suicide bomber that shredded an RG-31.¹⁷⁰

The UN warned that if the violence against their personnel escalated, they would scale back operations in Kandahar. Note that the entire UN effort in southern Afghanistan was quartered in Kandahar, so its neutralization by the enemy had widespread effects in the region. Recall that the UN facilitated the vital Community Development Councils

in the districts so that reconstruction and development money could be made available at the community level. The UN sent in Guang Cong to fill the leadership vacuum in July. Cong's first move was to lecture the Canadians at the PRT about the need to avoid civilian casualties during ISAF operations and to "dialogue" with all coalition parties on that topic.¹⁷¹ This was less than useful given the existing situation. The Red Cross announced in mid-July that they would pull out of Kandahar citing the security situation. A week later, one of the five major international development organizations, Oxfam, also pulled out.¹⁷²

Supporting Task Force Kandahar Operations

LCol Chuck Mathé, the new NSE commander, oversaw a massive change in how service support operated in Kandahar. Mathé's NSE had significantly more guns, tanks and other vehicles to maintain and service so in work ups for Afghanistan in November 2006, the number of positions in the NSE abruptly grew from 269 to 481. This rapid increase brought in support personnel from every logistics unit across the armed forces, not just the Army. The nucleus of the NSE came from 2 Service Battalion in Petawawa, with the tank maintenance from Edmonton, ammunition handlers from Valcartier, and so on: they were also trained for a ground combat environment. The NSE was now finally playing catch up for the attempt to use Kabul as a template for Kandahar in 2005–2006 but many of the non-land force augmentees needed basic soldiering skills which in turn slowed down the deployment of nearly 40% of the NSE in spring 2007.¹⁷³

There were deficiencies in key areas that needed to be rectified quickly during work ups. Canada now needed specialized tank transporters to move the Leopard tanks in a hostile environment. None existed in the system. LGen Leslie was able to convince the Dutch to lease Canada a number of Heavy Equipment Truck Transport vehicles so 13 drivers were sent to the Netherlands for training at the last minute.¹⁷⁴

The NSE structure under LCol Mathé changed from three platoons and a combat service support company to three full companies that were roughly in line with traditional Canadian doctrine: a supply and transport company; a maintenance company; and a force protection company. The NSE also became responsible for 200 contractors and 60 personnel support agency people stationed at KAF.¹⁷⁵

How the NSE supported the battle group also changed. Under John Conrad and Dan Labrie, the NSE had a cluster of platoons formed into a combat service support company that was essentially cut to the battle group and led by an infantry major. Under Mathé, the system was different. The nature of LCol Rob Walker's operations suggested that pushing supplies from the airfield to his four bases (Patrol Base Wilson, FOB Ma'Sum Ghar, Patrol Base Sperwan Ghar and Spin Boldak) and then distributing from there was the best means. LCol Mathé and his staff determined that Patrol Base Wilson was geographically

central to the ongoing and projected operations, so a robust combat service support detachment was stationed there. This detachment retained heavy equipment truck transport, wreckers, and Bison recovery vehicles, plus their protection, refueling trucks and a command post. This was prudent given the increased number of attacks on Highway 1 and later on Route Summit. It also permitted recovery teams to deploy to Maywand, Ghorak, Khakrez and points north as required.¹⁷⁶ The PRT at Camp Nathan Smith was another node. This meant mounting combat logistics patrols from KAF to those four points and having a small detachment at each point to handle storage and distribution. At any one time, the NSE had 140 of its personnel either on combat logistics patrols or in the forward operating bases. These personnel were rotated to get everybody “outside the wire.” The Force Protection Company had the added responsibility of handling one of the KAF gates, so they were rotated from gate duty to a combat logistics patrol and so on.¹⁷⁷ When D Battery deployed its guns to Helmand, multinational combat logistics patrols were formed to supply the Operation ACHILLES forces, to which the NSE contributed.¹⁷⁸

Overall, however,

Dedicated air assets would have allowed us to easily sustain this operation via rotary wing.... The lack of dedicated rotary wing assets made conducting resupply operations in remote locations extremely difficult... rotary wing became increasingly difficult to secure throughout the tour for sustainment operations due to other priorities and consequently were only made available for the purposes of emergency resupply.¹⁷⁹

Mathé’s NSE led the way in procuring local Afghan transport for non-vital supplies and equipment. The owners of the garish “jingle trucks,” for a fee, helped the NSE maximize its delivery capability. LCol Mathé and his staff saw this as one means of empowering the local economy and increasing the Afghans’ contracting capacity. The fact that the likelihood of a civilian jingle truck being targeted by an IED was much lower than a Canadian combat logistics patrol was not discussed openly. Various measures were put into place to ensure that fuel was not siphoned off before it arrived at the forward operating bases. Over time, the NSE developed relationships with the drivers and they became a source of “atmospheric” information. This was fed into the ASIC.¹⁸⁰

The combat logistics patrols remained at high risk in the IED environment. Canada still operated the unarmoured Heavy Logistics Vehicle-Wheeled truck, though the Force Protection Company had RG-31 and Bison armoured personnel carriers. Every combat logistics patrol was confronted with the life and death issue of rules of engagement in a crowded city like Kandahar. After some analysis, tactics changed one

month into operations. NSE and battle group patrols were initially dominating the roads and forcing local vehicles out of their way, which led to all sorts of havoc and complaints. BGen Grant ordered the practice to stop. Was there another way of handling the problem? Was there any way of not attracting attention? Naturally this was difficult with armoured vehicles, but when aggressive driving was reduced the number of incidents dropped off completely in the city. There were no IED or suicide vehicle-borne IED attacks against combat logistics patrols in the city when the tactics changed, but these events could not be completely correlated.¹⁸¹

The situation on Highway 4 improved throughout 2007 but then the Kandahar City–Ma’Sum Ghar run down Route Fosters became a shooting gallery. The Force Protection Company soldiers were all young reservists, 18 to 19 years old. LCol Mathé was impressed with their maturity: “Asking kids to process and assess and use escalation of force legalities in this environment was not easy.”¹⁸² The combat logistics patrols were hit regularly. One vehicle technician was even IED’d on three successive combat logistics patrols. Notably, the first Canadian soldier killed in 2007 came from the NSE. Cpl Kevin Megeney died of a negligent discharge from another soldier’s weapon on 6 March 2007.

On the Signals front, the shift from a coalition headquarters (CTF Aegis) and National Command Element drove changes to TF Kandahar. For the most part, tactical communications remained in a steady state but it was in the realm of information systems that significant changes were in the offing throughout 2007. For example, in 2006, there were several systems in play: SPARTAN (Canadian); TITAN (Canadian/U.S.); COINS (a NATO intelligence system); SIPR (a U.S. system); and NATO SECRET (a connection between the Canadian brigade headquarters and ISAF HQ). CENTRIX was the primary means of command and control at the brigade level. Once a new national layer was added to the chain of command, however, this network of networks was incapable of meeting TF Kandahar’s needs. Better information flow was required at the PRT and the battle group, so the TACNET system was added in 2007, followed by ISAF SECRET, which replaced CENTRIX. These changes meant beefing up the J6 section of TF Kandahar and essentially rewiring Canadian infrastructure in-theatre. Later TF Kandahar rotations benefited from the web of communication established in 2007.¹⁸³

Mention must also be made of the health services support system. The Role 3 Multinational Medical Unit (MMU) remained under Canadian command: LCol M.D Deilgat until February 2007 and then LCol M.C MacKay after that. Its multinational staff continued to work out of a mixed plywood and Weatherhaven facility next to the runway at KAF. As before, the Role 3 MMU played a key role in emergency care for coalition forces as well as for Afghan police and army wounded. As the number of casualties increased, the work done by Role 3 MMU became, unfortunately, all too routine. That said, if the

American medical evacuation helicopters could get the wounded to the Role 3 MMU within an hour, the chances of survival increased exponentially. Canada had a national Role 2 unit as well, which had a variety of resources, including the Evacuation Platoon with its Bison ambulances. A typical daily deployment for Evacuation Platoon had an ambulance detachment with each of the infantry companies, the tank squadron and the recce squadron, and medical technicians in each infantry platoon. Each forward operating base had a physician's assistant located there, while convoys rolled with medical technicians. Camp Nathan Smith had nine medical technicians stationed there: the PRT was essentially a mini-outstation of the Role 2 unit.

The electrical and mechanical engineers from the NSE continued to maintain the upgraded Leopard C-2 tanks and their aging associates, the Badger AEVs and Taurus armoured recovery vehicles. This included repairing the Leopard's implements, the rollers and ploughs, when they took hits from mines and IEDs. The Badgers and Taurus also got armour upgrades during this time to improve their survivability. The main issue with the use of the older Leopard vehicles was the heat in the summer. These vehicles were not equipped to operate in these conditions. The best local modification that could be made was to braise or weld a loop to the inside roof of the turret so that crews could hook up their own intravenous drip when they got heat exhaustion. The tank squadron personnel agreed that they needed a tracked ambulance in order to extract casualties from vehicles as the existing wheeled Bison ambulances could not always get into the same areas that the tanks could, especially in Zharey District.

Two issues drove the deployment of a new vehicle to Afghanistan. The first was that there were not enough LAV III chassis converted into specialist vehicles before the war. The second was the number of LAV III's taken out by IEDs and the time necessary to rebuild them. Back in the 1990s, the Army could not decide on a single fleet of infantry fighting vehicles and, as a result, maintained an upgraded 1960s-era tracked M-113 fleet as well as the incoming wheeled LAV series. Consequently, the decision was made to rebuild the upgraded M-113s into specialist vehicles for Afghanistan. With a new track system, new engine and additional protection, the M-113s came back into service as the Tracked Light Armoured Vehicle (TLAV). In 2007, the NSE handled the deployment of TLAV fitter vehicles (dubbed the "El Camino") and TLAVs equipped with the 1-metre turret taken off of the now-defunct Grizzly AVGP fleet. These vehicles mounted .50 caliber and a 7.62mm machine guns in the turret. The importance of having the TLAVs lay in the fact that the Electrical and Mechanical Engineers' technicians could deploy under armour and conduct repairs to the tanks and LAVs on site in the field instead of dragging them back to Ma'Sum Ghar or KAF and thus reduce exposure of those convoys to IEDs and ambushes.



Photo Credit: Author

The National Support Element technicians worked to equip Canadian vehicles with slat armour in order to counter enemy high-explosive anti-tank rounds. This tracked light armoured vehicle, deployed with the artillery battery, is so equipped.

For the electrical and mechanical engineers in the NSE, this meant that they were now responsible for a third armoured fighting vehicle type. The older NCOs had experience with the M-113 series in their career and taught younger mechanics the ins and outs, but the NSE supply system also had to expand to accommodate spare parts for this new fleet.

Finally, there were new arrangements relating to detainee handling. A new agreement between the Canadian ambassador and Afghan Minister of Defence signed in May 2007 led to an expanded role for the Military Police Company. The existing detainee handling facility was significantly improved and permanent structures erected. Improved procedures relating to detainee monitoring and transfer to the Afghan National Directorate of Security were also put in place.¹⁸⁴

Operations in Zharey District, May–June 2007

The situation in Zharey District deteriorated as summer approached. Afghan intelligence passed to I Company suggested that the Taliban campaign would continue to employ “heavy mining and IED emplacement along routes to inhibit ISAF influence in the region.” Of note, Maj Quick passed on that “They are using this to gain time for preaching jihad to the local nationals in the region in order to convert them and employ them as tier 2 fighters against ISAF/ANSF forces.” Led by Mullah Manan, the Taliban in the area were augmented with fighters from Uzbekistan, Pakistan and possibly Chechnya, which displeased many local people, including “all of the children we encountered [who] were indicating a Taliban presence and urg[ed] us to action.”¹⁸⁵

The anticipated Afghan Special Police, who 2 RCR Battle Group thought might be allocated to Zharey, did not arrive. The police in Zharey continued to have split loyalties. When Col. Akka was away, district leader Khairuddin absconded with some of Akka’s officers and conducted his own “operations.” The Canadians concluded that “it is clear there is Taliban within the ANP as well as the district shura.”¹⁸⁶

Early on in the tour, nobody in 2 RCR Battle Group knew what the District Development Assembly, the Community Development Councils, or the National Solidarity Programme were. Now, CIMIC was better integrated into operations, even though the development programmes themselves were moribund because of district tribalism. By May–June, no operation was conducted without tribal mapping and relationship analysis prior to its commencement—and no operation went without key leader engagements when it was in progress. The company commanders operating in the district, for example, believed that 90% of their information came from foot patrols, shuras, Afghan National Army, Afghan police and the PRT—and that project follow-up by CIMIC was integral to credibility with the population and connected to the quality of the information. Many viewed the ASIC and its comparatively limited knowledge base as “useless.” The maps were also considered to be next to useless and the company commanders relied more and more on imagery of the dense, tight terrain for planning. There were also constant problems with overclassification of information.¹⁸⁷

Over time, CIMIC teams lead by WO Jim Hunter fleshed out some of the underlying problems in Zharey District. Zharey was artificially carved out of Panjwayi, Maywand and Khakrez Districts in 2003. It had an identity crisis aggravated by the population’s dispersal during Operation MEDUSA—and not all of its occupants had returned. This generated land disputes between squatters, tenant farmers, and the fact that some landowners lived not just in Kandahar and Kabul, but as far away as Germany. Then there were the water rights issues with Route Summit. There were community representatives—but whom did they really represent? There was no legal system in the district: that void encouraged the Taliban

to act as the government. The only solution was governance followed by a resolution of grievances, but security was required first, and that was problematic because of the lack of police. Once again, Zharey District was a microcosm of the larger conflict.¹⁸⁸ The fact that Zharey District was a problem area was not new to Canadians: the 2005 iteration of the PRT and TF Orion in 2006 had significant insight into Zharey's problems, but it was as if 2 RCR Battle Group was starting from scratch in 2007.



Photo Credit: Author

Route Summit continued to attract parties interested in blowing up the newly paved road. Not all disruptions were Taliban as there were local feuds over water rights in play. Here a Badger armoured engineer vehicle assists with remediation of the irrigation system after an improvised explosive device strike.

Consequently, the battle group continued with its operations. (See Figure 1-7.) The lack of special police, coupled with other TF Kandahar operations in other districts, produced Canadian pressure for additional ISAF troops. The only European country that stepped up to the plate was Portugal, which had a contingent in Regional Command (West). TF Lisbon, based on a commando company mounted in armoured Hummers, was cut to TF Kandahar in May. As the non-standard logistics arrangements were worked out (TF Lisbon required specialized storage for its Port), H Company and a tank troop mounted

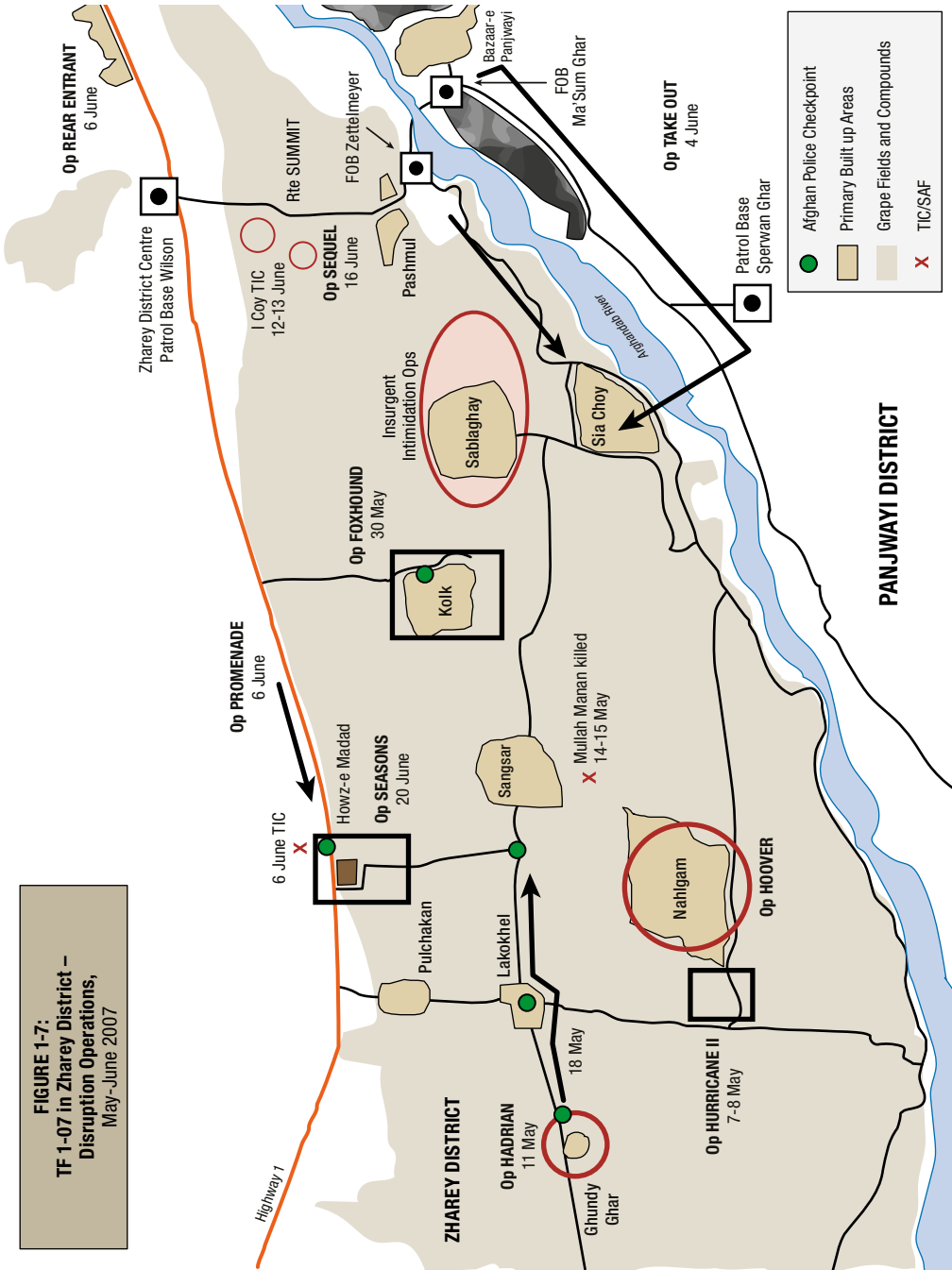


Figure 1-7: TF 1-07 in Zharey District – Disruption Operations, May-June 2007

the long-delayed Operation HURRICANE II against Nahlgam on 7 May. By now the Leopard tanks were equipped with mine rollers and specialized plows, not unlike those used during the Second World War. In effect, the tank squadron became, in the words of one officer, “a poor man’s route clearance package” that could detonate but not detect mines and IEDs. The idea was to “roll the roads” south from Howz-e Madad to the Diwar crossroads, east to Sangsar, south to Seyaddin and then west into Nahlgam.

The action started when an American jingle truck convoy was shot up with RPGs on Highway 1 near Howz-e Madad as the HURRICANE force deployed. The lead Leopard with the mine rollers then was hit with small-arms fire and multiple RPGs as it led the column south on Route Banff. Between 0611 hours and 1200 hours, the combat team had seven Troops in Contact (TICs) in the space of 1 kilometre, with substantial numbers of RPGs fired at each turn. In each TIC the tanks fired main armament and coaxial machine guns. The combat team killed an estimated 10 insurgents, and captured four, while information was collected identifying three insurgent leaders and their locations. The heat was now getting to the tank crews and, constrained by the terrain, the decision was made to pull back to Patrol Base Wilson and try again the next morning.¹⁸⁹

On 8 May, the H Company combat team with the Afghan National Army and Canadian OMLT, headed down Route Langley, through Lakokhel, and then turned east to get into Nahlgam. Establishing a leaguer at 0900 at the junction of Routes Montreal and Langley, the combat team was attacked with RPGs. Six enemy were killed by 25mm and 105mm fire. Moving east along Montreal, the Afghan National Army and OMLT dismounted to lead, with tanks following and H Company falling in behind. There were four more engagements with the Taliban (with an estimated 15 killed) before it got too hot again around noon. The Afghans and the OMLT were able to clear some of the compounds, but kept running into civilians. Maj Ruff and his Afghan counterpart decided not to pursue further. The combat team was withdrawn.¹⁹⁰

Operation HURRICANE’s movements and engagements shaped the situation around Nahlgam and Sangsar in such a way that Canadian SOF could track and target enemy leadership that unmasked themselves when they fought back against the tank-led assaults. I Company was then tasked as the QRF if any of the special operations forces operations went wrong. LCol Walker also decided to move back into Gundy Ghar and the planners put together Operation HADRIAN to do that. On 11 May, H Company reoccupied Gundy Ghar without incident.¹⁹¹

On the night of 14–15 May, Canadian SOF and the battle group mounted a counterleadership operation. Supported by airstrikes, the Canadian special operators successfully took out Mullah Manan, his second-in-command, and up to 12 of his fighters between Sangsar and Nahlgam.¹⁹² LCol Walker and staff now had an opportunity to exploit

this power vacuum—and wanted to get into and clear Sangsar and Nahlgam if possible. The plan was to have the Portuguese company feint to Howz-e Madad. I Company, which inadvertently got into a contact at Kolk on the afternoon of 16 May, provided additional deception. H Company and the tanks launched from Gundy Ghar at 0330 on 18 May, working two axes east along Route Ottawa. Local people told Maj Ruff exactly where the enemy dispositions and mines were. As the combat team moved along its routes, they had four separate contacts, all similar to those on Operation HURRICANE—small-arms fire, an RPG volley, then retreat or die in place. The combat team obliged the jihadis and engaged at least a section of insurgents. Then one of the Leopards hit a mine with its rollers, followed by a LAV III that struck a mine, with only minor injuries. Once again, constricted terrain and the heat forced an end to the operation and the forces returned to Gundy Ghar.¹⁹³

The Portuguese did not perform as expected. Despite that fact that TF Lisbon was made up of “commandos,” they were really light infantry and not special operators. Dismayed Canadians reported that the Portuguese were “very poorly prepared for battle” with no radio batteries, no situational awareness, and a complete inability to provide sitreps to the Canadian battle group. They lacked noise discipline and sang on their non-tactical route march out of the objective area.¹⁹⁴ TF Lisbon was, apparently, the best that NATO ISAF could come up with to backstop the hard-pressed Canadian contingent, but Canadian officers were cautioned not to openly criticize their erstwhile allies’ faults because “they at least showed up” to the fight and had been “raked over the coals by their own media about redeploying to Regional Command (South).” Still, it was a universal belief in the battle group that TF Lisbon was a “menace to the battle space” and they tried to find tasks that the Portuguese might be able to handle within their limits. No other European NATO ally deployed forces to assist.¹⁹⁵

Operation HOOVER Phase 4 continued. The PRT deployed CIMIC teams, one per company, for Phase 4. There was also increased Afghan National Army participation once the kandak commander’s polite reticence to provide input was overcome through OMLT battle group discussions.¹⁹⁶ The next iteration was to have I Company, TF Lisbon, the Afghan National Army and OMLT cross the Arghandab River at night and get into Nahlgam, while D Battery fired illumination north of Highway 1 as a deception. Coalition forces from three nations were going to converge on Nahlgam on three axes. To improve mobility through the dense irrigated terrain, engineers from 42 Field Squadron revitalized another Second World War idea: the fascine. In its 21st century iteration, long metal tubes lashed together into bundles were perfect for the task. When dropped into an irrigation ditch, the water continued to flow through the tubes while the armoured vehicles drove over the obstacle. A Badger AEV boom could then pull the fascine out and carry on.

When the operation started early on 25 May, an anti-personnel IED detonated, killing Cpl Matthew McCully, a signaler who was serving with the OMLT. One other Canadian and an interpreter were wounded.¹⁹⁷ A Leopard tank then struck a mine. When Nahlgam was searched, however, insurgents hid their weapons and pretended to be farmers, or else displaced toward Siah Choy. One enemy commander was assisted out of the area by a police sympathizer.¹⁹⁸

2 RCR Battle Group moved once again on Kolk. Operation FOXHOUND had larger ramifications and Operation ADALAT was gobbling up more and more Canadian troops; the push was on to get the semblance of security in Zharey to free them up. Re-establishing police control of Kolk was considered a crucial aspect. I Company and the tanks, Afghans and the OMLT went in on 30 May and ran into the usual mix of small-arms and RPG fire with the enemy “shooting and scooting” away from the force to buy time. This time, there was more air support. One Leopard fired a 105mm smoke round so that U.S. Air Force A-10s could do gun runs on the enemy as they withdrew away from the advancing force. At least 30 enemy were engaged and the Afghans took six prisoners.¹⁹⁹

By this point, A Squadron’s refurbished but aging Leopards were beat to hell. Almost all required extensive maintenance to keep even a troop going, with Tango Maintenance pulling out all of the stops every hour of the day. They discovered that the hulls of the Leopards were cracking from the usage and, in turn, each tank had to be rotated to NSE facilities at KAF to have its hull welded.²⁰⁰

I Company kept the pressure up with Operation TAKE OUT on 4 June. This time, it was Siah Choy’s turn. I Company moved in at night and debussed from its LAV IIIs east of Siah Choy. Then A Squadron and an Afghan company cleared Route Fosters West, crossed the Arghandab River from the south and seized Objective CHICKEN BALL, with the Afghan National Army clearing. Instead of moving on Objective EGG ROLL, the whole force bypassed and moved to Objective SUSHI, again with the Afghans clearing and the Canadians securing the area around the target community. When the Afghans and OMLT were preparing to extricate through the tank positions and I Company was preparing to pull out, a team of nine insurgents ambushed them, using a classic L-shaped ambush. RAF Harrier fighter-bombers were called in, and they used rockets, danger close, to help I Company’s platoons break contact. The enemy fled north and east in small groups, but one I Company platoon, 7 Platoon, pursued them until they reached their limit of exploitation. The whole force pulled back to CHICKEN BALL and then extracted to Ma’Sum Ghar.²⁰¹

Once again, IED use in and around Howz-e Madad caused problems on the vital Highway 1 route. At the same time, there were insurgent stirrings in the Asheque area to the east. Habibullah Jan, the primary power broker in that area, was losing his grip in the aftershocks of the Naqib assassination attempt. 2 RCR Battle Group mounted

Operation PROMENADE in the Howz-e Madad area with the tanks moving about covered by a Sperwer TUAV with artillery on call. When PROMENADE had the insurgents distracted, I Company launched Operation REAR ENTRANT into the Asheque area east of Patrol Base Wilson. The minute the tanks left headed west on the highway on 6 June, the Sperwer TUAV picked up a large Taliban group moving to ambush sites on Route Ottawa and establishing IEDs at choke points. I Company leaguered their LAV IIIs and conducted a dismounted night operation into Asheque. Nothing was discovered and any enemy who were there went to ground. The Portuguese, however, were lit up with small-arms and RPG fire, which forced the tanks to turn around and bail them out.²⁰² When PROMENADE and REAR ENTRANT were in progress, insurgents surged into the Kolk area again, isolated the police checkpoint, and cut the throats of pro-government people in the community. The police checkpoint at Howz-e Madad was subsequently attacked, twice in 72 hours, by 30 insurgents. REAR ENTRANT was based on police intelligence. After all was said and done, the assessment was that “the ANP are working with the Taliban... in order to observe our TTPs and how we set our outer and inner cordons. It is my assessment that if we continue to deploy with limited information provided by the ANP I believe we may be putting battle group soldiers unnecessarily at risk.”²⁰³ Intelligence analysis concluded that Manan’s death forced the Taliban to bring in new commanders from Helmand to prop up the fight in Zharey.

Up to now, there had been little activity on Route Summit. I Company with attached recee elements conducted a series of patrols west of the road and became embroiled in a TIC on 12–13 June when two Taliban groups in grape huts opened up on 7 Platoon. Too close for artillery or air support, the platoon opened up with M-72 light anti-tank weapons, while the Leopards breached south to support them with 105mm fire. Ten more enemy were spotted in a compound. In a running fight involving two Canadian platoons and a tank troop supported by a Harrier aircraft, the enemy decided to hold their ground, which allowed Maj Quick to resort to a classic firebase with tanks, followed by a right flanking action onto an enemy position. Four RPG teams were taken out with tank and small-arms fire, which drove the enemy survivors west into a wadi. Another contact, this time an RPG and a PKM machine gun, pinned down a Canadian section. Close air support was sent in, while more tanks deployed from Ma’Sum Ghar. Snipers started to pick off enemy RPG teams as they emerged, while a Harrier took out a section of enemy who fled into a grape hut. Eventually, most of the enemy were pinned into a wadi system, but the tanks then bogged down. As the Taliban struggled to escape, they were dispatched with M-777 artillery and a 1000-pound bomb from a Harrier. I Company estimated, when it was all over, that there were 18 enemy dead and as many wounded.²⁰⁴



Photo Credit: Author

Operation SEASONS was one of several disruptive incursions into Zharey District undertaken by I Company, the tank squadron, the Afghan National Army and their Canadian mentors in June 2007. After an artillery strike against insurgent positions, a UH-60 medical evacuation helicopter stands off to evacuate Afghan National Army wounded.

The closer proximity of the insurgents forces to Route Summit resulted in Operation SEQUEL on 16 June. Once again, I Company conducted a dismounted insertion at night into the target area, Burmohammad, followed by a mounted assault led by a Badger AEV down Route St. John's. This, it was hoped, would accomplish two things: it would get the enemy away from both Highway 1 and away from Route Summit in that area. I Company again found itself in a series of contacts, which included the destruction of an 82mm recoilless rifle team and ten heavily armed insurgents. One platoon stumbled across another enemy 82mm team and became embroiled in a separate engagement. There was an estimated eight enemy killed: one of these was a mid-level Taliban commander.²⁰⁵

To keep the enemy off balance along Highway 1, LCol Walker sent I Company, Leopard tanks from A Squadron, an Afghan National Army company and the OMLT back into Howz-e Madad. Operation SEASONS, mounted on 20 June, was almost standard operating procedure by now with dismounted infiltration, tank–Afghan army assault,

and close air support to kill any enemy that were reinforcing the fight. As the SEASONS force drove its way south of Howz-e Madad, they encountered stiff resistance—and even an enemy sniper. One Leopard tank took an 82mm recoilless rifle hit on its glacis plate. The jet penetrated the hull and came close to the ammo storage, which would have had obvious catastrophic effects for the crew. Once again, the enemy threw personnel and resources at the SEASONS operation and they were quickly mown down with artillery, close air, small-arms and tank fire.²⁰⁶

Across the river in Panjwayi, when Operation SEASONS was in progress, a Gator vehicle used to resupply Canadian-manned checkpoints on Routes Brown and Fosters, struck a massive IED, killing Sgt Christos Karigiannis, Cpl Stephen Bouzane and Pte Joel Wiebe from C Company. With the slacking off of enemy activity in Panjwayi and with the constant pressure exerted over in Zharey, it is likely that this attack was conducted to distract ISAF away from Zharey for a limited period so Zharey's Taliban could recover. Indeed, three rockets were fired at Ma'Sum Ghar that night, possibly for the same reasons.



I Company 2 RCR clears a compound complex during Operation SEASONS. These incursion operations kept pressure on the insurgents in Zharey, who took significant losses during this time and were unable to gain the momentum they enjoyed in 2006.

On 24 June, LCol Walker reported to TF Kandahar that “we are spread too thin and cannot respond to incidents effectively in Zharey and Panjwayi due to numerous commitments and the disposition of our forces. Massing the appropriate combat power is extremely difficult.” From 42 Field Squadron: “I believe this is a bridge too far but as always we are supporting the battle group with gun tape and bubble gum... the men are tired and continuing an extended tempo of operations like this will incapacitate the squadron...”²⁰⁷ 2 RCR Battle Group could not keep up the disruption operations in Zharey District indefinitely. Something had to give. Where? Zharey or Panjwayi?

Panjwayi District Operations, May–June 2007

Maj Henderson’s C Company and LCol Eyre’s OMLT mentors working with the Afghan kandaks were confronted with a radically different set of problems in Panjwayi District. First, there was a mobility crisis which in turn was connected to the size of the district relative to Zharey. Second, Panjwayi was not adjacent to Highway 1, which meant that higher formation headquarters did not see it as a priority. Third, there was a substantial Afghan security forces laydown in the district but appearances were deceiving as there were deep rifts between the Afghan security entities that militated against effective operations. Arguably, C Company did not have the same depth of comprehension of the inner workings of Panjwayi District compared to its counterparts in Zharey, which made it difficult to discern what the problems actually were.

In early May, the community of Mushan came under C Company’s scrutiny. Located at the western end of the Horn of Panjwayi and accessing western Zharey, the Reg Desert and Band-e Timor in Maywand, Mushan was geographically important to whoever hoped to exert influence in the area. Indeed, it had a reputation as a smuggler’s haven as it served as a perfect waypoint after coming out of the desert on a Helmand or Pakistan run, or if one wished to avoid the “police” and their “tolls” on Highway 1. Route Fosters, a dirt road and sometimes merely a black track, went east from Mushan paralleling the Arghandab River, to Bazaar-e Panjwayi and then hit the paved road all the way to the outskirts of Kandahar City and Highway 1. An alternate route, Lake Effect, paralleled Fosters to the south and accessed the southern suburbs of Kandahar City through Dand District. The dominant community in this area was Nakhonay. (See Figure 1-8.)

For the most part, nobody really understood what was going on in Mushan, so C Company mounted a patrol to gain situational awareness. It was uneventful. There were “police” of some variety in the community and contact was easily made with the local population, who were openly friendly. A source passed on to the patrol that the insurgents had weapons caches in the Mushan area. After the Canadian patrols left, a policeman was subsequently beheaded. All was not what it appeared to be in Mushan.²⁰⁸

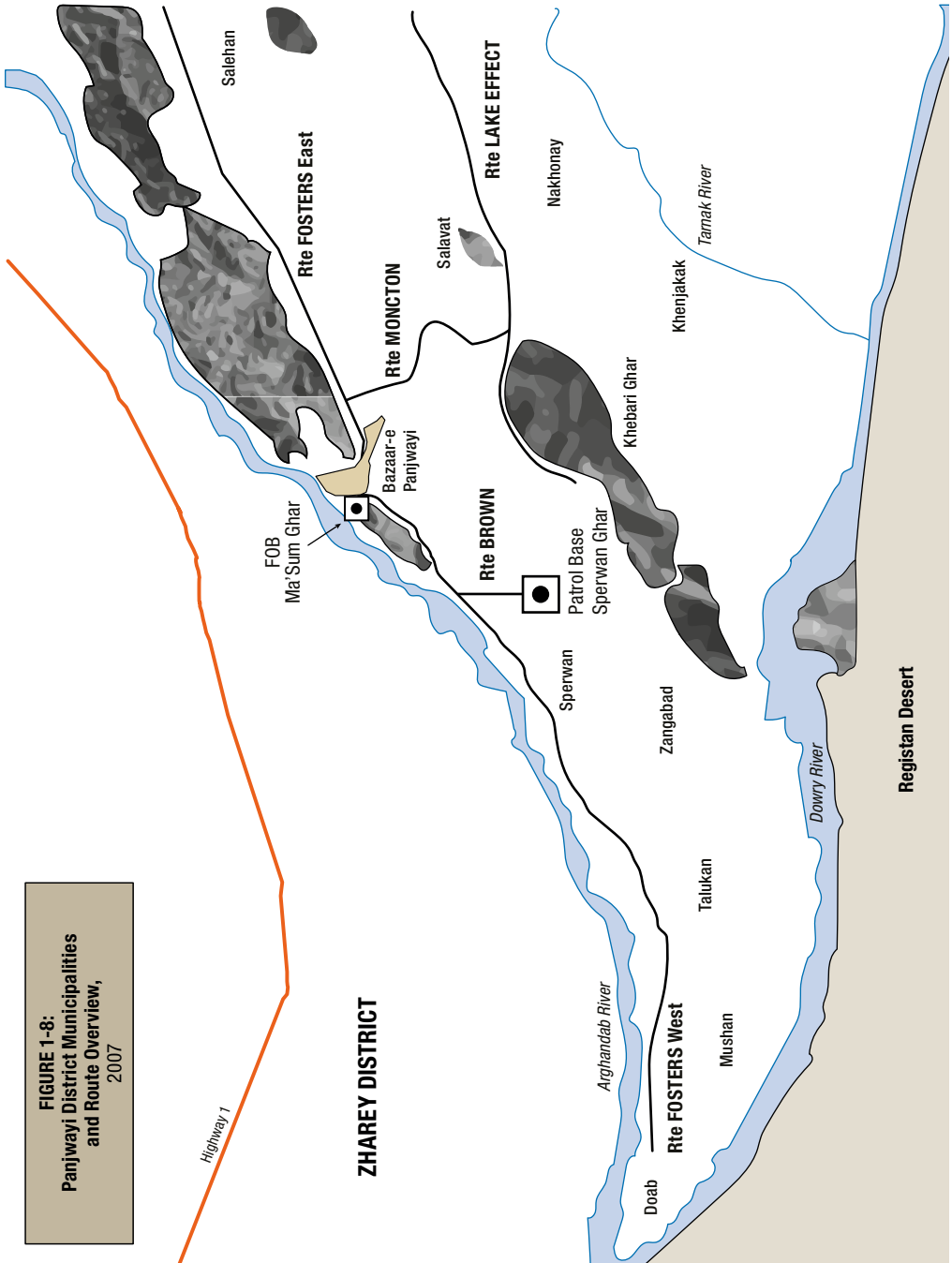


FIGURE 1-8:
Panjwayi District Municipalities
and Route Overview,
2007

Figure 1-8: Panjwayi District Municipalities and Route Overview, 2007

Afghan army intelligence learned that the Taliban were moving more forces into and through Nakhonay. A 40-man indigenous Taliban group hosted part of what was reported to be a 350-man Pakistani and Baluchi contingent that was filtering through the area. The Afghan army also had reports that the Taliban were recruiting vigorously in Nakhonay and Salavat. The Afghan police discussed establishing a checkpoint in Nakhonay and asked C Company if they would expand their patrols to Route Lake Effect.²⁰⁹

The new developments led to a reorganization of the security forces in the district. This had long-term implications, so the commanders of the battle group, OMLT, and 2nd Kandak, met to sort this all out. The agenda was to get the police to handle all of the checkpoints on Route Fosters, which would free up troops for other tasks, and Lt.-Col. Sherin Shah agreed to pressure his police counterparts. Of concern was the growing Nakhonay problem. Afghan army intelligence was slowly making connections between the attacks north on Highway 1 near Senjaray and the “hedgehog” that was developing in Panjwayi East. With their forces pinned down doing checkpoint tasks in Panjwayi West, it was difficult to shift forces to confront both problems. The commanders agreed to mount an operation into Nakhonay as soon as it was feasible.²¹⁰ (See Figure 1-9.)

Operation MIDAS was designed as a large presence patrol through Nakhonay and Salavat. Lt.-Col. Shah allocated his 3rd Company. A Canadian platoon from C Company was made available. While MIDAS was in the planning stages, however, a threat warning came in that the Taliban were preparing to kill Lt.-Col. Shah with a suicide bomber. At the same time, 60 families fled Mushan in response to Taliban warnings that there was going to be fighting. Clearly, Nakhonay was important, so the insurgency was sensitized to any operation near Nakhonay and sought to draw the coalition forces away from the village and its environs.²¹¹

Lt.-Col. Shah persuaded local leader Haji Fazil Mohammad and the police commanders to agree to police occupation of all of the Route Fosters’ checkpoints by the end of May. In return, the battle group and the PRT would assist with the construction of more and better checkpoint facilities not only on Fosters but wherever they were needed in Panjwayi District.²¹²

Operation MIDAS swept through Nakhonay and Salavat on 19 May. Operation MIDAS did strengthen linkages between 2 RCR battle group and 2nd Kandak and it was a good workout for procedures, but there was no contact with the enemy at all. The limited intelligence that did come in confirmed that Nakhonay was essentially an insurgent “G4 node,” that is, a supply and transfer area.²¹³

The enemy then ramped up activity on Route Fosters West. Police checkpoints were attacked on 21 and 22 May and, this was new, the Taliban established a roadblock on Fosters, north of Talukan. The police approached Lt.-Col. Shah for assistance and then approached the OMLT as well as the battle group. A platoon from C Company, an Afghan National

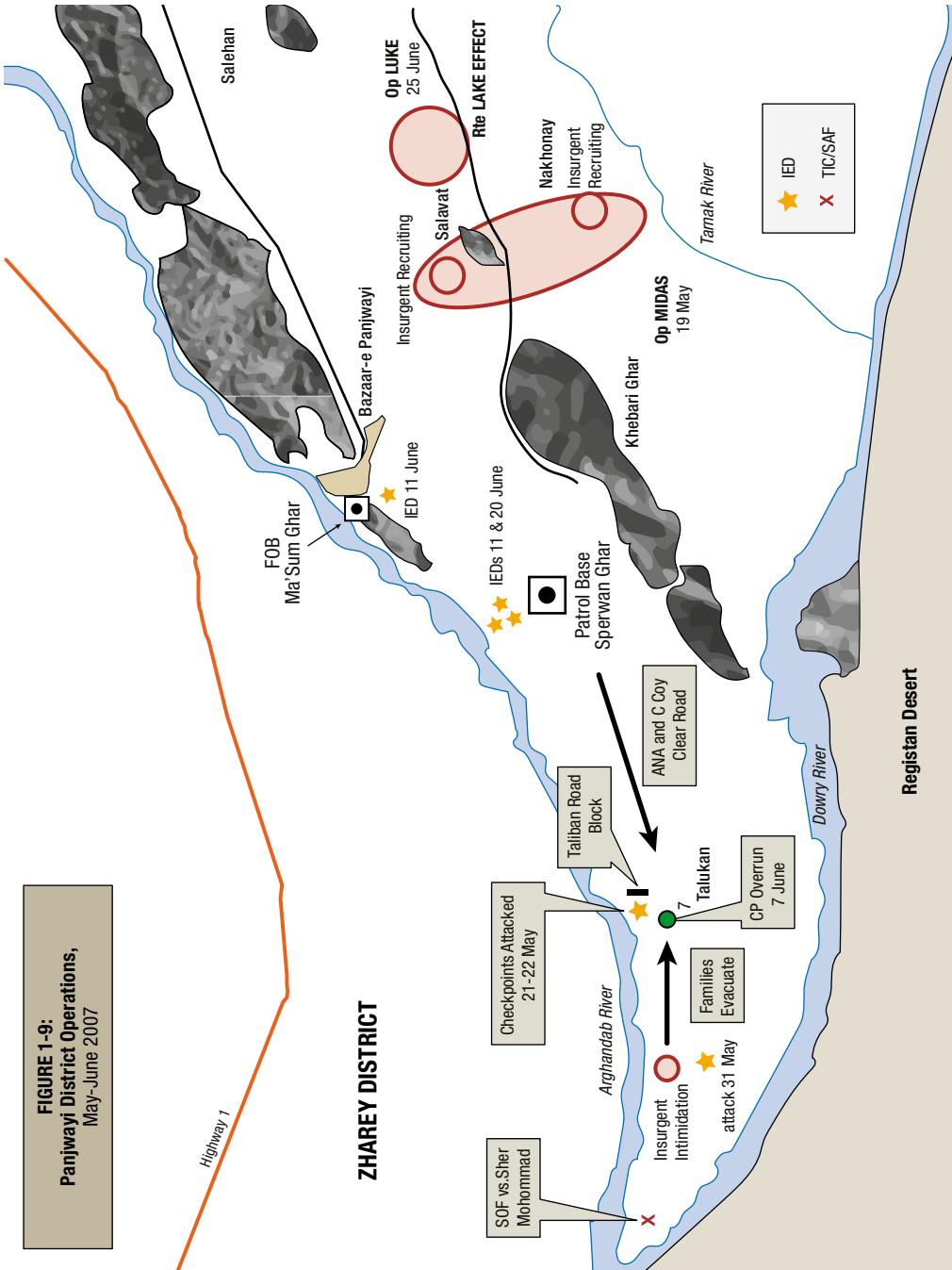


Figure 1-9: Panjwayi District Operations, May-June 2007

Army platoon from 1st Company, 2nd Kandak, and engineers from 42 Field Squadron moved out to clear Route Fosters. There was no contact. The promised Taliban attack on Mushan occurred on 31 May but there were no reports of what was happening or who was in control of the area.²¹⁴

The mini-crisis over Mushan led to several simultaneous but semi-coordinated actions. The Governor, Asadullah Khalid, decided that Standby Police Unit 005 would reinforce and then occupy Mushan. C Company spun up a contingency operation, OMERTA, to deal with IED placement on Route Fosters north of Talukan, and to patrol into Mushan. To make matters even more interesting, Canadian SOF launched an operation against a leadership target near Mushan on 1 June, bagging the notorious Sher Mohammad near Doab.²¹⁵ When C Company got into the community, they found only a handful of the 30 police left and the commander was dead. At night, the Taliban mounted a PSYOPS campaign, leaving night letters on all key residents' compounds.²¹⁶ The Afghan police flowed back into the Fosters' checkpoints and D Battery initiated an illumination schedule along the route at night to disrupt enemy movement.²¹⁷

Enemy activity only increased. Mines were placed near Talukan on Route Fosters West and one of these wounded six Afghan police. The population gave C Company and Afghan army patrols in Talukan the cold shoulder, which merely confirmed that Talukan was a hot spot.²¹⁸ But there was more. On 11 June there were three IED strikes against Canadian vehicles in Panjwayi District. One of these detonated under an armoured recovery vehicle, which burned and then cooked off in a spectacular fashion less than 100 metres from FOB Ma'Sum Ghar (there were no casualties). The following day, a C Company convoy took an IED hit at the intersection of Routes Fosters and Brown. When the tanks and recovery team arrived, they hit another IED, destroying a HLVW wrecker. Twenty-four hours later, C Company surged into the area between Talukan and the Arghandab River, while TUAV flights were redirected over Fosters. The TUAV operators were able to detect what they thought were two IED emplacement sites, which were then exploited and dismantled.²¹⁹

The battle group headquarters detected what they thought was a relationship between enemy operations in Zharey and in Panjwayi. This spate of IED activity coincided with the insurgents' eastward movement toward Route Summit and the subsequent contact that I Company was embroiled in on 12–13 June.²²⁰ Indeed, the killing of three Canadians with an IED on Route Brown on 20 June appeared to be an attempt to draw resources away during the height of Operation SEASONS.

The IEDs did not stop: the Afghan police were hit again and again. On 14 June the Taliban overran Checkpoint 7 and ambushed the Afghan police as they brought in reinforcements. Maj Henderson held shuras to determine what was driving this new campaign. The district shura kept telling him that this was all tribal violence, an argument

that Maj Henderson did not buy into, given the increased IED use. The ever helpful Haji Baran opined that he was having “a hard time recently convincing locals not to allow Taliban to destroy the new road [Route Fosters and Brown]... Since they blame the government for destroying their crops through this lack of water they see no reason to resist the Taliban.”²²¹ Maj Henderson and his men also discovered from local sources that the insurgents were using the mosques, knowing full well that coalition forces were sensitized when it came to searching them. C Company wanted to use mosque rehabilitation to relationship-build with the mullahs, but there was no clear means to get development resources for that purpose.²²²

A large shura with district leader Haji Fazil Mohammad, Haji Baran, Mohammad Sarwar from Talukan and the security force commanders produced the consensus that “security was stable in western Panjwayi until approximately two weeks ago when [Standby Police Unit 005] moved into Mushan.” The Afghan district leaders pressed the idea that the police from this unit were “mostly Noorzai and the population of Mushan is mainly Ishaqzai” and that tribal rivalries were in play. Maj Henderson confirmed this when he met with local leaders from Talukan, Zangabad and Sperwan.²²³



Photo Credit: Author

Route Brown, seen here in 2011 facing Patrol Base Sperwan Ghar, connected the base with the main east-west service route in Panjwayi District. Initially a dirt track, Brown was expanded and paved to deter improvised explosive device attack after several Canadians were killed in 2007. The enemy attempted to ambush vehicles on numerous occasions along this corridor, usually moving in from the west (right).

That view did not completely coincide with reality, however, since violence in Mushan started before Standby Police Unit 005 arrived. IED use against Canadians operating further east, who were not seen to openly associate with Standby Police Unit 005's activities, did not fit either. Standby Police Unit 005 was known to be a virtually private militia belonging to the Governor and had a reputation for corruption. Elements in the Kandahar power structure likely wanted control of Mushan, a vital transshipment node, and saw an opportunity to compete with or bypass Highway 1 "tolls" by using an alternate route from poppy-bearing areas to Kandahar City. The extant tribalism appears to have been superimposed retroactively to disguise the commercial and turf aspects of the dispute. Indeed, the Taliban were clearly exploiting these fractures for their own purposes on several fronts.

But then, the plot thickened. Reports came in that there was "Al Qaeda" in Mushan.²²⁴ To make matters even worse, the Standby Police Unit 005 officers garrisoning Mushan got into a gunfight with National Directorate of Security agents in Mushan Bazaar: four agents were killed and three seriously wounded. The JPCC looked into events, as did the OMLT, and were both assured by their counterparts that this was a tribal issue.²²⁵ It now looked like Mushan was embroiled in a *Badal* blood feud.²²⁶

The IED situation had detrimental effects on the NSE's ability to resupply the forces in Sperwan Ghar. Civilian water resupply, for example, dropped off, forcing the NSE to use its resources and increase the size or number of combat logistics patrols.²²⁷ As Maj Henderson and his men got out into the communities, they learned that the "Pakistani Taliban" were paying locals in Zangabad and Sperwan Ghar to lay mines and IEDs. What was going on in those areas and what was going on in Mushan appeared to be separate things.²²⁸

What really interested C Company, however, was the apparent Taliban sensitivity whenever any coalition forces or ANSF went anywhere near Nakhonay. Situated south of Route Lake Effect, this community was a cluster of compound complexes with one road in and out. It was completely surrounded, 360 degrees, with grape fields, drying huts and complex terrain: from the air, Nakhonay looked like a fortress.

Operation LUKE was designed to assert coalition presence in Zalakhan and Salavat, two pro-government communities north of Nakhonay, and then screen Nakhonay. Taliban from Nakhonay had infiltrated this area and murdered an elder who told them to leave. LUKE was essentially a manoeuvre to collect information and included Afghan police, part of 2nd Kandak and a platoon from C Company, led by Capt Matt Dawe. The results were interesting: the amount of chatter coming out of Nakhonay was as voluminous as it was varied: English, Persian, Tajik and even Chechen were identified.²²⁹

Repeated attempts to ascertain the best way forward in Panjwayi District produced a shura facilitated by the PRT CIMIC teams so that local leaders could air their grievances. This provided additional insight into district dynamics. In essence, communities did not

think that Canadians knew what was going on when they detained people and wanted a say in explaining who was guilty and who was not—at the community level. They did not trust the police, in any of its forms, because of tribal rivalries. Many believed that “reformed” Taliban who were processed through the Kandahar provincial PTS amnesty programme were annoyed that they had not received what they had been promised by the Karzai government: land and a government job. One leader went so far as to suggest that “the power of the government be shared amongst the Taliban and other parties” so security can be attained.²³⁰ Clearly, there was something wrong in western Panjwayi District. Unfortunately, Panjwayi was not a priority. The provincial government was increasingly fixated on the northern districts.

Operations in Northern Kandahar Province, June–July 2007

Regional Command (South) and TF Kandahar worked on Operation ADALAT in March in order to address the possibility that the enemy would move on Arghandab District in the wake of the Naqib assassination attempt. The plan involved security and development in Shah Wali Kot and Arghandab Districts, with a disruption operation in Khakrez and northern Shah Wali Kot. The public announcement by the Government of Afghanistan and the provincial government that Dahla Dam would be a central development feature was folded into the plan, as were the district and community mechanisms for the National Solidarity Programme.²³¹

In early April, the chiefs of police for Khakrez and Shah Wali Kot Districts complained to the JPCC that the enemy were building up in both of their districts. These concerns predated the Dahla Dam announcement by nearly two weeks. By the end of April, both police leaders were joined by their colleague in Neish District and were asking for an operation to clear the Taliban out of these areas before they could be established.²³² (See Figure 1-10.) On 27 May, Afghan police in Shah Wali Kot were ambushed while protecting a road repair crew near the dam. With two dead and three wounded, the Afghan police beat back the attack. Canadian Sperwer TUAVs tracked two separate enemy groups as they withdrew.²³³ The decision was made by TF Kandahar to launch Operation ADALAT. It took some time to sort out the command relationships because TF 71 was a U.S. Special Operations Task Force that was part of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, not NATO ISAF. The Americans agreed to redeploy part of TF 71 from Spin Boldak, muster their Afghan allies, while Canada agreed to deploy two M-777 guns from D Battery, and tanks from A Squadron, plus an infantry platoon from H Company. TF 71 established a forward operating base in Khakrez, and U.S. Army CH-47s Chinooks flew the Canadian guns into positions there on 29 May.²³⁴

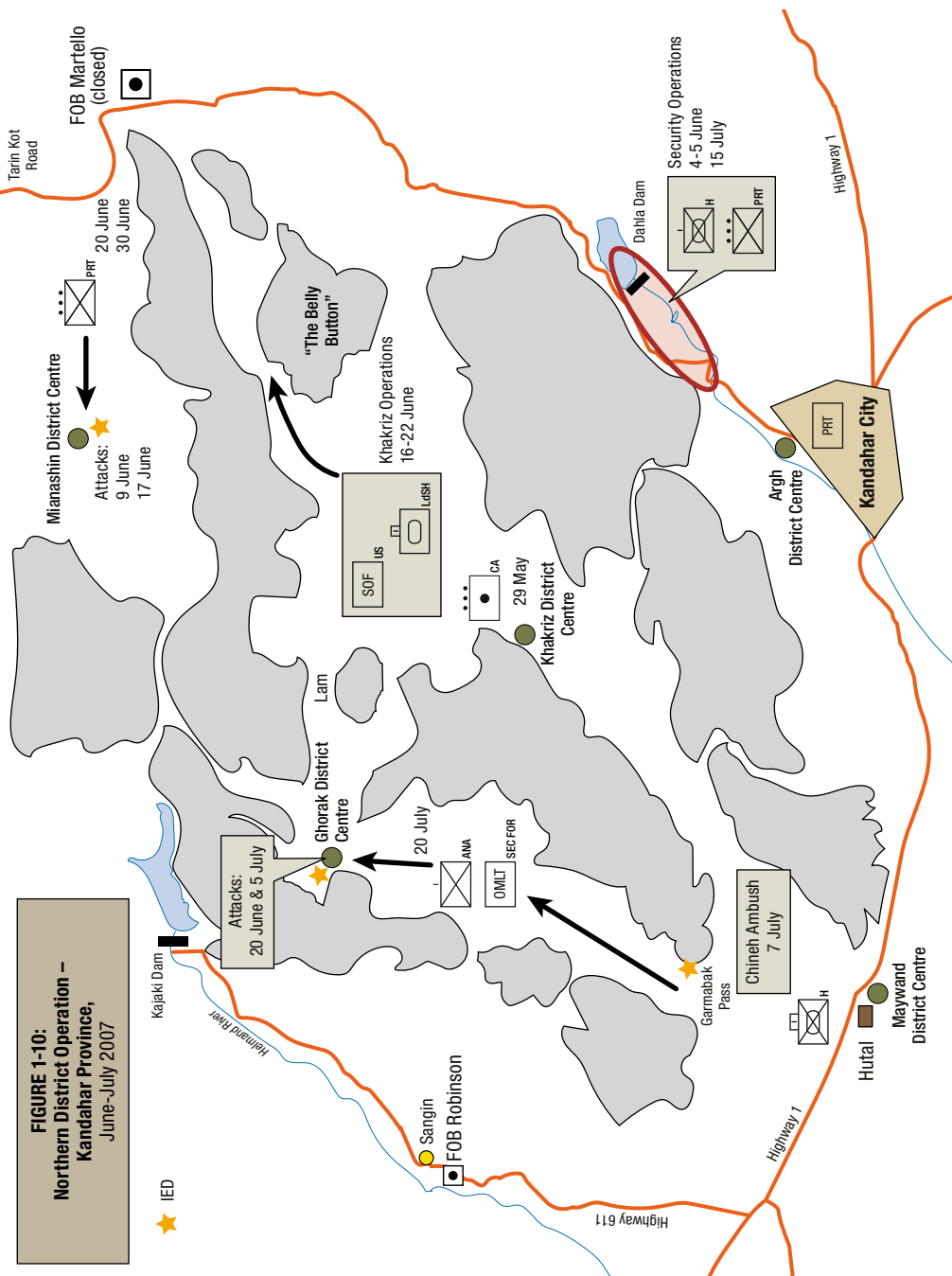


Figure 1-10: Northern District Operations – Kandahar Province, June-July 2007

On 30 May, LCol Chamberlain coordinated a security meeting between Canadian and Afghan commanders and the district leaders, from which several important items came to the fore. The Afghans viewed the developing problem in terms of a traditional insurgent transit route stretching from northern Helmand to Zabul via Khakrez and upper Shah Wali Kot: “these districts are used as temporary staging areas to launch small-scale operations into Arghandab as well as suicide attacks into Kandahar City. Residents were notably frustrated by the lack of [coalition forces] rapid response.... Overall the mood was one that recalls the similar situation of Taliban build up in Panjwayi–Zharey with pressures in Khakrez likely to lead to trouble in Shah Wali Kot and then threats into Arghandab and Kandahar City.”²³⁵

LCol Chamberlain noted that “All Afghan representatives clearly do not favour an Operation MEDUSA-style approach and were supportive of the nuanced delivery of the Operation ADALAT approach.” The inclination was to have the Afghan police forces take the lead and handle the Arghandab and lower Shah Wali Kot security tasks while the PRT worked the development piece. A coalition force would handle disruption operations in Khakrez and upper Shah Wali Kot.²³⁶

By 4 June, A Squadron combat team clanked its way up Route Oregon in Arghandab District, headed for Shah Wali Kot. Constant reports flowed into the JPCC that the enemy were going to make a play for Dahla Dam.²³⁷ On arrival, they encountered no enemy—to no great surprise, though the district leader believed there were hundreds in the hills. After a series of key leader engagements, the Canadians were told that the population wanted an ISAF presence in lower Shah Wali Kot and that the enemy would not attack if that presence was enduring. Promises had been made by “ISAF” in the past and they had been broken, so the population needed reassurances.²³⁸

While Operation ADALAT continued to unfold, insurgents attacked the district centre over in Ghorak. The Ghorak police chief contacted the chief of police of Kandahar Province, Brig.-Gen. Esmatullah Alizai, for assistance, who in turn contacted the JPCC for Canadian help. When none was forthcoming, he sent 15 officers, apparently on foot from Maywand, to the centre. With seven wounded and the enemy preparing to attack again, heated words were exchanged between the provincial chief of police and TF Kandahar. Twenty-four hours later, the insurgents attacked a police patrol in Mianishin District, killing five and wounding three. Esmatullah demanded Canadian assistance to extract the dead officers’ remains, but was turned down by TF Kandahar. The pressure on the police leadership, already heavy, got worse on the night of 9 June when motorcycle-borne assailants assassinated Afghan Police General Dawood. It looked as if the police system, such as it was in Kandahar, was about to collapse at the top end.²³⁹

Shah Wali Kot reported multiple TICs on 9 and 10 June. Coincident to these incidents, a Canadian patrol, possibly from the PRT, arrived at Shah Wali Kot District centre on a reconstruction-related task. The district leader thought they were reinforcements and was disgusted to learn they were there on what he called “a social call... They refused to help and just left!” The JPCC was able to get TF Kandahar to ask the Americans for attack helicopter cover for the police.²⁴⁰

When the Afghan police made their way south with the dead and wounded from the ambushes, A Squadron and part of H Company made their way into Khakrez District to link up with TF 71 for operations. D Battery continued to provide fire support from FOB Khakrez and plans were made with TF 71 for future operations in upper Shah Wali Kot to relieve pressure on the police in the south. The force grew to three Special Forces Operational Detachment Alphas with associated Afghans amounting to a small company for each Operational Detachment Alpha, plus a U.S. ETT and part of 2nd Kandak from 209 Corps, in addition to the Canadian mechanized forces and artillery. A special forces Operational Detachment Alpha was brought in to mentor a 100-man private militia that styled itself as the Oruzgan highway patrol.²⁴¹ In a general sense, the Canadians and U.S. Special Forces would operate in and around the “Belly Button” feature and Gumbad, while the “police” and their mentors would secure the Tarinkot Road and open it up for business. There were no illusions at TF Kandahar. This was an economy of effort mission, as there was no provision for development or reconstruction support.

The Taliban upped the ante on 16–17 June: three American embedded trainers were killed in a massive IED attack in Khakrez. On the same day, the insurgents put in an assault against the Mianishin district centre. With the casualties mounting and ammunition running out, the Mianishin chief of police pleaded for assistance. A pair of F-18s were dispatched as a show-of-force mission over the area but as there was no certified coalition joint terminal air controller available on the ground, they would not drop bombs. The Deputy Governor (Asadullah Khalid was on “medical leave” after the Mullah Dadullah Lang affair) and Chief of Police Esmatullah were “quite belligerent” about their demands for Canadian assistance.

TF Kandahar was able, once again, to acquire American attack helicopter support to over-watch an Afghan relief convoy if they could put one together, but Esmatullah demanded immediate support. Cooler heads, like Col Mohammad Abdul Hakim, the provincial Chief of Security, put a plan together with Afghan police, army and Canadian Army. The JPCC got the Afghan National Army on the line and was able to get troops as part of the package.²⁴² The Governor, now back from medical leave, plunged into the deepening morass. After a discrete late-night Afghan meeting, Brig.-Gen. Alizai was relieved from his position.

The Governor made it clear to LCol Chamberlain that he thought that the Mianishin district leader “had a tendency to cry wolf” and that the threat was not as “significant as originally described.” He then moved on to his primary interest: improvements to the road from Mushan to Bazaar-e Panjwayi.²⁴³

When Khalid saw that Mianishin could become a public relations liability, however, he decided to conduct a media event at the district centre. TF Kandahar then instructed LCol Chamberlain to mount up his Force Protection Company and deploy it in support of the Mianishin operation, now called Operation COLLABORATION. Police morale was at such a low point that Khalid determined that the event would publicly laud the “heroes of the Afghan National Police.” The PRT commander was not happy: “[such a deployment] sets a precedence which could restrict other PRT operational outputs at the governance and reconstruction and development lines of operations.”²⁴⁴ Once again, the PRT was in danger of losing its ability to independently deploy its other government department and CIMIC personnel, just as TF Orion’s PRT was crippled by the removal of B Company back in 2006.

As if to spite the Governor, the Taliban moved to attack the Ghorak district centre yet again on the night of 19 June. Reports flowed in that the local population warned the already depleted police garrison that the Taliban were about to attack so they moved south but maintained observation. The Ghorak chief of police even requested that ISAF drop a bomb on the centre now that the insurgents occupied it.²⁴⁵ TF Kandahar then instructed LCol Eyre over at the OMLT to deploy his SECFOR platoon to link up with a gaggle of American embedded trainers to retake the Ghorak district centre. Removal of the OMLT’s SECFOR had approximately the same effect on the OMLT that the removal of the Force Protection Company had on the PRT.²⁴⁶

OMLT SECFOR and the American embedded trainers linked up with the Maywand police (of dubious reliability at the best of times because they worked for the unreliable Haji Saifullah) and prepared to head north through the Garmabak Pass. An Afghan vehicle struck an IED, which aborted the mission temporarily. A troop of tanks from A Squadron joined the force, along with an Afghan National Army company from 2nd Kandak. On relaunch, the composite force reached the Ghorak district centre on 25 June with no opposition. The Governor decided to mount a media relations operation and flew into the Ghorak District centre with PRT representatives, where a large shura was held with locals. Always the brilliant opportunist, Khalid promised that Standby Police Unit 005 would redeploy from Mushan to Ghorak to handle security. The composite force left Ghorak on 27 June, followed by most of the Ghorak police force who did not want to wait for Standby Police Unit 005 to arrive.²⁴⁷

Meanwhile, over in Khakrez District, H Company combat team and TF 71 stepped off for operations around the rugged “Belly Button” feature. On arrival in Leaguer CANNISTER to the north, however, several breakdowns on the worn Leopards reduced the serviceable number of vehicles to two. An armoured recovery vehicle also blew its power pack. The combat team now had no means to recover their vehicles if they broke down or bogged. The NSE had a difficult time resupplying the Ghorak forces by ground with their resources stretched thin, thus delaying Canadian operations. D Battery continued to support TF 71 operations, killing several enemy personnel with 155mm and 81mm fire.²⁴⁸

The intent was to sweep through the villages of Padah and Mian with a view to setting TF 71 up to infiltrate the Gumbad area. Once A Squadron and H Company got into Padah, a violent and chaotic two-hour clearance operation erupted: the enemy were using the deserted village as a bed-down location. As the Leopards and LAV IIIs entered the area, two-man RPG teams and clusters of surprised insurgents moving among the irregular compound complexes attacked them. Moving steadily through the area, Leopards picked off RPG teams with 105mm fire, while M-777 artillery called in by the forward observers took out every identifiable insurgent observation post on the high ground. The infantry's LAV IIIs with their 25mm cannon even sniped at individual insurgents as they tried to mount a defence. Some 18 insurgents were killed in the fighting with no coalition casualties. Major caches of ammunition and weapons were uncovered and an enemy communications facility was destroyed with tank fire.²⁴⁹ Seizure of Padah and Mian set TF 71 up for their assault on Gumbad, which proceeded the next day.

Though the Padah engagement was a success, and TF 71 disrupted the insurgents in the upper Shah Wali Kot area, these operations were of great concern to the Canadian sub-unit commanders. Some planner in a higher headquarters wanted A Squadron to cut away two tanks, an infantry platoon, an engineer section and an armoured recovery vehicle for a wholly separate operation in Shah Wali Kot. This could “become very problematic should problems arise.... deployment of tanks in this manner could have grave results.” Similarly, 42 Field Squadron bluntly pointed out that “Operations in the Ghorak District are over-extending our forces.”²⁵⁰ It was time for the battle group's part in Operation ADALAT to cease. The D Battery M-777 troop was flown back to KAF by Chinook helicopter, and A Squadron combat team moved back to Ma'Sum Ghar.

And it was back to Mianishin, once again. The insurgents returned and used harassing fire against the police. When the police called for help and did not get it in a timely fashion, the bulk of them quit their posts and went home on 30 June. Operation COLLABORATION II, yet another ad hoc grouping of Afghan police, Afghan army and Canadians, prepared to go in, yet again. The Governor had enough and ranted to his police leadership about the “lack of police resolve.” The new provincial police chief, General Sayed Agha Saqib, Khalid assured everyone, would sort things out.²⁵¹

Unfortunately, the drama did not end. A sophisticated two-pronged insurgent attack against Standby Police Unit 005, ensconced in the district centre and an observation post, generated seven wounded and, as before, the defenders ran low on ammo. TF Kandahar initially denied police requests to deploy an infantry company, but were able to get several show-of-force air support sorties by allied aircraft over the district centre. Once again, the concept of the joint terminal air controller was explained to the police leadership. A police resupply column headed north to Ghorak District centre in response to the Taliban attack but it was ambushed near Chineh on 7 July. Six police vehicles and 60 policemen were hit and twelve were killed.²⁵² Subsequent to the ambush, Maywand District centre was shot up by local insurgents.

H Company and A Squadron deployed in their LAVs and tanks down Highway 1 to Maywand, linked up with OMLT and an Afghan army weapons company, and rushed to the ambush site before moving on to Ghorak District centre. The decision was made to leave an Afghan National Army company and OMLT mentors at Ghorak this time for the rest of the tour.²⁵³ A Leopard from A Squadron hit a mine in the Garmabak Pass. Notably, these operations, including the Leopard recovery, delayed a Canadian operation in Zharey District.

These district centre attacks were reminiscent of the Garmsir and Nawa attacks in July 2006. Judging from the pattern of enemy activity in northern Kandahar Province, it is likely that their leadership learned an important lesson from coalition operations in Helmand. The insurgents knew full well that the district centres were symbols of governance and that the government would react to re-take them. In this case, the near-simultaneous attacks against Ghorak, Mianishin, plus threats to Shah Wali Kot, drew out Afghan police at a time when the police were institutionally in serious trouble. TF Kandahar kept getting drawn in, partly to demonstrate solidarity, but also because there was the possibility that an enemy build up would be directed against Arghandab, which itself was in the throes of a leadership vacuum.

This must all be placed against the context of what was happening in Zharey and Panjwayi. Clearly, the coalition was making headway in those districts. By applying pressure to weaker districts further north next to their resupply routes, the insurgent leadership knew that the coalition would have to release their hold in Zharey and Panjwayi to deal with these new threats, and all of this activity was conducted in the heat of the summer as well as on the verge of another rotation of Canadian troops.

In mid-July, the Taliban moved back into Shah Wali Kot, using loudspeakers to order the population out of the area. It looked again like the enemy were making a play for the Dahla Dam area; on 14 July, I Company and Kandahar City police deployed in a show of force. There was no contact.²⁵⁴

TF Kandahar was, throughout this period, at odds with Regional Command (South) over what the regional centre of gravity should be: Helmand Province or Kandahar Province. The British leadership, naturally, gravitated to Helmand and its insatiable need for ground forces to fight the strengthening coalition between the clans and the insurgents, produced to a great extent by flawed counternarcotics policies. The Canadian view was that police credibility and capacity building in Kandahar Province was at risk at this crucial time and should have been a priority to improve the overall security situation. The Americans had their own priorities in Regional Command (East) and were not interested. There was, however, not enough coordinated Canadian influence in Kabul to “sell” the Canadian position in higher circles and force a re-allocation of resources.²⁵⁵

Mullah Naqib returned to Arghandab on 23 July and met with Maj Chip Madic, the PRT deputy commander. As they discussed the recent developments in and around Arghandab, Naqib asserted that “if ISAF did not react to the massing of insurgents immediately, there would be the necessity to conduct a large-scale operation in the future, which would cost the lives of Canadian soldiers.” Naqib informed Maj Madic that “the threat to Kandahar lies in Pakistan, that the Pakistani government is aiding the Taliban with their insurgency in all manner of ways, and that the ISI would be able to wipe out the entire cadre of Taliban leadership if they so desired because they know where all the leaders live... were one to wipe out Pakistan, one could focus on development in Kandahar Province unhindered, and he prayed for Allah to do so.”²⁵⁶ In Naqib’s view, “the ANP required more support from ISAF at a faster rate of speed than they currently have... they are the first line of defence in the fight against the insurgents.”²⁵⁷

Policing Problems Continue

The complexities of the judiciary-police-incarceration “triangle” or lack thereof in the case of Kandahar, fueled the insurgency in certain localities and was the reason why local people tolerated foreign jihadist assistance from Pakistan. Unjust structures produce unjust decisions. Unjust decisions generate grievances. Unaddressed grievances reduce the legitimacy of the government. Grievances, when not addressed, produce opposition, and over time, recalcitrant opposition shifts to extremist violence. The Canadian Army’s involvement with the Afghan police in 2007 provided a window into the key limitation the coalition forces faced in countering the insurgency.

In retrospect, there were far too many organizations involved and they were uncoordinated. The failure of the Germans to manage the police “pillar” produced much “ad hocery”. As a result, there were multiple and sometimes conflicting views on what should be done on the police front, with little or no Afghan input. The broadest expression of this problem was dubbed the “blue versus green” problem. Were the police supposed to be

police, were they a gendarmerie, or were they a militia? That question was never answered definitively to the satisfaction of any of the police assistance entities in Kandahar, let alone in Kabul. Without an answer, short-term tactical solutions designed to put a man in uniform with an assault rifle at a checkpoint with minimal training became the default position. To go beyond that, there needed to be answers to several unanswerable questions: what law was that nearly illiterate individual supposed to enforce? The Constitution? Sharia Law? Pashtunwali? And if that policeman arrested a suspect, what court was supposed to try him? All of the Italian-trained judges slated for Kandahar claimed refugee status in Italy and did not return to Afghanistan. Assuming the suspect was guilty, what facility should he be incarcerated in—and for how long?²⁵⁸

There was substantial and unrelenting pressure, after the detainee situation became a political issue in Canada, to somehow fix the three legs of the system and align them to Canadian values and standards. The critics in Canada refused to accept the fact that a Western legal system simply did not exist in Afghanistan in 2007, nor would it in the near future. These demands collided head on with the reality of the situation in Kandahar. TF Kandahar and its units were forced to adapt to the circumstances, no matter how distorted the outcome became.

The Canadian organizations included the MP Company, the CIVPOL team at the PRT, and DFAIT. The Military Police were themselves split culturally. During the peacekeeping years of the 1990s, a culture that leaned toward civilian policing dominated: Military Police stopped wearing the same uniforms soldiers did, for example, and adopted a black uniform. There was a belief that many people joined so they could set themselves up for civilian police employment, as opposed to career military policing. Many Cold War-era Military Police skills were lost: among them mass prisoner of war handling and rear area combat operations. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) CIVPOL, on the other hand, were gendarmerie-like in their outlook. DFAIT was not split: its representatives had funding for all manner of programmes related to improving policing and legal systems capacity-building.

Maj Bernard Hudson at TF Kandahar and Superintendent Dave Fudge at the PRT slowly delineated policing responsibilities, while Gavin Buchan and Jon Davison provided whatever DFAIT funding they could muster. Similar to the OMLT-Afghan National Army issues, CIVPOL was concerned that the police lacked a logistics system and planning processes at the higher levels. This was aggravated by poor communications systems, and, when pay was not forthcoming, local corruption was used to make up the pay differential. Indeed, many police took time off to assist with the poppy harvest to make ends meet. Professionalizing the police was the CIVPOL approach. The Military Police were initially interested in contributing to Operation PORTCULLIS but that became a CIVPOL responsibility.

As a result, the Military Police contributed to the military training component at the regional training center in addition to their other duties. The idea of a “policing OMLT” was raised in many Canadian quarters where the Military Police could contribute to field mentoring, but it took some time to develop the concept.²⁵⁹

The pressure to pump out partially-trained warm bodies from the DynCorp-run regional training center was substantial, but the Canadian players all understood that they had a moral responsibility to at least provide Afghan policemen with basic military survival skills and more than a veneer of police training. For the most part, that was what occurred throughout early 2007. The districts needed police to man checkpoints and conduct searches in the “blue box” while surrounded by the “green box”—the battle group and the Afghan National Army. The fine details of the law were not as relevant in those situations. Kandahar City, however, needed police to patrol as “beat cops” would back in Canada, that is, mediate local grievances and keep the peace on the streets. Law became more important in this environment.

All of these aspects were works in progress and never seemed to move quickly enough for the critics. The Afghan police themselves were internally divided, sometimes deliberately so. The DIAG programme (see Volume I) converted some tribal militias into “police” but even though they were vetted through the regional training center, all Afghans knew their loyalties. The growing number of non-militia professional police was at odds with those groups, even though they wore the same blue-gray serge uniform and carried the same identification card and weapons. Each district chief of police was hostage to the tribal, not to mention commercial, dynamics of their district. Some were appointed via a patronage process, so the provincial chief of police did not control all of his personnel. Here there was another dynamic: Kandahar versus Kabul. The provincial power brokers, public and non-public, did not want Kabul meddling in their commercial activities, which were, in turn, facilitated by “their” police who “understood” how business was done. This was how General Esmatullah Alizai ran afoul of the informal Kandahar power structure and was replaced with General Saqib. By July, it was evident that there was an assassination campaign against the police in Kandahar City. But by whom? The constant turbulence meant that the police system in Kandahar could not stabilize in 2007. Some people did not want it to do so, and not exclusively the Taliban.

On the positive side, Operation PORTCULLIS had a significant effect on security in the city. The checkpoints, about to become police sub-stations, did not provide 100% security, but the semblance of perimeter control was a start. This was a major PRT success. It must also be said that the TF Kandahar-hosted security coordination meetings between the police forces, TF Kandahar and the Afghan National Army were another crucial success, as were the operations of the JPCC, rocky though that relationship was at times.

The mechanisms were in place, and were used by all players, even if they were imperfect. Though they built on foundations established in 2005–2006, TF Kandahar was able to take them to the next level.

It was difficult, however, to avoid the feeling that by mid-2007 there were deep systemic problems with the police. Maj Craig Gardner, running the JPCC, put it best:

There is not a day that goes by when I am not disappointed in the [Afghan police]. They are well behind the eight-ball, are suffering horrendous losses, and are poorly paid. They are however trying, but lack the mentorship and in my opinion a trusting relationship from district to HQ and back down again.²⁶⁰

Despite all of the Canadian efforts, some things would not change. A JPCC report noted that:

The J5 staff asked me to query the ANP regarding an Afghan Radio Broadcast that discussed a toll being levied on Taxi and Bus drivers traveling on HWY 1 WEST of KC. Apparently it was reported that the toll was 500 Afghans, and drivers threatened with being shot if they did not pay. All personnel in attendance stated that of course this is what happens, it was business as usual and would never stop. All police throughout all districts do this, and are typically linked to power brokers such as Ahmed Wali Karzai and Mullah Naqib. It is considered to be all about filling pockets with cash, and a destabilized security situation only makes it easier for this to happen... thus many of these individuals will never want the security situation to improve. *I was quite shocked at the candor of the comments by the personnel around the table.*²⁶¹

There was a fleeting ray of hope, however. In late 2006, the Germans finally admitted failure at the Afghan International Police Coordination Meeting, held in Dubai. The European Union agreed to bail out the Germans and establish a European Union police training mission. The Americans, not wishing to be bamboozled with a name change and a bunch of talk, instructed Combined Security Assistance Team-Afghanistan (CSTC-A) to augment its police training structure and get Police Reform going in the Ministry of the Interior. Powerful forces from Kandahar tried to interfere with Police Reform at every turn, but the Americans came up with the idea of deploying Police Mentoring Teams run by a Regional Police Advisory Command (South). The American Police Mentoring Teams, thrown together hastily in summer 2007, were National Guardsmen mixed with Military Police. The first Police Mentoring Teams, three 11-man teams, arrived at the PRT in late July 2007. Regional Policing Assistance Command (South), however, was not an

ISAF organization (it belonged to Operation ENDURING FREEDOM) and did not fall under any command structure that remotely connected it to TF Kandahar. They also had little or no experience in the complexities of Afghanistan.²⁶²

Into the Relief in Place: Operations, July–August 2007

LCol Walker was increasingly concerned about the state of affairs west of the city. 2 RCR Battle Group warned TF Kandahar that if more police were not made available and soon, control over Zharey District would be lost. The insurgents were ramping up their information operations against the population throughout the district and if there was no government presence, there was no competing message.²⁶³ All the battle group could do was continue with its disruption programme. (See Figure 1-11.)

Operation DRAGON took I Company into Tajmohammad, situated between Howz-e Madad and Lakokhel. Using their, by now, characteristic night infiltration techniques, Maj Quick took three dismounted platoons through extremely dense terrain into designated defensive locations that were located on anticipated Taliban withdrawal routes. His “Zulu’d” LAV IIIs and 1st Company, 2nd Kandak and their Canadian mentors from the OMLT established a firing line along a wadi line to the north. From their positions, I Company observed insurgents preparing weapons and readied to move north when contact was initiated and the fight was on. “It was clear the Taliban had no idea how the company was oriented on the ground,” according to the post-op report. The Taliban then withdrew east and was pursued by I Company, joined by 1st Company. This resulted in multiple contacts and multiple enemy killed. A joint terminal air controller was able to direct an A-10 to take out more of the fleeing enemy, and D Battery’s guns were also brought to bear. A Squadron moved to Howz-e Madad in case I Company and 1st Company needed extraction, but the only need for armour on this occasion was the use of a Badger to bury all of the enemy bodies.²⁶⁴ H Company then loaded up for Operation MARS, while I Company recocked for Operation PLUTO to keep the pressure up on the Howz-e Madad-Sangsar area.

Over in Panjwayi, Maj Henderson and C Company struggled to maintain the balancing act between the Horn of Panjwayi in the west and the developing problem in the eastern part of the district around Nakhonay. The enemy expressed their annoyance with continued Canadian interest in Nakhonay on 4 July. A Canadian convoy from C Company, led by a Leopard tank equipped with a roller, moved slowly east down Route Lake Effect. An Icom chattered, “They’re coming.” At a dip in the road adjacent to the tip of the Salvat Ghar feature, the IED triggerman located 120mm to the north detonated a TM mine lashed to a 152mm shell. The blast struck an RG-31, killing six Canadians and an Afghan interpreter.²⁶⁵

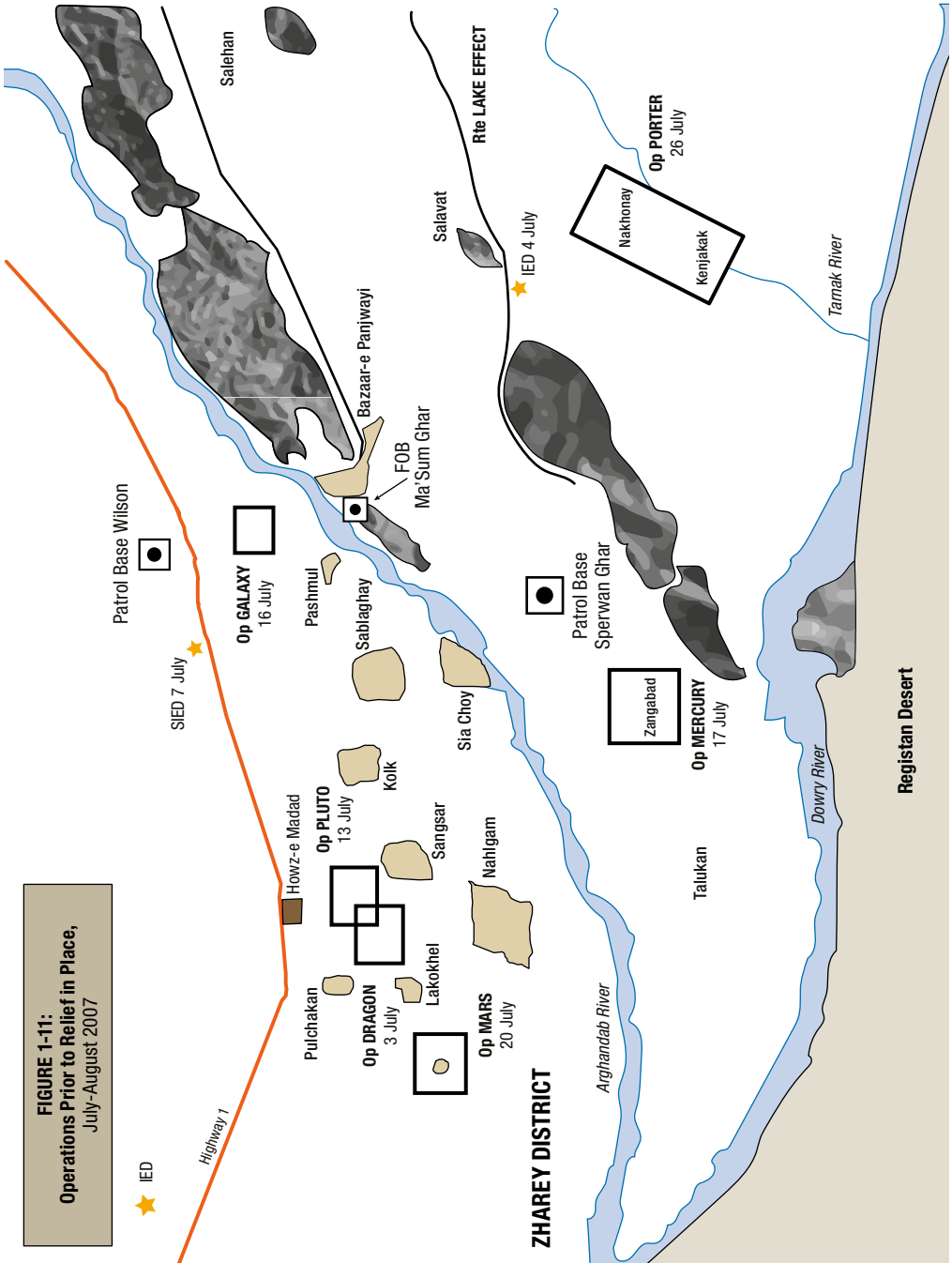


Figure 1-11: Operations Prior to Relief in Place, July-August 2007

The dead included Capt Matt Dawe; Cpl Jordan Anderson; Cpl Cole Bartsch; and Pte Lane Watkins, from 3 PPLCI; Capt Jeff Francis from 1 RCHA; and MCpl Colin Bason from The Royal Westminster Regiment. The blast was so uncharacteristically large that a Badger had to be brought in to right the shattered hull so the crew could be recovered. Counter-IED and Canadian Forces National Investigative Service investigators swarmed all over the site before everything was removed.²⁶⁶

Three days later, a suicide vehicle attacked an H Company LAV III that was deploying on Highway 1 for Operation MARS. This attack wounded four Canadians and took place in the same area as numerous other suicide IED attacks that summer. A number of IEDs were also reported on Route Fosters West at the same time, which resulted in the full closure of the route. LCol Walker reported that: “The IEDs that are attacking us are large enough to cause significant damage to armoured vehicles. There is a high rate of non-serviceable electronic countermeasure (ECM) on the vehicles.” There were more rockets directed against Ma’Sum Ghar. The assessment was that the indirect fire was intended “to tie down forces in Ma’Sum Ghar in order to facilitate an IED strike against a battle group convoy on [Highway 1].” Operations MARS and PLUTO were delayed a week.²⁶⁷

Operation PLUTO’s objective was to disrupt enemy activity, and in particular, an enemy command and control node between Howz-e Madad and Sangsar. ISTAR resources indicated that there were two 30-man groups operating in this area, some of whom had been pushed out by Operation DRAGON. A night infiltration by I Company, along with Recce Platoon and snipers, was completely successful, while the LAV IIIs and 1st Company and OMLT again from 2nd Kandak formed an interdiction line along the first wadi line south of Highway 1. The night infiltration was completely undetected, and the Canadians could see the Taliban praying and conducting morning ablutions 200 m away. There were no civilians present, the fields were not tended and the place looked neglected. The snipers gained “eyes on” a pair of insurgents, one of whom was identified as a known Taliban commander. Permission was given to engage, and Abdul Baqi and his partner were taken out. The fight was on and two insurgent groups engaged the Canadian positions from two directions. Artillery and close air support were called in: one bomb missed its target but inadvertently took out the other.²⁶⁸

Maj Quick prepared to move his force south to Objective BUGS, where the Taliban commander met his end. A Sperwer TUAV then spotted an 82mm recoilless rifle team and a 12-man group armed with RPGs: bomb runs eliminated these. When the force did advance, it was engaged by another section-sized element fighting from a grape drying hut. They were also hit with close air support. BUGS, it turned out, was a fully prepared fighting position with personal equipment, weapons, ammo, stores and cell phones.

Some body parts were found. During the exploitation phase, once the Afghan National Army and OMLT linked up, the force came under mortar fire from the north. D Battery laid a smoke screen to interfere with any observers. Three rounds out of 20 fired at the Canadian-Afghan force detonated but there was no damage.²⁶⁹

PLUTO's delay had follow-on effects. A significant volume of ISTAR reportage was coming out of Asheque along Highway 1, so a plan called GALAXY was formulated to go into the community of Makuan after the estimated 70 insurgents that had taken up residence there to interdict the highway. However, when the threat to the Dahla Dam emerged on 14–15 July, H Company was cut away to head up to Shah Wali Kot instead.²⁷⁰

When they returned, H Company mounted a deception operation with its vehicles to draw the attention of the enemy early warning net. Unlike previous operations, the accompanying Afghan National Army company conducted a night insertion as well. There was no contact. Snipers spotted an insurgent O Group who were preparing to respond to the Canadian and Afghan movements. The snipers took out all six leaders. A firefight erupted but when artillery was called in, it landed on the friendly positions 700 metres off the targets and “effectively suppressed India Company resulting in a delay in the advance.” As before, Sperwer TUAV coverage facilitated close air support on several groups of reinforcing insurgent groups, with a pair of 500-pound bombs killing ten enemy personnel. Six more enemy personnel were captured. Afghan police were then brought in to assist with detainees and searches, which freed up the troops to fight. The Afghans found a cell phone on a detainee: his commander was calling him for situation reports. This led to the clearance of that location, but by then the enemy departed.²⁷¹ One of the enemy prisoners was a medium-value leadership target. Operation GALAXY was determined to have decisively disrupted the enemy in the vicinity of Asheque.²⁷²

I and H Companies then moved on to a series of layback patrols around Route Summit, which was getting cratered by locals who were annoyed over the irrigation and water rights issues. The long-delayed Operation MARS was executed on 20 July and H Company re-established Canadian positions at Gundy Ghar. Subsequently, they were mortared the next night. The Afghan police were not “impressed by ISAF unwillingness to fire indiscriminately into possible Taliban locations without positive identification. The lack of serviceable heavy support weapons at the ANP checkpoints severely limits ANP force protection.”²⁷³ Was the Afghan police a militia or a police force?

The situation in Zharey remained critical, however. Col. Akka announced suddenly that his officers at Gundy Ghar, Lakokhel and the Langley checkpoint would be removed because they lacked weapons and ammunition. To the battle group, it looked like blackmail directed at ISAF and the Governor to get more weapons.²⁷⁴ Four days later, the Taliban overran Afghan police checkpoints at Sablaghay and Kolk. The Canadian assessment follows:

There is a relatively good chance the ANP will lose additional checkpoints in the Zharey District in the next few weeks, which will represent a significant blow to Operation BAAZ TSUKA Phase 3C. Some of the important factors that exacerbate the situation include the fact that there is very little interaction between the civilian population and the ANP, the checkpoints are difficult to sustain, and the ANP have suffered significant losses recently.²⁷⁵

Maj Henderson and C Company were at this time working up two operations in Panjwayi: VENUS and MERCURY. 2nd Company from 2nd Kandak plus OMLT mentors were allocated for the disruption of enemy forces that were increasingly present in the Zangabad and Talukan communities. Timed to coincide with Operation GALAXY, the upcoming relief in place of 2nd Kandak limited its employment to one operation. VENUS was cancelled and Operation MERCURY focused on Zangabad. C Company swept into the community and had two short, sharp encounters with the insurgents, killing two, wounding four. Among the detainees was an IED facilitator involved in the Route Fosters attacks.²⁷⁶

The security forces did not completely neglect eastern Panjwayi District. The new Kandahar Province chief of police, General Saqib, wanted to demonstrate the Afghan police's capability to both the enemy and to ISAF after what proved to be a very bloody summer for his forces. An ambitious plan to cordon and search Nakhonay and an adjacent community, Khenjakak, was raised with TF Kandahar. After some negotiation and fine-tuning, Operation PORTER emerged from the process and wound up involving practically the whole battle group.

General Saqib put together the Afghan police portion of PORTER with vague intelligence. The overall idea was to have police blocks on major routes in Dand and south of Khenjakak, and a thorough search of the compounds in the target areas, with the military forces handling a cordon. Saqib pulled out all the stops but was only able to muster 85 police on short notice, including prosecutors and National Directorate of Security from the city, as well as police from neighbouring Dand District. Initially, Saqib wanted to search Salavat, Nakhonay and Khenjakak in one day but he was persuaded by TF Kandahar that this was too ambitious. Khenjakak became the primary target area.²⁷⁷

C and I Companies plus A Squadron moved to Route Lake Effect on the night of 25 July and established leaguers. The Leopards and Badgers created a breach to an area northwest of Khenjakak and awaited the Afghan police, who arrived around 0500 the next morning. The tanks led the police to an assembly area. I Company, C Company and A Squadron essentially formed a ring of steel around Khenjakak, while Saqib's police conducted searches. Of the seven detainees taken, two were Taliban leaders. The police uncovered ten RPGs, bounding anti-personnel mines, mortar fuses, "spider" devices (used to detonate IEDs

outside of the protective ECM bubble), plastic explosives, and ammunition of all types. The combined Canadian–Afghan force withdrew but took ineffective mortar fire on the way out.²⁷⁸

What Operation PORTER missed, however, is significant. Information that flowed in the next day asserted that the Taliban had a court in Nakhonay and had also made a deal with the populations of Nakhonay and Khenjakak. The insurgents would not lay IEDs in the area, nor would they draw attention to their activities by conducting operations in and around the two communities. Some 200 Taliban apparently moved out of the uncordoned areas to establish ambushes but they were constrained by the local agreement.²⁷⁹

The IED problem coupled with maintenance issues finally put the brake on 2 RCR battle group operations: “As we possess no route clearance package capability the ability for us to keep the routes safe has become almost insurmountable.” Only two out of three Badgers were operational and the engineers had a significantly high-stress casualty level by this time in the tour.²⁸⁰

2 RCR Battle Group sub-units returned to their bases and awaited the relief in place with the incoming battle group. The relief in place itself did not go well. Incoming sub-units did not arrive complete and this made it difficult for the TF 1-07 sub-units to acquaint them with the situation and the terrain. At the same time, much of the battle group’s combat power was undergoing heavy maintenance, and, as it was the previous summer, the heat was deadly. There were three planned joint disruption operations: CASTOR, CARNIVAL and BAPTISTE. Two could not be mounted because of the chaotic relief in place. Operation CASTOR was mounted in Shah Wali Kot to familiarize B Company, 3^e Bataillon du Royal 22^e Régiment (3 R22eR) with the area. There was no time to do a proper work up so the Van Doos deployed without firing in their LAV III weapon. Contact started immediately as the enemy moved on Zangabad and Gundy Ghar with a vengeance.²⁸¹

Conclusions

The nature of Canada’s war changed significantly in the first half of 2007 as a comparative steady state emerged in the Canadian Army’s deployment in Kandahar Province. The enhancement of TF Kandahar’s capabilities commensurate with the capacity-building and development lines of operation set the conditions for Canada to pursue those lines in parallel with the security line. The PRT built solidly on its predecessor’s foundations, and mounted numerous and bold initiatives that were finally connected to a national development strategy. The priority this time was to connect all levels of Afghan government to facilitate the delivery of services. Once Canadians moved out and then down into the communities, however, the “simplest things became difficult” as the PRT ran headlong into the realities of local politics, which, in turn, generated enough friction to prevent Afghan projects from meeting Canadian timelines.

The successful disruption operations mounted by 2 RCR Battle Group throughout spring and summer 2007 in Zharey District were, unfortunately, marred by the lack of policing capacity to hold the ground. This was not a new problem, but one where a better solution was sought, toward the end of the tour, at a much higher level. Certainly, the turbulence in NATO ISAF strategy for the country did not help. Without these disruption operations, however, the enemy would have regained the initiative in Zharey and threatened Kandahar City as they had in 2006. 2 RCR Battle Group must be credited for doing “more with less” while higher entities tried to respond to the insurgency *tout azimuths*. The OMLT expansion to the brigade-level and the partnering of two 1-205 Kandak with 2 RCR Battle Group qualifies as a major Canadian success during this time, moving the Afghan National Army toward company and battalion-level operations instead of deploying platoon-sized levies for others. Realizing and accepting that an independent and functional Afghan National Army was part of Canada’s exit strategy for Afghanistan finally found firm expression at almost all levels. It also reduced pressure on the single Canadian battle group operating throughout the entire province.

As with many endeavours, unexpected events deflected a hard-fought trajectory. The destabilization of Arghandab District, followed by expanded enemy activities in the northern provinces, coupled in turn with Regional Command (South) priorities in Helmand Province placed substantial strains on the Canadian effort all at once and in opposite geographical directions. The legacy deployment in Panjwayi and Zharey was enough of a stretch for 2 RCR Battle Group: deploying forces to Maywand, Khakrez, Shah Wali Kot and Ghorak, let alone Spin Boldak, taxed the NSE to the limit (not to mention highlighting the folly of the 1990’s Canadian Forces aviation policies). TF Kandahar tried to do too much with too little, though BGen Grant and his staff did employ creative measures and leveraged personal connections with allies to the maximum. When the enemy moved into Nakhonay and threatened Dand District, it was almost too much and, with the mass casualty-producing IED attacks employed by the insurgents, the domestic political pressure from Canada for tangible successes and the pressure from the Afghan government to maintain credibility became the definition of the word “intense.”

In stark terms, the relief in place did not go well. Once again, it was conducted under extreme environmental conditions in the heat of August. The battle group’s equipment was worn out and every move was maintenance-intensive. Increased enemy IED use, the lack of appropriate route clearance capability coupled to the need to travel between the by now static Canadian positions in Zharey and Panjwayi increased the dangers to a significantly higher degree than previous reliefs in place. On the operational level, however, TF Kandahar and its units continued to prevent the enemy leadership in Quetta from realizing their objectives in and around Kandahar City. The disruption operations continued.

ENDNOTES

1. The author was consulted by CEFCOM in the course of these discussions during this period.
2. Interview with BGen Tim Grant (Kandahar, 3 June 2007).
3. Interview with Lt Col Charlie Herbert, UK Army (Kandahar, 5 June 2007).
4. January 2007 "Commander's Direction-Operational Plan for Winter 2007."
5. Ibid.; Annex A, "Campaign Design."
6. Interview with Lt Col Glenn Stockton, Australian Army (Kandahar, 7 June 2007).
7. Ibid.; Interview with Lt Col Charlie Herbert, UK Army (Kandahar, 8 June 2007).
8. "Developing the Afghanistan National Development Strategy: Strategic Workplan Final Draft, January 2007."
9. Ibid.
10. "Commander's Direction and Guidance: Commanding Officer Strategic Advisory Team Afghanistan" (5 March 2007).
11. See Gavin Buchan, "Canada's Whole of Government Approach: Pursuit of Civil-Military Coherence in Afghanistan, 2005–2009," Master's research project, Department of Political Studies (Kingston: Queen's University, 2010).
12. Discussion with SAT-A personnel (Kabul, 23 July 2006).
13. Discussion with SAT-A personnel (Kabul, 26 June 2007). Authors observations, SAT-A (Kabul, June 2007).
14. Telephone interviews with David Mulroney (9 October 2014 and 13 October 2014).
15. Indeed, once Mr. Mulroney was removed from his position and sent to China as ambassador in 2009, BGen Jon Vance noted to the author that the interagency atmosphere was much more collegial.
16. A useful examination of the interdepartmental organizations dealing with Afghanistan can be found in Nicholas Gammer's "The Afghanistan Task Force and Prime Ministerial Leadership" a 2011 paper from the Canadian Political Science Association Annual Conference at www.cpsa-acsp.ca. The paper's limitations include the fact that it is Ottawa-bureaucratic centric and thus divorced from the complex realities of operations in Afghanistan.
17. Ibid.
18. Lalani's past appointments can be found at: DFAIT Biographical Note (27 April 2007); DFAIT Diplomatic Announcement (28 August 2012); "Arif Lalani: A Key Player in Canada's Middle East Policy," *Embassy Magazine* (3 July 2013). The author encountered a senior Kandahari power broker during the meeting between Lalani and the power structure in Kandahar City on 10 June 2007.
19. The author repeatedly attempted to contact and interview Ambassador Lalani but there was no response.
20. Interview with Major Bernard Hudson (Kingston, 3 July 2008).
21. Discussions with LCol Tom Bradley (Kandahar, 6 and 7 June 2007).
22. In-theatre discussions with J-5 and PRT staff with the author (June 2007).
23. LCol Bob Chamberlain briefing to the author (10 June 2007).
24. Note that this operation's code word was spelled in three different ways in almost every official document from the time. It was usually spelled "PORTCULUS" or "PORTCULLIS."
25. Chamberlain briefing to the author.

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26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. PRT CIMIC Ops Report (8 October 2006).
29. PRT CIMIC Report (28 October 2006).
30. The possible reasons included: decreased interest at the higher levels of government in Canada; DFAIT annoyance at the CDS's attempts at defence diplomacy; shifting UAE policy vis-à-vis Iran; the unwillingness to cut the UAE in on intelligence; problems between the UAE liaison detachment and the harassment of female Canadian soldiers.
31. PRT DSR (26, 27 February 2007).
32. Discussions with the author with JTF-A J-5 personnel (Kandahar, 4 June 2007). See also notes on a nasty encounter with a CF Padre (Kandahar, 4 June 2007).
33. Interviews with Helena Kadi (Camp Nathan Smith, 15 June 2007); interviews with LCol Bob Chamberlain (Camp Nathan Smith, 10 and 15 June 2007); discussions with Maj Chip Madic (Camp Nathan Smith, 15 June 2007); discussions with Andrew Scyner (1 November 2011). The author also observed PRT Targeting Board processes in 2007.
34. Ibid.
35. DCOS R7D Weekly Reports (28 March, 4, 11, 18 April 2007); PRT DSR (4 March 2007).
36. Emails Michael Callan to D.L. (8 February 2007); DCOS R&D Weekly Reports (18 April 2007).
37. Message U.S. Embassy to State, "Kandahar Politics Complicate US Objectives in Afghanistan" (6 December 2010).
38. Briefing to the author, KAF detention facility (May 2011).
39. A formal complex designation system existed: for example, 1/1/205 Brigade was 1st Kandak, 1st Brigade, 205 Corps but for stylistic purposes the brigade will be designated 1-205 Brigade, and the kandaks designated Kandak 1, 2, 3, etc. The author acknowledges that different OMLTs used different terminology over the years to mean the same thing.
40. Telephone interview with LCol Wayne Eyre (11 November 2011); "OMLT End-Tour Briefing" (July 2007).
41. Eyre interview. Bradley interview.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid.
44. "JTF-A R3 OMLT Structure" (February 2007).
45. "JTF-A End Tour Report-OMLT: Commanding Officer's Assessment."
46. Ibid.
47. TF 1-07 DSR (4, 10, 15, 16, 17, 18, 23 February 2007). See also interview with LCol Rob Walker (Ma'Sum Ghar, 16 June 2007).
48. Briefing to the author by TF 1-07 senior staff (Kandahar, 16 June 2007).
49. Telephone interview with LCol Steve Graham (11 March 2013).
50. Eyre interview.
51. TF 1-07 "Op Order 01 Op ATHENA R3" (14 February 2007).

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52. Ibid. See also Eyre interview.
53. "Op MINOTAUR POR" (13 February 2007).
54. "H Cbt Tm CONOP: Howz-e Madad Post-Op report-Troops in Contact, 23 February 2007" (25 February 2007).
55. Notes from a Meeting with National Directorate of Security (16 July 2007).
56. USPI analysis passed to the Battle Group.
57. Information Operations brief to the author (KAF, 7 June 2007).
58. JTF-A "R3 End Tour Report."
59. This material was captured, translated and disseminated in the spring of 2007.
60. JTF-A "R3 End Tour Report."
61. PRT DSR (26 March 2007).
62. JTF-A Briefing, "Current Threat Picture" (15 July 2007).
63. JTF-A J-2 briefing to the author (6 June 2007).
64. Canadian Press, "Afghan Warlord Urges Youngsters to Lay Down Arms" (24 January 2007).
65. PRT DSR (17 February 2007); JPCC DSR (8 March 2007).
66. JPCC DSR (10 and 11 March 2007).
67. TF 1-07 DSR (12 March 2007). See also undated engineering power point presentation, "Dahla Dam."
68. JPCC DSR (10 March 2007). Interview with Helene Kadi (Camp Nathan Smith, 15 June 2007).
69. PRT DSR (15 March 2007).
70. JTF-A HQ J-2 summary, "Naqibullah Assassination Attempt" (22 March 2007).
71. JPCC DSR (11, 13, 14, 16, 25 March 2007).
72. TF 1-07 DSR (20 March 2007).
73. RC (South) Operations Order Op ADALAT (25 March 2007).
74. Ibid.
75. JTF-A "Op ADALAT Briefing" (12 July 2007).
76. Eyre interview.
77. Bradley interview.
78. NSE DSR (19 April 2007).
79. NSE DSR (4 May 2007).
80. H Company DSR (20 April 2007).
81. TF 1-07 DSR (9 March 2007).
82. TF 1-07 DSRs (17, 20, 25-26 March 2007).
83. TF 1-07 DSR (5 March 2007).
84. JTF-A "Op ACHILLES Briefing to R3" (13 July 2007).

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85. TF 1-07 DSR (30 February 2007; 3, 4 March 2007).
86. TF 1-07 DSR (18 May 2007).
87. TF 1-07 DSR (6 March 2007).
88. Graham interview. Note that the use of Canadian MPs as mentors was formalized in the Police OMLT later in 2007 during the next rotation.
89. TF 1-07 DSR (6-7 March 2007).
90. TF 1-07 DSR (9, 10 and 11 March 2007).
91. "Op ROAD TRIP Post-Op Report" (11 March 2007).
92. TF 1-07 DSR (12 March 2007).
93. TF 1-07 DSR (5 and 6 April 2007).
94. KLE Report-Zharey District Shura Meeting in Pasab (20 March 2007).
95. PRT DSR (15 February 2007).
96. KLE meeting at PRT with district leader and claimants (31 March 2007). PRT DSR (31 March 2007).
97. CIMIC briefing to the author (Camp Nathan Smith, 9 June 2007).
98. TF 1-07 DSR (March 2007).
99. TF 1-07 DSR (16 March 2007).
100. TF 1-07 DSR (20 March 2007).
101. TF 1-07 DSR (22 March 2007).
102. "TF 1-07 B Squadron Royal Canadian Dragoons" report compiled from Recce Squadron DSR by Lt Ben Gould. See also Graham interview.
103. TF 1-07 DSR (25,26 March 2007).
104. Ibid.
105. TF 1-07 DSR (26 March 2007).
106. "TF 1-07 B Squadron Royal Canadian Dragoons" report compiled from Recce Squadron DSR by Lt Ben Gould.
107. Ibid.
108. TF 1-07 DSR (30,31 March 2007).
109. Ibid.; Graham interview.
110. CONOP HELIX (5 March 2007); TF 1-07 DSR (29-30 March 2007).
111. TF 1-07 DSR (3-4 April 2007).
112. "Post Operations Report Op NEPTUNE" (12 April 2007).
113. "TF 1-07 B Squadron Royal Canadian Dragoons" report compiled from Recce Squadron DSR by Lt Ben Gould. Cpl Gionet, Pte Dolmovic and Pte Renauld each received the Medal of Military Valour for their actions.
114. TF 1-07 DSR (11 April 2007). Note that TC-6 AT mines were supplied to the Mujahideen in quantity by the ISI who sourced them from Egypt who manufactured the TC-6 under licence from Italy in the 1980s.
115. TF 1-07 DSR (24 April 2007).

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116. TF 1-07 DSR (30 April 2007).
117. Briefing to the author by STA Battery (Ma'Sum Ghar, 19 June 2007).
118. TF 1-07 DSR (19, 21, 24, 25 April, 14, 17 May and 20 June 2007).
119. TF 1-07 DSR (17, 22 March 2007).
120. TF 1-07 DSR (5 April 2007).
121. TF 1-07 DSR (8 April 2007).
122. TF 1-07 DSR (5-6 April 2007).
123. OMLT DSR (1 April 2007).
124. PRT DSR (4 March 2007); KLE with Haji Baran (31 March 2007).
125. TF 1-07 DSR.
126. TF 1-07 "B Squadron Royal Canadian Dragoons" report compiled from Recce Squadron DSR by Lt Ben Gould (18 April 2007).
127. TF 1-07 DSR (16 April 2007).
128. TF 1-07 DSR (29 April 2007).
129. OMLT DSR (8 April 2007).
130. OMLT DSR (11 April 2007).
131. Telephone interview with Gavin Buchan (24 October 2011).
132. The author traveled to Spin Boldak on numerous occasions from 2003 to 2011. See also Graham interview.
133. Recce Squadron "Op SATYR NYX Phase I: Spin Boldak District Assessment" (15 June 2007).
134. Major Steve Graham briefing to 2 CMBG Professional Development Training (9 November 2007).
135. Ibid.; Graham interview.
136. Author's observations.
137. Recce Squadron "Op SATYR NYX Phase I: Spin Boldak District Assessment" (15 June 2007).
138. Ibid.
139. OMLT DSR (3 May 2007); Recce Squadron "Op SATYR NYX Phase I: Spin Boldak District Assessment" (15 June 2007).
140. Recce Squadron "Op SATYR NYX Phase I: Spin Boldak District Assessment" (15 June 2007).
141. This is based on the author's experiences in Spin Boldak during the course of the war.
142. NSE DSR (8 May 2007).
143. DOCS R&D Weekly Reports (2 May 2007).
144. Graham interview.
145. Ibid.
146. Library of Parliament, "Afghanistan: Chronology of Canadian Parliamentary Events" (20 November 2007); CBC News, "The Afghan Debate: Where the Parties Stand on the Deployment of Troops"; Hansard, 16 April 2007 (February 2008); www.ndp.ca "Debate Fact Check: Duceppe Wrong on NDP Afghan Vote."

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147. Based on an analysis of the author's chronology of events for TF 1-07 (February–August 2007).
148. See Bruce Riedel, "Unraveling Al Qaeda's Plot Against Spain," Brookings Institution (7 August 2012), at <http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2012/08/07-al-qaeda-spain-riedel>.
149. CTV News "MPs Set to Debate Canada's Role in Afghanistan" (10 April 2006).
150. WikiLeaks, America Embassy Ottawa to State, "Canada: Making the Case for the Afghan Mission" (17 October 1997).
151. Interview with Major David Warnke (KAF, 8 February 2009); C-IED briefing (KAF, 8 August 2008).
152. C-IED briefing to the author, January 2008.
153. The suicide IED "chain" was related to me by Canadians who were present when Colonel Raziq captured a suicide bomber who tried to kill him in Spin Boldak. The failed bomber was feted at a dinner and he revealed how the system operated.
154. C-IED briefings to the author.
155. Warnke interview.
156. DOCS R&D Weekly Reports (17 May and 13 June 2007).
157. Kadi interview; DOCS R&D Weekly Reports (2 May 2007).
158. Interview with LCol Tom Bradley (Edmonton, 10 February 2010).
159. PRT DSR (2, 18 May 2007; 16 June 2007; 3 July 2007); JPCC DSR (4, 15, 30 May 2007; 20 June 2007, 5 July 2007).
160. JTF-A HQ "Operation BISSEL."
161. Ibid.
162. Author's observations of an intense discussion during a PRT Project Targeting Board meeting (15 June 2007).
163. J2 DSR (6 August 2007).
164. Telephone interview with Colonel Bob Chamberlain (16 November 2011).
165. Ibid.
166. PRT and JPCC DSR (19 March 2007; 17, 28 April 2007).
167. PRT and JPCC DSR (17 May 2007; 4, 18 June 2007; 1 August 2007); DCOS R&D Weekly Reports (13 June 2007).
168. DCOS R&D Weekly Reports (12 July 2007).
169. It was not clear who was behind this particular event. Amnesty International asserted that they had credible information that Governor Asadullah Khalid was somehow involved but has up to this point not yet elaborated why. See "Afghanistan: Defer Vote to Appoint Intelligence Director Accused of Torture," Amnesty International news (13 September 2012).
170. PRT DSRs.
171. DCOS R&D Weekly Reports (12 July 2007).
172. DCOS R&D Weekly Reports (19 July 2007).
173. Telephone interview with Colonel Chuck Mathé (28 February 2012).
174. Ibid.
175. Ibid.

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176. "National Support Element R3 End Tour Report, 2007." See also "Concept of Support" Graphic.
177. Mathé interview.
178. Ibid.
179. "National Support Element R3 End Tour Report, 2007."
180. Mathé interview.
181. Ibid.
182. Ibid.
183. "J6 Brief on Comms for Theatre" (24 January 2007).
184. Military Police Complaints Commission, "Commission's Final Report MPCC 2008-042 Concerning a complaint by Amnesty International Canada and British Columbia Civil Liberties Association in June 2008."
185. I Coy DSR (13 April 2007).
186. TF 1-07 "Zharey District ANP" (10 June 2007).
187. TF 1-07 briefing to the author (Ma'Sum Ghar, 19 June 2007).
188. CIMIC briefing to the author (Patrol Base Wilson, 20 June 2007).
189. Storyboard, "Hotel Company TIC 07 May 2007"; TF 1-07 DSR (7 May 2007).
190. Storyboard, "Hotel Company TIC 08 May 2007." TF 1-07 DSR (8 May 2007); OMLT DSR (9 May 2007).
191. TF 1-07 DSR (10, 11, 12 May 2007).
192. Briefing to the author (Ma'Sum Ghar, 21 June 2007).
193. Consolidated SITREP for Op HOOVER Phase 3 (Clear Sangsar West) (18 May 2007).
194. TF 1-07 DSR (19 May 2007).
195. TF 1-07 briefing to the author (Ma'Sum Ghar, 16 June 2007).
196. OMLT DSR (20 May 2007).
197. OMLT DSR (25 May 2007).
198. TF 1-07 DSR (25 May 2007).
199. TF 1-07 DSR; (31 May 2007) OMLT DSR (10, 31 May 2007).
200. TF 1-07 DSR (1,2 June 2007).
201. "Op TAKE OUT Consolidated SITREP 4 June 2007."
202. TF 1-07 DSR (5, 6, 7 June 2007).
203. TF 1-07 DSR (7 June 2007).
204. "C/S 3 TIC Consolidated SITREP 12-13 June."
205. I Company Post-Op Report, "Op SEQUEL."
206. The author observed Op SEASONS alongside LCol Walker's TAC HQ.
207. TF 1-07 DSR (24, 25 April 2007).
208. TF 1-07 DSR (5, 7 May 2007).

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209. TF 1-07 DSR (9, 13 May 2007).
210. OMLT DSR (12, 14 May 2007).
211. OMLT DSR (15-16 May 2007).
212. OMLT DSR (16 May 2007).
213. TF 1-07 DSR (18 May 2007); OMLT DSR (18 May 2007).
214. OMLT DSR (23 May 2007); TF 1-07 DSR (31 May 2007); TF 1-07 DSR (1 June 2007).
215. Briefing to the author (Sperwan Ghar, 19 June 2007).
216. TF 1-07 DSR (1, 2 June 2007).
217. TF 1-07 DSR (2 June 2007).
218. TF 1-07 DSR (9 June 2007).
219. TF 1-07 DSR (10, 11, 12 June 2007).
220. TF 1-07 DSR (16 June 2007).
221. "KLE with Haji Baran" (1 June 2007).
222. Briefing to the author (Sperwan Ghar, 19 June 2007).
223. TF 1-07 DSR (4, 6 June 2007).
224. TF 1-07 DSR (25 June 2007).
225. JPCC DSR (12, 13 June 2007); OMLT DSR (13 June 2007).
226. Badal is the justice component of the Pashtunwali tribal code and when improperly implemented can degenerate into blood feuds.
227. TF 1-07 DSR (25 June 2007).
228. TF 1-07 DSR (19 June 2007).
229. TF 1-07 DSR (25 June 2007).
230. TF 1-07 DSR (23 June 2007).
231. DCOS R&D Weekly Reports (23-30 May 2007).
232. JPCC DSR (3, 5, 13 April 2007); DCOS R&D Weekly Reports (25 April 2007).
233. TF 1-07 DSR (27 May 2007); JPCC DSR (27 May 2007).
234. TF 1-07 DSR (29 May 2007).
235. KLE Report, "Security of SWK, Arghandab, Khakrez" (30 May 2007).
236. Ibid.
237. TF 1-07 DSR (2, 3, 4 June 2007); PRT DSR (5 June 2007).
238. TF 1-07 DSR (6 June 2007); "KLE- Shah Wali Kot District Centre" (6 June 2007).
239. JPCC DSR (8, 9, 10, 11 June 2007).
240. JPCC DSR (10 June 2007).
241. JTF-A "Op ADALAT Briefing" (12 July 2007).

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242. JPCC DSR (17-18 June 2007).
243. KLE with Governor Asadullah Khalid (18 June 2007).
244. PRT DSR (19 June 2007).
245. JPCC DSR (20 June 2007).
246. OMLT DSR (20 June 2007).
247. OMLT DSR (20-27 June 2007).
248. FOB Khakrez SITREP (17 June 2007); FOB Khakrez SITREP (19 June 2007).
249. TF 1-07 POR, "Padah Engagement, 22 June 2007."
250. TF 1-07 DSR (24 June 2007).
251. DCOS R&D Weekly Reports (5 July 2007); JPCC DSR (28-30 June 2007).
252. JPCC DSR (6, 7, 12 July 2007).
253. OMLT DSR (17-27 July 2007).
254. TF 1-07 DSR (15 July 2007).
255. Chamberlain interview (Camp Nathan Smith, 9 June 2007).
256. PRT "KLE Report: Mullah Naquib" (23 July 2007).
257. Ibid.
258. Interview with Superintendent David Fudge (Camp Nathan Smith, 12 June 2007).
259. Interview with Major Bernard Hudson (Kingston, 3 July 2008).
260. JPCC DSR (16 June 2007).
261. JPCC DSR (20 February 2007).
262. Fudge interview; RPAC-South briefing to the author (February 2008). This is also in part based on the author's experiences with the PMT, callsign "MISFIT."
263. TF 1-07 DSR (2 July 2007).
264. "Op DRAGON Post Op Report" (3 July 2007).
265. TF 1-07 DSR (4 July 2007).
266. TF 1-07 files, "Statement of Events 4th July 2007."
267. TF 1-07 DSR (10-15 July 2007).
268. "Op PLUTO Post Op Report" (14 July 2007).
269. Ibid.
270. TF 1-07 DSR (14 July 2007).
271. "Op GALAXY Post Op Report" (17 July 2007).
272. TF 1-07 DSR (17 July 2007).
273. "Op MARS" (21 July 2007).

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- 274. TF 1-07 DSR (22 July 2007).
- 275. TF 1-07 DSR (26 July 2007).
- 276. "Op MERCURY OC's Assessment" (18 July 2007). OMLT DSR (20 July 2007).
- 277. "AAR Op PORTER" (26 July 2007). JTF-A HQ DSR (26 July 2007).
- 278. "AAR Op PORTER" (26 July 2007).
- 279. "AAR Op PORTER" (26 July 2007). OMLT DSR (26 July 2007).
- 280. TF 1-07 DSR (21 July 2007).
- 281. TF 1-07 DSR (1, 2 August 2007).

BALANCING ACT ON THE ARGHANDAB:

AUGUST 2007–FEBRUARY 2008

The next iteration of TF Kandahar, unlike its predecessor, was not an ad hoc formation headquarters. BGen Guy Laroche and his team had time to structure their headquarters while they had a steady feed of information right up to their deployment in August 2007. This permitted constant adjustment to Roto 4's approach to Kandahar and also permitted the incorporation of crucial organizational changes to the new environment. Once on the ground, however, the pattern of activity proved to be very different to that encountered by the previous two rotations. As we will recall, CTF Aegis defined the problem in and around Kandahar with TF Orion in the lead and then shaped the conditions for Operation MEDUSA to deliver a body blow to the insurgent forces. TF Kandahar in early and mid-2007 exploited that shock effect to give itself space and time to define the development and governance "terrain" but then found itself engaged by an enemy who was in the process of adapting to the damage incurred by MEDUSA. Cumulatively, CTF Aegis under Fraser and TF Kandahar under Grant pushed the enemy into a particular course of action that was not their preferred one. In turn, it deflected the insurgent leadership from the trajectory they established in early 2006. Laroche's TF Kandahar came into play dealing with a somewhat disrupted and recovering enemy but one that remained lethal and agile.

The decision to base TF Kandahar Roto 4 on the Quebec-based 5^e Groupe-brigade mécanisé du Canada came with substantial domestic political risk. Historically, the population in Quebec were not supportive of Canadian involvement in past overseas conflicts. There was a generalized belief that if this rotation took too many casualties it might give rise to demands for a Canadian withdrawal from Afghanistan in Quebec, in addition to similar demands voiced by the opposition parties in the House of Commons.¹ A lot was riding on this rotation and the pressure was on. Would "The Tabarnac Men" (as they were called by the Afghans at the PRT) be able to pull it off?²

A New Slant

BGen Laroche's TF Kandahar retained a structure similar to the earlier rotation: there was a battle group, a PRT, an OMLT, a NSE and intelligence enablers, including the ASIC. The TF 3-07 Battle Group was based around 3eR22R, led by LCol Alain Gauthier. Unlike previous battle groups, there were two infantry companies of four platoons each: B Company, led by Maj Dave Abboud, and C Company, led by Maj Patrick Robichaud.

A Company headquarters and a platoon's worth of soldiers were moved over to augment the OMLT. Recce Squadron came from 12 Régiment blindé du Canada (12 RBC) and was led by Maj Pierre Huet. C Squadron, led by Maj Trevor Gosselin, consisted of three tank troops drawn from all three armoured regiments. X Batterie, led by Maj D.W. Smith, grouped the former STA Batterie and its resources (HALO, and lightweight counter mortar radar) with three troops of M-777 guns. The 53e Escadron, 5^e Régiment du génie de combat (53^e RGC), led by Maj Walter Taylor, was the combat engineer squadron. The counter-IED organizations overlapped with 53e Escadron and there was some evolution during late 2007 to sort out these relationships.

The OMLT changed hands and LCol Stéphane Lafaut took up the torch wielded by LCol Wayne Eyre. The OMLT's configuration remained the same, with Canadian mentors working with four of the five kandaks in 1-205 Brigade, plus mentors at brigade and corps levels. During Roto 4, 2nd Kandak entered the Red (leave and refit) and Yellow (training) cycles for three months, and 3rd Kandak went into the Green (conduct of operations) cycle.

The PRT remained under the command of LCol Bob Chamberlain, but his force protection company and CIMIC organization also rotated with 5 brigade-based sub-units. The NSE, now at a strength of 430 personnel, was commanded by LCol Nick Eldaoud. During the course of the rotation, each organization fielded a substantial amount and variety of new equipment, so the capabilities that existed in early 2007 were enhanced substantially by fall 2007. Canada still commanded the Role 3 Multinational Medical Unit, supplying 90 of its personnel as well as its commander LCol Pierre Charpentier. The ASIC was commanded by Maj Steve Desjardins.

TF Kandahar, however, differed from previous rotations in critical areas. There had been political and development advisors to the senior Canadian commanders in the past. With the increased emphasis by the Canadian government on generating visible and measurable development effects, the Political Advisor and Development Advisor also became links to, or representatives of, their parent organizations in Canada. When this proved problematic or complicated at the TF Kandahar level because of the confused relationships between the Kabul embassy, SAT-A and the PRT, a retired diplomat, Michel de Salaberry, was brought in late in 2007 to act as a focal point for DFAIT and CIDA activities in Kandahar. This would eventually lead to a greater rationalization of the Army–Other Government Departments (OGD) relationship in the next rotation under TF Kandahar, led by BGen Denis Thompson, but for the time being in mid-2007, the situation was as ambiguous as the relationship was ambivalent.

Similarly, there were unspoken expectations that were communicated from Ottawa via CEFCOM to TF Kandahar. Canada had 18 months to make a real difference, given the 2009 withdrawal date. Casualties were to be minimized. More emphasis was to be made on training the Afghan security forces. Canada had to be seen to be increasingly involved in development.³

This increased emphasis on development, particularly the central role of infrastructure reconstruction and development in the districts, led to some reorganization of engineering at the TF Kandahar level. The previous TF Kandahar had downplayed centralized engineering structures. Whether this was due to inter-arm politics or to the usual manpower caps and competition for positions remains unclear, but the Laroche-led headquarters displayed an evolution of opinion as the tour progressed. First, an Engineer Support Unit was established under TF Kandahar to provide relief to 53e Escadron when it came to non-combat infrastructure tasks in forward operating bases. Second, as operations progressed in the districts by late 2007, the need for a protected construction engineer capability was also identified: this became the Construction Management Organization. In time, the task force Engineer Advisor position expanded to handle this and the expansion of counter-IED capability and became known as the Force Engineering Office.⁴

The area that evolved significantly with this headquarters was in effects coordination. The concepts of kinetic and non-kinetic effects and the idea that they could and should be coordinated was not new to Canadians in Afghanistan, as we have seen going back to Operation APOLLO. In most cases, the concept of coordinated effects was something unseen and unsaid, yet understood. By 2007, the further the Canadians drilled down into district-level politics the more complexity emerged, and this in turn demanded a refined approach. The Grant TF Kandahar was blessed with personnel who had experience in tracking Kandahar politics and could build on the data generated by CTF Aegis, TF Orion, 1 RCR Battle Group and the PRTs. When those personnel went home, however, there were problems with continuity in what was now starting to be called “White Situational Awareness” (White SA, as opposed to “Red” SA, or the enemy’s activities). The incoming units had to start from scratch and develop their own relationships with Afghans.

Attempts by the van Loon led Regional Command (South) headquarters to understand Afghan tribal and political dynamics led to the creation of Operation SATYR DEUCALION in December 2006, right before Operation BAAZ TSUKA. The idea that systematic contact with Afghan power brokers would lead to increased understanding and thus would open doors to increased influence on the situation was attractive to the Laroche TF Kandahar as it trained in early 2007. As a result, more attention was paid to folding White SA into the formal planning process.

The Laroche TF Kandahar had a Joint Effects Coordinating Board and an Effects Synchronization Meeting. The objective of these organizations, according to a jargon-free briefing, was to identify for the TF Kandahar Commander:⁵

- What should we whack or influence?
- What happens if we whack this?
- What should we whack with?
- Go forth and whack it!
- Did we whack it good?
- Did we do good by whacking it?

In this case, the thing to be “whacked” or influenced included the insurgents and the Kandahar power structure. The Laroche headquarters understood that the two audiences overlapped in some areas and only careful targeting could bring about the effects needed to support Canadian objectives without jeopardizing success in other areas. The Joint Effects Coordinating Board determined these priorities, but the Effects Synchronization Meeting looked at how they would be implemented. There were four verbs associated with that process: define, convince, influence and neutralize. The tools used could include a key leader engagement; it could involve meetings or liaison at the JPCC; or perhaps special operations forces conducting full spectrum capture-kill operations. The process gave the TF Kandahar commander the ability to use a scalpel instead of a sword when the sword was not required.⁶

Crucial to all of this was the fact that Canada was trying to maintain insight and influence in Kandahar Province in the shadow of a Regional Command (South) headquarters, now led by Maj.-Gen. David “Jacko” Page. Canadian salience into these types of operations was necessary not only from a national prestige perspective within the coalition and when dealing with the Afghans, but for practical domestic political considerations. It forced the issue of influence in esoteric circles like the “black” world of the special operations forces, where the objective was to make it less likely that Canada would be left holding the bag if uncoordinated operations killed the wrong people. Given the domestic climate in Canada, these organizations and processes were of vital strategic importance.

The increase in the numbers of coalition special operations forces organizations in southern Afghanistan, some with competing or overlapping mandates, meant that there were a lot of “men in black” from different countries gearing up to capture-kill enemy leadership targets. Regional Command (South) headquarters had the Kandahar Fusion Centre colocated with it. It was run by Operation ENDURING FREEDOM but included ISAF liaison officers. Canada was represented in the Kandahar Fusion Centre and having a Canadian deputy commander at Regional Command (South), MGen Marquis Hainse, certainly did not hurt either.⁷

It is unclear as to whether the Laroche TF Kandahar had a better or worse relationship with Canadian SOF. The Grant TF Kandahar got along with American special forces better than it did with Canadian SOF but this was based more on previous personal relationships than anything else. In a general sense, Canadian SOF in Afghanistan at this time suffered from the lack of internal mobility, specifically helicopters, which reduced its ability to rapidly react to a developing target. This forced Canadian SOF to focus on Kandahar City to some extent. At least five successful special operations forces strikes against enemy leaders occurred from August to December 2007 in the Canadian area of operation outside of the city: one by the Afghan National Army and the OMLT, one by U.S. Special Forces, and three from an unidentified non-Canadian organization.⁸

Changes to the ASIC during this rotation significantly improved the care and feeding of the TF Kandahar “systems.” There was an even greater operational and tactical focus than the previous three Kandahar-based ASICs, which, as we have seen, were hampered by the priority to feed Ottawa in competition with supporting the battle group and PRT. The philosophy in the new ASIC was to make it an “intelligence NSE” and focus on the commander’s intent rather than act as a way station for information headed home to Canada. The ASIC was also reorganized during its tour. The Mission Support Group and the Field Security Group were brought under one roof and the amount of processed human intelligence quadrupled from the previous rotation. The ASIC also established stronger links with the various Canadian and allied counter-IED organizations, which, over time, had a significant effect on targeting insurgent bomb makers and their networks.⁹

New Plans: From Operation SATYR PERSEUS to Operation SHA AYENDA

For the Laroche iteration of TF Kandahar, the higher planning framework outwardly looked like the previous one. The ANDS remained in the driver’s seat, while Operation ARGUS RESOLVE Operation OQAB, the ADZ strategy, remained on the books. In Regional Command (South), Operation SATYR PERSEUS was the baseline operation plan.

When Maj.-Gen. “Jacko” Page and his British-led headquarters took over from the van Loon headquarters in May 2007, however, what was done in the name of the plans and how this related to the Canadian effort changed significantly.

Canadian officers assigned to Regional Command (South) noted, with alarm, numerous deficiencies and problems with the new command. A senior Canadian reported that Page was “abusive,” that the headquarters was structurally “dysfunctional” and was overly compartmentalized. Canada, a number of officers believed, was “marginalized” by Page and the British officers he brought with him. The focus for Regional Command (South) was exclusively oriented toward Helmand Province, and Page, according to one officer, “became fixated on Musa Qala” over in Helmand Province. Indeed, the rationale for emphasis on Musa Qala was not clear to Canadian officers, who in turn resisted Page’s attempts to draw more and more Canadian resources to Helmand. Laroche refused to deploy to Helmand unless he was given a better understanding as to why Musa Qala had a higher priority over Kandahar. The information provided to him did not satisfy Laroche.¹⁰

The effects of this state of affairs, coupled with other external factors, led TF Kandahar to formulate its own baseline operations plan while it was deploying in mid- to late August 2007. BGen Laroche relied heavily on his planning staff, particularly LCol Claude Fournier and Maj Eric Landry, to react rapidly to the turbulent situation.¹¹ They could not fall back completely on the Grant headquarters plan. After intense discussions with his civilian counterparts on the Executive Steering Committee, Commander CEFCOM, LGen Mike Gauthier, directed TF Kandahar to work more closely with the OGDs in order to “synchronize whole-of-government effects within Afghanistan.” At the same time, TF Kandahar was instructed to shift from conducting operations with Afghan security forces to supporting Afghan security forces. SAT-A was supposed to become “more responsive” to “whole-of- government direction.”¹²

These changes were extremely important ones. Recall the problems encountered in gaining CIDA assistance and coordination with the Army back in 2002 and Operation APOLLO and in 2003–2004 in Operation ATHENA in Kabul. Recall also the pressures encountered by the Government of Canada regarding criticism that there was too much fighting in Afghanistan and not enough development. Commander CEFCOM pressured TF Kandahar to be seen to be making a difference to Ottawa and the broader Canadian audience.¹³

The new plan was called Operation SHA AYENDA [Better Future]. SHA AYENDA’s depiction of the enemy’s objectives was an improvement over previous baseline plans. The planners clearly stated that the Taliban’s intent was “To re-establish a legitimate Taliban government in the Pashtun belt within Afghanistan.” Previously, the enemy’s objectives depicted in baseline plans was based on the vague concept that they were merely against something as opposed to for something. According to SHA AYENDA, the enemy had four lines of effort:

1. cause the coalition forces to leave Afghanistan;
2. have the Afghan people support and/or comply with the Taliban;
3. have the people oppose the Government of Afghanistan; and
4. retain an external haven and external support.

Their methodology, again according to SHA AYENDA, was to impose “unacceptable costs to [coalition] nations in terms of casualties and resources” while “undermining the national confidence in our ability to win” and “convincing people that the Taliban is the only viable alternative.” Erosion of Canadian and Afghan public confidence in the Government of Afghanistan was a crucial part of the enemy agenda. Retaining safe havens in Quetta, Waziristan, the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, and the Northwest Frontier Province was as critical to the insurgency as retaining external supply lines from Pakistani Pashtuns, rogue Pakistani elements, the Iranian government, Gulf country financial support and Al Qaeda global extremist network.¹⁴

SHA AYENDA accepted, for planning purposes, that the ADZ strategy was still in play in Kandahar, though the term was used less and less at TF Kandahar as time rolled on and Page’s Regional Command (South) appeared to have jettisoned the concept altogether. However, by early January 2008, “expanding the ADZ” was still being used as an operational-level justification for activities in TF Kandahar planning documents. SHA AYENDA focused solely on five districts: Zharey, Panjwayi, Shah Wali Kot, Arghandab and Spin Boldak. The objective of the plan was to meet several district-level objectives in those areas by May 2008.¹⁵

In Zharey and Panjwayi, TF Kandahar wanted a consistently secure and stable environment. The Afghan security forces were to operate autonomously, local governance was connected to the Kandahar government, and non-governmental organizations could conduct humanitarian operations in the districts. In Arghandab and Shah Wali Kot, efforts were to be made toward restoring the Dahla Dam in a secure environment. Displaced persons were to be able to return and local economies benefit from the dam. A forward operating base with an Afghan force would maintain security. As for Spin Boldak, Canada was supposed to “encourage” the “licit economy.”¹⁶

SHA AYENDA used the same lines of operation, security, governance and development, as previous plans did in the Grant and Fraser headquarters. Existing PRT plans and programming were to continue but now had to be “aligned and prioritized with JTF-A intent.”¹⁷ The scheme of manoeuvre that TF Kandahar planned to use to attain objectives

in these lines of operation was called by the Laroche headquarters “Clear-Hold-Develop” or “Clear-Hold-Stabilize.”¹⁸ Based on the “Clear-Hold-Build” concept articulated earlier in 2006, and later by CEFCOM planners in 2007 when the NATO and Canadian campaign plans were under revision, the general idea was that “mowing the lawn” or “emptying the garbage” vis-à-vis the enemy forces in the districts was repetitive and led only to disruption operations, not reconstruction and development. The only way development resources and monies could flow to the district and community levels was to have the police secure the area, make contact with the people, generate security, and then enable district leaders to hold shuras, conduct development assemblies and activate community committees.¹⁹

What the larger SHA AYENDA plans did not state in so many words was that BGen Laroche wanted to shift Canadian forces out of Zharey and Panjwayi by December and move them to Shah Wali Kot after turning the two districts over to the Afghan security forces. Canada could then be seen to be making progress.²⁰

The Nature of the Insurgency in Kandahar Province, June–December 2007

Canadian analysis of the insurgent threat in Kandahar Province in the latter half of 2007 revolved around the belief that there were separate insurgent groups operating in each conflicted district. These groups were supported from the outside with fighters and leaders from Helmand Province and Pakistan, depending on the time of the year, and weapons and supplies brought in from outside sources (see Figure 2-1). Structurally, local men with leadership skills and charisma led the district groups, and they could conduct ambushes and indirect fire missions but were reliant on specialists from outside to provide them with IED expertise. To a great extent, the insurgency played off of grievances generated between local people and the provincial government. There appeared to be tentative moves toward mutually supporting operations. The district-level groups communicated but rarely coordinated.²¹

The insurgents in Ghorak and Maywand focused on harassing the district centres, while those in Khakrez had a live-and-let-live relationship with what amounted to the district-level government.²² In upper Shah Wali Kot, the insurgent groups had an economic relationship with Matiullah Khan, the strongman from Oruzgan who handled the Tarinkot Road with his own mercenary security force, the Kandak Amniant Uruzgan. The Dutch and Australians had a relationship with Matiullah, who ensured that the local Taliban groups did not interfere with ISAF logistic convoys.²³ Lower Shah Wali Kot was subjected to radio propaganda, abductions and other localized intimidation.

Arghandab was a tough nut for the insurgents to crack. The Alikozai militia, the Afghan National Auxiliary Police, and the strong leadership of those associated with Mullah Naqib ensured that the insurgents did not operate from that district, though they likely transited it from time to time for a fee.²⁴

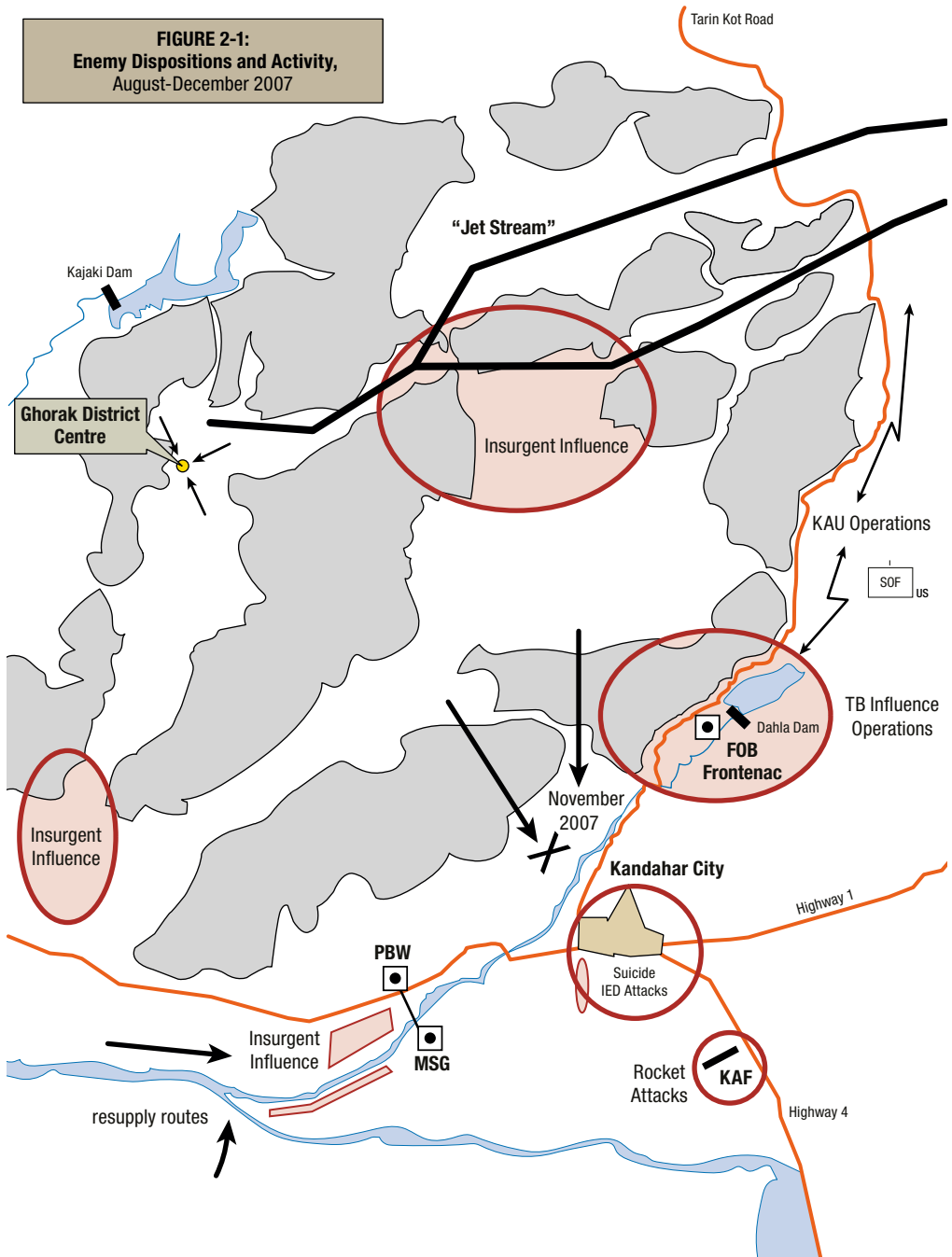


Figure 2-1: Enemy Dispositions and Activity, August-December 2007

Kandahar City was a special case and was essentially an urban terrorist operating area where the focus was suicide terrorism and IED activity. The rabbit warren nature of District 9 and its virulent mosques made it an ideal bed-down area for commanders and individual fighters transiting in from Spin Boldak via commercial transport. District 6 in the southwest was a logistics transfer node connected to the ratline that went through Panjwayi District to Maywand and then Helmand, or into the Reg Desert from Panjwayi where non-ideologically motivated smugglers assisted whoever paid them.²⁵

Maruf and Arghistan were resupply routes to Kandahar City and to the northeast “rocket box” that periodically hosted “non-insurgent insurgents” who were paid money by the Taliban and perhaps other entities to fire 107mm rockets at KAF. The two districts acted as bed-down areas for foreign fighters coming in from Pakistan. Special operations forces disruption operations resulted in a cat-and-mouse game in those districts as the enemy tried to avoid Col. Abdul Raziq’s private war in Spin Boldak.²⁶

As for Zharey and western Panjwayi, the insurgency was pressurized by the new strong points and police substations. These reduced freedom of movement but the insurgents continued to lash out like animals in a cage against the new facilities and against targets on Highway 1. The insurgent groups south of Route Fosters in Panjwayi west started to react to the security forces’ presence with ambushes and IEDs in an effort to break the chain. Nahlgam was the centre of the enemy effort to retain a presence in the western part of both districts.²⁷

Hard Into Zharey District: August 2007

Concurrent with SHA AYENDA planning was another planning cycle that emerged in August. While TF Kandahar was sorting out its conceptual framework, LCol Gauthier and the 3 R22eR Battle Group were in the process of recovering from a disruptive relief in place. Though the transfer of authority from Grant to Laroche took place on 2 August, it was not until 11 August that LCol Rob Walker handed over battle group transfer of authority to Gauthier. Maj Robichaud’s C Company paired with Maj David Quick’s I Company and the Afghan National Army for familiarization operations in Zharey starting on 1 August. As other units flowed in, they did not arrive complete, so a one-for-one replacement of sub-units was not possible. Planned operations were cancelled or pushed to the right. By 3 August, TF Kandahar accepted the fact that the “security situation in Zharey District is a concern as the [relief in place] may provide an opportunity for the enemy to surge.”²⁸ In part, this was due to incoming Canadians having problems with acclimatization, which forced TF Kandahar to reduce the number of its planned presence and disrupt operations. As the counter-IED organization had to rotate as well, in-theatre IED training slowed down.²⁹ This produced a lull in patrolling coverage in Zharey and Panjwayi Districts.³⁰

TF Kandahar, in the commander's view, needed to relieve the pressure on Zharey and regain the initiative. At the same time, a security meeting with Asadullah Khalid and General Saqib revealed that they thought "security in Zharey was slipping away." Their idea was to redistribute checkpoints in Zharey and Panjwayi and reassert control through them.³¹ The need to handle these challenges resulted in Operations MALDAR and GARRANDAY ZMARAY.

The new Regional Command (South) under Maj.-Gen. "Jacko" Page earmarked a British light infantry battalion as the Regional Command (South) reserve. Dubbed the Regional Battle Group (South), a variety of British light infantry units rotated in and out of the role. BGen Laroche put in a request for the Regional Battle Group (South) to deploy into Maywand District to support Operation MALDAR with the objective of disrupting enemy activity. A platoon from Maj Abboud's B Company, 3 R22eR and a troop of tanks from Maj Dave Broomfield's A Squadron, plus X Batteries' M-777 guns were to assist 1st Battalion, The Royal Welch Fusiliers in this effort starting 14 August. TUAV coverage was also expanded over to Maywand District. MALDAR produced no enemy contact but allowed the incoming Canadians to acquaint themselves with Maywand District.

The Afghan government's plans for re-examining security in Zharey District influenced Operation SHA AYENDA while it was being formulated by the TF Kandahar staff, but it was clear that a separate implementation plan was necessary as it was a discrete part of a larger, province-wide plan. Operation GARRANDAY ZMARAY was the result. Discussions with the Afghans on 4 August evolved into a formal planning process between 6 and 10 August, with a planned start date of 1 September.³²

Out in the field, however, the situation in Zharey was seriously deteriorating (see Figure 2-2). On the nights of 6 and 7 August, almost all of the existing Afghan police checkpoints in Zharey came under small-arms fire. LCol Walker launched B Company down Highway 1 to Howz-e Madad to shore up the position there and to make contact with the other Afghan police checkpoints in the vicinity (Operation CARIBOU). When B Company moved its LAV IIIs south of Howz-e Madad, they encountered heavy direct and indirect fire from the Ghundy Ghar feature and were forced to withdraw. The police, it turned out, were gone and the enemy now controlled Gundy Ghar.³³ Ghundy Ghar is the primary high ground in western Zharey District, much like Sperwan Ghar is in Panjwayi District. Successful security operations in the district were simply not possible if the enemy controlled Ghundy Ghar.

To make matters worse, enemy harassing fire on the New Lakokhel police checkpoint increased and insurgents overran the position on 14 August. Three days later, an unusually large IED blew up an A Squadron TLAV, flipping it onto its side. Over in Panjwayi, Checkpoints 5 and 10 near Sperwan Ghar came under direct fire. To make the point that

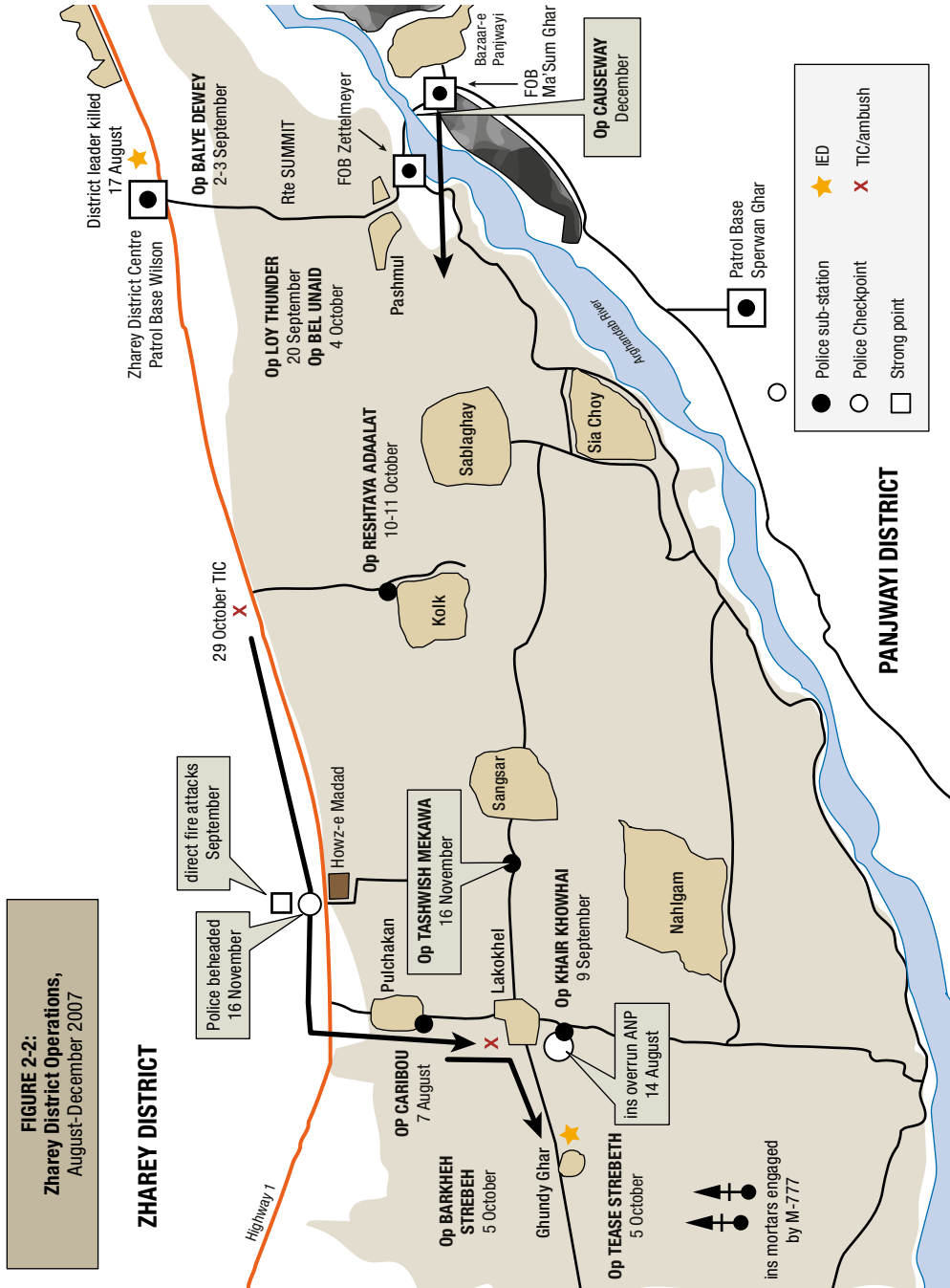


Figure 2-2: Zharey District Operations, August-December 2007

supply lines were vulnerable, a combat logistics patrol wound up in a sustained ambush on Route Fosters East. Five palletized loading system trucks escorted by three RG-31s and a Bison ECM vehicle headed east toward Kandahar. The lead RG-31 was targeted by an IED, which caused no damage. The convoy pressed on and 12 kilometres later, another IED attack took place, blowing up the RG-31 and wounding five soldiers.³⁴ A separate IED attack on Fosters East, this one against C Company, struck a LAV III, killing Pte Simon Longtin on 19 August.

The Zharey District leadership was neutralized on 17 August when a suicide bomber in a white Corolla killed the notoriously corrupt Haji Khairuddin and his three children. Another attack, preceded by a taunting cell phone call, nearly succeeded in killing Col. Akka, the Zharey District police chief.³⁵ Three Afghan police officers were kidnapped from the Howz-e Madad checkpoint and beheaded. Col. Akka responded with an operation of his own and bagged a local Taliban commander.³⁶

At the time, it appeared that this was an escalation in insurgent violence in the district but, in retrospect, there is a possibility that rival leader Habibullah Jan played some supportive role in these events. Earlier that day, Governor Asadullah Khalid decided to remove all of Habibullah Jan's checkpoints in neighbouring Senjaray as a prelude to Operation GARRANDAY ZMARAY but did not remove Col. Akka's, so it remains possible that insurgents were "facilitated" into the area with help from the Senjaray power structure. At the same time, Habibullah Jan despised Khairuddin because of his connections to Ahmad Wali Karzai and he would not have shed tears at his demise either. In any event, Zharey District was now thoroughly destabilized.

Operation BARKHEH STERBEH [Eagle Eye] was the temporary answer. At this point LCol Gauthier had taken over from LCol Walker. To distract enemy attention, LCol Gauthier sent Maj Robichaud and C Company with a troop of Leopards from A Squadron down Fosters West on 22 August. They manoeuvred into three positions opposite the river from Sia Choy, with ISTAR resources focused on the area. At the same time, he sent a combat team led by Maj. Abboud supported by an NSE echelon south of Howz-e Madad, and then down Routes Edmonton and Ottawa. This combat team also had Afghan National Army and OMLT participation, as well as police with American police mentors. The OMLT was in the process of breaking in 3rd Kandak a unit that in the mentors' view, was "spoon-fed by American and [Dutch] forces, getting almost any equipment and funding they requested for projects. It is a slow road to get them to...realize that we are here to provide them mentoring and help develop sustainable infrastructure that will last once coalition forces are no longer in Afghanistan."³⁷

B combat team encountered sustained RPG and mortar fire as it moved along Edmonton and Ottawa. B Company's LAVs opened fire with 25mm fire while the Sperwer TUAV and a SUAV, launched from X Batterie, attempted to locate the mortar positions. F-15 and A-10 close air support arrived to take out insurgents manoeuvring toward the incursion force. X Batterie engaged the mortars with 155mm fire. Across the river, C Company combat team was engaged by enemy RPG and 82mm teams but was able to identify and destroy all of them with 105mm fire from the Leopard's guns, 25mm cannon fire from the LAV-III's. There were an estimated 30 enemy killed in three engagements. The same scenario repeated itself in all three of C Company's manoeuvre positions, with an estimated 20 enemy killed for a total of 50 estimated insurgents eliminated.³⁸



Photo Credit: Author

The vital Gundy Ghar feature in western Zharey District was the scene of tragedy during the relief in place conducted between the 2nd Battalion, The Royal Canadian Regiment and 1^{er} Bataillon du 22^e Régiment Battle Groups in August 2007. This is Gundy Ghar from the west.

The fighting lasted all day on 22 August. By late afternoon, B Company combat team arrived at Ghundy Ghar, with the Leopards taking up positions on the high ground. The experienced armoured soldiers, having survived nearly six months of hard operations in Afghanistan, knew enough not to move around too much as the area was potentially riddled

with IEDs. Rollers and ploughs beat and carved the ground up enough to manoeuvre on lanes until the place was cleared by 53e Escadron combat engineers. When B Company's LAV IIIs arrived on the position, however, their crews were not *au courant* with keeping on the cleared path and a LAV III hit an IED, disabling it. A second LAV III struck an IED as it manoeuvred around the switchbacks up the hill. This device killed MWO Mario Mercier, MCpl Christian Duchesne, and an Afghan interpreter, who later passed away at the Role 3 hospital.³⁹ UH-60 medical evacuation helicopters arrived to extract the dead and wounded.

The next day, a Coyote surveillance troop from Maj Huet's Recce Squadron arrived to take over the Ghundy Ghar feature and Abboud's combat team withdrew. The MEWTs and a variety of other resources were busy collecting on enemy movements that were stimulated by Operation BARKHEH STERBEH. A direct action conducted by special operations forces nabbed a seven-man IED facilitation cell as a result.⁴⁰ Maj Taylor from 53e Escadron looked at the resupply route from Ghundy Ghar to Highway 1 and, in discussions with PRT CIMIC, came to the following conclusion:

JTF-A should buy a used paving machine to build roads fast [where they are] needed for force protection in areas where contractors cannot or want not to operate....Security forces need to establish the security before reconstruction is done and ISAF cannot establish security unless a presence is created (thus the need for paved roads). If ISAF had the capacity to pave roads for security reasons, the reconstruction would happen faster because the security would be created faster.⁴¹

Four days after the operation, the Taliban's 82mm mortars started up against FOB Ghundy Ghar. The same day, insurgent RPG teams attacked Ma'Sum Ghar and this was followed by a 107mm rocket attack at night. X Batterie destroyed the mortar with 155mm fire directed by HALO sound ranging data, while the Leopard tanks in run-up positions used HESH rounds to kill the insurgent RPG teams.⁴² These attacks repeated themselves on 1 and 2 September, though the volume of enemy fire against Ghundy Ghar was considerably greater. Recce Squadron's patrols outside the base clearly disturbed the enemy and this was their response. HALO and Lightweight Counter Mortar Radar systems were used to locate the offending mortar positions, which were subsequently engaged and destroyed with 155mm fire and close air support directed by the joint terminal air controllers accompanying Recce Squadron.⁴³



Photo Credit: Author

Lightweight counter mortar radar systems, like this one seen in 2010 at Operation CLIFF in eastern Panjwayi District, assisted the M-777 battery with fire missions against insurgent mortar and rocket positions. Fake LCMRs were also deployed by the Canadians to deceive insurgent fire control teams that had Pakistani Army training and understood what the detections systems were capable of.

The first weeks were hard ones for the 3 R22eR Battle Group. With three dead and over ten wounded in such a short period, one would have expected mass demonstrations in the streets of Quebec City calling for Canadian withdrawal from Afghanistan. This did not happen and the pundits were wrong. Quebecers were not the weak link that some anticipated. That weak link was elsewhere. The fight was back on in Zharey, but without police to hold positions in the district, it started to look like “emptying the garbage” all over again.

Operation GARRANDAY ZMARAY, August–September 2007

In order to move the Canadian battle group elsewhere, it was necessary to ensure that the Afghans could take control of Zharey District. This meant coordinating the Afghan army, Afghan police, and engaging the Governor and the Kandahar power structure, which of course took time. Operation GARRANDAY ZMARAY’s initial concept of operations was to re-establish control over the district with a web of strong points from which security would emanate. Note that this approach was not new as the previous task force worked toward that end but were thwarted with the lack of trained and effective police and were being undermined by those involved in district-level governance.

The GARRANDAY ZMARAY plan was not a purely Canadian project. In August, Governor Asadullah Khalid drew out 16 police checkpoints on a napkin during a security meeting. The sketch was passed around and refined with police input. When it made its way to the Afghan army, Lt.-Col. Sherin Shah added 15 more possible checkpoints to the chart along Route Langley. General Saqib, the police chief for the province, believed Nahlgam should be isolated, so that was included too. TF Kandahar planners took all of this away, rationalized it, and briefed it back to the Afghans on 22 August.⁴⁴

The idea now was to progressively establish six strong points (see Figure 2-3) starting with the newly retaken Ghundy Ghar, then alternating between Highway 1 and the district interior.⁴⁵ In theory, these actions would move the enemy away from Highway 1, reduce police corruption along Highway 1 and build confidence with the population. Later on, GARRANDAY ZMARAY was expanded to include a progressive line of strong points extending from Bazaar-e Panjwayi to Mushan. As the plan evolved yet again into fall, the idea that a paved road to connect Bazaar-e Panjwayi to Mushan then crossing the Arghandab River and heading north to Highway 1 near Ghundy Ghar emerged within the planning staff. The concept of isolating the insurgent stronghold in Nahlgam by surrounding it was one motivation underlying the planning, but another lay in the possibility of improving the economy by permitting better access to markets outside of the district.⁴⁶

The issue was now who, exactly, would man these strong points. When the issue was raised by the OMLT with 3rd Kandak, the Afghans did not like the idea of occupying defensive infrastructure in two districts with a single kandak. It took a lot of convincing to get the Afghan army leadership to move a company to Howz-e Madad.⁴⁷ As we saw in the last chapter, the Afghan police situation was in shambles. The Americans finally stepped in and developed a response to the German failure after the Dubai meetings in summer. Kandahar policing support was still a “Tower of Babel” that TF Kandahar had to manoeuvre around. To get the trained personnel needed for Operation GARRANDAY ZMARAY, TF Kandahar had to deal with a web of coalition policing support agencies: European Police, U.S. Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan (CSTC-A) and DynCorp, as well as several Afghan police forces. This meant harnessing and then coordinating a variety of TF Kandahar resources: Canadian civilian police and the Specialist Engineer Team at the PRT, the JPCC at the Palace, Maj Michel Zybala’s Military Police Company, and Jon Davison from DFAIT.

The prime complicating factors were the Police Mentoring Teams and the provincial mentors. The Police Mentoring Teams were U.S. Army National Guard infantry and Military Police re-roled as police mentors. It was a lash-up attempt by CSTC-A to create something akin to a “P-OMLT.” DynCorp, for example, could not leave its training bases because of life insurance policy restrictions, and the Americans could not work out

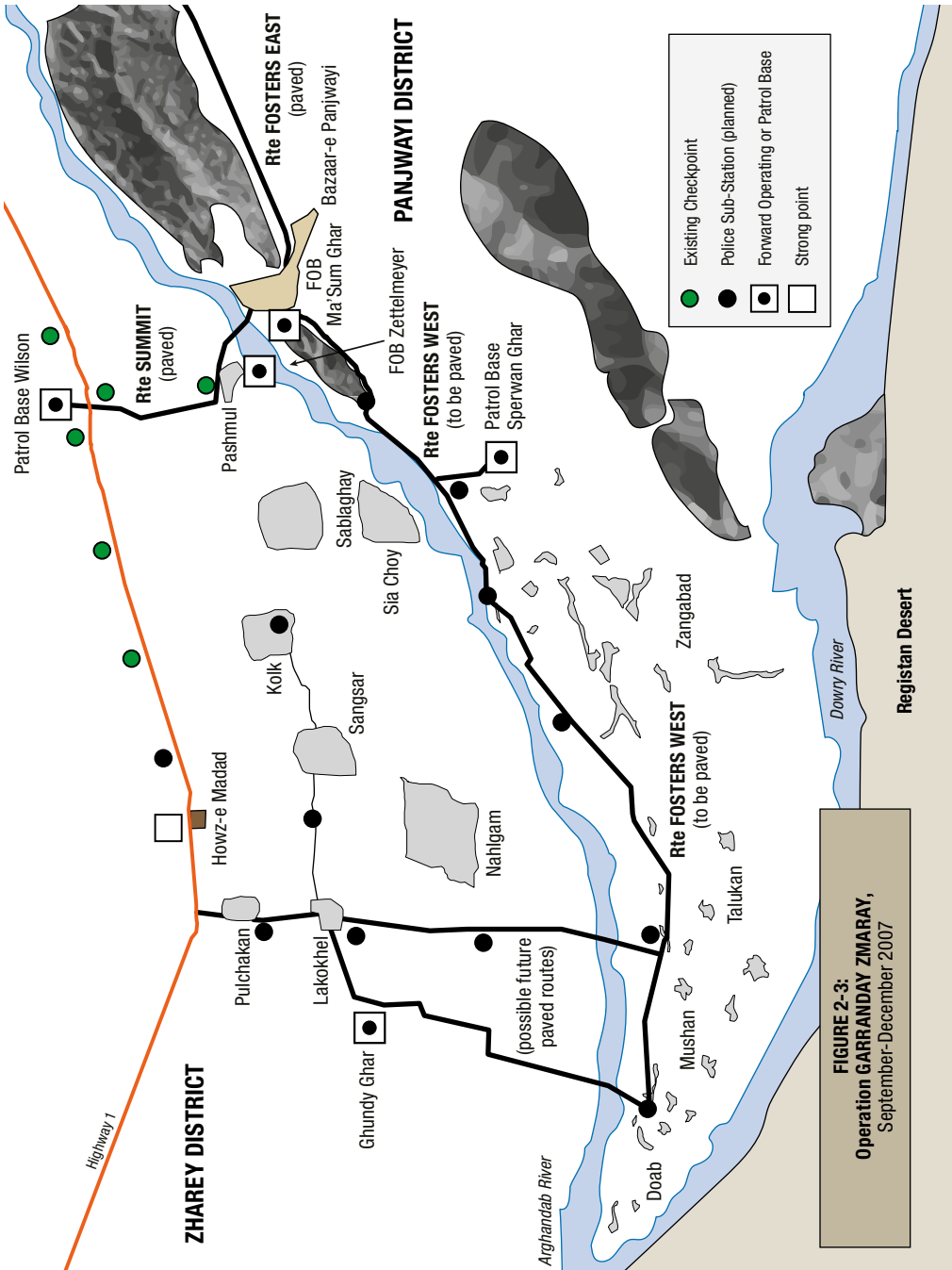


Figure 2-3: Operation GARRANDAY ZMARAY, September-December 2007

a myriad of complex funding issues. The Canadian CIVPOL from the PRT wanted to mentor the Afghans in the field, but Ottawa limited their “outside the wire” activities to reduce risk. The Police Mentoring Teams were going to handle that activity but they were mobile teams that returned to base at night and did not live with the Afghans in the way the OMLTs did. The American police mentors, furthermore, were not an ISAF resource: they belonged to Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. The Police Mentoring Teams in Kandahar in 2007 were not shy about throwing that in Canadian commanders’ faces when matters of coordination came up. In some cases, the police mentors went off with the U.S. Army special forces looking for action using their Afghan police as the “Afghan face.” In the senior provincial mentor’s view, he did not think that static police mentoring in support of the static array of police sub-stations was the direction to take because, in his view, this was how the French lost Indochina. Once again, the issue of whether the Afghan police should be a gendarmerie, a militia, or beat cops still was not sorted out.⁴⁸

In a nutshell, any Afghan police going into the strong points in Zharey and Panjwayi had to be mentored in place. The Police Mentor Teams were doing their own thing elsewhere. The regional training centre only took the Afghan police so far in their training: They needed combat survival training to augment it. Nobody seemed to have resources to do this. The solution, therefore, was the Police Operational Mentor Liaison Team (P-OMLT). TF Kandahar looked to its internal resources. There was a military police platoon at the PRT, but from the previous rotation, it was clear that the Canadian CIVPOL wanted to run its own show in the city and in any event TF Kandahar planners thought that they were being used solely as armed escorts to the Canadian CIVPOL. There was even a battle group Military Police section. There were, according to BGen Laroche, far too many Military Police officers handing out speeding tickets on KAF. By the end of August, six “mobile mentoring teams” of seven personnel each were formed from these resources and turned over to the OMLT for administrative and command purposes with the understanding they would work in the newly established police bases alongside the Afghan police. Maj Louis Lapointe was eventually put in command and the first P-OMLT stood up on 6 September.⁴⁹

As for those strong points, there were problems funding their construction. TF Kandahar could divert Canadian combat and construction engineering resources to build them, but there were material costs involved as the bases had to be defensible positions and not like the previous “cop in a box” concept employed earlier in 2007. CIDA was unable to provide any funding, so it fell to Jon Davison to plug into DFAIT’s Global Peace and Security Fund. DFAIT would not fund military strong points, but they would fund police stations. From here on in, the strong points were renamed “police sub-stations.” That said, the sub-stations were, in effect, walled mini-forts with run-up positions for armoured vehicles and plenty of barbed wire.⁵⁰



Operation GARRANDAY ZMARAY [Better Future] established a lattice of police sub-stations in Zharey District. The volatile situation produced police sub-stations that were, in effect, Afghan police and Canadian soldiers-manned small forts tenuously connected by a vulnerable road network. This is Police Sub-station Kolk, the scene of repeated small-arms engagements in 2007–2008.

Operation GARRANDAY ZMARAY planners looked to the phases of the operation while all of the supporting players were assembled. The first phase was designed to establish control over Highway 1 and demonstrate to the population that corrupt policing would no longer be tolerated. For example, reports came back that Col. Akka's police working alongside Canadian troops at vehicle checkpoints routinely told citizens that the Canadians would shoot them if they did not hand over money to the police. Afghans were perplexed by how the apparently smiling Canadians were so cruel and vicious. Of course, the extortion was conducted in Pashto so the Canadians did not even know it was happening.⁵¹ This clearly had to stop as it was undermining what little government legitimacy remained.

A strong point, not a police sub-station, would be constructed at Howz-e Madad, and manned by the Afghan National Army and the OMLT. Habibullah Jan had to be convinced to remove his checkpoints in Senjaray, and finally, Col. Akka had to be removed from his position as district chief of police. These were the preconditions if the operation were to move into the Zharey District's interior.

3 R22eR Battle Group put together a precursor operation, Operation BALYE DEWEY [Lit Candle] on 23 September. The psychology behind the operation was to make the point that Canadian and Afghan armies and police could operate in the Senjaray area, conduct a cordon and search, and establish a legitimate police checkpoint to offset Habibullah Jan's checkpoint system. In the early hours of 3 September, Maj. Abboud led B Company alongside 3rd Company from 3rd Kandak and its OMLT mentors in a dismounted night insertion. Making use of a deception plan where X Batterie fired illumination rounds offset to the northwest of the target compounds while the Afghans and OMLT moved into a village adjacent to the target area, Makuan. B Company crept in to establish the cordon and then 3rd Company abruptly shifted east into Makuan for the search. The police accompanying the Afghan army conducted the searches. BALYE DEWEY did not uncover any enemy activity but the message was sent to and received by Habibullah Jan.⁵²

The first two new positions went in on 9 September. Operation KHAIR KHOWHAI [Keeping Goodwill] involved an ad hoc route clearance package consisting of a Leopard tank with rollers, and the only operational Badger engineering vehicle leading two platoons of infantry from B Squadron and a tank platoon, plus two Afghan platoons and OMLT mentors south from Highway 1 to Lakokhel. The first position was established, with minimal contact. The Sperwer TUAV and X Batterie, working together, actively sought targets, one of which was engaged with ten rounds of HE. The enemy fired at the second Lakokhel checkpoint site with RPG and 82mm mortar fire. The Leopard tanks engaged with HESH and an A-10 flew in hunting targets. At the same time, C Company sent a platoon in LAV III with two troops of tanks from Maj Trevor Gosselin's C Squadron south from Highway 1 but further west in order to resupply Ghundy Ghar. This move was completed without incident. Afghan police and their associated P-OMLT were not expected to arrive until 13 September when construction of the police sub-stations was to be completed by 53e Escadron engineers.⁵³

The enemy did not like these impositions on their turf and, for several days, there were numerous "shoot and scoot" TICs in Zharey District. In one day, there were three small-arms engagements, a mortar attack, and RPG fire at various coalition and Afghan facilities. The strong point at Howz-e Madad also came under heavy fire. Most of these attacks took place north of the new police sub-stations, along their resupply routes to Highway 1. At the same time, there was a shower of rockets fired against FOB Ma'Sum Ghar.⁵⁴

The response to this was Operation LOY THUNDER, an Afghan National Army operation. Launched at night, 3rd Company from 3rd Kandak, screened with a platoon from Weapons Company and backed up by a Canadian platoon from C Company, swept through the area between FOB Ma'Sum Ghar and Pashmul. Significantly, a Sperwer TUAV flew in to support the operation and was controlled by the OMLT at its command post

through a TUAV liaison officer. Though there was no contact, the operation demonstrated that 3rd Kandak had the potential to operate autonomously at the company level. Their brothers in 1st Company, who were occupying the Howz-e Madad strong point, beat back yet another enemy probe, killing two insurgents.⁵⁵

The matter of Col. Akka came to a head by the end of September, though it took a meeting with the Governor to gain momentum on the problem. Khalid was told that “there is a lack of cooperation and trust between the Afghan police and the CF in Zharey. This is directly linked to Col. Akka’s perceived lack of will to support our operations... and because he is evidently profiting from his position to the detriment of his forces.”⁵⁶ Apparently, the Provincial Council “dealt with the problem” and Khalid confirmed Akka would be removed.⁵⁷ However, General Saqib resisted Akka’s removal stating that Akka was just misunderstood, he would not be fired, and he would get a soft administrative position in Afghan National Police headquarters. Akka’s removal letter blamed the Canadians for removing him, and that it was done to the protestations of the Afghan police and the Governor himself.⁵⁸ Over time, Akka cultivated a relationship with the American police mentors. Akka then used this relationship to drive a wedge between the American Police Mentoring Teams and the Canadians. This was not difficult to do given the deteriorating relationship between the American Police Mentoring Teams and Canadian forces.⁵⁹ While Akka was in the process of being fired, the Police Mentoring Teams raided an internally displaced persons camp in Zharey supported by Col. Akka and confiscated the uniforms and weapons of the legitimate Afghan police that were protecting the camp. They publicly humiliated the police in front of the camp population.⁶⁰ In hours, the police leadership in Kandahar was up in arms, with the JPCC blaming the Canadians for harassing Zharey police. It was evident to outside observers that the American Police Mentoring Team was manipulated into this action and it seriously highlighted the dangers, on all levels, of having uncoordinated, politically unaware forces operating in the Canadian battle space.⁶¹

Under the surface, however, lay three items of interest. First, the displaced persons camp police commander had, in the past, arrested a relative of Akka for laying IEDs. Akka’s action served as payback. Second, it was evident that Akka’s relationship to Ahmad Wali Karzai intimidated the Kandahar power structure into cushioning the blow, as it were, using Canada to take the blame for his removal. Again, this type of problem and these sorts of events had a cumulative effect on the Zharey District over the course of years and fueled distrust in ways that PRT-administered projects could not mitigate. Third, Col. Akka was eventually transferred to Dand District as police chief and not to an administrative post, right when insurgent problems started up in that district in early 2008. Of note, Dand was one area that had land required for the Kandahar City bypass road. There were interests that evidently wanted to have their man on the ground when the right land needed to be appropriated for the project.⁶²

Operations in Panjwayi District, August–September 2007

Operation GARRANDAY ZMARAY flowed into Panjwayi District concurrently with the Zharey operations. Maj Robichaud's C Company and the PRT CIMIC teams ran up against credibility issues with the district power brokers when they moved in in August. The district chief of police, Bismillah Jan, was incensed about the Canadian response, or lack thereof, to the Checkpoint 5 and 10 attacks of 7 August. Jan was "very upset that Canadians had sent support only to evacuate injured Afghan police and not to engage in the fighting." Jan reported nine dead and three wounded, plus an unknown number of missing.⁶³

The other issue was the ongoing lack of compensation over land expropriation and water diversion on the construction of Routes Brown and Dwyer near Patrol Base Sperwan Ghar. Local people saw compensation money flowing into Zharey over Route Summit and wanted the same thing for Panjwayi. The shura pressured the PRT to get the Governor to cease construction until a compensation package acceptable to all parties could be negotiated. When the shura met with the Governor, "he told them that they will not get money from him and to take their "dirty faces" away from his office immediately." The shura members told the Canadian CIMIC teams that the Governor "has broken the golden rule of respect for elders within their culture [and] want to have him removed from power and replaced."⁶⁴ Haji Agha Lalai Dastagiri supported the district elders both publicly and behind the scenes in this matter.

At issue was the lack of district leadership, as well as poor provincial-level leadership. The Khairuddin assassination left a vacuum in Zharey, so Asadullah Khalid transferred Niaz Mohammed Sarhadi over from Panjwayi and planned to shift Bismillah Khan, the chief of police, as well.⁶⁵ At this time, three Afghan police in eastern Panjwayi were kidnapped; the Taliban subsequently took them to Nakhonay and publicly executed them. The bodies were dumped in Chalgowr. When the local people called the district police, the responding unit was ambushed and had several officers wounded.⁶⁶

In effect, the population was annoyed with the provincial government for not behaving properly socially as well as financially; the population believed that the Canadians were unable or unwilling to facilitate these matters on their behalf, and the police were annoyed at the Canadians for not assisting them when they were in dire straits.

The battle group and the NSE, meanwhile, were concerned about Route Fosters East. To disrupt enemy activity to the south of the highway and maintain freedom of movement, 3 R22eR Battle Group launched Operation SAMANDARY TOOFAN [Peace Hurricane] into the Salehan–Mohajerin area on 4 September. Three clusters of community compounds were selected, isolated by C Company and C Squadron, and then two unmentored Afghan army platoons and a platoon of Panjwayi police searched them. Supported by PRT CIMIC, key leadership engagements were held to gain information on the area. No enemy were encountered and no weapons were found.⁶⁷

The lack of information on the enemy in Panjwayi and their connections to the insurgency in Zharey with specific reference to command and control was of some concern, so the battle group and the ASIC produced a manoeuvre-to-collect operation, SOLAH ARAME. SOLAH ARAME, as it turned out, became a running fight all day up Route Fosters West to Zangabad. C Company, C Squadron, and an engineer troop from 53e Escadron moved west down the Arghandab riverbed and breached in near Talukan. Two tanks were de-tracked and had to be recovered, and this delayed the operation three hours. At 1133 hours, there was an IED strike on a LAV III, with no casualties. 82mm rounds started to land, but the tanks were able to engage the launchers with 105mm HESH rounds. The force headed east up the highway and from 1135 hours to 1830 hours, there were 18 separate contacts over the space of 3 kilometres with small arms, RPGs and mortars. (See Figure 2-4.) There were no Canadian casualties but, in six of the contacts, the SOLAH ARAME force was able to engage and destroy the ambushing forces. The force made it back to Ma'Sum Ghar without further incident by 1930 hours.⁶⁸ The enemy leadership in Panjwayi was not sure what was going on. One leader, Haji Agha Lalik, was acquired by ISTAR resources as he moved around the Sperwan Ghar area. C Company wanted to sortie out and get him but was already overstretched and unable to do so.⁶⁹

SOLAH ARAME provided enough information to permit Operation SADIQ SARBAAZ [Honest Soldier] to proceed on 24 September. This operation was designed to establish a police sub-station on a critical piece of terrain on Route Fosters West, eight kilometres from FOB Ma'Sum Ghar. As Fosters wound around the Ma'Sum Ghar feature, the road doglegged and then narrowed considerably next to a shrine that had a mosque set above it on a high feature. The three-kilometre gap from this junction to Zangabad Ghar was also a crossing point on the Arghandab River: the community of Sia Choy in Zharey District lay to the north. Having a coalition presence here was crucial not only to interfere with enemy movements across the river but also for keeping the route open to Brown and Patrol Base Sperwan Ghar, and then west along Route Fosters toward Zangabad, Talukan and Mushan. C Company and C Squadron, supported with an engineer troop and two platoons from Weapons Company, 3rd Kandak, moved on Objective JESTER from two axes: part of the force moved along the Arghandab riverbed, while the other moved along Fosters West. The tanks established a block on the river, while the Afghan army and the engineers cleared the police sub-station site. Maj Robichaud's vehicle, unfortunately, struck an IED, and two soldiers were wounded. Down the riverbed, a Leopard C2 became immobilized, so an Armoured Recovery Vehicle from Tango Maintenance deployed to recover it. While the mobile recovery team was doing so, they came under fire from RPGs and 82mm recoilless rifles (though mortars were reported as well). An 82mm round struck

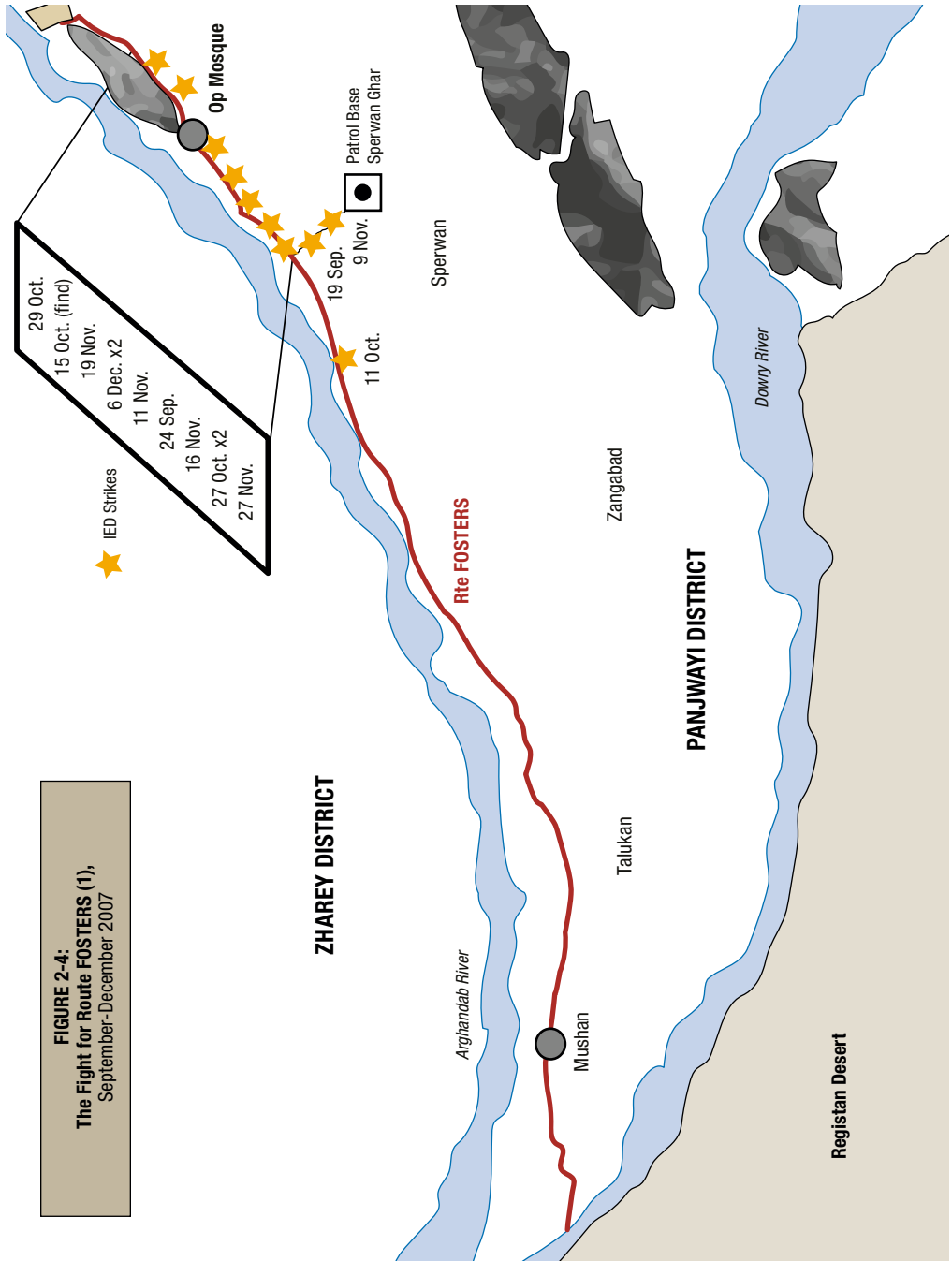


Figure 2-4: The Fight for Route Fosters (1), September-December 2007

the armoured recovery vehicle, penetrated the armour and killed Cpl Nathan Hornburg from the King's Own Calgary Regiment. RPGs hit the area, wounding a total of five Canadians. One of the Leopards identified where the fire was coming from and took out the enemy anti-tank teams with 105mm fire.⁷⁰

Once the casualties were evacuated, work continued on what was now designated Police Sub-station (PSS) Haji and Maj Robichaud conducted a key leader engagement with the local elders and mullahs. The occupation of the area with a police sub-station provoked the insurgents, who ambushed a C Company patrol wounding two Canadians. X Batterie's M-777s fired in support to help the platoon break contact. That night, an enemy team tried to emplace IEDs on Route Fosters West but accidentally detonated their own device, wounding four of them. PSS Haji now came under ineffective but persistent mortar fire. Occupying the high ground, C Company called in X Batterie and 12 155mm rounds destroyed both enemy mortars. The P-OMLT arrived with Afghan police and took up positions: they were engaged with small-arms fire as they deployed. The police responded with their weapons, beating back an ambush at their checkpoint.⁷¹ PSS Haji was, evidently, hot property, and would continue to be so.

Spin Boldak and Recce Squadron

Spin Boldak remained the “lost command” during the remainder of 2007 and into 2008. Geographically and psychologically separated from Kandahar City, the Laroche TF Kandahar was still mandated to maintain Operation SATYR NYX. Once again, elements of Recce Squadron were tasked with this mission. Whereas TF 1-07 defined what was going on in Spin Boldak with an eye toward assisting the United Arab Emirates task force deployed there, Recce Squadron led by Maj Pierre “Pete” Huet, was forced by changing Canadian political circumstances to take things a step further.

First, there was increased DFAIT interest in Spin Boldak, which produced increased DFAIT pressure for increased battle group involvement in Spin Boldak. This related to a variety of law enforcement programmes geared towards improving border security on both sides of the Durand Line. Second, and related to this, was the strategic need to generate taxes and thus revenue for the Government of Afghanistan using border crossing points. Third, CIDA wrestled the Highway 4 paving project away from USAID and committed to ensuring that this vital regional trade route was accessible and open. Thus, having some saliency in the security situation was crucial so these aims could be met.⁷²



Recce Squadron in Spin Boldak conceived and implemented an important organizational development: the Joint District Coordination Centre. The Joint District Coordination Centre brought together all of the disparate security organizations in the district so they could exchange information. This idea was implemented elsewhere in the Canadian area of operation. Col. Abdul Raziq, the primary power broker in Spin Boldak, is second from the right.

Maj Huet and his troops saw that there were too many uncoordinated entities operating in Spin Boldak and that, in many cases, they worked at cross purposes. There were Col. Raziq's Afghan Border Police (Col. Hakim Jan from Kandahar was in charge of the regular Afghan National Police); a Reconnaissance Company from the Afghan National Army; the remnants of the former Afghan National Highway Police; and the National Directorate of Security. An American ETT worked with the Border Police, while DynCorp mentored the Border Police headquarters.⁷³ Indeed, just getting forward operating base space was problematic as the United States provincial police mentor claimed American ownership of the FOB land, which led to juvenile games over who could set up where.

Maj Huet and staff looked at the situation. They were familiar with the Joint Provincial Coordination Centre in Kandahar, and the Joint Regional Coordination Centre for southern Afghanistan. Why could a similar organization like it not work at the district level in Spin Boldak? The result was the Joint District Coordination Centre or JDCC. Huet and his team took the idea one step further. Why not establish a duty officer with a phone, bring in the PSYOPS teams to distribute leaflets, and establish a 911-like emergency phone system? At the same time, why not establish a joint QRF, a mixed team of army and police?

This is precisely what Recce Squadron did between August and October 2007. It was an effort just to get all of the Spin Boldak security entities in one room and this was accomplished through force of personality more than any other factor. Canadian PSYOPS came down and handed out cards and flyers with the emergency phone line, which immediately lit up with citizens pouring information into the system on suspicious activities.⁷⁴

Recce Squadron also attempted to develop relationships with Pakistani border-security forces. Dubbed “Border Flag Meetings,” there were great expectations but those expectations had to be managed, especially when the Pakistani commanders insulted their Afghan counterparts. Little was accomplished. That said, when a Recce Squadron Coyote patrol crossed the Durand Line due to a navigational error, the matter was resolved locally over tea rather than expanding into a major international incident.⁷⁵

The PRT also deployed a CIMIC officer, Capt Steve Winter, to maintain situational awareness on development issues. In Spin Boldak, the usual accusations of corruption were flung back and forth between the Achakzais and the Noorzais. As it turned out, the bulk of the District Development Assembly members and even members of the district shura actually lived across the border in Pakistan, a state of affairs that completely undermined the legitimacy of the district leader and the government in the eyes of the population. Col. Raziq was seen by many to be more legitimate than the elected or appointed officials.⁷⁶

The ongoing problems with smuggling in and around Spin Boldak bedeviled the security forces during this entire rotation. In essence, Raziq’s border police deployed a long line of permanent but austere observation posts along the border, radiating east and west of Spin Boldak in the rural areas. There was the main crossing point, Friendship Gate, right in the middle of them in the built-up area of Spin Boldak. The enemy had three means of thwarting security measures: they could outflank the system and go through the mountainous Maruf District or desert wastes of the Reg Desert, or they could infiltrate in some of the thousands of trucks crossing through Friendship Gate. They could even employ a combination of these whereby the weapons took one route and the personnel another, to be married up in the districts around Kandahar City.⁷⁷

For the most part, the best Recce Squadron could do was help the security forces make the movement of insurgent contraband and personnel as inconvenient as possible. Special operations forces tended to operate in Maruf and the Reg Desert, but did so in a relatively uncoordinated fashion with the Spin Boldak forces. Recce Squadron therefore focused its efforts on Highway 4, Spin Boldak and the flanking observation posts.

The main threat to Canadians operating in Spin Boldak was from two sources. First, Highway 4 was still not paved half a year after the project was started, even though provincial dignitaries launched the project publicly in April 2007 and funded it with Canadian money. An unpaved route was more susceptible to IEDs. Second, there were frequent

attempts to kill Col. Raziq with suicide bombers, which put everybody around him at risk. From September to November 2007, four suicide attacks were made against Raziq and he even captured a fifth bomber before he could detonate. An attack on 13 October produced severe casualties. Recce Squadron moved in, secured the site and arranged for medical evacuation. The Role 3 MMU hospital at KAF was now confronted with a mass casualty event. A team of two doctors and six medics deployed by CH-47 to the strike site to pick up 21 casualties. As the CH-47 helicopters returned and landed next to the hospital, the wounded were triaged and rolled into surgery in an almost assembly-line fashion. All of them, fortunately, were saved. As usual, it remained unclear as to whether it was the Taliban trying to kill Raziq, or tribal rivals using Taliban contacts to carry out their work at arm's length.⁷⁸

Recce Squadron continued to add to TF Kandahar's understanding of the region with frequent patrols and a more precise mapping of the border area. Ultimately, a decision was made by commands other than TF Kandahar to emplace unattended ground sensors in selected areas. These operations were, in some cases, escorted by Recce Squadron. The "lost command" continued its operations throughout fall and winter 2007.

Ghorak Again

Maintaining the Ghorak police station district headquarters during the last half of 2007 was problematic. No one really wanted to keep forces in upper Ghorak, except the Governor. The police claimed they did not have the resources, and the Afghan army argued it could not resupply the remote facility. Naturally, both looked to TF Kandahar to solve the problem. The Afghan army's 1st Brigade was forced, given the circumstances, to keep an Afghan company in Ghorak, and TF Kandahar instructed the OMLT to maintain a team at the Ghorak District centre equipped with an RG-31, a LAV III and a joint terminal air controller.

Ghorak was another "lost command" situation. There was an Afghan infantry company of 65 men and a Canadian detachment of about a dozen soldiers with little to do. There was virtually no contact, although the odd rocket was flung at the district centre. It was not even clear whether these were Taliban fighters or smugglers who were annoyed at the government presence. Depending on the quality of the Afghan troops, mounted and dismounted patrols were conducted, and checkpoints established. Canadian influence also helped the Afghan company commanders engage in low-level CIMIC activity. In one case, the Afghan troops worked with locals to fix an irrigation project. This state of affairs continued from August to November. The Afghan commanders were annoyed at wasting an entire company to do what they thought the police should be doing, and wanted the company redeployed down to Zharey or Panjwayi Districts. Indeed, the bored troops were

getting into trouble in Ghorak and were starting to interface with the local drug trade, but the Governor insisted that they remain in desolate upper Ghorak, which they did well into early 2008.⁷⁹

New Equipment, New Capabilities

The 2006 deployment of the refurbished 1970s-era Leopard C-2 tanks was a stopgap measure and seen to be so at Army headquarters in Ottawa until more suitable vehicles could be procured. Fortunately, with the Cold War long over, there were large stocks of armoured fighting vehicles belonging to various NATO countries stored all over Europe. Unfortunately, none could be cajoled into giving them to Canada, not even the small number required. This was particularly galling. Some of these nations received division-sized stocks of equipment in the 1950s gratis from Canada when they reconstructed their armies and air forces after the Second World War. They had been defended by Canadian forces during the Cold War and were now collectively unwilling to relinquish 20 tanks without extensive negotiations, contracting and other bureaucratic impediments. Some of these countries had no forces operating anywhere near Kandahar, let alone Zharey District.

The Army was engaged in ongoing doctrinal debates over the acquisition of the Stryker gun-over-armor system and was experimenting with mounting the ADATS missile system on a LAV chassis as an anti-tank vehicle. The Chief of Land Staff believed that neither of these systems was suited for the requirements of the Afghanistan environment, which emphasized protection and direct fire. Feelers went out to the United States, France, the United Kingdom and Germany for tanks to replace the older Leopards. There was no response from the British or the French. When the Canadian Army expressed interest in acquiring the M1-A2 Abrams, the Americans said no.⁸⁰

Direct personal communications between LGen Leslie and Lt.-Gen. Hans-Otto Budde of the German Army opened the gates for Canadian Defence Attaché Col Tony Battista in Berlin, who played a significant role in negotiations.⁸¹ In the end, the manufacturer Krauss-Maffei Wegmann agreed to lease 20 Leopard 2A6M tanks and a pair of Leopard 2 armoured recovery vehicles to Canada for use in Afghanistan. The A6M was a Leopard 2 specially modified as a mine-resistant vehicle. Nineteen of these vehicles were deployed to Afghanistan in 2007. With their 120mm guns, 360 degree “hunter-killer” sights, and night fighting capability and speed, the 70-tonne tanks brought precision firepower to bear as required in the districts. 120mm canister rounds were also deployed for close-quarters fighting. For a time, the tanks were armed with German MG-3 machine guns (which the troopers called “The Bonestripper” because of its high rate of fire) but these were later replaced with Canadian C-6 and C-9 weapons. The tank squadron quarters in Ma’Sum Ghar now boasted a new sign: “Panzer Parking Only: All Violators Will be Totaled.”



Photo Credit: Author

The sophisticated, fast and deadly Leopard 2A6M, with its accurate 120mm gun, hunter-killer sight system and canister rounds, was specially modified to operate in an improvised explosive device-heavy environment. These vehicles proved to be crucial force multipliers in mounted operations in both Panjwayi and Zharey Districts.

Development and Reconstruction with the Provincial Reconstruction Team, August–October 2007

The PRT, led by LCol Chamberlain, continued in its reconstruction and development endeavours but with a new CIMIC organization, a beefed up DFAIT team and a more capable Specialist Engineer Team. The main Afghan development effort was, however, in trouble. The National Solidarity Programme, with the district assemblies and community councils, briefed well in PowerPoint. By November 2007, there were supposedly 529 Community Development Councils operating in Kandahar Province. CIDA claimed that there were 20 each in Spin Boldak and Khakrez Districts and that there were now development councils funded by CIDA in Kandahar City. A briefing map depicted development councils throughout Zharey District, with the notable exception of a blank circle surrounding Nahlgam.⁸² The reality was, however, that the whole effort was stalled by September 2007. UN HABITAT was supposed to provide confirmatory data on the development councils but refused to go “outside the wire” because of the security situation. As a result of this and other factors, project money was being delivered to only a few of the listed communities via the district assemblies and shuras, which were, in turn, facilitated through the PRT CIMIC teams.⁸³

Indeed, CIDA discovered that the insurgents had infiltrated some of the community development councils in areas where Afghan and ISAF forces did not operate or only visited sporadically.⁸⁴ That situation was dangerous for the whole Afghan and coalition effort. The insurgents were, in effect, taking international community (and Canadian) monies and working with local populations as if they were the government. This posed a direct threat to the legitimacy of the Afghan government at the community level and was yet another example of how the insurgents were able to use government resources for their own purposes.

Another example of insurgent parasitism was the health care system. The medical staff assassinations in the first half of the year effectively cowed the Kandahar medical community. The Red Cross told ISAF and the Afghan security forces that military vehicles, personnel and weapons were no longer welcome at Mirwais Hospital. Wounded Taliban insurgents and Al Qaeda terrorists, however, were welcomed at Mirwais Hospital. In effect, the hospital became a neutral zone in Kandahar City, one that was not aligned with the government nor with the government's development plan. And, in this environment, anything that was neutral benefited the insurgency and not the government. This further undermined government legitimacy with the population. An international organization that repaired insurgents to go back out and fight against the government using government resources was just too mind-bending for the average Afghan and fed a whole host of anti-ISAF conspiracy theories.⁸⁵

Kai Eide, a Norwegian diplomat and later the UN special representative in Afghanistan, noted that by late 2007 the UN agencies did not want to be involved in the reconstruction effort in Afghanistan:

The mandate was not only demanding: I would soon find out that it was also controversial, not least within the UN family. It required closer UN cooperation with the Afghan government and the international military forces, but a number of UN agencies saw such cooperation as a threat to the independence of the UN. It could blur the lines between civilian and military activities, make the UN staff more vulnerable, and harm its efforts to provide humanitarian assistance to areas where the Taliban was present. It could certainly have a negative impact on attempts to play a role in reconciliation, since the Taliban would see the UN as being too close to the enemy, the international military forces. These views were widely shared among the non-governmental organizations in Afghanistan.⁸⁶

This attitude seriously attenuated reconstruction in Kandahar Province. Unable to connect with UN agencies, the PRT focused more and more on road construction planning. USAID and CIDA worked out a division of labour in this area through fall 2007 but, in this case,

CIDA representatives at the PRT were constrained from leaving Camp Nathan Smith because of their security parameters and claimed they could not gather confirmatory data. The PRT's new Specialist Engineer Team (SET) tried to use its contacts where it could, and Recce Squadron sent back data on the lack of movement on the Highway 4 paving project, but there was a lack of interdepartmental synergy on these and other issues. The prototype of the SET emerged earlier in 2007 with a lot of preliminary work undertaken by a small team, led by Maj. Tanya Concannon, a British exchange officer. On the later 2007 rotation, 1 Engineer Support Unit from Moncton provided the SET, led by Capt Barbara Honig. The expanded SET gave the PRT the ability to handle project design and management tasks. Why was this important? The PRT was increasingly involved in military infrastructure as well as reconstruction infrastructure, and that assessment work had to be conducted in a non-permissive environment. CIMIC needed support in technical areas as well, as did the P-OMLT. To some extent, the Specialist Engineer Team made up for some of CIDA's deficiencies. For example, CIDA would not fund toilet construction for the Afghan National Police sub-stations because it was security-oriented. The SET could go out and work with the Afghan police, design and build the appropriate facilities, or, if necessary, mentor and quality control a contractor using DFAIT global peace and security funding. The SET also supported the "Engineer Club." Engineers from all of the international organizations and, most importantly, Afghan engineers who survived the Taliban era, met with the Specialist Engineer Team for regular lunches, professional development, and information exchanges. This sort of informal capacity-building was not measured by higher Canadian headquarters or by Ottawa, but it had a significant effect on the community and the coalition effort as a whole.⁸⁷

This sort of gap filling made the PRT a unique and effective organization. By mid-2007, the Italians still had not delivered in the justice sphere. DFAIT's inability or unwillingness to get deeply involved in disentangling the Afghan justice system, and instead focus on policing, led the PRT Judge Advocate General, LCdr April Inglis, to expand the PRT's involvement to make up for the shortfall. As discussed in the previous chapter, LCdr Gina Connor had identified that the police, justice and incarceration aspects of governance were interlinked and that addressing only one of these "legs" was a problematic exercise. This also had a direct impact on the Canadian detainee issue in that the Canadian Army was being criticized by the opposition for turning over detainees to Afghan police and then not keeping track of them.⁸⁸

Though it took several months, the PRT was finally able to collect enough information on the Kandahar justice system to gain insight into the problem, information that should have been readily available from the Italians who were supposedly handling the judiciary "pillar."

The conclusions were nothing short of daunting. No matter how it was presented, there was simply no functional government-controlled justice system in operation in Kandahar Province. As a result, “There is a common belief amongst key actors (from judges to citizens) that the issue of corruption is seriously eroding the little trust that people have in the formal judicial system.”⁸⁹ There was minimal infrastructure. Only 7% of the judges’ positions were filled, 45% of the prosecutors reported for duty, and defence attorneys defended an estimated 12% of the cases. It took months for the Judge Advocate General to determine what legal texts were in play. And, on further examination, there were three separate sets of laws that conflicted with each other: there was the Constitution, Sharia Law and Customary Law (Pashtunwali). There was no consensus on which form of Sharia Law was the standard for the province.⁹⁰ An attempt to establish a “Legal OMLT” using Canadian Forces legal officers was opposed by both CIDA and DFAIT.⁹¹

The lack of basic legal knowledge had significant ramifications for the counter-insurgency effort in the districts. Uneducated religious leaders in the rural areas, left to their own devices, believed that Sharia Law and Pashtunwali were one and the same. The CIDA and DFAIT reluctance to deal with religious engagement activities meant that Canadians could only deal with part of the legal system, and not the whole. If local people went to a local mullah for a ruling, say, on a land or water use grievance issue, this completely bypassed any Afghan government legal structure that might ideally exist and made the process susceptible to Taliban competition for legitimacy. That is, a Taliban-influenced mullah could dispense justice locally and the Afghan government could do nothing to compete with him.

On the incarceration front, a lot of Canadian energy was directed at making Sarposa Prison a showpiece, especially its women’s section. Sarposa seemed to be a perfect project as it was a visible structure with people working in it. The progress of the prison was easier to measure in numbers, bricks and mortar than progress in ephemeral things like words, ideas or beliefs.

The most robust aspect of PRT operations remained the CIMIC teams. Building on the previous rotations and their relationships, the CIMIC operators strengthened relationships with the district leaders and their District Development Assemblies. When the Community Development Councils progressively ran into problems in the fall and less and less funding for the District Development Assemblies was available to dole out, CIMIC representatives were able to work at the district level to prop the system up using PRT funding where possible. The PRT and CIMIC pushed the long line of contractors at Camp Nathan Smith out to the districts so they could deal, Afghan to Afghan, with the development assemblies. All the while, CIMIC maintained situational awareness, and fed information back to the PRT and then to TF Kandahar.⁹²



Photo Credit: Author

Operation CAUSEWAY was a major construction project linking the economic centre of Bazaar-e Panjwayi with Route Summit and then to the main trade route, Highway 1. It took many months of negotiation between every possible governance entity before it went into operation. This is the causeway seen from a tank run-up position on Ma'Sum Ghar.

An example of this was Operation CAUSEWAY. The demand to get a bridge across the Arghandab River between Bazaar-e Panjwayi and Pashmul was finally bolstered by the GARRANDAY ZMARAY plan. CIMIC, Specialist Engineer Team and other PRT resources were employed to sort out land use issues, engineering matters, information operations and local buy-in. CAUSEWAY was a laborious process in fall 2007, especially given the complexities of the socio-political situation in Zharey and Panjwayi Districts. Though it took months, the PRT was able to mitigate at least some of the negative effects and hard feelings that came with the project. In many ways, Operation CAUSEWAY was a test case on how to use all of the PRT tools together to handle larger district-level projects in the absence of non-governmental organization and other government assistance.

Operations in Zharey and Panjwayi Districts, October 2007

The main effort in Zharey and Panjwayi Districts remained the emplacement of the police sub-stations, specifically Kolk, which was next in line. At the same time, the Joint District Coordination Centre concept was extended to both districts based on the positive results attained by Recce Squadron in Spin Boldak. With the removal of

Col. Akka and with his replacement with Bismillah Jan in early October, TF Kandahar and the battle group believed that the time for change was now. To establish the conditions, however, LCol Gauthier wanted to put the insurgency back on its heels west of Summit with Operation BEL UNIAD. B Company, with the Leopard tanks in support, inserted dismounted patrols into the Pashmul area. The tanks attracted enemy anti-tank teams and two enemy sub-commanders, all of whom were killed during their attempts to engage the Canadian vehicles. ISTAR reportage indicated BEL UNIAD had a temporary disruptive effect.⁹³ To keep the enemy guessing, a 48-hour long manoeuvre-to-collect operation, TEASE STREBEH, was mounted west of Gundy Ghar, with a higher-level ISTAR collection effort arrayed to support it. TEASE STREBEH defined the enemy presence in the Maywand–western Zharey area for future operations.⁹⁴

The OMLT assisted 3rd Kandak planning Operation AWAL MOSHTEREK, which involved police, army, and civil order police. This operation into Nakhonay would have been a significant operation, not only in size but also in terms of the substantial coordination between the three Afghan organizations. For some reason, the Governor did not give his consent and the operation was shut down.⁹⁵

The Afghan police needed serious propping up. Akka's departure meant that police officers loyal to him walked away from their checkpoints and sub-stations. PSS Haji was under small-arms fire daily and, as October continued, nearly every police sub-station in Zharey had its Canadian P-OMLT engaged either at the sites, on patrols or when SECFOR convoys were resupplying them. Three Canadian P-OMLT personnel were wounded in various bomb attacks.⁹⁶

Throughout October, however, there was notable progress. The fact that the enemy targeted the police and their mentors was an indication that local police patrols or, at the very least, a police presence, interfered with insurgent freedom of movement and ability to influence the population. The system in place, as imperfect as it was, prevented the enemy from building up in large numbers. More sophisticated operations were also conducted. Afghan police working with a Canadian P-OMLT were supported with a Sperwer TUAV, whose crew directed the police into an ambush position to intercept possible insurgents. On the less sophisticated front, checkpoints intercepted individual insurgents, including at least one local commander.⁹⁷

Once the Joint District Coordination Centre in Zharey was up and running, however, the game changed dramatically. Almost overnight, the amount, and eventually the quality, of information on all forms of activity in the district increased. The Afghan police, situated in the police sub-stations and patrolling while carrying their Icom receivers, had greater contact with the population and spread the intelligence collection web at a lower level. So did the Afghan army. Later on, Canadian PSYOPS teams moved in to pass word to

the population that a 911-style phone system was in place—any trouble, call the JDCC. The Joint District Coordination Centres permitted all of this information to be brought to one location where it could be assessed and acted upon. A similar and parallel Canadian process was also in place. The main issue, of course, was what to do with the information and that meant sorting out governance at the district level. In any event, these were positive developments that needed to be built on as this was the first real means that the population had to call their government for help when confronted with insurgent intimidation.⁹⁸ By the end of October, the P-OMLT noted that “We are seeing a drastic improvement on the Afghan police’s performance on the different police sub-stations. It is encouraging for everyone....”⁹⁹

A combined battle group Afghan army–Afghan police operation, RESHTEYA ADAALAT, was conducted on 10–11 October. Like previous emplacement operations, RESHTEYA ADAALAT was to deposit a functional police sub-station near Kolk. LCol Gauthier brought in B and C Companies. 3rd Kandak was only willing to provide a reduced company of infantry, which wound up being led by its mentors because of a leadership dispute within the kandak. RESHTEYA ADAALAT had two prongs thrusting south from Highway 1, both led by IED and mine clearance machinery, in this case the remote-controlled M-113 Improved Landmine Detection System (ILDS) vehicle. The first prong was a feint down Route Chilliwack, led by a dismounted infantry platoon from C Company, followed by the mine clearance and a mounted platoon in LAV III, and then an Afghan platoon plus police. The idea was to distract the enemy and draw them east away from the other prong, led by B Company and backed up with Leopard tanks, that headed down Route Victoria later on. The station was to be set up at the junction of Routes Halifax and Victoria.¹⁰⁰

The movement to the line of departure on the highway went without incident, as well as the C Company insertion. C Company had little contact—five insurgents and an RPG. B Company, on the other hand, hit an IED with the remote-controlled vehicle and was engaged by 30 insurgents with anti-tank weapons. X Batterie and A-10 air support were called in to assist B Company in its movement south. There were two more IED strikes before they reached the police sub-station site. At 2000 hours, two separate insurgent attacks were made against the leaguered troops. 25mm fire from the LAV IIIs drove them off and construction started.¹⁰¹

Coincident to this was an Afghan army operation, LUMARRAY BAADWEN [First Blow]. 1st Company and Weapons Company from 3rd Kandak and its Canadian mentors, plus engineers from 53e Escadron, mounted a surprise series of cordon and search operations in and around Howz-e Madad. The searches turned up electronic components and ammo but no insurgents.¹⁰²

During both operations, the Afghan police in the Zharey sub-stations surged into checkpoints in their areas to intercept any insurgents retreating from or reinforcing the battle. Of six people detained, three were local insurgent commanders from Sablaghay in Zharey District.¹⁰³ The insurgents responded with a flurry of harassing small-arms attacks against FOB Ma'Sum Ghar, Afghan army positions over in Panjwayi as well as indirect fire directed at Patrol Base Sperwan Ghar, plus an IED attack on Route Fosters against an NSE combat logistics patrol. The Leopard tanks took out many of the attackers and drove the rest away, while X Batterie dropped 155mm rounds on insurgent mortar positions who were in the process of bracketing the forward operating base. Approximately seven enemy were killed.¹⁰⁴

The battle group launched into Operation YAZ AWAZ, a route clearance operation where the Expedient Route-Opening Capability (EROC) teams, now operational, gained experience sweeping Route Fosters. In their first sweep, an EROC team in their Husky and Buffalo vehicles discovered and exploited what they termed a “massive” pressure-plate IED near Route Brown.¹⁰⁵

Reports came in that the Afghan police had abandoned PSS Haji and the scramble was on for more police once again. It was time to get the Joint District Coordination Centre up and running in Panjwayi District. Canadian commanders learned that a man named Haji Baran from the Sperwan area was now the district leader. It was up to Maj Robichaud and C Company to re-establish some semblance of order. He assessed that the police were “highly ineffective....[The American PMT] tried to conduct a vehicle checkpoint this morning and a third of their effectives did not show for work. Of the rest, most were so intoxicated on narcotics that it was dangerous for the CF and the operation was terminated.” C Company immediately occupied PSS Haji and pushed out patrols in the area around Sperwan Ghar. A snap operation into Zangabad to disrupt enemy activity was in the planning stages, while C Company requested more ISTAR assets. The PRT was looking toward getting Operation CAUSEWAY underway. Was it now time to get serious about Panjwayi District?¹⁰⁶ The answer was, no.

The Death of Mullah Naqib and Its Effects on Arghandab District

Though BGen Laroche remained focused on redeploying the battle group to southern Shah Wali Kot and leaving security in Zharey and Panjwayi to the Afghan security forces, the death of Mullah Naqib from wounds sustained from the assassination attempt earlier in 2007 deflected the Canadian trajectory in southern Afghanistan.

Naqib's death was nothing short of earth shattering for the Kandahar power structure. It built on already developing tensions between the Alikozai leadership and the Popalzai representatives. On 6 October, General Saqib, the Kandahar provincial chief of police,

arrested his deputy, Col. Mohammad Abdul Hakim, for alleged corruption. The reality was that Saqib resented the fact that Hakim's loyalty was to Naqib first, and not to Saqib. Hakim, an Alikozai, was closely connected to Mullah Naqib. Naqib called an Alikozai shura, who then sent a letter to President Hamid Karzai, Governor Asadullah Khalid and council chairman Ahmad Wali Karzai, stating that their tribe would pull out of the government at all levels if this harassment did not stop.¹⁰⁷

With Naqib's death, one leg of a three-legged stool was cut from under the governance base in Arghandab with subsequent effects on stability. This had an impact on two levels. First, the larger power game between the Naqib-led Alikozai, the Sherzai-led Barakzai and the Popalzai representatives was thrown into confusion. Second, and the more immediate problem, was how the insurgency might exploit a power vacuum in Arghandab District. Naqib's son, Haji Kalimullah Naqibi, received phone calls from Taliban leaders requesting the right to move into and operate from Arghandab. The Canadians in the JPCC, using their sources, learned that the prevailing Afghan attitude was "No son can really replace the father."¹⁰⁸

The Taliban, led by Mullah Nazar, infiltrated two small communities in northern Arghandab on 20 October. Why, exactly, this took place in close proximity to the other inter-tribal problems cannot be determined at this point.¹⁰⁹ ISTAR reportage suggested that 150 Taliban were on the move to join him in an attack on the Arghandab District centre on the east side of the river, a facility that commanded a view of the whole district. As this was an entry point into the hills separating Arghandab from Kandahar City, the district chief of police, Col. Zmaray, worked with Kalimullah to deploy what police they had to protect the district centre and find out what the Nazar band was up to. LCol Chamberlain put the PRT QRF on alert.¹¹⁰

In order to ascertain what was happening in Arghandab District, TF Kandahar directed the PRT to engage the Arghandab power structure (Operation REACH OUT). At the same time, Recce Squadron prepared to conduct a route reconnaissance from the city to Arghandab District and then to the Dahla Dam area (Operation GAUNTLET) ostensibly to recce the future location of an FOB in lower Shah Wali Kot (Operation NORTHERN RECCE). These operations were intended to message the Afghan population as well as the insurgents.¹¹¹

The next day, the PRT sent a CIMIC team and infantry platoon to meet with Col. Zmaray. He warned that the population was concerned and many told him they would leave the district if nothing was done about the situation. The prospect of a mass exodus from Arghandab was now very real. TF Kandahar quietly put together a contingency plan, INITZAAR ZMAREY, in case the enemy moved on Arghandab. Operation GAUNTLET detected no enemy in Arghandab as the recce passed through the district but ISTAR coverage indicated that there was an enemy build up in Shah Wali Kot. If Operation GAUNTLET



Photo Credit: Author

The assassination attempts against the Afghan leadership in Arghandab District in fall 2007 produced increased Canadian interest in this important gateway to Kandahar City. MWO Michel Pelletier, the PRT civil-military cooperation officer assigned to Arghandab, discusses the situation with local notables.

had proceeded further into that district, the enemy planned to ambush Maj Huet's Recce Squadron.¹¹² The manoeuvre-to-collect operation produced, the next day, a large volume of enemy communications clearly indicating that Operation GAUNTLET had, indeed, thrown off the enemy's timetable.¹¹³

The military dimension of the problem came out in a meeting between the PRT and Naqib's brother-in-law and second-in-command, Khan Mohammad. Khan Mohammad, who had been an anti-Soviet Mujahideen leader and a Corps commander, reminded everybody that Arghandab was the gateway to Kandahar, and he proposed deploying Afghan security forces, checkpoints and an Afghan QRF to prevent the enemy from even getting into the district, let alone near the district centre. He thought ISAF forces, with their superior night equipment, should handle night patrols in conjunction with Arghandab police. Politically, the Alikozai tribe was still united against the Taliban and he canvassed support from elders who formerly supported the Taliban. The district police chief, Col. Zmaray, was reliable and in his view "Arghandab would surely have fallen if he was not there to defend the district." Indeed, others in the power structure kept trying to remove Col. Zmaray because he was sound and Naqib had blocked those attempts.¹¹⁴ Khan Mohammad believed that the Arghandab crisis was a manageable problem and nobody favoured a MEDUSA-style operation in the district.

The INITZAAR ZMAREY contingency plan was put into effect. If the insurgents were observed to be massing outside of Arghandab, TF 32 plus UAVs and air power would disrupt them before they moved out of Shah Wali Kot or Khakrez. If the enemy infiltrated the district in small groups, then the Canadian and Afghan security forces would respond. The main trigger point would be any enemy move on the district centre.¹¹⁵ The Canadians at the JPCC reported on 23 October that “it is kind of like waiting for the other shoe to drop. There have been many reports of Taliban movements but to date there has been little activity of consequence.”¹¹⁶

At the same time, BGen Laroche issued his planning guidance for Operation SORR ZMARAY [Cold Lion]. He wanted a whole-of-government plan to refocus Canadian efforts in Kandahar Province from Zharey and Panjwayi to Arghandab and lower Shah Wali Kot Districts. Given the situation in Arghandab, Laroche reasoned, the time was ripe. Broadly put, the guidance for SORR ZMARAY established objectives based on all three lines of operation. Security objectives included the screening and disruption of enemy movements in the northern districts; forestall insurgent influence on the Alikozai tribe; coordinate with and monitor the activities of the TF 32; and establish a Joint District Coordination Centre. In the Governance line, he wanted to “define White SA”; maintain connectivity with tribal power brokers; and “monitor the vacuum gap over the leadership in the area created by Mullah Naqib’s death.” As for Development, the district development assemblies and the community development councils were to be supported, and the operation was to “reinforce the Arghandab River project as a potential regional economic centre of gravity.” That is, there should be a synergy of Canadian efforts in and around Dahla Dam.¹¹⁷

Ideally, Laroche wanted Operation SORR ZMARAY to “become TF Kandahar’s main effort in January 2008 once Operation GARRANDAY ZMARAY becomes secondary.” The guidance was formulated in ADZ terminology in that SORR ZMARAY was, in that context, an expansion of the Kandahar ADZ to the north. Thinking ahead to February 2008, Laroche wanted tactical infrastructure in place to move the 3 R22eR Battle Group to a forward operating base that would be called Frontenac and then have the incoming 2 PPCLI Battle Group conduct a relief in place in the lower Shah Wali Kot valley. By then, the Afghans would have taken control of Zharey and Panjwayi Districts.¹¹⁸ The enemy, however, were not interested in complying with Canadian timelines and, arguably, neither were the Afghans.

Operation INITZAAR ZMAREY: Taking Back Arghandab District, 31 October–2 November 2007¹¹⁹

There was some debate as to the exact motives underlying the Taliban decision to move on Arghandab. The “limited” view was that a Taliban regional commander wanted to seize and remove the contents of Mullah Naqib’s three weapons depots, so he mounted the operation on his own. The “operational” view was that the insurgent leadership in Quetta wanted to exploit the power vacuum in order to gain a foothold in Arghandab, which would ultimately be part of their larger plan for the interdiction and seizure of Kandahar City. It is possible that both objectives coexisted.¹²⁰

The insurgent infiltration was preceded with a cell phone intimidation campaign directed at the district power brokers. This proved ineffective, as District Chief of Police Zmaray taunted the insurgents back using the same means. On 28 October, however, the PRT received reports that the enemy were in Chalgoa village in the north and that the population was fleeing the area. ISTAR reportage indicted that a Taliban team had also taken over Mullah Naqib’s family compound. Then a small-arms fight against an Arghandab police checkpoint at Jelawur started up. All of this activity had unintended effects, as measured by Karen Foss, a foreign affairs member at the PRT. Since 2003, the cell phone network in the province had dramatically expanded and cheap cell phones were plentiful. Word spread that the Taliban were moving in strength into Arghandab and people in Kandahar started departing the city. At this point, the exact number of insurgents in the district was not known but later estimated to be between 150 and 200. The idea that that number of insurgents could panic a city of nearly a million people was almost incomprehensible to many but was taken seriously by Governor Asadullah Khalid and BGen Laroche.

The attack came at a bad time. Hakim Jan, the Afghan National Auxiliary Police (that is, the Alikozai militia for the district) was away in Kabul, along with Mullah Naqib’s military deputy, Khan Mohammad. They called up the militia using their cell phones from Kabul. TF Kandahar was able to get a pair of Royal Air Force GR-7 Harriers to provide an aerial presence over the district. It is possible that these moves deterred the insurgents from immediately moving on the district centre. This bought time for INITZAAR ZMAREY to commence.

Early in the morning on 29 October, the district elders arrived at TF Kandahar and formally asked BGen Laroche to intervene. He returned with them to the district centre with a small planning staff from TF Kandahar. Laroche contacted LCol Gauthier and ordered him to begin battle procedure. Meanwhile, LCol Chamberlain deployed a LAV III platoon from the PRT to the district centre, and Maj Huet sent a Coyote troop with them. Another Coyote troop deployed to the critical bridge crossroads area where Highway 1 met Route Red Dog, the main route into Arghandab District. The Joint District Coordination Centre liaised with General Saqib, the provincial chief of police. He was able to put together



Photo Credit: DND AR2008-K031-32

Operation INITZAAR ZMAREY, conducted from 31 October to 2 November, was a major operation to retake Arghandab District after the death of Mullah Naqib. This is the view from the Arghandab District centre, and the adjacent shrine and gardens taken in 2008, facing west. In 2007, the causeway did not yet exist. Khakrez District is the mountainous area behind the district “green belt.”

a 120-man force bolstered with LTC Tom Ritz’s Police Mentoring Team. They also moved out to screen the district centre. A company from 2nd Kandak arrived later on to assist them. TF Kandahar also communicated with the U.S. SOTF, TF 32. They agreed to move ODAs and their Afghans to the northern edge of the district, south of Dahla Dam.

The general plan was to contain the insurgents in the district and then send a force in to clear it systematically. The main issues for LCol Gauthier’s battle group were how to hold down Zharey and Panjwayi and clear Arghandab at the same time. Arghandab was complex terrain. It was a green belt like Zharey, with irregular compound complexes, irrigation ditches and fields. Arghandab also boasted swaths of orchards, which provided overhead cover from surveillance systems. The river split the district in half, with the district centre overlooking the whole valley. Fortunately, that piece of vital ground was under friendly control.

After the attacks against Ma’Sum Ghar on 11 October, the situation in Zharey was quiet. On 26 October, the insurgents mounted a coordinated attack against PSSs Lakokhel and Pulchakan, and an Afghan police patrol. Over in Panjwayi, an American police mentor

team was ambushed, with one American killed and two wounded. C Company then uncovered IEDs near PSS Haji. Exploitation by the counter-IED team uncovered a new type of IED consisting of a yellow plastic 20-litre jerry can loaded with some new type of explosive using an anti-personnel mine as a trigger.¹²¹

On 29 October, nine fuel tank trucks heading west on Highway 1 were ambushed. The 2nd Kandak platoon and the OMLT stationed at Howz-e Madad responded and wound up in a gunfight with 20 insurgents. The enemy withdrew south under small-arms and 155mm artillery fire.¹²² These events all appeared to be unrelated to what was happening in Arghandab but the possibility existed that, given its timing, the attack on Highway 1 was designed to pin down coalition resources and keep them in Zharey. The P-OMLTs and their police counterparts seemed to be in contact with enemy forces in one way or another on a daily basis.

With these factors in mind, LCol Gauthier decided to re-deploy Maj Abboud's B Company and part of C Squadron for INITZAAR ZMAREY, while keeping Maj Robichaud's C Company in place. Lt.-Col. Sherin Shah met with LCol Gauthier in a hasty meeting at Patrol Base Wilson, while B Company formed up. 2nd Kandak and its OMLTs were going in as well. LCol Gauthier had 52e Escadron provide an engineer troop mounted in LAV III: they deployed with 2nd Kandak to provide fire support. X Batterie relocated a pair of guns to a forward position so they could cover Arghandab District. 2nd Kandak and B Company formed a "piston" that would move southwest to northeast through the district. The "cylinder" consisted of coalition and Afghan forces arrayed on the periphery of the district: C Squadron Leopards and Recce Squadron Coyotes covered the left flank, while TF 32 covered the north. The Afghan police and their mentoring teams plus the PRT infantry platoon handled the right flank on the southern side of the river near the district centre. ISTAR reportage indicated three Taliban commanders and 150-200 insurgents still present. They were trying to get other insurgent commanders to reinforce but were not making any headway with their erstwhile allies. Word also came out that the Taliban commanders were holding shuras in some of the communities. It was time to get in and remove the infection before it took hold and spread. (See Figure 2-5.)

At 0200 hours 30 October, 2nd Kandak, the OMLT and the engineers passed through the Recce Squadron Coyotes and massed on Route Red Dog. Maj. Abboud took B Company through Kandahar City, up into the hills, south past the district centre and into the Arghandab riverbed to a ford point identified by the PRT and held by the police. Operating on two axes, the idea was to have 2nd Kandak and its support clear the left, with C Squadron Leopards and Recce Squadron Coyotes moving in parallel on the bare, low hills to the west providing flank security and to guard the operation from any possible interference

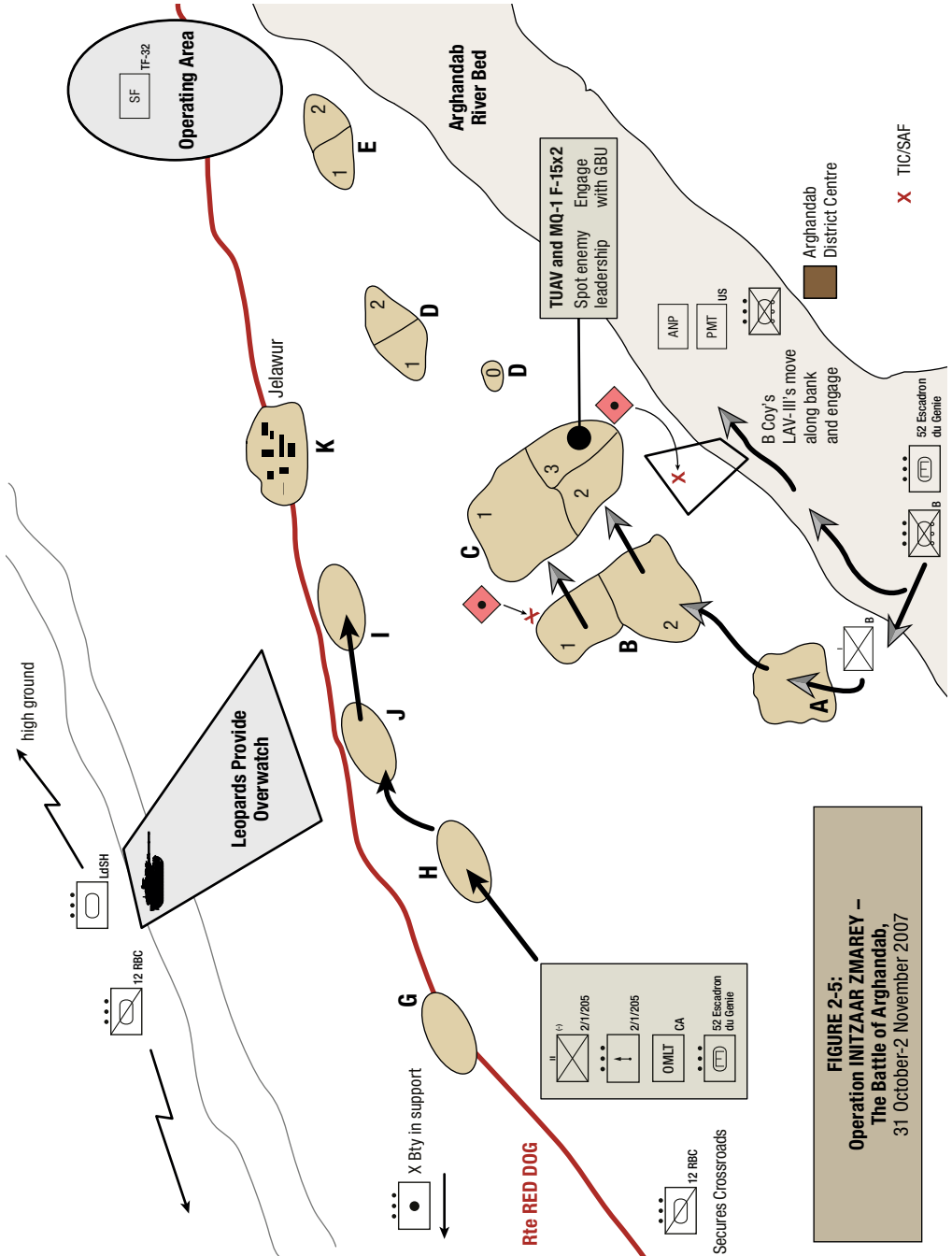


FIGURE 2-5:
Operation INITZAAR ZMAREY –
The Battle of Arghandab,
31 October-2 November 2007

Figure 2-5: Operation INITZAAR ZMAREY – The Battle of Arghandab, 31 October-2 November 2007

from the enemy in Khakrez District. These forces stepped off at 0530 hours and started clearing compounds in Objective H. B Company, at the same time, crossed the river and dismounted. The “Zulu” LAV IIIs moved along the riverbank, covering the infantry platoons as they moved into the compounds at Objective A and cleared them. B Company immediately encountered civilians fleeing from the Taliban who were located in the compounds in Objective C: one Arghandabi even explained to B Company exactly where the enemy were. Once Objective A was cleared, around 1100 hours, B Company moved on to Objective B, where they surprised a Taliban insurgent in an observation post. A firefight erupted as B Company shook out into Objectives B1 and B2 and engaged the enemy in Objective C with machine gun fire. The Taliban responded with PKM machine guns and RPGs. The LAV IIIs in the riverbed were able to manoeuvre and bring 25mm fire down onto C2 and C3, killing a section of enemy that was trying to flank the Canadian positions in B2. This firefight lasted two hours. Eventually, M-777 fire rained 155mm rounds down on the enemy positions. Another enemy section tried to flank B1 but was caught in the open and killed to a man.

The fact that the enemy were staying in place in Objective C and fighting was intriguing. As a result, the battle staff at the Provincial Operations Centre deployed a Sperwer TUAV over Objective C to see what was going on. Observer controllers spotted what looked like an enemy group, with armed fighters clustered around a leader who was giving orders. Two U.S. Air Force F-15 Eagles were orbiting the district, awaiting targets. The Canadian team at the battle group Tactical Operations Centre vectored one of these planes onto the target. A 500-pound GBU bomb hit the target dead centre killing 15 insurgents including the enemy commander.

B Company continued its fight, while the Afghans moved up to Objective J, where they encountered a high volume of enemy fire. One of the Afghan platoon leaders was killed, which stalled the advance and bogged it down in a firefight. 2nd Kandak brought up its mortars and engaged in a duel with Taliban RPG teams. A Taliban anti-tank team was spotted by a Canadian artillery officer and was taken out by 155mm fire.

By late afternoon, LCol Gauthier was concerned that a combination of the enemy’s tactical proficiency, coupled with the gap between his two main axes, might lead to problems, so he ordered a halt. Lt.-Col. Sherin Shah also wanted to bring in his other two infantry companies. Water was in short supply and there were several Canadians from B Company with twisted knees and damaged ankles who needed assistance.

CHAPTER TWO



Photo Credit: DND IS2007-0587



Photo Credit: DND IS2007-0588

Canadian troops from 3 R22eR Battle Group engage the enemy during Operation INITZAAR ZMAREY in Arghandab District in early November 2007.



Photo Credit: DND AR2007-Z049-02

In addition to the Canadian battle group, Operation INITZAAR ZMAREY involved the Canadian OMLT and elements of 2nd Kandak, led by Lt.-Col. Sherin Shah. The Afghans lacked armoured vehicles and relied on Ford Ranger trucks.

ISTAR coverage established that the enemy leadership was divided and pleading for reinforcement from Zharey and even Helmand Province. The Taliban force had at least 50 dead, and more wounded. The enemy leaders then called back to Pakistan for help but none was forthcoming.

On the morning of 31 October, Maj. Abboud moved all of his forces into Objective C1 to force the enemy to withdraw southeast into the LAV III platoon's 25mm cannons. 2nd Kandak and the OMLT quickly occupied Objective J. There was no resistance. The Sperwer operators saw two groups of Taliban exfiltrating north to Jelawur and then "bombshelling," that is, dispersing individually, after that. Another Taliban group pulling north from Objective D was engaged with 155mm fire from X Batterie, killing seven.

The Afghans and the tanks moved onto Objective I. AH-64 Apaches spotted another enemy group but because of the built-up area in Objective I, it was difficult to engage them. Once in the open south of Jelawur, however, the attack helicopters made short work of this force.

B Company methodically cleared Objective C. This took all day but produced no contact. However, they did discover an IED belt between C and the river where there was a cut in the bank. 52e Escadron cleared this out. After another night, the coalition and Afghan forces pushed out on 1 November, but by this time the enemy was gone.

ISTAR reportage noted that the enemy survivors set a rendezvous point in Jelawur, and then evacuated to Chalgoa to the north after burying their weapons. As the Afghan police flowed into Arghandab District behind the coalition forces, they captured a Pakistani jihadist equipped with a suicide vest. After discussions with locals, the Afghan police also learned that the Taliban leader killed in the air strike was a Pakistani named Commander Ahmadullah. His body had been exfiltrated by the retreating Taliban, taken to Chaman and buried. The Taliban fighters even told Arghandabis that they were shocked by how quickly the Canadians reacted and by how many fighters they lost in such a short time. They thought they would have time to reinforce their position and get help from elsewhere.¹²³

The battle group and the Afghans from 2nd Kandak were treated to what amounted to a victory parade as they redeployed through Kandahar City. There is little doubt that Operation INITZAAR ZMAREY was a victory not only for Canadians but for the Afghans as well. Arghandab was not turned into another Zharey District and there was minimal collateral damage, if any. The psychological threat to the city and its inhabitants was withdrawn and it was clear that the bulk of the population in the district still supported the government and coalition. There was some payback, however, as a Taliban IED team infiltrated the district and disabled one of C Squadron's Leopard 2s on 4 November as the battle group prepared to shepherd an Operation GAUNTLET resupply convoy through Arghandab District and up the Tarinkot Road.

Consolidating After Arghandab: Problems with the Police

Arghandab was cleared. Now it had to be held. There was broad agreement between the Canadians and Afghans brokered through the JPCC with General Saqib by which Afghan police would come in behind the Afghan army and Canadian army to secure the cleared areas and restore governance. There was no real plan, however, so the Afghan police responded in an ad hoc fashion. RCMP officers from the PRT confirmed that the pre-op checkpoints were manned and still in place and the PRT was prepared to release stores for more of them, as required.¹²⁴ Saqib, however, reminded everyone that the security of Arghandab was reliant upon the security situation in Shah Wali Kot, where he wanted more police and resources. In his view, it was “important for the coalition to maintain a strong presence in Arghandab or we would be back in the same situation again.”¹²⁵ There were, of course, the usual communications and manning issues. A company from 2nd Kandak allocated to assist with the holding operations moved into the district around 3 November and occupied checkpoints on the Arghandab–Shah Wali Kot boundary. In an unexpected move, they coordinated at the local level with the Arghandab police, who in turn established a series of traffic checkpoints on the main highway throughout Arghandab.¹²⁶

Two weeks later, reports flowed in that the Afghan army was abandoning its positions in Arghandab, which caused some angst at TF Kandahar and the JPCC. The reality was that this infantry company was withdrawn because of fighting in Zharey on Highway 1 (see below) and its removal was not well coordinated with the police, who were annoyed as they scrambled to fill the void. The police leadership in Arghandab called up 50 officers from Hakim Jan's Afghan National Auxiliary Police, the semi-approved Arghandab pseudo-militia. Personnel from the rogue Standby Police Unit 005, apparently under the control of Governor Asadullah Khalid, were also brought in.¹²⁷ A Canadian patrol from Recce Squadron moved to the area to provide presence and support but hit a remote-controlled IED, disabling a Coyote. There were no casualties.¹²⁸

It took some time for the Canadians to grasp what was going on but when violence erupted within the police forces in Kandahar City on 20 November, ISTAR assets determined that the nature of these inter-Afghan problems were somehow related to Arghandab. Afghan National Police headquarters in Kandahar was shot at, then three police checkpoints came under sustained fire. The staff of the JPCC "stood to" as small arms fire was exchanged within 300 metres from their facility. Nobody was talking to the Canadian representatives but the PRT and the coordination centre heard that Naqib's son, Kalimullah, was in Kabul for an emergency meeting with President Karzai. This meeting, apparently, was related to "tribal" issues.¹²⁹



Photo Credit: Author

Initiated under the rubric of Operation PORTCULLIS, most of the police sub-stations in Kandahar City were up and operating by summer and fall 2007. The rudimentary nature of the average police sub-station is evident here.



Photo Credit: DND/ISX2009-0039

There was a heavier emphasis on supporting the Afghan National Police in late 2007. Task Force Kandahar reorganized its Military Police personnel into Policing Operational Mentor and Liaison Teams (P-OMLT). Rather than “beat cop” policing, the Afghans were first taught basic combat survival skills like shooting.

Those issues connected to a slate of problems that emerged in early October. First, the anointing of Kalimullah as the Alikozai tribal leader without a formal Alikozai shura caused a split within the tribe, although on the surface there appeared to be a consensus that the Alikozais agreed to the move.¹³⁰ Second, with Naqib dead, no one was around to protect Col. Hakim, the deputy chief of police, from General Saqib and the Governor. Col. Hakim was fired on 20 November, which probably triggered the intramural police attacks. Alikozai auxiliary police, led by Hakim Jan, most likely conducted these. According to observers, the violent elements “used good fire discipline” unlike the insurgents or the Afghan police.¹³¹ The Governor tried to convince the Canadians that it was all Hakim Jan’s doing, that he was in league with the Taliban, who allegedly contacted him prior to the Arghandab operation. Hakim Jan may have been a mystic and was weird by Afghan standards, but there was really little question about his negative views vis-à-vis the Taliban, or his views of Asadullah Khalid for that matter.¹³²

What did all of this mean for the Canadians and TF Kandahar? The Alikozai in Arghandab were increasingly disaffected with the Popalzai power brokers and their representatives in Kandahar Province. The main Alikozai leader was dead and their primary representative to the security apparatus was removed. No matter how many police or army personnel were deployed into Arghandab to hold it, a serious surge of discontent was building in the district, which was directly attributable to the vagaries of Kandahari power politics. As for the provincially-controlled police, that already fragile institution was now threatened from within by the division generated by General Saqib's clumsy attempts to remove somebody else's tribal rival. Word spread and police at Patrol Base Wilson who were from the Alikozai tribe deserted, leaving a vacuum in the post-Col. Akka Zharey District. Somebody had it in for the Alikozai in addition to the Taliban and those entities were progressively undermining the coalition effort in Kandahar.

Canadian views tended to be shaped by the Governor. Asadullah Khalid presented a negative case for the three top Alikozai contenders in favour of the young and impressionable (and possibly malleable) Kalimullah. Hakim Jan, Khalid maintained, was Taliban connected. Khan Mohammad, Naqib's security deputy, was "not respected" and had a "poor reputation." As for Haji Agha Lalai Dastegiri, he was "not trustworthy" and "came from the wrong branch of the tribe."¹³³ None of this was necessarily accurate, but without the appropriate framework to place it in, the Canadians at TF Kandahar had no means to counter the message with other data and the ASIC was not structured to collect it. The PRT, and to some extent the JPCC, were key mechanisms in this regard, but more focused attention was needed to protect Canadian interests.¹³⁴

The larger questions were these: how did this seriously deteriorating situation escape observation by those responsible for the governance portfolio in Kandahar, and second, how did it escape the observation of those responsible for the governance portfolio in Kabul? Given the importance of Arghandab District to the effort in Kandahar, the combined resources of both should have been applied to identify what was happening and assist with solidifying the situation as soon as possible. They were not, and the path to further tragedy in Arghandab was set. Whatever was done, it was not enough. Clearly, there was some hold, but no build.

The convergence of the Arghandab situation with the planned Operation SORR ZMARAY occurred in November. The Canadians held a district shura with the Arghandab and Shah Wali Kot elders on 9 November to solicit their views prior to a Canadian whole-of-government coordination meeting on the future direction of the mission. What fell out of these meetings was that the Arghandab population did not want coalition forces tactical infrastructure in the district, and they did not want "outsider" Afghan police

sub-stations. But if they had their own militia and police, they would welcome Canadian CIVPOL and some mentoring. The Shah Wali Kot leadership, however, wanted a coalition and police presence with infrastructure. As a result, “All civilian and military members of the PRT agree with the Afghan district leaders that coalition force operations and traffic must be kept to a minimum in Arghandab.”¹³⁵ A GARRANDAY ZMARAY-like plan, they determined, was not feasible for Arghandab and that it was better to fight the Taliban in Shah Wali Kot than in Arghandab given the differing population densities and terrain.¹³⁶

Reconnaissance conducted in November identified the location of a future forward operating base, dubbed “Frontenac,” near the Dahla Dam. The timeline saw work starting on its construction by 15 December.¹³⁷ The TF Kandahar planners cautioned, however, that any movement north was conditional on the situation in Zharey and Panjwayi. Indeed, USAID was about to suspend funding in those districts because of the security situation.¹³⁸

The Situation on Highway 1, November 2007

Keeping Highway 1 open continued to be a priority for Regional Command (South) and TF Kandahar. The combination of P-OMLT and police activities coupled with the new Joint District Coordination Centre had an effect, especially in the Kolk area where there was a steady flow of arrests. CIMIC worked with the P-OMLT to distribute school supplies during patrols. A district-level QRF was also established and consisted of Afghan police, Canadian P-OMLT and U.S. Police Mentoring Teams, led by the Zharey chief of police. Information came into the Joint District Coordination Centre that there was an ambush in progress in Asheque involving a Canadian platoon. An RG-31 was damaged, but the ambush team, including the 82mm recoilless rifle team, was taken out.¹³⁹

The enemy’s response to coalition activities both in Zharey and in Arghandab was to apply pressure to the Howz-e Madad strong point and the highway. The strong point itself came under daily contact in late October and well into November. The Afghan company and the Canadian OMLT deployed on numerous occasions in response to apparent enemy activity only to find themselves lured into killing zones and ambushed by a manoeuvring insurgent element. This was new. When the Canadians and Afghans figured out what the game was, they turned the tables and brought X Batterie to bear on the likely routes and locations of the enemy manoeuvre elements, destroying them with 155mm fire. Now it was the Canadians and Afghans doing the luring. During one of the actions, a local Taliban commander, Nazar Gul, was critically wounded and evacuated to Pakistan. The insurgent leadership, alarmed at the backlash, brought in Taliban commanders Sadiq Agha and Haji Lala into the Sangsar region to up the ante, while the district commander, Jabar Agha, retreated to Quetta for orders.¹⁴⁰

While the Minister of National Defence was visiting, BGen Guy Laroche's tactical headquarters was ambushed east of Patrol Base Wilson with a volley of RPGs and small arms fire. The IED that was supposed to trigger the ambush missed and hit a jingle truck but an RPG round found a LAV III, disabling it. The convoy pushed to Patrol Base Wilson. Fortunately, BGen Laroche and the Minister were not in the convoy at the time as he was at the patrol base awaiting the 99 TAC vehicle. It was unclear if this complex ambush had foreknowledge of the Minister of National Defence visit but it was too close for comfort.¹⁴¹ Kolk continued to be a thorn in the enemy's side so they decided to try and block the access routes with IEDs. The EROC clearance patrol was brought in with its specialist Husky and Buffalo vehicles to clear Route Victoria. It took two hours to move nearly 2 kilometres because of the high IED density. As the engineers leaguered, the insurgents engaged them. The engineers fought back with their LAV IIIs, killing five enemy. Dismounted patrols cleared the area.¹⁴² Over at PSS Lakokhel, the P-OMLT, with its 84mm Carl Gustav launcher, became proficient against insurgents attempting to interfere with police activities.¹⁴³

On 14 November, the insurgents mounted a complex ambush in three separate locations against a Compass Logistics convoy on Highway 1. Three groups of five insurgents hit this convoy, producing six dead security personnel and a tanker truck in flames. 1st Company from 1st Kandak were able to engage two of the ambush positions in enfilade from the Howz-e Madad strong point, while the Canadian mentors called in artillery support consisting of Afghan 82mm mortars and Canadian M-777 guns. The ambushing forces died in place.¹⁴⁴

LCol Gauthier decided to launch Operation TASHWISH MEKAWA on 16 November. TASHWISH MEKAWA's specific objective was, like previous operations, to clear, build and man a police sub-station west of Sangsar at the junction of Routes Ottawa and Banff. The overall objective, as we will recall, was to push the insurgent ambush teams south and away from Highway 1, and isolate Nahlgam. This operation was a Canadian-Afghan endeavour. The OMLT in Howz-e Madad was the feint: they stepped off first and moved south to establish a vehicle checkpoint on Route Langley. At the same time, Maj. Abboud deployed two of his platoons by vehicle to PSS Lakokhel, where they were joined by part of an Afghan company from 1st Kandak. Recce Platoon and snipers joined them. Moving in dismounted at night, B Company approached Objective RAFTMAN from the west and south. Sperwer TUAVs kept an eye east of the objectives, while X Batterie's M-777s prepared to take out enemy forces that moved in to reinforce or attack.¹⁴⁵

As B Company and the Afghan troops moved east, they apprehended a pair of insurgents. In the fighting that followed, B Company overran the objective area, while the TUAV and artillery combination took out insurgent reinforcements and then retreating insurgents as they headed east. An F-15 and a MQ-1 with Hellfire joined in the fight. Initial estimates were that 15 enemy were killed on 17 November. However, battle damage assessments on

the ground, information collected by the police in the surrounding police sub-stations and local information called in to the Joint District Coordination Centre (and reported back to TF Kandahar by the P-OMLT teams) indicated that around 30 enemy were killed in TASHWISH MEKAWA, while a Taliban commander was seriously wounded and eight other insurgents captured. Interestingly, the police intercepted low-level chatter at PSS Haji while the operation was in progress and learned that the enemy “have engaged the services of ‘engineer’ to make a ‘new kind’ of IED that would be used ‘soon.’”¹⁴⁶

TASHWISH MEKAWA Phase IV had the M-113 ILDS mine clearance unmanned ground vehicle and a troop of C Squadron’s Leopards escort an Afghan company from 2nd Kandak and engineers from 53e Escadron down Route Banff to the objective area, and construct a police sub-station. This was completed around 24 November. Multiple contacts occurred with enemy forces as they sought to define how the new police sub-station interfered with their activities: there were three TICs with B Company in one day (20 November). One of the first patrols from this location uncovered a significant weapons cache, the destruction of which greatly agitated the local insurgents.¹⁴⁷

The ongoing ambushes on Highway 1 led to Operation RING ROAD SURGE late in November. The tanks supported the Afghan army and OMLT in a series of patrols and sweeps. Ultimately, however, Canadian analysis concluded that “The occurrence of contacts in the past several days indicates that the police sub-station is well positioned and is disrupting insurgent activities in the area; they are engaging the police sub-station rather than the convoys on [Highway 1] which is preferable.”¹⁴⁸

Supporting TF Kandahar Roto 4

Roto 4’s NSE was commanded by LCol Nick Eldaoud: “I was a lucky guy. I inherited Chuck Mathé’s structure. He had a hard time with all of the changes to the TO and Es, so I had enough resources to work with.” This proved fortuitous. There had been more and more centralization of the combat service support in 2006–2007 but now, with the Laroche headquarters shift to decentralized tactical infrastructure, the NSE had to, ironically, figure out how to decentralize to meet the requirements of supporting the battle group, OMLT, P-OMLT, and PRT.¹⁴⁹ For the most part, the distributed logistics system in the forward operating bases in Panjwayi and Zharey was retained.

One issue LCol Eldaoud identified was an “unhealthy psychological separation” between the Replenishment Company and Force Protection Company: there was “the CLP” and “force protection.” Combat logistics patrols tended to be ad hoc and he believed that melding Force Protection and truckers/suppliers was an important step toward team building. He spearheaded a move where Canadian force protection soldiers were removed from handling gate guard duties for the airfield. With the increased numbers of Bulgarian

and Hungarian troops at KAF eager to do this job, it was a relatively easy shift. In the end, “force protection” and “the CLP” became just “the CLP.” They were a combat team, not necessarily in a doctrinal sense but in a psychological one. Eldaoud continued with the policy of ensuring that everybody in the NSE served as co-drivers on CLPs, including cooks. There was push-back in some quarters, but in the end, this increased the operational tempo of the NSE by reducing driver fatigue. Eldaoud and his RSM, like their Military Police counterparts, had to apply leadership to overcome attitudinal inertia associated with Canadian garrison life with some personnel.¹⁵⁰

This NSE also built on the idea that every soldier was an intelligence collector. The combat logistics patrols travelled significant distances and repeatedly through vital points. Every vehicle was provided with digital cameras, while an NSE technician tried to figure out how to mount one on an RG-31 remote weapons system turret. The combat logistics patrols were able to add to the “brown SA” database on road conditions, likely IED positions, ambush sites, and so on. At the NSE, the intelligence cell grew to process and disseminate this information, which relieved the ASIC of this specialized task.¹⁵¹

LCol Eldaoud and his men were seriously concerned with the vulnerability of the NSE vehicle fleet, especially in the wake of the large IED attacks during their tour. The Heavy Logistics Vehicle–Wheeled (HLVW) trucks with expedient up-armouring were still in use at this time. On one of the first combat logistics patrols of the tour, a HLVW column was hit with an IED-initiated ambush. The convoy pushed through the “X” and reconstituted. Bullets were found to have penetrated the cab’s roof, thus bypassing the armour. Eldaoud called Ottawa and said that this was it: no more use of the HLVW in Afghanistan. The 15-tonne Western Star trucks had integral armour, so these took over but there were not as many of them as the others, which reduced the resupply tempo down for a time. The lack of an armoured fuel truck led to the expedient method of carrying the vehicle on the back of a low-bed trailer with the fuel pod as far away from the cab of the rig as possible.¹⁵²

The result of this situation was the accelerated acquisition of armoured heavy support vehicle systems, the Mercedes-Benz Actros logistics truck, but they would not be available until the next rotation.¹⁵³ As for other vehicles, the LUVWs that had thus far served Canadian forces in Afghanistan since 2004, were now grounded. Their frames were cracking under the strain of the add-on armour and continual use.¹⁵⁴

The NSE re-examined its tactics and procedures. Existing doctrine was to run the combat logistics patrols at night: the roads were clear, and darkness served as cover. Why not move during the day instead? Intelligence indicated that the enemy were increasingly concerned about the negative public relations effect of killing civilians as collateral damage in attacks on Canadian patrols: the Canadian information operations campaign highlighted

the Taliban's' callousness in this regard as far back as 2006. The NSE exploited this situation after debating the ethics of it. There was concern that the NSE might be accused of using the population as shields against Taliban IED attacks in Kandahar City, but the reality was that the choice to attack a Canadian convoy was the insurgent's and the onus was on them. No more ambushes and attacks took place during the day along Highway 4, between KAF and the city itself.¹⁵⁵

Operations in Panjwayi District, November 2007

The situation in Panjwayi District was dominated by problems surrounding PSS Haji and Route Fosters. A platoon from Maj Robichaud's C Company was supposed to reinforce the Howz-e Madad strong point in preparation for Operation TASHWISH MEKAWA and then assist with security during the construction phase. Unfortunately, a LAV III, the last in a six-vehicle convoy, struck an IED on Route Fosters southwest of Ma'Sum Ghar, killing Cpl Raymond Beauchamp from 5 Field Ambulance and Pte Michel Levesque from 3 R22eR. An Afghan interpreter was also killed and everybody else in the vehicle shocked or wounded. Measures by the driver to extricate dead and wounded personnel had to stop as the flames reached the ammunition and the vehicle started to cook off.¹⁵⁶ The C Company commander reported that "Fosters is still an IED lane."¹⁵⁷

A combination of C Company and P-OMLT held PSS Haji since its construction in October, awaiting Afghan police to arrive and relieve them. There were two reasons why this relief did not take place. First, police in outlying sub-stations were not getting paid. When the district chief of police held a pay parade, it was in Ma'Sum Ghar. Consequently, the police threatened to abandon the police sub-stations along Route Fosters. When the Canadians tried to get the Afghan army to man PSS Haji, they ran into even larger problems. The kandak commanders were concerned that their poor logistics system would not be able to handle the extended line of strong points and positions along Route Fosters to Mushan. And, given the heightened IED threat on Fosters, that appeared reasonable. Moving 1st Company and the OMLT from 3rd Kandak to Patrol Base Sperwan Ghar was delayed by IEDs.¹⁵⁸ As of 23 November, the P-OMLT reported that "there are still no Afghan police in Haji, we are still awaiting developments on this issue but have limited influence over the Panjwayi [chief of police]. The P-OMLT [Commander] has concerns about the loss of freedom of movement on Route Fosters when the battle group assets depart from PSS HAJI."¹⁵⁹

C Company led Operation COUNTER IED in an effort to "neutralize the IED threat along Route Fosters" on 25 November. The EROC clearance vehicles passed down the road from Ma'Sum Ghar, to PSS Haji and points west. A number of temporary observation posts

were established and a night ambush position put in. There was no activity until 27 November, when a LAV III from C Company hit an IED north of Zangabad Ghar wounding three Canadians. "From now on, any movement between police sub-station Haji and Patrol Base Sperwan Ghar will be done using the EROC suite or a [Route Clearance Package]," Maj Robichaud declared. Operation COUNTER IED wound down the next day.¹⁶⁰

The enemy clearly realized something was amiss and upped the pressure on PSS Haji. The position was subjected to a deadly mortar attack on 22 November, wounding six Canadians and an Afghan interpreter. C Company scraped together five personnel and sent them in to replace the wounded. Two days later, however, PSS Haji was hit with a coordinated ground attack from three positions. The Canadian defenders of a reduced C Company platoon and a pair of P-OMLT mentors drove off the assault and killed eight insurgents.¹⁶¹ Forty-eight hours later, the process repeated itself with another complex enemy attack that was beat back by C Company and the P-OMLT. A Sperwer TUAV followed the retreating enemy, who were then engaged with artillery and air support. There were indications that "the local Taliban commander was very upset with the result of the attack and that he was planning for another one....The fact that the Taliban is willing to sacrifice so many men in order to attack PSS Haji is a source of interest."¹⁶²

Eventually, slight progress was made on getting more Afghan security forces for the area, but it was an arduous affair. 1st Company from 3rd Kandak was going to deploy a 20-man element at the junction of Fosters and Brown, with 40 more at Patrol Base Sperwan Ghar. A 20-man Afghan foot patrol would be made from Sperwan Ghar to PSS Haji every two days. If Canadian engineers built the facilities, 20 more Afghan National Army troops were to man two positions on Fosters on a permanent basis.¹⁶³

Contact with the Afghans led to more insight into the policing problems that were affecting the area. First, there was the Alikozai power feud that served as a backdrop to the whole situation. Second, Bismillah Jan, the chief of police over in Zharey, was not getting paid and "General Saqib does not support him and does not care much about his fate."¹⁶⁴ Third, there were problems between Panjawayi District leader Haji Baran and the Panjwayi chief of police: Baran wanted unqualified friends of his in Bazaar-e Panjwayi taken on as "police" but have their salaries go to him. When an American police mentor intervened to support the police chief, Baran "was upset and one of his men told the [chief] that he would come at night and kill him and any Afghan police that tried to stop him. [Baran] advised the U.S. PMT officer that it would be dangerous for him as well."¹⁶⁵

Taliban mortars, meanwhile, continued to rain down on PSS Haji with increased accuracy. This led the defenders to believe a trained mortar fire controller had moved into the area.¹⁶⁶ The fight continued.

Development, Reconstruction and Security, November 2007–January 2008

Once the PRT redeployed its resources from the Arghandab operation, it shifted attention to Operation CAUSEWAY. The project encountered several obstacles: district elders in Zharey and Panjwayi viewed the planned deployment of some 80 concrete segments into the river to form a causeway with some alarm. Concerns about water diversion needed to be allayed. Haji Baran and Abdul Khaliq were agitating against the project probably because both were competing for development money. When Khaliq was engaged, he pushed for an alternate plan involving retaining walls and stated that “this situation could degrade into a violent rift if ISAF was not careful with the citizens’ concerns.” PRT analysis determined that Khaliq wanted contracts to build the retaining walls the locals supposedly needed.¹⁶⁷ CIMIC operators reported that “Op CAUSEWAY which was meant to have a desired effect aimed at enhancing governance and development could turn into a counter-IO campaign on the part of the Taliban...if not properly addressed.” The people of Pashmul had no community development council (in part because UN HABITAT would not go there out of security concerns) and were forced to deal with Panjwayi elders and organizations. This state generated a competitive and escalatory situation.¹⁶⁸

Concerted Canadian resources were brought to bear to engage the Afghan authorities but slow progress was made throughout November and December. The Governor’s lack of attention to this pressing matter compounded the problem, which, in turn, generated ill will and grievances. As the CIMIC team noted, “They have little or no faith in the Governor of Kandahar to solve the problem and turn to ISAF for help.” To make matters worse, UN HABITAT upbraided the PRT for interfering in an area that they thought was their purview.¹⁶⁹ This concerted effort paid off, however, and the causeway was opened to great public fanfare on 8 January 2008 and, notably, security was 100% provided by the Afghan army and police. Finally, after a multi-year effort, there was now a trade link between Panjwayi District and Highway 1 that did not require a diversionary trip to Kandahar City.

The PRT was drawn into another delicate situation in Panjwayi at this time. A large internally displaced persons camp of 9 000 Kutchies located east of Bazaar-e Panjwayi was told by Haji Baran and the chief of police to depart the area as winter approached. The CIMIC detachment learned about this and reported that there was a humanitarian crisis in the offing. A CIDA representative at the PRT disbelieved the reports but did not investigate further. The CIMIC team went to the camp and reported that, in addition to having to evacuate the area, there were serious water and sanitation issues. This was confirmed by a UN representative and by the USAID representative at the PRT during another visit. Together, CIMIC and USAID confronted Haji Baran, who claimed that there was no problem. CIDA representatives contacted Baran through an intermediary (as CIDA personnel were not allowed to leave Camp Nathan Smith by CIDA Ottawa for

security reasons) who convinced them that everything was okay. Eventually CIDA and DFAIT gave permission for their representatives to accompany CIMIC to the camp, while the CIMIC team arranged for water-well drilling. In the interim, a number of Kutchie children died of exposure, several elders were kidnapped by unknown elements, while the drilling crews were harassed and forced to pay a “tax” to a Taliban representative from Khenjakak in southeastern Panjwayi.¹⁷⁰

A Kutchie representative approached the PRT and asked for blankets and tents. He was directed to the UNAMA representative in Kandahar. UNAMA said no; they would not do anything unless asked by the Government of Kandahar. Finally, CIDA representatives finally acknowledged that there was a problem, pressured the Governor to intervene and ask the UN to help the IDP camp people, and put together a plan to go to the World Food Programme and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) if the Governor gave his assent. Neither the World Food Programme nor UNICEF would move without a request from the Governor either. LCol Chamberlain, now aware of what was happening, interceded with Asadullah Khalid and asked him if he was empowered to make a decision or not and, if so, to use the Provincial Development Committee as the mechanism to respond to the crisis. CIDA and DFAIT personnel worked on the Deputy Governor at the same time.¹⁷¹ Meanwhile, more Kutchies succumbed to the elements. Men claiming to be Taliban then showed up at night and harassed the camp people. The insurgents confiscated what little material CIMIC was able to drop off. Finally, the World Food Programme sent a person to the camp who reported to CIDA that the Kutchies were in “dire straits.” When the World Food Programme arrived with aid, the Kutchie elders refused to take it out of fear of the intimidators. Nearly two weeks after the drama began, LCol Chamberlain and the PRT were able to get all of the players around a single table to deal with the issue. With the TF Kandahar Development Advisor involved, pressure was applied to UNAMA, who finally agreed to resettle the Kutchies in a larger, protected internally displaced persons camp: Zharey-Dasht.¹⁷²

None of this looked good on Canada, but the behaviour of the international community and the Governor was nothing short of appalling. Indeed, Baran and his district police chiefs’ motives were vile, in that they wanted the Kutchie gone so they could use the land for construction. The Kutchie nomads generally lived in the Registan District south of Panjwayi. Registan was a conduit for several enemy “ratlines” back to Quetta in Pakistan. The Kutchie now had a host of new grievances against the Afghan government that could be exploited by the Taliban, and the lack of an adroit Canadian response made the situation worse. The Kutchie were consequently less likely to assist the coalition effort in providing information on enemy movements in the lands they inhabited.

The only positive benefit from this was the Governor's increased willingness to finally use the Provincial Development Committee as a governance tool. It is possible that the Kutchie affair served as a catalyst for increased and systemic discussions between the provincial government, the PRT, the UN and non-governmental organizations on projects like the proposed highway bypass south of the city, Dahla Dam, and school construction.¹⁷³

The National Solidarity Programme's District Development Assemblies and Community Development Councils that were supposed to be the main reconstruction and development "fronts" in the province were in a mixed state by December 2007–January 2008. There were ongoing issues between UN HABITAT and the PRT over who was to handle requests from these entities. Much of the time, the Afghans defaulted to the PRT because they could not get timely action from UN HABITAT. It was easier for a district reconstruction shura member to communicate with a Canadian CIMIC patrol, for example, than with a UN representative who rarely, if ever, came out to the districts.¹⁷⁴

Arghandab District's development organizations were operational just before the death of Mullah Naqib. Naqib had been trying to remove the District Development Assembly head, who was not believed to have the best interests of the district at heart. A parallel District Development Assembly leader had credibility but the various personalities were not getting along. CIMIC and the PRT spent a lot of time working with all sides to get the development assembly running again. By January 2008, Arghandab's District Development Assembly was considered by the PRT to be a success story.¹⁷⁵

As for Shah Wali Kot, the environment was deemed to be non-permissive. There was an informal development assembly but there were no community councils. Money was able to flow to lower Shah Wali Kot from the PRT system but the effects were unclear. U.S. TF 32 working with USAID was able to use their civil affairs capability for local projects in upper Shah Wali Kot and over in Khakrez, but larger programmes were not possible yet. These connections strengthened over time so that CIMIC and American Civil Affairs activity could be expeditiously deconflicted.¹⁷⁶

Panjwayi was a mixed bag, as the CIMIC teams learned that each community was practically a separate district. CIMIC was only starting to get into the Mushan and Talukan areas. Sperwan was on the verge of accepting some kind of development connectivity with the Panjwayi District Development Assembly because Haji Baran came from there and Bazaar-e Panjwayi was a thriving town. Nothing was happening over in Nakhonay, for example, or in Zangabad.¹⁷⁷

Dand District, however, had a functional District Development Assembly and functional Community Development Councils by January 2008, as did Spin Boldak. Zharey was another mixed bag. There was a District Development Assembly and there were some Community Development Councils but the post-Khairuddin environment was still a work-in-progress.

Most of the development occurred along Highway 1 or along Route Summit. CIMIC teams and the P-OMLTs were experimenting with connecting with the population around the police sub-stations but it was still early days. The Provincial Development Committee slowly but steadily continued to improve in quality into early 2008.¹⁷⁸

Unfortunately, in mid-January 2008, UN HABITAT's representative at the PRT announced that there was no more money from Kabul to establish and support new community development councils in the province because of the security situation. The PRT found that "this is very alarming. If the National Solidarity Programme does not register new CDCs, the gap would grow even bigger between the sub-districts in Zharey." This would generate a have-have not situation in communities that were now only just starting to get security from the Afghan police and the P-OMLTs. There would be a semblance of security but no connectivity between the population and the district and provincial governments. Needs would not be met and the population would once again be subject to Taliban influence.¹⁷⁹

Another chapter in Kandahar's tale of woe was added on 12 January 2007 when the No. 3 turbine at the Kajaki Dam over in Helmand Province ceased to function. Kandahar City plunged into rolling blackouts as the municipal power plant was able to only handle a handful of districts at a time.¹⁸⁰ Given the regional nature of the problem, there was little that Canada could do for the time being and the matter laid to rest at the door of Regional Command (South). Various options were explored, including transporting large generators used to pump out New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina but there was no quick solution.¹⁸¹

The development effort in the province was also subjected to Taliban terrorist operations. The August 2007 hostage drama, involving South Korean aid workers and the unsatisfactory conclusion of that episode whereby South Korea agreed to disengage from Afghanistan, stimulated more of the same activity. In Kandahar, the decision by the Afghan government to release Taliban commander Mullah Mansour in exchange for an Italian journalist, and the exchange of the body of Mansour's brother for five kidnapped health care workers in Maywand, only spurred the enemy on. On 18 December, six Afghan medical personnel were kidnapped near Salehan in Panjwayi District. Two days later, the Governor's secretary was assassinated. The kidnapping of American aid worker Cyd Mizell, however, had a direct impact on the PRT. Nabbed on 26 January, the Asian Rural Life Development Foundation worker disappeared from a bazaar in Kandahar City's Police District 6.¹⁸²

American special operations forces went into overdrive trying to get her back and launched into Nakhonay, taking out three Taliban commanders. Other insurgent commanders were extremely upset with the "heat" that was brought to bear on the whole movement, especially in what appeared to outsiders like a tranquil part of Panjwayi District.¹⁸³ Unfortunately, Cyd Mizell was spirited away to Helmand, where she disappeared.

There were reports that she was subsequently murdered. The Mizell kidnapping, however, had a disproportionate effect on certain civilian elements, as this event spooked them and some used it as a reason to reduce their sortie rate outside of their bases. Indeed, the hysteria disproportionately spread throughout the aid and development community in Kandahar and nearly shut things down for some time.¹⁸⁴ Surprisingly, over 500 women dressed in burqas marched the streets of Kandahar in protest of the kidnapping.

The slow but discernable progress with policing in Zharey then took a body blow when four policemen disappeared from their positions near Howz-e Madad between 25 and 27 December. On 29 December, a large team of insurgents dressed as Afghan police and driving three green Afghan police Ford Rangers infiltrated a Maywand checkpoint and kidnapped 16 Afghan police. These officers were removed to Nahlgam and Band-e Timor, where they were taken in front of Taliban judges and sentenced to death. The Taliban then distributed three of the unfortunate police officers each to Kolk, Sia Choy and Band-e Timor, where they were executed publicly to intimidate the population. Of the 22 missing, 13 were confirmed to have been murdered. The JPCC noted that “the recovered bodies will be difficult to identify [as] they had been rather brutally mutilated.”¹⁸⁵

The “fad” caught on and three policemen were kidnapped by insurgents in Shah Wali Kot and beheaded. Panjwayi Taliban also grabbed Karim Khan, an Achakzai tribal leader and, incidentally, a personal friend of Ahmad Wali Karzai. They also seized his son and demanded money. Because of political sensitivities related to some intertribal dynamic that Canadian analysis was unable to penetrate, a negotiated release conducted outside of Canadian channels resulted in the return of both men.¹⁸⁶ Nonetheless, the murders continued. On 13 January, insurgents infiltrating using police uniforms and Ford Rangers entered a barracks area at a post in eastern Maywand District and killed nine police officers as they slept. Another was found zip-tied, taped and shot in the head.¹⁸⁷

It was one thing to fight guerillas in the hills and in the grape fields. It was quite another to figure out how to fight this kind of insidious terrorist activity. And all the while, there was no Canadian (or international) media coverage of the outrages against medical personnel nor was there any on the savage “justice” meted out to police by what amounted to a parallel power. There was, however, intense Canadian media coverage on the detainee issue, which forced the PRT to increase the number of patrols to Sarposa Prison.¹⁸⁸

Zharey District Operations, December 2007–January 2008

The decision to focus development and reconstruction resources in the Bazaar-e Panjwayi-Pashmul area was related to but not directly connected to a series of operations led by the battle group conducted in mid- to late December. The continued rocket attacks against FOB Ma’Sum Ghar, and the connections between insurgents in Sia Choy and the

violence around Kolk were two of the main drivers. In the background lay the ongoing issue of keeping Highway 1 open. The Sia Choy operation, TEREH TOORA, went in on 16 December. It was a large affair specifically targeting weapons caches and probable command nodes previously identified and assessed by the ASIC. Special resources were applied to the site dubbed the “Rock School,” located at the junction of Victoria and Cornerbrook, which had been a rally point for the enemy on previous operations in Zharey.

TEREH TOORA was a 24-hour operation. Sperwer TUAVs observed the intersection of Route Brown and Fosters to ensure no one was planting IEDs. C Company departed Sperwan Ghar, moved across the Arghandab River, and took up blocking positions west of Sia Choy. C Squadron with attached infantry moved west along the riverbed to block from the south. A Gurkha company with an Afghan platoon and Canadian OMLT inserted north of Sia Choy, while recce and sniper assets watched the area east of the community from their positions on Ma’Sum Ghar. The advance started at 0500 from the north. At 0630, there was visual contact with armed insurgents carrying tubes of some type: they were engaged with close air support. Then there was word that an enemy commander was present and that he would try to exfiltrate with his protection party dressed as Afghan police. The Afghans and Gurkhas found small weapons caches as they swept the compounds. ISTAR resources reported, however, that every time the Gurkhas advanced a bound, the enemy called for help to evacuate wounded. Clearly, Sia Choy was also being used as a casualty collection point and medical facility. Eventually, the manoeuvring enemy fighters were engaged with an airstrike, killing or wounding 20 of them. One insurgent leader requested reinforcement from the “Rock School.” An airstrike was directed at this area and it produced multiple detonations and secondary explosions. The enemy, running out of ammunition, melted away, leaving an estimated 47 dead with four captured by the Afghan army.¹⁸⁹

LCol Gauthier shifted his attention over to the Senjaray area. ISTAR reportage suggested that the rockets fired at Ma’Sum Ghar were being dropped off from trucks passing through Senjaray. Apparently there was a cache in Makuan, a known base for trouble-makers. C Squadron took the lead and mounted Operation METAWARKAWEL SHEPPA on 21 December. A similar package which consisted of a Gurkha company, an Afghan company, Canadian mentors and combat engineers swept into Makuan, only to find a small number of weapons and no rockets.¹⁹⁰ The enemy were not expecting a repeat performance two days later when Operation KHWASHA SEMA came back, using the same package and coming from different directions. Little was uncovered as the enemy fled east into the built-up areas of western Kandahar City.¹⁹¹

The material results of these three operations were ambiguous. The Senjaray “cage” was “rattled” twice again and there were some disruptive effects in Sia Choy, but without detailed local information, it was difficult to bring a halt to enemy activities. It is likely

that the enemy had little or no means to conduct operations due to a lack of ammunition and leadership in the area. And, after all, it was winter with no foliage, so their ability to conduct unobserved movement in the area was restricted in any event.

The Fight for Route Fosters, December 2007–January 2008

The conclusion of Operation COUNTER IED at the end of November was no guarantee that the enemy would stop trying to isolate Karim Khan, an Achakzai tribal leader in Haji. On 6 December, a route clearance operation moving down Route Fosters detonated two IEDs with mine detonation trailers pulled by the Husky vehicles. LCol Gauthier and his planners decided to clear the Zangabad region with two objectives in mind: one, to relieve pressure on PSS Haji and, collaterally, stimulate negotiations with the Afghan security forces to take more interest in security, and to eliminate the IED makers.¹⁹² (See Figure 2-6.)

Intensive intelligence preparation for Operation DADA SHAY identified three groups of insurgents. There were two commanders with their associated fighters in the Zangabad area and a third commander with his forces just north of the Arghandab River. The main Taliban commander in Zangabad, who had the nom de guerre “Zia Al Haq,” also commanded an IED cell. Zangabad was a perfect nest for the insurgents, as were the other communities in the “horn of Panjwayi.” Route Fosters, which was really an unimproved dirt road, ran along the northern part of the “horn,” with tracks that went south into the communities which themselves were nestled in complex terrain made up of the usual mix of grape fields, drying huts and walled compounds. To the south of that was the Dori River and the Reg Desert. A spur of hills from central Panjwayi jutted southwest right at the Dori River.¹⁹³

The operations box for DADA SHAY used the hills as the southern boundary and the Arghandab River as the northern boundary. As for forces, there was C Company and C Squadron, plus two Afghan army companies and Canadian OMLTs from 3rd Kandak. The operation also benefited with the addition of a company of Gurkhas from the 1st Battalion, Royal Gurkha Rifles. All of the usual supporting forces were available: X Batterie, 53^e Escadron and the Sperwer TUAVs. Canadian and Gurkha snipers were inserted into positions in the southern hills at night on 7 December.¹⁹⁴

The concept of operations was straightforward: a nighttime infantry insertion on two axes, followed by the Afghan army companies moving in at first light. This would occur simultaneously with the Leopard tanks from C Squadron and the battle group tactical headquarters, moving down the left flank in the open ground between the hills south of Zangabad onto Objective GUINNESS to act first as a feint and then as a block. Then the route clearance package would move down Fosters and head for PSS Haji. The infantry would clear all objectives and the force would return to FOB Ma’Sum Ghar.¹⁹⁵

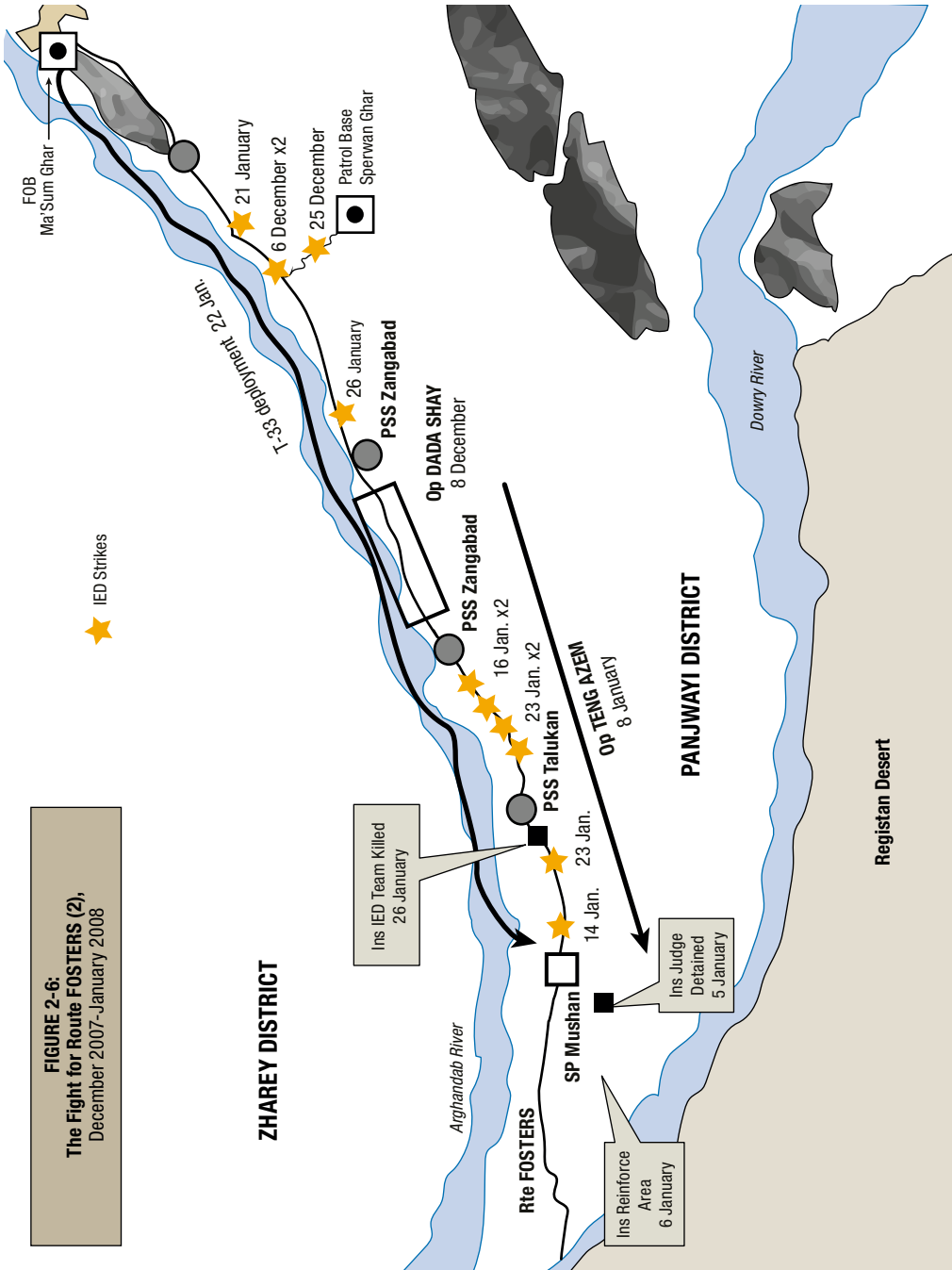


Figure 2-6: The Fight for Route Fosters (2), December 2007-January 2008

C Company started their dismounted moves into Objective MOLSON at 0245 hours on 8 December. The Afghans were a bit slower and moved into MOLSON an hour later. The route clearance package departed at 0515 and the mechanized feint went down the left flank at 0530. The enemy reacted sluggishly around 0700 hours: the snipers in the hills spotted movement near SLEEMAN and vectored an MQ-9 Reaper onto them, killing five fighters. The mechanized feint then spotted over 20 enemy making their way toward their fighting positions west of the LABATT operations box: a Sperwer TUAV came on station, identified the enemy to distinguish them from civilians, and directed a pair of 500-pound bombs onto them, killing at least ten.¹⁹⁶



Photo Credit: DND

Afghan infantry, Gurkhas, and Canadian tanks advance to contact during Operation DADA SHAY.

By this time, the Gurkhas moved through MOLSON into Objective MILLER, and the engineers made good progress down Fosters, detonating explosives as they found them. By 0930, MOLSON and SLEEMAN were cleared, and the Gurkhas were working on MILLER. The battle group tactical headquarters, operating as part of the feint, was then attacked with mortars, recoilless rifle and RPG fire. There was damage to some of the vehicles but no mobility kills, so they were ordered to get out of range. One of the Leopard 2s responded with fire and killed four enemy fighters. Another took on an RPG team, eliminating them as well. At 1115 hours, the engineers made it to PSS Haji

and the enemy pulled back to the west of the operations area. C Company then ran into resistance in Objective GUINNESS and a gunfight broke out with 18 insurgents. Using Sperwer TUAV information, the Canadian infantry tracked down and eliminated all of the fighters among the compound complexes and grape huts. A Taliban mortar joined in the action until its crew was dispatched by sniper fire. The snipers then spotted more enemy movement and brought an airstrike down on eight fighters, killing them.¹⁹⁷

The Sperwer TUAV-artillery combination continued to track and kill enemy exfiltrating the area. X Batterie conducted ten fire missions during this period. The battle group command post back at KAF joined in: using a Sperwer TUAV feed, the tactical air controller was able to vector in an airstrike, killing seven more enemy. The operation was marred by a “blue on blue” when Canadian forces engaged each other by accident, wounding two. At least five Afghan soldiers were wounded throughout the day but there were no coalition forces deaths. The DADA SHAY force withdrew late in the afternoon.¹⁹⁸

Enemy activity dropped off. The EROC counter-IED teams cleared Fosters on 17 December and then again on 24 December so that a combat logistics patrol could resupply PSS Haji. The problem remained: Fosters was a dirt road, which narrowed into a dirt track in places as it wound its way through complex terrain that severely canalized movement. On Christmas Day, an IED was discovered on Route Brown and blown in place. The enemy were back. It was gratifying to finally grapple with the enemy in a stand-up fight but once again, operations like DADA SHAY had short-term effects as there was no “Hold” to go with the “Clear.”

The larger matter of what to do about the “horn of Panjwayi” related to how to conduct the “Hold,” and this was subject to serious problems relating to governance in Panjwayi District as well as internal issues within the Afghan security forces. The existing chain of police and army outposts along Route Fosters was seriously decaying, and the situation in Mushan continued to deteriorate. The larger TF Kandahar SHA AYENDA plan had Canadian forces departing Panjwayi and Zharey before the relief in place with 2 PPCLI Battle Group in February so that that relief in place could happen in Shah Wali Kot. This meant that the Afghan security forces had to be in place and operating from proper facilities in Panjwayi long before then.

The concept that the Afghans would occupy police sub-stations and strong points along Fosters seemed to revolve around the idea that the police and army would patrol the communities that lay to the south of these facilities. In reality, the “horn” resembled Zharey in that a lattice of stations and strong points was needed given the depth of places like Zangabad from the road and the poor connectivity between them. It appears, however, that the fluctuating number of assigned Afghan forces meant that just handling Route Fosters was barely feasible.

The sticking point for the Afghan army was Mushan. Despite the fact that the enemy were extremely sensitized to any coalition presence in Mushan because of its centrality, the 3rd Kandak commander and staff argued that they could not resupply a company if they manned a strong point there. Then they complained about having to man OP Mosque. Fundamentally, the Afghan National Army did not want to man tactical infrastructure, and they certainly did not want to work with the Panjwayi police. There were several clashes between the increasingly professional Afghan National Army and what amounted to partially-trained thugs led by corrupt officials: at least that is how the army leadership portrayed things. On the police side, the P-OMLT reported that the Panjwayi police chief claimed to have men ready to go and man sub-stations, but the reality was that he did not. The dispute continued over manning PSS Haji. The Panjwayi police leadership refused to man this vital position, claiming they could not resupply it.¹⁹⁹ The relationship between presence patrolling, getting to know the local population, and thus stopping IED emplacement so that safe resupply could take place was a concept that the Panjwayi police leadership found difficult to grasp. At the same time, grievances generated by the district leader amongst the local population did not help matters at all.

The OMLT and P-OMLT mentors engaged all players to generate a compromise. The Afghan army agreed to deploy a platoon to Mushan with Canadian mentors. Higher-level officials were engaged to get more police, though it was not yet clear where they would come from. With all of this in the background, the battle group launched Operation TENG AZEM on 1 January 2008.

The stated objective of the operation was to isolate Nahlgam and set the conditions for an enduring ANSF presence in both Zharey and Panjwayi Districts. The method was to establish four strong points and police sub-stations, one on Langley and three on Fosters.²⁰⁰ The preliminary moves, conducted on 13 January, had Recce Squadron deploy a Coyote troop to the Maywand–Zharey border area to block the west; a mix of MEWT, forward observation officer/forward air controller and armour deployed to Strong Point Ghundy Ghar, and snipers inserted into the Reg Desert south of Mushan. The Gurkhas sent their forward logistics point to Ghundy Ghar and then followed with a company transported by CH-47. On 3 January, the Gurkhas moved into Nahlgam as a diversion, while a C Squadron combat team departed Ma'Sum Ghar. C Squadron took a very different route, skirting the Kabari Ghar feature to the east before proceeding south to the Dori River and then west where they hooked up with the snipers the next day.²⁰¹ On 5 January, a pair of insurgents were engaged from Ghundy Ghar as the EROC clearance team moved south on Route Langley. B Company, unfortunately, suffered a vehicle accident which killed WO Hani Massouh and Cpl Eric Labbé.²⁰²

The Gurkha Company extracted on 7 January with no contact. The coalition forces made no other contact. Due to poor environmental conditions at the bottom of Route Langley related to the high water table, the decision was made not to build PSS Montreal. Construction of Strong Point Mushan, however, commenced. The enemy proceeded to mortar the site until X Batterie brought 16 rounds of high explosives to bear. Construction teams then moved to sites north of Talukan and Zangabad, where police sub-stations were sited and built. The enemy infiltrated the Mushan area and laid mines, some of which were detonated by the EROC, wounding four, and a command wire IED targeted a Leopard from C Squadron on 14 January. Another IED took out a Coyote, killing Trooper Richard Renaud the next day. Aerial medical evacuation was impossible because of the weather, so the decision was made to move out on the ground. On 16 January, another IED strike one kilometre east of Mushan on Fosters wounded seven Canadians. The tanks found themselves in a contact with RPG teams and were forced to shoot their way out of the trap.²⁰³

The OMLT and the Afghan company were now ensconced in Strong Point Mushan and initiated presence patrols in the nearby bazaar. This activity produced a flood of local information on enemy movements. ISTAR reportage flowed in and indicated that the enemy were planning to scatter IEDs on all of the routes in and out of Mushan.²⁰⁴ The ring around Nahlgam remained unfinished, however, and it was still not clear who was going to man the police sub-stations along Fosters north of Talukan and Zangabad. Furthermore, analysis of the various explosive events indicated that the devices were not all improvised. Some of the weapons were plastic anti-tank mines and the EROC was not capable of detecting them at all.²⁰⁵

Route Fosters now attracted every IED maker and mine layer the insurgents could muster. Five Afghan civilians were killed when they struck a device on 21 January. When C Squadron mounted a resupply operation to Mushan, one of their armoured recovery vehicles hit an IED, disabling it, on 22 January. On 23 January, a LAV III from 52e Escadron was disabled, killing Cpl Étienne Gonthier and wounding two other soldiers. A Leopard from the QRF struck another device with its rollers, disabling the vehicle. In the space of one week, there were nine IED or mine strikes killing three Canadian soldiers and five Afghans civilians, with another 15 or so Canadians wounded.

Intensive ISTAR resources were assigned to the Route Fosters area on 25 January. The following evening, during TF Kandahar's barbecue night in the command compound, there was an ISTAR "hit." A Sperwer TUAV was launched and vectored onto the grid where the crew identified a dig team in the process of laying an IED on Route Fosters. The headquarters personnel crowded into the Provincial Operations Centre to watch as a French Mirage fighter bomber released a GBU onto the dig team, killing them. One wounded insurgent staggered away as a MQ-1 Predator came online to replace the TUAV.

The Predator crew followed the wounded insurgent to a compound where they identified another ten insurgents. Word was passed to the OMLT, who contacted their mentors in the field, and an Afghan army patrol was launched to exploit the dig site and raid the compound. They bagged half a dozen insurgents without incident.²⁰⁶ Using the information gained by the exploitation, Maj Robichaud mounted a raid into Zangabad on 30 January with C Company and uncovered IED-making materials.²⁰⁷

The informal but tight relationship between TF Kandahar and the American MQ-9 Reaper Squadron led to an experiment in using a Reaper's sensors to scan and map Route Fosters and then run comparison flights to see if earth on the roadbed had been disturbed in the intervening period. These experiments were considered a success, so a combination of TUAV and MQ-9 Reapers focused on looking for possible "dig sites" to cue patrols to those sites for assessment.²⁰⁸

The situation along Route Fosters in western Panjwayi now took on unanticipated dimensions. The strong point at Mushan, the police sub-stations on the road north of Talukan and Zangabad, plus PSS Haji, all had to be manned and resupplied. There appeared to be a lack of concept of local operations, there was a lack of local buy-in at the district police level, and the Afghan army was not convinced about the efficacy of sustaining Mushan. Without the unbuilt PSS Montreal, there was no way to isolate Nahlgam. The lack of a paved road made Route Fosters susceptible to IED emplacement, and that road project would take months using the imposed technology. This state of affairs did not bode well for the coalition effort in Panjwayi or Zharey Districts.

Policing and Clear-Hold-Build, January-February 2008

Recalling that TF Kandahar embraced the "Clear-Hold-Build" operating concept, what was the status of the Canadian and Afghan effort in Zharey and Panjwayi Districts by February 2008? There was a coalition presence in both districts, but it was debatable whether they were Clear enough to Hold. Yes, there was a network of police sub-stations in Zharey, covered by Strong Point Gundy Ghar in the west, and anchored by Patrol Base Wilson and FOB Ma'Sum Ghar. Yes, there was a string of police sub-stations along Fosters West anchored by Strong Point Mushan and FOB Ma'Sum Ghar. Yes, there were varying amounts of development and reconstruction activities and there was a semblance of governance in both districts, but the districts were not cleared nor were they held. For example, on the map there were PSSs Talukan and Zangabad. When briefed, it appeared as though, because of the names, that there were police sub-stations in each community. This was not accurate. The sub-stations were small forts located on Route Fosters, which paralleled the Arghandab River. They were not police stations situated in the middle of the communities of Talukan and Zangabad, which lay one or more kilometres south of

the road. Similarly, a lattice of police sub-stations in Zharey looked progressive on a map. Qualitatively, however, how far did the police range from their fortifications? How alert were they? Were there, in fact, enough police to man the police sub-stations and at the same time mount presence patrols? Were they holding ground, or interacting with the population so that governance and development could be facilitated?

The brunt of this problem fell on the Canadian P-OMLT mentors working with the Afghan police in the police sub-stations or, in some cases, operating by themselves in the case of PSS Haji, and others later on. Police sub-station Kolk was an example of where the system worked. The police and their mentors did patrol out of Kolk, met the population, and developed a network of informants who passed on information to the Joint District Coordination Centre or the Afghan National Directorate of Security. Police sub-station Pashmul was also starting to have a similar effect. It was clear from ISTAR reportage that the enemy hated the police operating from PSSs Kolk and Haji. Police sub-station Haji got hit regularly, as we have seen, and the P-OMLT was integral to its defence.²⁰⁹

Other police sub-stations were more problematic. There was a cultural problem that revealed itself within the Canadian Military Police under the pressure of P-OMLT operations. Cold War-era Military Police tasks like route control and rear area combat operations had withered away during the “peacekeeping” period of the 1990s. Attempts by the 1990s Military Police leadership in Ottawa to make the Military Police officers more like beat cops for the base married-quarters areas were successful but ultimately detrimental. When some Military Police who had joined under that regime deployed to Afghanistan and then were told they were going to a police sub-station to work with Afghan police, they balked. Maj Michel Zybala, the Military Police Company commander, had to reorganize the P-OMLTs carefully so that they contained a mix of ex-combat arms Military Police who had the weapons and tactical skill sets that the civilianized Military Police did not possess. Gender issues also reared their heads when the Afghan police were suddenly confronted with working and living with female Military Police. Some Afghan police refused outright to work with them, which attenuated operations in some locations. Others had little issue with co-educational policing and figured out that having female police available was useful for searching Afghan females.²¹⁰

The P-OMLTs and their Afghan counterparts, however, could only hold the line so long. For example, there were only 240 or so police in Panjwayi District, many of them only partially trained. That was not enough for the militia-type and policing tasks they were asked to undertake. Panjwayi and Zharey Districts needed an injection of trained, motivated and loyal police if there was to be any hope of holding those portions of the districts that had a coalition presence.

As previously discussed, the admission by Germany that they could no longer handle the policing portfolio led to the Dubai meetings in 2007 whereby the Americans agreed to revamp and fund Afghan policing programmes. The arrival of the U.S. Police Mentoring Teams in fall 2007 was a stopgap. By early 2008, a solution was under discussion: this was called the Focused District Development or FDD plan. This was the next phase of a police professionalization plan that the Americans initiated in summer 2007. The plan involved pay and rank reform, payroll transparency to reduce corruption, and identification cards. Those programmes were underway by November 2007. The goal of the Focused District Development plan was to “strengthen the [Afghan Uniformed Police] linkage to the provincial, regional, and national leaders and staff” to get them away from local tribal politics. A targeted district would have all of its police removed to a regional training centre where they would be screened, retrained for eight weeks in matters related to the chain of command and the justice system, given new leaders and then re-inserted back into the district. The Afghan National Civil Order Police or ANCOP would be brought in to backfill the district while the local police were away.²¹¹

Focused District Development was not an ISAF plan: it came down from the American Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan, which was an Operating ENDURING FREEDOM owned structure in Kabul. As such, its resources, including the American mentors, did not fall under ISAF command. The immediate problem was that Canada led the ISAF effort in Kandahar Province, but did not have any apparent influence on CSTC-A and the Focused District Development plan in the same way Canada did not have influence on American SOF activities. In other words, there was an absence of unity of effort, while at the same time there was substantial overlap. Word trickled down to the PRT that the Canadian embassy, apparently, did not want to hear about Focused District Development because it was an American project and did not want to get involved in the problem at the Kabul end.²¹²

Focused District Development for Zharey and Panjwayi was scheduled for February 2008: at exactly the same time, the 3 R22eR Battle Group was to conduct a relief in place with the incoming 2 PPCLI Battle Group, and the Afghan kandaks were also rotating during their cycle. And no one could predict what the Afghan provincial chief of police, General Saqib, would have to say about “his” police being subjected to the Focused District Development plan, let alone what Haji Baran might have to say down in Panjwayi.²¹³ There were just too many cooks in the kitchen when it came to policing in Kandahar.

Power Brokerage, Kandahar Style

On 17 February 2008, several hundred Afghan spectators crowded on a field next to the river in Arghandab District to watch a regional dog fight. In the midst of the event, a bomb exploded and men wearing police uniforms fired into the crowd with automatic weapons. At KAF, the mass casualty siren tones came over the “Giant Voice” system and personnel descended on the Canadian-led Role 3 hospital, waiting for wounded. The attack swamped Mirwais Hospital and the Afghan National Army facilities at Camp Hero, so more sophisticated wounds like head injuries went to the Role 3 at KAF for triage and care. In the end, 100 Afghans were wounded and 80 killed. It was the largest civilian death toll in Afghanistan since 2001.²¹⁴

Strangely, the Taliban did not take credit for the attack as they had in other mass casualty events in place, like Spin Boldak, where hundreds had been killed over the years as suicide bombers kept trying to kill Col. Raziq. Indeed, a suicide attack the next day in Spin Boldak killed some 30 people and wounded another 30. The Taliban did take credit for that one. And, on 19 February, another suicide attack took place west of Kandahar City but nowhere near the scale of the other two attacks: there were two dead and four wounded civilians. All three devices were different and there appeared to be no connection between the attacks.

When all was said and done, TF Kandahar learned that Hakim Jan and the bulk of his Afghan National Auxiliary Police had been killed in the incident. This was yet another stunning blow to the Alikozais and Arghandab District. And, over time, it appeared as though Hakim Jan was the primary target of the suicide bomb which was delivered by a man dressed as a police officer.

The implications were not apparent to TF Kandahar in the immediate aftermath. The media assumed it was a Taliban attack and treated it accordingly. A lot of effort was spent trying to determine whether the three attacks were connected or if they were independent events. The reality was that the Dog Fight Massacre eventually destabilized Arghandab District almost as much as Mullah Naqib’s death. But there was more. Hakim Jan’s death, when placed against other incidents, indicated that there was a concerted attempt to eliminate Alikozai influence from the Kandahar political scene: the marginalization of Alikozai allies like Habibullah Jan in Senjaray; the removal of Col. Hakim and his men from provincial policing; the police-on-police violence in November 2007; and now Hakim Jan’s death along with most of his men. At the time, however, TF Kandahar was not connecting the dots and there was a paucity of analysis coming from those handling the governance portfolio at the PRT. The implications, however, were long term and had a significant impact on the subsequent TF Kandahar under the command of BGen Denis Thompson later in 2008.

Trouble Brewing in Dand District, January 2008

Dand District was, for all intents and purposes, a quiet, prosperous suburb of Kandahar City, with a mix of urban and rural activity under the able leadership of the young but exceptionally capable Ahmadullah Nazak. Dand was aligned with the Barakzais, specifically, the former governor Gul Agha Sherzai whose representatives remained in the province to protect their interests in the face of Popalzai domination of the political and security processes. The PRT deployed CIMIC patrols to Dand in September and in no time was able to connect with the District Development Assembly. Community Development Councils, some of which already existed, were then linked up to the development assembly. Project monies started to flow soon after, and by the end of 2007, Dand was a district that was going places. Geographically, Dand was a sort of crossroads between eastern Panjwayi District, the southwestern Kandahar City districts, and KAF, which lay to the southeast through a gap in the mountain spine. Indeed, the planned Kandahar City bypass road project was supposed to go through Dand from Highway 4, though the exact configuration was still in dispute.²¹⁵

As Dand's prosperity grew, so did insurgent intimidation. The OMLT in Panjwayi reported that the insurgents established a court in Nakhonay, thus challenging the government for legitimacy there.²¹⁶ CIMIC reported that there was insurgent theft and threats of kidnapping, then there was a pair of RPG attacks against the police as they sought to maintain security in the area bordering Panjwayi. Nazak only had 45 policemen for the entire district and they were now led by the infamous Col. Akka, formerly of Zharey District (indeed, Akka's arrival seemed to coincide with increased insurgent intimidation directed at Dand's civilian population). Akka deployed his resources in a series of checkpoints along the interdistrict boundary but this led to increased attacks against the police. The violence was, however, not internal to Dand. Dand's power structure incorporated the mullahs at the community level, where they worked alongside the maliks and as such were able to bring a better synergy to bear on local problems, which, in turn, made many of the communities resistant to the Taliban message and afforded increased information to the police.

In fact, most of the violence was coming from Nakhonay over in Panjwayi. Nazak and his people knew this, but they also understood, and articulated to the CIMIC team, that ISAF was spread thin and would not be able to prioritize Dand. Therefore, Dand had to be as self-sufficient as possible. Nazak and his community leaders had a cell-phone network and had recently activated their own Joint District Coordination Centre. They knew they could not withstand a deliberate insurgent assault but, at the least, they could and were deterring their intimidation efforts. Dand was stable but given its defiance of the Taliban and its geographical importance, it was unclear how long this success story could be maintained without challenging the insurgency in Nakhonay. And that was dependent on how well things went in the western part of Panjwayi District.

Maywand on the Brink, February 2008

The police massacre in mid-January was a significant indicator that the situation was deteriorating in Maywand, with the possibility that the insurgents could interfere with the Highway 1 Main Service Route to Helmand. However, the state of play was not clear-cut. Maywand was, for the most part, terra incognita except along Highway 1. The strip of communities that paralleled the Arghandab River to the north, Band-e Timor, was a known insurgent route to and from Helmand. It was believed to be a logistics support area, for Zharey and Panjwayi. This was why the community of Mushan was so important in that the tip of the “horn of Panjwayi” was a crossroads between all three districts. North of the city of Hotal lay the Garmabak Pass into lower Ghorak District.

Haji Saifullah, a man with multiple loyalty vectors, ruled Maywand District. Like Habibullah Jan and others to the east on Highway 1, Saifullah’s police were in the toll business. As General Saqib’s influences moved west, however, and Habibullah Jan and Col. Akka were marginalized, there was the inevitability of conflict between the two men and their backers. And, as with everything else, this had an impact on Canadian operations.

On 13 February, a World Food Programme convoy was attacked as it passed over the Zharey–Maywand District border. A Sperwer TUAV happened to be observing the area and was directed over the incident while the OMLT at Howz-e Madad dispatched an RG-31 patrol. The TUAV’s crew observed the hijackers as they absconded with a truck and its contents. The hijackers were wearing Afghan police uniforms and were seen to meet with people with connections to the district leader. General Saqib used this event as an excuse to replace, one for one, all of the Maywand police with police from Kandahar. Haji Saifullah, with the loss of his “muscle,” was somewhat annoyed.²¹⁷

At the same time, TF Kandahar was planning the battle group and OMLT relief in place, which was scheduled to start at the end of February. The Regional Battle Group (South) was currently at TF Kandahar’s disposal, but the issue revolved around whether or not there would be some form of enduring effect by sending a battle group into Maywand for a short period. There was an opportunity to disrupt the insurgent logistics system into Zharey and Panjwayi and the ASIC believed that the insurgents were low on ammunition. An operation into Maywand could draw off enemy resources while the inevitably chaotic relief in place took place. Working with Lt. Col. Johnny Bourne’s 1st Battalion, Royal Gurkha Rifles, TF Kandahar developed Operation SOHIL LARAM II. The Gurkhas, supported with Canadian artillery, CIMIC, and PSYOPS would sweep into Band-e Timor, while 2nd Kandak of the Afghan army and Canadian mentors would move into Hotal with the new police and rebuild the checkpoint system along Highway 1.



Photo Credit: Author

Operation SOHIL LARAM II focused on the enemy “ratlines” in Band-e Timor and the city of Hotal, which was the district headquarters and an important waypoint on the main service route to Helmand Province. Hotal was also a crucial economic centre. Canadian army and police mentors with their Afghan counterparts operated from this location, which an Afghan soldier and his 23mm cannon contemplates.

SOHIL LARAM II was launched in the early hours of 21 February. The Gurkhas deployed their Viking and Vector ground vehicles from KAF all the way to blocking positions between Highway 1 and Band-e Timor. This deception move was timed with a nighttime air assault conducted by RAF Chinooks and Lynxes, which landed the Gurkha infantry at each end of Band-e Timor. With the vehicle block in place and pressure from the east and west, enemy forces tried to flee south into the Reg Desert, where around 15 were killed by a combination of an MQ-1 Predator, an MQ-9 Reaper and a B-1B bomber dropping guided munitions. A Canadian M-777 detachment situated in the Dasht provided artillery support as required.



Photo Credit: Author

Operation SOHIL LARAM II had Canadian elements supporting the 1st Battalion Royal Gurkha Rifles deployed to Maywand District under Canadian command. This included an artillery detachment of M-777 guns as well as CIMIC and PSYOPS teams.

The Afghan police and Afghan National Army troops moved into Huta the next day and immediately started joint police–army patrols, to the chagrin of Haji Saifullah, who was dismayed that the government had come to town. Canadian CIMIC and PSYOPS teams ranged out with Afghan and Gurkha patrols. The operation was marred by the negligent discharge of an RPG, which killed seven Afghan soldiers, but ISTAR reportage indicated that several insurgent commanders who were transiting the area were trapped. One used a non-governmental organization that was Taliban-infiltrated to escape, using their vehicles and papers.

In a matter of a week, the Gurkhas were withdrawn, as was the bulk of 2nd Kandak. A platoon from 2nd Kandak, plus the Canadian PSYOPS and CIMIC teams remained behind, as did a detachment from 53e Escadron, which rebuilt the Afghan police checkpoints on the highway. The new police settled in and immediately developed sources in the bazaar that led them to suppress insurgent activities in the city. Band-e Timor, however, reverted back to Taliban influence but not in time for the enemy to build up weapons and ammunition to have any effect on the relief in place that was underway by the end of February. And, most importantly, the coalition now had a foothold in Maywand. But could that foothold be maintained?



Photo Credit: Author

The accidental discharge of a rocket-propelled grenade killed seven Afghan soldiers from 2nd Kandak, led by Lt.-Col. Sherin Shah, seen here at the back roving the incident site providing encouragement to medical efforts. Canadian OMLT personnel, led by Capt William Cooper (kneeling), worked against the clock to save and evacuate the injured.

Conclusions

After an initial stumble during the August 2007 relief in place, the incoming JTF Afghanistan headquarters recovered by establishing its long-term plan and several new mechanisms to implement it. The Afghan–Canadian plan, GARRANDAY ZMARAY, had the laudable goal of making the Afghans responsible for the security Hold in Zharey and Panjwayi Districts and extricating the Canadian battle group to southern Shah Wali Kot District, where both the Afghan and Canadian governments were keen to focus on the remediation of the Dahla Dam and its associated irrigation systems.

A crucial and important synergy emerged with the creation of the Joint District Co-ordination Centres, first in Spin Boldak and then in Zharey and Panjwayi, and their later connection to the existing JPCC in Kandahar. The Joint District Coordination Centres provided key elements for a counterinsurgency campaign: connectivity with the population; input from the local power structure; and a higher degree of coordination between the security forces, specifically the Afghan police and army, than had been achieved thus far. The addition of CIMIC to district-level operations was a powerful enabler when it could be employed effectively. The Joint District Coordination Centres were not perfect instruments but they went a long way toward improving Canadian–Afghan operations in key districts.

Similarly, the deployment of the P-OMLTs to work with the Afghan police in those districts and help them “plug in” to the Joint District Coordination Centres and their superiors in Kandahar City was a notable success over time (once Canadian personnel matters were dealt with). Though the P-OMLTs would continue to be the poor cousin to the OMLT in many ways, they proved to be crucial enablers at the community and district levels.

Another area of significant progress was with the Canadian—Afghan National Army relationship. Building on the solid base established by the previous rotation, the OMLT facilitated more and more Afghan National Army operations and, as such, moved from putting an “Afghan face” on operations to encouraging and then conducting mentored Afghan operations at the kandak level. The OMLT came into its own throughout 2007 and these were significant improvements over the situation as it existed in 2006.

Unfortunately, a number of things retarded this progress. First, there was the policing “Tower of Babel,” where police assistance from three international coalitions, two countries, one corporation and four policing organizations was conducted in an uncoordinated fashion with three separate Afghan police forces throughout 2007. Understandably, these attempts to backfill a longstanding deficiency generated in Kabul were incoherent at first. Related to this was, by late 2007, the fact that the PRT recognized that the judicial system, which was supposed to support the police, was in worse shape than had been understood.

The traditional law enforcement triumvirate was in disarray but any initial steps taken would be small given the magnitude of the problem: southern Afghanistan was nearly a post-Apocalyptic environment and there was no quick fix, no matter how many people in Ottawa demanded that there be one.

Second, interagency coordination issues aggravated by a palpable recoil by aid providers in the wake of the Taliban kidnapping and intimidation campaign threw those efforts back, specifically in the crucial organizations that were supposed to support the Community Development Councils and District Development Assemblies. These organizations were critical for the delivery of projects and programmes at the district and community levels. Third, insurgent parasitism and the taint that went along with it also undermined development efforts in the demining and health care delivery fields.

With all of that as a backdrop, Operation INITIZAAR ZMAREY must be held up as a major Canadian and Afghan success. The anticipation of insurgent incursions into Arghandab District, in the wake of Mullah Naqib's death and the subsequent operations to eject the enemy before they could establish a foothold in this crucial district, was a major Canadian and Afghan victory. On the downside, the inability to consolidate that success was a major failure, which had long-term effects. The dynamics of the Kandahari power structure and the misplaced priorities it established in the wake of the operation hampered that consolidation, and this intersected with the larger policing problems that were extant.

Connected to this was the failure of those involved in dealing with governance issues to comprehend and then react appropriately to the marginalization of and, ultimately, the outright elimination of the Alikozai power structure in Kandahar Province. This also had long-term effects on the Canadian mission beyond 2007. Over time, the population became less and less inclined to trust the Government of Afghanistan and its representatives in Kandahar Province. This situation seriously contributed to a crisis of legitimacy but this will be explored in later chapters.

Another unanticipated consequence of the operational design established in August–September 2007 was the fight for Route Fosters in the early part of 2008. Almost a battle unto itself, Canadians learned the hard way that maintaining the infrastructure necessary to surround the Nahlgam-centered insurgent node and open up connections between the rural area of western Panjwayi and the governmental centre Bazaar-e Panjwayi was an expensive proposition. The Canadian contingent did not realize it yet, but with the lack of police to man these positions, and a resurgent enemy after the poppy harvest, Canadian soldiers were going to become “trapped in the TI” (as the Tactical Infrastructure was called). That drama is central to the course of events in the next chapter.

ENDNOTES

1. As explained to the author by BGen Guy Laroche (KAF, 5 March 2008).
2. The interpreters at the PRT were heard to call Quebecois soldiers "The Tabarnac Men" when the first Van Doo Company deployed as part of force protection to Camp Nathan Smith in late 2006.
3. Interview with LCol Bob Chamberlain (Camp Nathan Smith, 27 January 2008).
4. Briefing by TFK Force Engineering Office (Kandahar, 4 February 2008). BGen Grant was reported as saying, "I'm not going to turn Zharey and Panjwayi into an engineering playground."
5. JTF-A HQ Presentation, "Joint Effects Coordinating Board" (16 August 2007).
6. Based on the author's observation of the JTF-A HQ Effects Synchronization Meeting in action in early 2008 and discussions with its participants.
7. Interview with MGen Marquis Hainse (Kandahar, 24 January 2008).
8. Discussion with SOF personnel; JTF-A HQ End of Tour Report briefing (23 May 2008); Interview with Major Mathieu Boutin (Kandahar, 5 February 2008). Interview with LCol Bob Chamberlain (Camp Nathan Smith, 27 January 2008).
9. Boutin interview.
10. Meeting with BGen Guy Laroche (Kandahar, 23 January 2008); Discussions with Col "Spike" Hazleton, Kandahar, 2 March 2008; discussions with BGen Marquis Haines (Kandahar, 24 January 2008); discussions with Maj Randy Graddic (Kandahar, 13 February 2008); Chamberlain interview.
11. Discussion with Major Eric Landry (Mushan, 24 April 2011). Landry recounted to me how Laroche was disengaged from the planning process and left it up to Fournier and him to handle.
12. JTF-A HQ "Commander's Planning Guidance: Op SHA AYENDA Commander's Action Plan" (12 August 2007).
13. Chamberlain interview.
14. JTF-A HQ "Operation SHA AYENDA: Commander's Action Plan Information Brief" (27 August 2007).
15. Ibid.
16. JTF-A HQ "Commander's Action Plan Orientation Brief" (11 August 2007).
17. Ibid.
18. Briefing deck, "TFK ROTO 4 End-Tour Report" (23 May 2008).
19. Sean M. Maloney, "Towards Clear-Hold-Build," Unpublished paper.
20. Chamberlain interview.
21. Briefings to the author (KAF, 23 and 25 January 2008).
22. Ibid.
23. The controversial Dutch-Australian relationship with Matiullah Khan is discussed in "*Warlord, Inc.: Extortion and Corruption Along the U.S. Supply Chain in Afghanistan*," Report of the Majority Staff of the Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform U.S. House of Representatives (June 2010), pp. 25-26.
24. Briefings to the author (KAF, 23 and 25 January 2008).
25. Ibid.

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26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. TFK DSRs (1–3 August 2007).
29. TFK DSR (4 August 2007).
30. Chamberlain interview.
31. TFK DSR (4 August 2007).
32. TFK DSRs (6 and 10 August 2007).
33. TF 3-07 DSRs (10-11 August 2007); TFK DSR (10 August 2007).
34. NSE DSR (11 August 2007).
35. JPCC DSR (17 August 2007).
36. JPCC DSR (23 August 2007).
37. OMLT DSR (22 August 2007).
38. TF 3-07 "Rapport Post-Operation – Op BERKHEH STERBEH 21-23 Aout 2007" (26 August 2007). There are two PORs, one for each infantry company. See also TF 3-07 DSR (22 and 23 August 2007) and my untranscribed interview with tankers who witnessed the IED strikes.
39. Ibid.
40. TF 3-07 DSR, J2 DSR (23 August 2007).
41. CIMIC DSR Zharey District (22 August 2007).
42. TF 3-07 DSR (28 August 2007).
43. TF 3-07 DSRs (1 and 2 September 2007).
44. Interview with Major Eric Sauvé (Kandahar, 25 January 2008).
45. JTF-A HQ "Operation GARRANDAY ZMARAY Concept of Operations" (27 August 2007).
46. Sauvé interview.
47. OMLT DSRs (23, 24 and 28 August 2007).
48. Discussions with DynCorp trainers and RCMP CIVPOL, FOB SCORPION (26 January 2008); Policing briefing to the author (Camp Nathan Smith 26 January 2008); Interview with Major Michel Zybala (Kandahar, 4 February 2008). The author observed U.S. PMT operations in the field in January–February 2008 where LTC Ritz expressed his views on Afghanistan and Indochina.
49. Zybala interview.
50. Policing issues briefing to the author (Camp Nathan Smith, 26 January 2008).
51. This anecdote was recounted to me by P-OMLT and CIVPOL personnel at the PRT in February 2008.
52. TF 3-07 "Rapport Post Opération Op BALYE DEWEY 2 Au 3 et Sept 2007." (3 September 2007); OMLT DSR (3 September 2007).
53. "Rapport Post Opération – Op KHAIR KHOWHAI, Période Couvrant 8 et 9 Septembre 2007" (9 September 2007); TF 3-07 DSRs (9-11 September 2007).
54. TF 3-07 DSRs (10-11 September 2007).

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55. OMLT DSR (19 September 2007).
56. JPCC DSR (7 September 2007).
57. JTF-A HQ WSR (9-15 September 2007).
58. J2 DSR (1 October 2007).
59. LTC Ritz was believed by many to be personally unsupportive of Canadian efforts in Kandahar Province. This was in part apparently connected to an early incident in his tour when he called for assistance on the radio during an event but the battle group unit he was calling refused to speak English to him and insisted that he speak French. The PMT was then, in his view, abandoned by TF 3-07 for three days without resupply. When I asked why he had not reported this to JTF-A HQ, I was told that LTC Ritz was "not a complainer." Discussions with DynCorp trainers and RCMP CIVPOL, FOB SCORPION (26 January 2008); further discussions between the author and LTC Ritz, throughout early February 2008.
60. Ibid.
61. JPCC DSR (25 September 2007).
62. Confidential interview.
63. PRT DSR (7 August 2007).
64. PRT DSR (10 August 2007).
65. PRT DSRs (10 August and 6 September 2007).
66. JPCC DSR (6 September 2007).
67. C Sqn Briefing, "Op SAMANDARY TOOFAN" (4 September 2007); TF 3-07 "Rapport Post-Operation Op SIERA (SAMANDARY TOOFAN)" (6 September 2007).
68. TF 3-07 DSR (15 September 2007). See also C Company POR "Op SOHLA ARAME."
69. TF 3-07 DSR (17 September 2007).
70. "Rapport Post Operation, Op SADIQ SARBAAZ" (26 September 2007); briefing slide, "C/S T3 TIC operation SADIQ SARBAAZ 241204Z Final." There was a debate over what weapon hit the ARV and killed Cpl Hornburg. The 82mm mortar round may have been an indirect loft of an RPG but the belief in the squadron was that an 82mm recoilless round hit the vehicle and that this was kept quiet to prevent the enemy from gaining BDA and weapons effectiveness data. Note that this type of downplaying of 82mm recoilless effects also occurred in June 2007 when a Leopard was hit with an 82mm HEAT round during Operation SEASONS but the extent of the penetration was concealed even in written reports. I was asked at the time not to photograph the hole in the vehicle.
71. TF 3-07 DSRs (27–30 September 2007); OMLT DSR (1 October 2007).
72. PRT "Border Assessment in Spin Boldak" (21 October 2007). PRT briefing to the author (February 2008). Chamberlain interview.
73. Recce Squadron briefing to the author (Spin Boldak, 10 February 2008).
74. Discussions with Capt Carl Chevalier (Spin Boldak, 9–11 February 2008).
75. TF 3-07 DSR (28 September 2007).
76. Author's observations while attending the Spin Boldak shura (12 February 2008).
77. Recce Squadron briefing to the author (Spin Boldak, 10 February 2008).

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78. TF 3-07 DSRs (24–25 September, 13–14 October and 4 December 2007); J2 DSR (7 January 2008); briefings to the author (Spin Boldak, February 2008). Interview with LCol Heather Coombs (KAF, 6 February 2008).
79. OMLT DSRs (August 2007–January 2008).
80. Telephone interview with LGen Andrew Leslie (26 October 2014).
81. Ibid.
82. PRT Briefing, “National Solidarity Programme (NSP) Community Development Councils (CDCs)” (3 November 2007).
83. Chamberlain interview.
84. Discussion with Ron Schatz (Camp Nathan Smith, 27 January 2008).
85. PRT DSR (29 September 2007); Chamberlain interview; discussions with PRT interpreters reference conspiracy theories and information ops. Maloney discussions from 2008–2010 with CF medical personnel.
86. Kai Eide, *Power Struggle Over Afghanistan: An Inside Look at What Went Wrong and What We Can Do To Repair the Damage* (New York: Sky Horse Publishing, 2012), p. 10.
87. Interview with Capt Barbara Honig (Camp Nathan Smith, 28 January 2008).
88. Interview with LCdr April Inglis (Camp Nathan Smith, 26 January 2008).
89. “PRT Assessment: Kandahar Province Judicial System” (24 December 2007).
90. Ibid.
91. Inglis interview.
92. Interview with Major Luc St Jean (Camp Nathan Smith, 28 January 2008).
93. TF 3-07 DSRs (1-2 October 2007).
94. TF 3-07 DSRs (4-6 October 2007).
95. OMLT DSR (2 October 2007).
96. OMLT DSRs (1–5 October 2007).
97. OMLT DSRs (4–6 October 2007).
98. This assessment is based on my examination of the OMLT and PRT DSRs, plus PSYREPs for the period October 2007–January 2008.
99. OMLT DSR (19 October 2007).
100. GT 3 R22eR Rapport Post-Op pour l’Op RESHTEYA ADALAAT-10 Octobre 2007” (11 October 2007).
101. Ibid.
102. OMLT DSR (11 October 2007).
103. OMLT DSR (12 October 2007).
104. 104. TF 3-07 DSR (11 October 2007).
105. 105. TF 3-07 DSR (18 October 2007).
106. TF 3-07 DSR (13 October 2007). OMLT DSR (13 October 2007).
107. JTF-A HQ J2 assessment on policing issues (24 November 2007).

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108. JPCC DSR (17 October 2007).
109. That is, to what degree was there collusion between the Popalzai power structure and the Taliban to exploit the post-Naqib power vacuum...or not?
110. JTF-A HQ SIGACT List (20 October 2007); JPCC DSR (20 October 2007).
111. PRT DSR (16 October 2007); TF 3-07 DSRs (18–19 October 2007).
112. J2 DSR (24 October 2007); J2 DSR (22 October 2007).
113. J2 Commentary in JTF-A HQ DSR (23 October 2007).
114. PRT KLE with Khan Mohammad (23 October 2007).
115. Discussion with Major Mathieu Boutin (Kandahar, 5 February 2008).
116. JPCC DSR (23 October 2007).
117. JTF-A HQ "Commander's Planning Guidance – Arghandab/Lower Shah Wali Kot – Op SORR ZMARAY" (31 October 2007).
118. Ibid.
119. This section is drawn on interviews and discussions I conducted in January 2008 with BGen Guy Laroche, LCol Alain Gauthier, Major Dave Abboud, Major Eric Landry, Major Mathieu Boutin, LCol Bob Chamberlain, Karen Foss, and LTC Tom Ritz. See also my narrative of the operation in Sean M. Maloney, *War in Afghanistan: Eight Battles in the South* (Kingston: CDA Press, 2012).
120. The author was part of a discussion in the J2 shop at JTF-A HQ in January 2008 where evidence of both views was presented.
121. OMLT DSR (26 October 2007); TF 3-07 DSR (27 October 2007).
122. OMLT DSR (29 October 2007).
123. JPCC DSRs (2–3 November 2007).
124. PRT KLE: Arghandab District (1 November 2007); JPCC DSR (31 October 2007).
125. Saqib KLE (2 November 2007).
126. OMLT DSR (3 November 2007); JPCC DSR (4 November 2007). These were likely Hakim Jan's ANAP rather than ANP from outside the district.
127. JPCC DSRs (17–18 November 2007).
128. TF 3-07 DSR (17 November 2007).
129. JPCC DSRs (20 and 22 November 2007). The larger questions are 1) how this escaped observation by those at the PRT responsible for the governance portfolio in Kandahar; and 2) how this escaped the observation of those responsible for the governance portfolio in Kabul. Given the importance of Arghandab District, resources should have been applied to solidify the situation as soon as possible.
130. Interview with Capt Bruno Talbot (Camp Nathan Smith, 28 January 2008).
131. JTF-A HQ J2 assessment on policing issues (24 November 2007).
132. KLE at Camp Nathan Smith: Governor of Kandahar (2 November 2007).
133. Ibid.

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134. See Talbot interview. Note that the Tribal Mapping data provided to the PRT in late 2005 lacked the depth of knowledge and definition of tribal problems like this one. It took time and experience to sift through the chaff and uncover what was going on, but with six month and nine month rotations, it was difficult for the JTF-A headquarters to grasp the situation without a dedicated White SA structure.
135. JTF-A HQ briefing "Operation SORR ZMARAY Whole of Government Planning Session" (25 November 2007).
136. Ibid.
137. JTF-A HQ briefing, "Decision Date: FOB construction" (n/d).
138. JTF-A HQ briefing "Operation SORR ZMARAY Whole of Government Planning Session" (25 November 2007).
139. OMLT DSR (1 November 2007).
140. OMLT WSRs (28 October–2 November 2007); J2 analysis and TF 3-07 DSR (3 November 2007); TF 3-06 DSR (5 November 2007).
141. TF 3-07 DSR (6 November 2007). See also TIC storyboard for that date.
142. TF 3-07 DSR (15 November 2007).
143. OMLT DSR (12 November 2007).
144. OMLT DSR (14 November 2007).
145. OMLT DSRs (17–18 November 2007); "CIE B GT 3 R22eR Rapport Post-Op pour l'Op TASHWISH MEKA- WA, 16–23 Novembre 2007" (24 November 2007).
146. Ibid.
147. "CIE B GT 3 R22eR Rapport Post-Op pour l'Op TASHWISH MEKAWA, 16–23 Novembre 2007" (24 November 2007); TF 3-06 DSRs (19–20 November 2007).
148. OMLT DSR (13 December 2007).
149. Telephone interview with Col Nick Eldaoud (16 March 2012).
150. Ibid.
151. Ibid.
152. NSE briefing to the author (KAF, 19 February 2008).
153. Ibid.
154. Ibid.
155. Ibid.
156. TF 3-07 DSR (16 November 2007); IED strike storyboard.
157. TF 3-07 DSR (17 November 2007).
158. OMLT DSRs (15–21 November 2007).
159. OMLT DSR (23 November 2007).
160. 160. TF 3-06 DSRs (24–29 November 2007).
161. OMLT DSRs (22 and 24 November 2007).
162. OMLT DSR (27 November 2007).

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163. OMLT DSR (29 November 2007).
164. OMLT DSR (30 November 2007).
165. OMLT DSR (5 December 2007).
166. OMLT DSR (6 December 2007).
167. PRT DSRs (8–9 November 2007).
168. PRT DSR (3 November 2007).
169. PRT DET 51 CIMIC report of KLE (17 November 2007).
170. Interview with Capt Michel “Bunny” Larocque (Camp Nathan Smith, 1 February 2008); PRT DSR (10 December 2007). See also PRT CIMIC report in the DSR (3 December 2007).
171. PRT DSRs (11–15 November and 9 December 2007).
172. PRT DSRs (15–21 November 2007).
173. PRT DSR (3 December 2007).
174. This was the consensus of Capt Michel “Bunny” Larocque, Capt Bruno Talbot, MWO Michel Pelletier, and Maj Luc St-Jean, who were all interviewed by the author in January and February 2008 in Camp Nathan Smith and in the field.
175. Pelletier interview.
176. Ibid. St Jean interview. PRT DSR (10 January 2007).
177. St-Jean interview.
178. PRT DSR (2 January 2008).
179. PRT DSR (11 November 2007) and (14 January 2008).
180. PRT DSR (12–13 January 2008).
181. RC (South) “Record of Discussions on the Kajaki Dam Project Held at KAF on 27–28 November 2007” (28 November 2007).
182. JTF-A HQ J2 assessment (3 October 2007); JPCC DSR (18 December 2007); PRT DSR (20 December 2007); JPCC DSR (26 January 2008).
183. JTF-A HQ DSRs (18 and 30 January 2007).
184. Conversation with Ron Schatz, CIDA representative (Camp Nathan Smith, 27 January 2008). My discussions with military personnel at CNS during this time detected a note of disgust with the skittish behaviour that some OGD personnel indulged in after the Mizell kidnapping. There was no danger of Canadian personnel getting kidnapped, not with a protection platoon that deployed whenever they did.
185. JPCC DSRs (29 and 31 December 2007).
186. JPCC DSRs (11–13 January 2008).
187. OMLT DSR (13 January 2008).
188. PRT DSR (7 November 2007).
189. GT 3 R22eR “Rapport Post-Op pour l’Op TEREH TOORA, 16 Décembre 2007” (16 December 2007).
190. Escadron C, RPC pour l’Op METAWARKAWAL SHEPPA, 21 Décembre 2007” (25 December 2007).

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191. GT 3 R22eR "Rapport Post-Op pour l'Op KHWASHA SEMA, 23 Décembre 2007" (23 December 2007).
192. GT 3 R22eR "Rapport Post-Op pour l'Op DADA SHAY, 08 Décembre 2007" (13 December 2007).
193. Ibid.
194. Ibid.
195. Ibid.
196. Ibid.
197. Ibid.
198. Ibid.
199. OMLT DSRs (2, 8–10 January 2008).
200. GT 3 R22eR "Rapport Post-Op pour l'Op TENG AZEM, 1–17 Janvier 2008" (January 2008).
201. Ibid.
202. Ibid.
203. Ibid.
204. OMLT DSR (14 January 2008).
205. TF 3-07 DSRs (14–16 January 2008).
206. The engagement was related to the author by POC staff shortly after the event in question (I came into the POC part way through the process).
207. TF 3-07 DSR (30 January 2008).
208. Visit by the author to the MQ-9 Squadron (KAF, 18 February 2008).
209. Zybala interview.
210. Ibid.
211. Briefing to the author by ARSIC, "Afghan National Police Programmes."
212. Confidential interview.
213. FDD briefing at JTF-A HQ (KAF, 13 February 2008).
214. The author was present at the Role 3 MMU for the MASCAL event and was involved in subsequent analysis of the attack at JTF-A HQ and RC (South).
215. The author accompanied a PRT CIMIC patrol to Dand in January 2008.
216. OMLT DSR (28 December 2007).
217. The author was present for the entirety of the Operation SOHIL LARAM II planning process and accompanied the Gurkhas into the field for the duration of the operation.

TRAPPED IN THE TI:

FEBRUARY-AUGUST 2008

The first half of 2008 marked several transitions. The Canadian government, the opposition, and the bureaucracy agreed on a new way ahead for Canada in Afghanistan with a plethora of structural changes to the mission. There was a major change at ISAF's Regional Command (South) when Canadian MGen Marc Lessard replaced British Maj.-Gen. "Jacko" Page: this change shifted the operational-level terms of reference for JTF Afghanistan. It was also time for three relief in place operations to take place simultaneously as TF 1-08, based on 2 PPCLI, relieved the 3 R22eR Battle Group; the Afghan National Army kandaks rotated; and the Focused District Development Afghan police rotation was also implemented. And, when all of that was completed, BGen Denis Thompson and his headquarters relieved BGen Guy Laroche in early April. After that, there was the seasonal transition from winter to spring, with its accompanying poppy harvest period. There were a lot of moving parts, perhaps too many. And, as with any mechanism, the likelihood of something breaking increased with the complexity of the instrument. By spring 2008, there was a widespread impression that Canada was fixed in place by both circumstances and the enemy, or as it was referred to at the time, "trapped in the TI" (tactical infrastructure). In reconstruction and development activities, there was decreasing room to manoeuvre, this to the chagrin of those in the government, opposition, bureaucracy and media who increasingly demanded measurable progress from Canada's representatives in Kandahar.

Canada's New Strategic Direction in 2008

The end date of the Canadian mission in Afghanistan was 2009. And, in the heat and light of parliamentary debate arising from a muscular opposition who wanted the mission ended, the minority government announced, on 22 June 2007, that the mission would not be extended beyond 2009 without the consent of Parliament.¹ On 12 October 2007, however, the Prime Minister announced the formation of an "Independent Panel on Canada's Future in Afghanistan."

Shortly after, the Clerk of the Privy Council Office, Kevin Lynch, called in David Mulroney and asked him to create a Secretariat for this organization. Mulroney, confusingly, also retained his leadership of the nascent interdepartmental coordination group working on Afghanistan. Mulroney selected Elissa Golberg from DFAIT to work on the Secretariat recommendation.²

Led by former cabinet minister John Manley, the “Manley Panel” and its product, the “Manley Report”, can be seen in two ways. First, seasoned domestic political observers in Ottawa saw the whole process as “a carefully crafted document aimed at uniting Canada’s badly divided Parliament”³ and pundits called it “a master stroke that defused an explosive issue.”⁴ Another view was that this was all predetermined political theatre for the critics and the masses.⁵

The Panel’s purpose, as stated in the Chairman’s foreword, was to determine a future direction for Canada in Afghanistan that all parties in Ottawa agreed on: the government, the opposition, the bureaucracy and the media. The key line in the preamble was this: “we assumed responsibility for fighting an insurgency in a dangerous province of the country and we did so with little political debate and not much public engagement. And that insurgency is far from defeated.” The Panel was, in effect, to answer the question “how do we move from a military role to a civilian one and how do we oversee a shift in responsibility for Afghanistan’s security from the international community to Afghans themselves.”⁶

That said, “the Panel could find no operational logic for choosing February 2009 as the end date for Canada’s military mission in Kandahar, and nothing to establish February 2009 as the date by which the mission should be completed.” There were several options:

1. withdraw troops in February 2009 and leave a police and army training mission behind;
2. have Canada focus solely on governance and development and have others handle the security challenges of Kandahar Province;
3. move Canadian efforts to another region of the country; and
4. withdraw completely.

The Panel agreed that “Bringing the Canadian combat mission to an end is the objective we all share, but the issue here is timing.” What the Panel really meant was that they understood that Canadian international prestige and alliance credibility was on the line as much as anything. The members stated that:

A premature military withdrawal from Afghanistan, whether full or partial, would imperil Canadian interests and values. It would diminish the effectiveness of Canadian aid in Afghanistan, by further constraining the ability of Canadian aid workers to move among

Afghans. It could encourage insurgents. It could weaken the confidence of some Afghans living in Kandahar in their own future and in their own government, increasing their susceptibility to the Taliban insurgency. It would undermine Canada's influence in the UN and in NATO capitals, including Washington....⁷

What was unsaid in the report but understood by all was this: how could the Canadian government, the opposition and the bureaucracy extricate themselves from Afghanistan, and cause as little damage as possible to other Canadian interests? Given that those combat operations were inconveniently generating divisions in Parliament, this decision could topple a minority government that wanted desperately to stay in power.

Major recommendations were provided by the Manley report:

1. The Prime Minister needed to take the diplomatic lead and apply pressure when necessary in NATO, UN and Afghan forums to accomplish Canadian objectives;
2. More forces were necessary in Kandahar: an additional 1 000-man battle group preferably from another NATO country; medium-lift helicopters; and UAVs. The Panel recognized that Canada was too dependent on allies for these systems, which limited flexibility. And, importantly, "If no undertakings on the battle group are received from ISAF partner countries by February 2009, or if the necessary equipment is not procured, the government should give appropriate notice to Afghan and allied governments of its intention to transfer responsibility for security in Kandahar;"⁸
3. In the development sphere, Canada "should concentrate more on aid that will directly benefit the Afghan people including a "signature project identified with Canada and led by Canadians....This project assistance should be intensified alongside longer-term projects to build the capacity of Afghan communities and institutions CIDA's internal procedures should be altered as necessary to facilitate this shift in emphasis;"⁹
4. The Panel accepted that the ANDS, as mentored by SAT-A, laid out "benchmarks and timelines for Afghan government and international programming," but what was now needed were "more practical standards for judging performance and actual results." But military and developmental progress "must be tracked and assessed more thoroughly and systematically;"¹⁰ and

5. Finally, “the Government must engage Canadians in continuous, frank and constructive dialogue about conditions in Afghanistan and the extent to which Canadian objectives are being achieved.”

Note that the Manley Report did not seriously examine the basis for the insurgency in Afghanistan nor did it clearly frame the conflict in regional or global terms, nor did it connect all of this together coherently. It assumed that the driving force behind the insurgency could somehow be addressed by better organizing the mission and coordinating its constituent parts. It completely shied away from any discussion of Pakistan, “Pashtunistan,” or a detailed explanation of the type of conflict that Canada was engaged in. The Panel presented the problem as an Afghan provincial problem that was partially the result of weak governance and that it could be solved if only the right amount of balanced resources were deployed and applied to Kandahar. There were serious weaknesses with that view as strategic and operational consequences revealed themselves throughout 2008.

The one real dissenting voice in the media that warned about the flaws in the Manley Report was Arthur Kent, a reporter who understood just how deadly it was to ignore Pakistan’s role in the conflict:

[T]he Harper government takes no steps whatsoever to address the real weaknesses: the misguided U.S. command and control effort; chaos and corruption in the Western-sponsored Karzai regime; and the Taliban leadership’s holiday in the borderlands of Pakistan from where they coolly and efficiently plot the killing of Afghan civilians and Canadian soldiers. Debate in Ottawa over the Afghanistan mission distracts the nation with the crass, ill-informed parry and thrust of party politics at its lowest....Contributing to the confusion are Canada’s leading newspapers, news agencies, and networks, who management stubbornly refuse to staff and report the Kabul regime or Pakistan sanctuary stories....As a result, Canadians hear and see the Afghanistan story mainly in the context of parliamentary debates, those confusing tangles of hyperbole that have done so much to sap understanding of country’s Afghanistan mission....¹¹

Two weeks after the Manley Report was released, the government made a motion in the House of Commons to enact the Panel’s recommendations. On the same day, the Cabinet Committee on Afghanistan was established, followed by a Parliamentary Committee and a Privy Council Office Afghanistan Task Force to coordinate the Ottawa bureaucracy. On 13 March 2008, the House of Commons accepted the military recommendations (an additional allied battle group, acquisition of medium-lift helicopters and new UAVs), but then set a mission end date for 2011.

During this time, one of the main sticking points was getting NATO nations to commit a battle group to operate in Kandahar alongside the Canadian forces. Attempts were made at the NATO meeting in Brussels in February 2008, with no success. Between February and April, when there was a further NATO meeting in Bucharest, intense diplomatic efforts were made by Canada to gain traction on this issue in European capitals, to no avail. The Americans were watching the situation very carefully but were hesitant to commit to anything during the course of their own national election campaign, which was in progress at this time.¹² And, in any event, the Americans themselves were unclear about their objectives and were about to undergo a protracted strategic review process that would last until late 2009.¹³

While the new Cabinet Committee sorted itself out, discrete progress was made at the military and national defence levels with the Americans regarding the possible commitment of an American battalion and other resources to serve under Canadian command in Kandahar.¹⁴ The acquisition of CH-47 helicopters and a new UAV to replace the Sperwer TUAV officially commenced. The Chief of the Land Staff, LGen Leslie, approached General George Casey, the Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army, on the helicopter issue. These conversations produced an agreement to supply Canada with six CH-47 Chinook helicopters from American stocks in Afghanistan until new machines could be acquired from Sikorsky.¹⁵

Lessard Takes Over Regional Command (South)

Another significant development was Canada's reassumption of command of ISAF's Regional Command (South) on 2 February 2008. MGen Marc Lessard relieved Maj.-Gen. "Jacko" Page and brought with him a new attitude and less tense approach. MGen Lessard believed that there had been too much national jockeying for resources and emphasized that he was a NATO commander, not a Canadian one, which was a departure from the Page approach. And, unlike van Loon who wanted seamless movement of ISAF forces from one province to another, Lessard and his staff "accepted the national provincial fiefdoms model [and was] never in our tactical shorts,"¹⁶ according to BGen Thompson. The new Regional Command (South) believed that their role was to manage "division" level resources (reserves and enablers) and be the interface with ISAF headquarters.

ISAF headquarters finally released its plan, Operation SHAMSHIR, in mid-January 2008. SHAMSHIR supposedly replaced ARGUS RESOLVE, which was the ADZ strategy from 2006, but in reality, the new plan was a minimalist clarification more than anything. SHAMSHIR instructed subordinate commands that the district level was to be the focal point for the governance, security, and development lines of operation.

All existing security programmes, DIAG, the PTS programme, and counternarcotics, coupled with the focused district development process, were to be placed into the framework of existing ISAF operations. JPCCs were to be enhanced to become the basis of coordinated action. The mission was to “secure key areas” and “extend” Government of Afghanistan authority by building institutional capacity, and through “focused” reconstruction. Nothing cancelled out the ADZs, but then nothing in SHAMSHIR mentioned that they still existed. The language in the plan was low-key, bordering on pessimistic: one operational objective was the acquisition of an “adequate” level of security and governance in key areas to enable freedom of action. The insurgency was to be “contained,” while defeating it was not even mentioned.¹⁷ SHAMSHIR did not articulate the complex reality of how ISAF and non-ISAF organizations were to accomplish all of this at the provincial and district levels.



Major General Marc Lessard took command of NATO ISAF Regional Command (South) in 2008. Lessard brought a less tense and more realistic approach to Regional Command (South) operations throughout 2008.

With Operation SHAMSHIR as its overall guidance, the Regional Command (South) baseline operations plan’s purpose was to “deny insurgents influence and secure key areas and routes in order to support [Government of Afghanistan]-led expansion of sub-national governance and development.” Regional Command (South) planned to “weave our three Lines of Operations [Security, Governance, Development] into a comprehensive whole to

achieve unity of action with singular purpose. We will Clear, Hold, and Build when we can, where we choose. Where we cannot expand, we will disrupt, interdict, and defeat the enemy forces to keep them off balance.”¹⁸

With a nod toward TF Kandahar’s Operation GARRANDAY ZMARAY, Regional Command (South) wanted to replace ISAF forces with the ANSF and conduct “hold” and “build” operations in those areas which, in turn, would free up ISAF forces to “clear” elsewhere. Regional Command (South) saw Focused District Development as a key tool but they had no control over the process: that belonged to CSTC-A, the non-ISAF American command. Similarly, the “disrupt” forces outside the security zones were a mix of ISAF and non-ISAF, so Regional Command (South) saw that it would play a role in coordinating these operations as well. “Decapitation” operations to take out enemy leadership were to be re-examined so that better operational and strategic effects on the enemy could be generated instead of mere “tactical” death.¹⁹

As it affected TF Kandahar and Canadian operations in Kandahar, then, the new Regional Command (South) plan set Kandahar City, Spin Boldak and Zharey-Panjwayi as its key areas for Hold and Build operations. Highway 1, Highway 4, and the Tarinkot Road had to be secured to link Helmand, Oruzgan and Zabul to Kandahar and the airfield. The main effort for Regional Command (South) in Kandahar, in terms of application of Regional Command (South) resources as opposed to TF Kandahar resources, was Maywand District because of its role in linking Helmand and Kandahar Provinces.

In effect, Lessard and his staff now categorized forces into 1st Echelon and 2nd Echelon forces. 1st Echelon forces were the nationally-led provincial task forces like TF Kandahar in Kandahar that were “principally employed to conduct enduring operations that yield benefit over time” and “deployed in or adjacent to more densely populated areas of political and economic significance where persistent presence reassures the population and deters insurgents.” 2nd Echelon forces, on the other hand, were any other forces commanded or directed by Regional Command (South) that had a disrupt function and were not necessarily involved in enduring presence.²⁰

By 2008, Regional Command (South) had access to, or had to coordinate with, a number of different forces. Regional Battle Group (South), usually a British light infantry battalion; the Commander ISAF QRF, which consisted of a Portuguese light infantry company; the Theatre Task Force, also a Commander ISAF resource, based on 2nd Battalion 506th Infantry Regiment; and the 19-man TF Eagle Assault Pathfinders unit. Units from the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force and Special Operations Command Central Europe were not under Regional Command (South), but relationships of varying strengths existed between TF 32 and TF 71 on one hand and Regional Command (South) on the other. Other special operations forces operated in Kandahar Province, including

the Polish GROM (TF 49), which operated under NATO command, not Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. TF Kandahar had to be able to interact with all of these organizations as they temporarily moved through or operated in its battle space. In some cases, units or sub-units came under TF Kandahar command temporarily so the relationship between TF Kandahar and Regional Command (South) had to be solid in ways that it was not under the previous headquarters.²¹

Ultimately, more ISAF and Operation ENDURING FREEDOM resources were theoretically available than before for operations in Kandahar Province, but none of them were in the province for the long haul and not all of them were under Canadian or even ISAF command. For example, the United States committed the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit (24 MEU) from April to November 2008. The continuity necessary for 1st Echelon operations was just not possible. And, just as important, Regional Command (South) did not have any control over policing: that remained an Afghan Regional Security Integration Command (South) responsibility which led back to the non-ISAF CSTC-A in Kabul. There were simply too many organizations and agencies that were not formally directed or in some cases even coordinated toward the same goal. There were multiple reporting chains regarding reconstruction and development programming, and multiple financial responsibility chains with differing criteria for funding release. Compare this to the situation as it stood in 2006 with CTF Aegis/TF Orion operating under Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, with American ETTs, police mentors, and special operations forces that all reported to Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (most of them, at least). What is important to note here was that the Lessard-led Regional Command (South) headquarters understood this “Tower of Babel,” accommodated its limitations into its planning, and used personal diplomacy to make it work as best it could in the near-absence of NATO ISAF strategic direction, let alone formal unity of effort. The entire effort had an ad hoc, temporary lash-up feel to it, not that of a well-oiled machine. That said, MGen Lessard and his staff set about calming the winds of chaos as best they could. Regional Command (South) under Lessard was the first Canadian-led division in wartime since the Second World War.²²

Regional Command (South)’s War in 2008

Canada had not had a higher-level coalition command in Afghanistan since CTF Aegis in 2006. For the most part, Regional Command (South) headquarters, led by van Loon and Page, were problematic in many ways vis-à-vis Canada’s efforts in Kandahar and, as a result, the brigade-level task force headquarters in each province were akin to national fiefdoms. The Regional Command headquarters approximated a division-level headquarters of an earlier time. And, like their historical predecessors, their job was to campaign plan and set the allocation of formation-level resources to their subordinate commands (brigades),

depending on where the division commander believed the main effort should be. In Afghanistan under the Page headquarters, the brigades worked for themselves and there was a Darwinian competition for formation-level resources: aviation, intelligence and surveillance platforms, special operations forces, and so on. When MGen Lessard took over in February 2008, he and the other Canadians in the new headquarters set out to improve this state of affairs.²³

One of the first issues was to address the state of campaign planning. According to Regional Command (South) Chief of Staff, Col Spike Hazleton, who deployed a number of months prior to the formal transfer of authority from Page to Lessard, “When we took over from Page there was no campaign plan, there was no op order...there was no coherent plan. They had plans on power point that they were going to do. There was a campaign plan in draft to which General Page did not want to sign...there was no coordinated effort or synergies going on.”²⁴ Instructions came down from the new and incoming Commander ISAF to establish campaign plans as soon as possible.

Another problem was the Joint Operations Centre. As discussed in Volume I, this centre was a critical institution for coordinating activities between the various allied forces and maintaining situational awareness so the commander could plan and, if necessary, react effectively. This directly related to deconfliction processes and the prevention of inadvertent friendly civilian and military casualties. On arrival, LCol René Melançon, the incoming Joint Operating Centre commander, learned that the Page headquarters operated on “Fear. [The headquarters] was not getting the right information because nobody would see the [JOC commander]...people would get pissed off and then they’d get shit on. So at this point they were getting the information they wanted to hear.”²⁵

The Regional Command (South) Joint Operating Centre remained, as it had in previous iterations, the deconfliction organization for airstrikes, tubed artillery strikes, and missile strikes. For example, the HIMARS missile system needed to have cleared airspace because of its ballistic trajectory. It would not do to have helicopters flying into or through a missile’s beaten zone.²⁶

In a coalition war like Afghanistan, each country tried its best to keep control of its own “enablers.” If a country lacked certain enablers, they had to borrow from others. Canada found itself in this situation, particularly when it came to intelligence platforms, helicopters and, to a lesser extent, special operations forces.²⁷ In effect, a barter economy emerged between troop-contributing nations, and the “Wall Street” of that barter economy was Regional Command (South). Having control of Regional Command (South) allowed, in theory, Canada to influence this barter economy to benefit operations in Kandahar. Under MGen Lessard, however, this did not take place. Lessard and his staff saw their role as re-balancing the situation from the Page headquarters, not tipping it the other way to favour TF Kandahar.²⁸

Regional Command (South) brought pooled intelligence systems and helicopters to the fight. Regional Command (South) also had control of the Regional Battle Group (South), and could access the other formation-committed units like the Theatre Task Force by bartering with ISAF HQ and the other Regional Commands. What was really important, however, were the coordinating processes that Regional Command (South) were part of. These were extremely significant.²⁹

First, there was the ability to accelerate rules of engagement authorizations. In all cases, nations had strict controls over dropping ordnance from their aerial vehicles, and extensive procedures, including legal ones, existed that had to be accommodated. This could and did slow down engagements. Referred to as “shortening the Kill Chain,” Regional Command (South)’s process was conscientious, ethical, moral and rapid, which improved targeting and increased the success rate of the engagements. The confidence level in Regional Command (South) grew within the nations in southern Afghanistan throughout 2008. The possibility of inadvertent civilian casualties decreased.³⁰

Second, there was the deconfliction of special operations forces with conventional forces. In Kandahar Province, for example, there were special operations forces that belonged to ISAF; special operations forces that did not belong to ISAF but reported to Operation ENDURING FREEDOM; special operations forces that reported to American government agencies other than the Department of Defense; and Afghan special operations forces that worked with all of the above. All of these entities were operating simultaneously in the Canadian battle space. Under Page, there was little or no coordination between most of these entities with, say, BGen Guy Laroche’s headquarters, and Regional Command (South) did not seem to go out of its way to assist. MGen Lessard’s staff, in this case Col Hazleton and LCol Melançon, developed rapport and then respect with the entities that controlled these various elements. An existing organization, the Kandahar Fusion Cell was re-empowered in 2008, and instructions were given from higher levels to the various special operations forces entities to deconflict with Regional Command (South). This was not always a perfect system. In one of its iterations, the leadership-hunting TF 373 had a *Team America* reputation, which was cause for concern from time to time.³¹ For the most part, however, relations were superb with units like TF 71, a U.S. Special Forces task force, and TF 49, the Polish GROM, both of which worked in provincial districts where TF Kandahar had no presence.³² According to LCol Melançon, “We didn’t control them but we had a gentlemen’s agreement with them because they’re always playing in the sandbox.”³³ Like any good formation headquarters, Regional Command (South) under Lessard “worked the seams” between its constituent units with whatever forces it could muster. An example of this was Maywand District, or the mountains between Zabul and Kandahar north of Highway 1. This proved crucial during the period where the Afghan Development Strategy was in play and the provincial-level task forces focused on the ADZ districts.

Lessard was particularly concerned about having good situational awareness on all “outlier” activities in the region:

There was so much movement....There were the “weird Harolds” you never knew about. There was the movement of NGOs, Japanese road crews and all this. You never knew. But we started coordinating that as well. There were the Brits bringing in their own little cloak and dagger machine. The Canadians did the same thing, you knew the Dutch did the same. Everybody did their own little things. There were so many moving parts. There were the drug guys....³⁴

Related to this was the overhaul and revitalization of intelligence processing at Regional Command (South) during 2008. There were essentially two organizations handling this: the Kandahar Fusion Cell and the Kandahar Intelligence Fusion Centre. The centre was part of Regional Command (South), while the cell was an American organization that was not part of NATO. The Kandahar Fusion Cell did not necessarily talk to Regional Command (South), but under the Lessard command, personal relationships led to better coordination in several important areas relating to targeting.

A crucial area where the Lessard-commanded Regional Command (South) excelled was in the kill-capture arena. The Joint Prioritized Effects List (JPEL) was not a new tool: Canadians had worked with it since at least 2006. By 2008, the JPEL was no longer an exotic mechanism. Regional Command (South) was the JPEL “broker” for Kandahar Province and allocated intelligence, surveillance and strike resources to hunt down targets on the list in the same way the 2 PPCLI Battle Group developed its “Deep Strike” system for its battle space. The kill-capture fight was superimposed on the other actions that were taking place in each province. During the course of its time, the Lessard Regional Command (South) tracked, killed or captured insurgent leaders on “an industrial scale.”³⁵

Regional Command (South) also had control of the Regional Battle Group (South), usually a British light infantry battalion that was rotated between the Gurkhas and the Royal Marines. The Regional Battle Group (South) was employed by MGen Lessard in the “seams” to disrupt enemy forces: Maywand, Khakrez and Zharey Districts in Kandahar Province, and in locations up in Zabul Province when required. Regional Battle Group (South) operations were usually synchronized with provincial-level task force operations to increase the effects of each operation. For example, the unit was used to sweep eastern Panjwayi District communities in Salavat and Nakhonay to relieve pressure on Dand and western-central Panjwayi District.³⁶

Regional Command (South) was also responsible for coordinating medical assets. Each task force and province had a finite medical capacity, usually measured in available or unavailable “beds.” For example, the Canadian-led Role 3 MMU at KAF had a particular

capacity, the British Role 2+ in Helmand had another, and so on. If the medical system as a whole was at capacity, enough medical evacuation helicopters were not available, or the weather was too bad to fly them, the Regional Command (South) commander had the ability to suspend operations, which in theory would reduce the number of incoming casualties until the situation improved. Similarly, casualties could be transferred to increase capacity in a given province, if necessary. Sometimes this entailed accessing strategic medical evacuation aircraft from one country or another, which, in turn, required command “horsepower” and influence at higher levels.³⁷

Route control was another Regional Command (South) responsibility. In this case, the Highway 1 corridor and the Highway 4 corridor were main service routes for ISAF resupply and, as such, keeping them open was the focal point for a substantial amount of the Regional Command (South) effort. Without a passable and open Highway 1, the ability of the task forces in Helmand and Zabul to operate would be significantly attenuated. There was also the connection between Kabul and Kandahar that was symbolic but crucial: Highway 1 was a physical reminder that southern Afghanistan was connected to northern Afghanistan and the seat of government.³⁸

Finally, there was support to the counternarcotics programme. Canadian policy and Regional Command (South) policy at this point was that poppy eradication was not supported as it was considered counterproductive to the counter-insurgency effort. However, the United States-led and sponsored counternarcotics task force did operate in the Regional Command (South) battle space and its operations had to be deconflicted with NATO operations. And there was a deal whereby “in extremis” support could be demanded if the drug task forces came into heavy contact. Again, this was a Regional Command (South) task.³⁹

The revitalization of Regional Command (South) headquarters under MGen Lessard in spring of 2008 played a crucial role in maintaining the coalition position and then taking offensive action against the myriad threats throughout a very active and violent 2008. That, in turn, established a more favourable environment so that the steps taken by TF Kandahar in 2009 could flourish. If anything, the actions of an improved Regional Command (South) in 2008 was a shot across the bow of the skeptics in Washington D.C. and elsewhere who maligned NATO efforts in Afghanistan.

Laroche Recocks

With the context of the Manley Report and the new ISAF planning guidance absorbed, the Laroche-led TF Kandahar took stock of its ongoing operations. A new battle group was rotating in March, as was a whole new OMLT. With the increased demands from NATO and Canada for capacity-building and measurable progress to accompany it, TF Kandahar

put together direction for the incoming forces. Everything possible that could be done to engage all three lines of operations together would be done in the pursuit of setting the conditions for the “Afghan local and national authorities to assume complete control and maintain order.” Operation GARRANDAY ZMARAY already neatly fit into this, but some command and control changes were explored. TF Kandahar believed that there should be a “transfer of authority toward OMLT-led areas of operations within the ADZ.” The battle group was to move into the business of expanding the ADZ to the north. The “core” of the ADZ, Kandahar City, Dand and Daman, would be the responsibility of the PRT. The priority was to consolidate in Zharey and Panjwayi, then transfer to the ANSF. Second priority was Operation SORR ZMARAY, which would “set conditions” to expand the ADZ into northern Kandahar. TTING ZMARAY encompassed the ongoing Spin Boldak operations.

The new Joint District Coordination Centres, working with whole-of-government (the new term for “OGDs”), and the OMLT, Canadian P-OMLT and American Police Mentor Teams, were to ensure coordination at the district level with Afghan authorities.⁴⁰

Two concepts that were already under consideration by the Laroche TF Kandahar were folded into the new approach. The first was Operation RAHAWANA ZMARAY [Constructing Lion], which is discussed in detail below and involved paving projects in Zharey and Panjwayi Districts. The second was Operation SHNA DARA [Green Valley], also known as the “Pashmul Development Bubble.” The missing piece of the GARRANDAY ZMARAY plan was its lack of linkages to development and reconstruction. The idea now was to “synchronize the three lines of operations in Pashmul in order to set the conditions for development agencies to continue their operations.” Operations Box AMANDA was the designated area of operation: it approximated the former MEDUSA operating area in Zharey District. TF Kandahar staff established designated “Area Security Patrol Boxes” and tossed around ideas about how to synchronise CIMIC and other resources. The next TF Kandahar under BGen Denis Thompson expanded and formalized this idea and called it a “Stability Box.”⁴¹

Another important project that TF Kandahar kept an eye on was the Dahla Dam project. The head of aid in Kabul presented President Karzai with the Canadian technical findings on the state of the dam and the possible benefits that could be gained through its rehabilitation. This, as previously discussed, built on the existing enthusiasm generated by Asadullah Khalid and the Kandahar power structure back in early 2007. Out of this meeting, Karzai “provided clear direction to his ministers that the Arghandab ‘Dahla Dam’ was one of the most important national projects.” As a result, TF Kandahar concluded that they would “need to keep a clear focus on the security capacity building in upper Arghandab and lower Shah Wali Kot Districts. This remains a long-term plan and much is required before the government intent translates into a fully financed project.”⁴²

In effect, the Laroche headquarters staff was able to dovetail what they were already engaged in with the changes that were coming down from Ottawa, Kabul and Regional Command (South). Indeed, TF Kandahar reportage changed to include significant detail on development and capacity-building. Battle group operations were de-emphasized to some extent.

Another important change in the early months of 2008 was the development of Operation RAHAWANA ZMARAY, otherwise known as the Construction Management Organization. After the issues with Operation CAUSEWAY, BGen Laroche wanted increased involvement from OGDs in development operations in the “forward” areas of Zharey and Panjwayi, particularly in paving projects, to reduce the susceptibility of resupply forces to IEDs. This involvement was not forthcoming at a whole-of-government planning session held in December 2007: “[the] battle group and various development agencies, through the PRT, do not have the same time constraints or shared assessment of the permissiveness of the environment,” as a memo described the problem.⁴³

An ad hoc and then a composite structure was put together to handle paving projects. Behind this project was the idea that a Canadian-managed and funded paving project led and manned by Afghans would employ some 400 fighting-age males which, in turn, would draw off “Tier 2” Taliban manpower and have spin-off economic benefits to their communities over a protracted period. The new organization was to engage the Joint District Coordination Centres and involve “legitimate” Afghan leaders. This was the sort of creative synergy demanded by counter-insurgency operations and it could solve, in theory, a multitude of problems.⁴⁴

Like the P-OMLT, the Construction Management Organization was formed from internal resources. There were 19 engineers brought over on a six-month “technical assistance visit” from 4 Engineer Support Unit in Moncton, plus 30 attachments from the battle group, OMLT and NSE. Later on in 2008, naval plumbers, firefighters and air force airfield engineers also deployed with the Construction Management Organization. Led by Maj Geoff McCarthy, who hailed from Defence Research Establishment Suffield, the Construction Management Organization formed two teams: CMT-1 and CMT-2. CMT-1 focused its attention on Route Fosters and CMT-2 looked at Route Langley. Equipment and training issues meant that the Construction Management Organization would not deploy forward until April 2008, but the prospect of having so many positive effects potentially being produced by such a small organization was enticing to TF Kandahar, which was pressed to demonstrate measurable effects in reconstruction and development before Canada pulled out in 2009.⁴⁵



Photo Credit: Author

This is the Route Fosters paving project from a position on Ma'Sum Ghar facing south looking over Panjwayi District. Construction Management Team-1 was able to employ 400 local people, but corruption eventually took its toll on the project.

Mention of TF Eagle Assault should be made here. In February 2008, the Americans rotated the aviation battalion stationed at KAF that was supporting Operation ENDURING FREEDOM forces. The incoming unit, 5th Battalion, 101st Combat Aviation Brigade, included an OH-58D Kiowa Warrior reconnaissance helicopter unit, B Troop, 2/17th Cavalry Regiment, better known as the Banshees. Using a helicopter type similar to the Kiowa machines forsaken by Canada nearly 20 years before and replaced by the so far undeployed CH-146 Griffon,⁴⁶ the Banshees, as discussed later, developed a close relationship with TF Kandahar units throughout 2008.⁴⁷



Photo Credit: Author

The elimination of the Kiowa Light Observation Helicopter from the order of battle in the 1990s led to a deficiency in Canadian recce capability. An informal relationship was established with B Troop, 2/17th Cavalry Regiment to assist with convoy overwatch and counter-IED tasks west of the city until Canadian Griffons could arrive.

The Nature of the Insurgency in Kandahar Province, Early to mid-2008

The insurgency in the first half of 2008 demonstrated increased sophistication in several new areas that was used to augment the capabilities of the existing geographical forces in the districts. At the same time, the enemy's inability to gain traction in Zharey and Panjwayi led to a shift in focus by June. (See Figure 3-1.)

In areas they believed to be under their control, the Taliban implemented rudimentary shadow governance measures. This initially took the form of vehicle checkpoints in Zharey, where they questioned locals, confiscated food, weapons and cell phones. Four schools were reported burned by the end of March in Zharey and girls were not permitted in the madrassas. By June, there were reports that the northern Kandahar Commission authorized Taliban leaders to settle civilian disputes in Khakrez and Shah Wali Kot. Other Taliban judges appeared in Zharey District. Finally, and importantly, Taliban leaders implemented a policy whereby “vehicles, medicines, and other materials confiscated from non-governmental organizations and the private sector belong to the public.” Security, adjudication and basic necessities provided to the population by a parallel power posed a direct challenge to the Afghan government. The enemy continued their shift from negative to competitive governance throughout 2008.⁴⁸

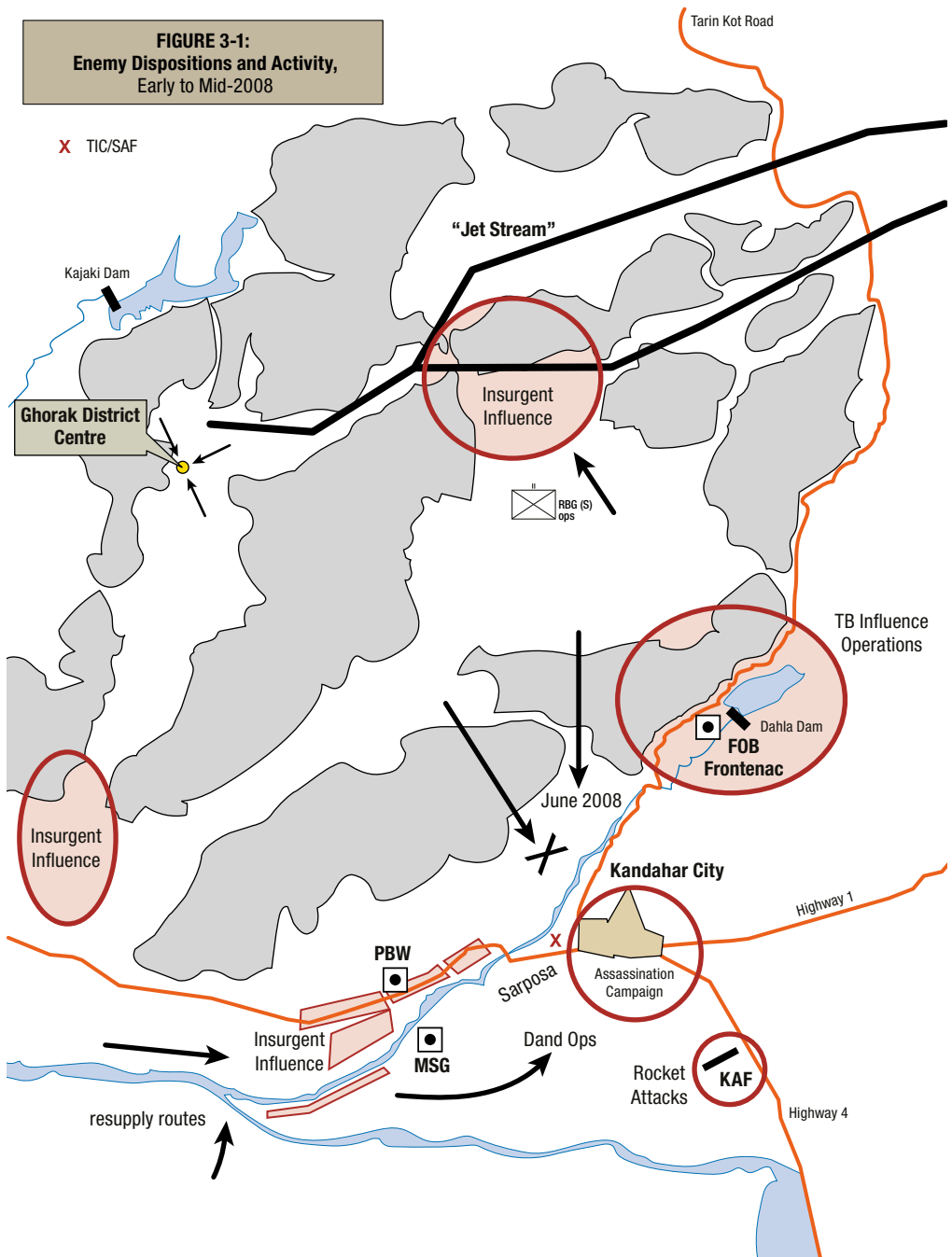


Figure 3-1: Enemy Dispositions and Activity, Early to Mid-2008

The enemy also continued to place emphasis on religious engagement. Two madrassas in Kandahar City known for extremist teachings had a selection process for potential suicide bombers who were then sent to a special madrassa in Chaman, Pakistan, for more indoctrination and training. Other “alumni” from this facility, four Pakistani citizens, two from Peshawar and two from the Punjab, were captured by security forces on their way into Kandahar City.⁴⁹

The ever-resourceful insurgents developed countermeasures against coalition forces and these were disseminated among the various groups. In one encounter in May 2008, with Canadian troops, the enemy fired from several compounds against a night cordon and search operation. The ambush was preceded with the enemy lighting “pre-positioned bundles of sticks laced with accelerant. This instant blaze washed out the [night vision goggles] and lit the area for several minutes.”⁵⁰

By this point in the war, the enemy had detailed knowledge of ISAF rules of engagement and capitalized on those limitations. Canadians observed enemy fighters moving from safe havens, without weapons, to a cache site, where they picked up weapons, moved to an engagement position, fired, and then returned the weapons to the cache, all to avoid being targeted by armed UAVs. In another case, transiting fighters, again knowing that positive identification was not possible and thus they could not be engaged by orbiting UAVs, concealed heavy weapons in rolled-up blankets. In other cases, insurgents used children as human shields to avoid being targeted.⁵¹

It was evident to Canadian analysts that the insurgents:

have become particularly fearful of ISAF air assets. If helicopters are in the area, the Taliban are resigned to the fact that they are severely restricted in their ability to move around. When helicopters are heard or seen, the Taliban will hide rather than be caught trying to conduct an attack....The Taliban in Zharey and Panjwayi are also afraid of UAVs. They identify the presence of a UAV by the sound of its engine. They...will take evasive action.⁵²

The creation of the Joint District Coordination Centres and their reporting phone lines seriously disturbed the insurgents in Kandahar Province. Centrally directed by the Quetta Shura, insurgent groups in Kandahar attacked cell phone infrastructure starting in February 2008. The insurgents then approached the Afghan cell phone companies and told them if they did not turn off phone service at night, they would continue to destroy cell towers. The enemy shifted to another form of communication at night when the towers were off.⁵³ Again, this was a serious challenge to the Afghan government and the Canadian forces in Kandahar. Though recognized as a problem by this and subsequent TF Kandahar



Photo Credit: Author

The enemy's interdiction of the Afghan cell phone system undermined security efforts in Panjwayi and Zharey Districts. Plans were made to move the service equipment into more secure locations like Three Tank Hill, seen here behind a combined Afghan–Canadian OMLT patrol.

headquarters, nothing effective or concrete was done about it for some time as the problem became normalized over rotations. It was unclear if it was a CIDA problem, a DFAIT problem, or a military problem.

ISAF's insatiable need for fuel and the decision to land and transport material from the port of Karachi in Pakistan to Kandahar led NATO countries into the morass that was the Pakistani trucking business. Forgetting that it was the Pakistani trucking "mafias" and Quetta business interests that created and supported the Taliban in 1994 to clear the Highway 4–Highway 1 trade route, NATO ISAF became increasingly dependent on the same institutions in an environment that it could not influence but the enemy could. To complicate things further, the Pakistani Army controlled the Port of Karachi and a trucking company through a commercial entity called the National Logistics Cell. There was also an ongoing dispute between Afghanistan and Pakistan over the 1965 Afghanistan Transit Trade Agreement and its proposed successor, the Afghanistan Pakistan Transit Agreement.⁵⁴ It was not clear to Canadians in Kandahar how it all functioned, just that a huge amount of money was on the line, most of it coming from Western countries, and a variety of interests wanted their cut. As one who was involved in this resupply effort explained:

Karachi is the Sea Port of Debarcation for Operation ENDURING FREEDOM...[The main supply route] up from Karachi is 759 klicks, 472 miles of bad road, shakedown, extortion, break down and delay. The drivers get jacked around at Pakistani Customs, the Pakistani version of the Teamsters, the trucking company they contracted with, and all the various trolls setting up roadblocks for the collection of protection money, and then they sit in the parking lot at Chaman waiting to cross over to Spin Boldak. Things go boom in the night in that parking lot....⁵⁵

By August 2008, fuel convoy attacks were epidemic with British forces in Helmand on the verge of running out of fuel. On one occasion, four “jingle trucks” with fuel disappeared into central Zharey District after being diverted. Canadian observers believed that there was a convergence of interests, possibly tribal in some cases, between the “truck mafias” and the Taliban.⁵⁶ These problems continued throughout 2008 to varying degrees.

Overall, however, the enemy leadership did not see itself as achieving success in the districts. They had seriously challenged Canadian freedom of movement in western Panjwayi and were capitalizing on the disorder in Senjaray, but they were thrown back again in Arghandab. By June, Mullah Omar sent his brother-in-law to meet personally with Kandahar insurgent commanders. The situation was not good, he said, and the Quetta Shura “have decided to take the fight to Kandahar City as they are unable to successfully fight coalition forces in the rural areas.” In effect, the insurgent leadership believed that the Canadians would not fight in the city in order to avoid collateral damage. Zharey and Panjwayi retained organizations to keep the pot stirred, but they wanted the focus to shift to the city as soon as possible. In order to assist with this shift, Al Qaeda’s senior advisor to the Taliban sent two of his men in to coordinate a high-profile urban terrorist campaign.⁵⁷

Counter-IED Operations

Counter-IED operations continued to expand and evolve under the Laroche headquarters, where the counter-IED component and its constituent organizations were now called C-IED Squadron.⁵⁸ The mounting number of human and vehicle casualties, however, produced substantial pressure in Ottawa to develop new approaches. In essence, the constant drip of tactical IED attacks was having a strategic effect on a casualty-conscious minority government via the media and the opposition.

One of these responses was the acquisition of the Enhanced Route Opening Capability or EROC, which was the same thing as the American Route Clearance Package. The EROC consisted of three vehicles: the Husky detector vehicle and its trailer, the Buffalo removal vehicle with remotely controlled arm, and an RG-31-like vehicle with a robot. The EROC, of which four groups of three vehicles were deployed by summer 2007, were not part of C-IED Squadron; they belonged to the deployed combat engineer squadron

commanded by the battle group. As in the past with the American route clearance package, the EROC led each vehicle column down the roads in contested territory like Zharey and Panjwayi. Finally, Canada was no longer dependent on this scarce American capability.⁵⁹

Then there were electronic countermeasures. As discussed in Volume I, the teething troubles of deploying a Canadian electronic countermeasures capability were somewhat alleviated by 2007. Almost every vehicle was now equipped with electronic countermeasures systems and a man-pack electronic countermeasures system now accompanied dismounted patrols. Electronic countermeasures were the realm of the Signals community, not C-IED Squadron, as it was crucial to deconflict jamming frequencies from communications frequencies. This took some time and effort.

C-IED Squadron, meanwhile, looked at methodologies and intelligence connectivity. The debate revolved around who targeted whom. Did the existing forces and their intelligence capabilities go after IED makers as a matter of course as they went about operations, or should specialized organizations be formed to specifically target the IED chain? With the trend toward “strategic” (that is, political and information operations) issues, the Canadian system leaned toward specialized targeting in late 2007, and particularly early 2008. That meant that C-IED Squadron had to evolve to meet that demand.

Conceptually, C-IED Squadron understood that there were specialized IED cells and, for want of a better term, “multidisciplinary” cells: insurgent units that did everything, including laying IEDs and mines. Using a Canadian analogy, there were Manufacturers, Engineers and Pioneers. “Bomb Knowledge” decreased as one moved from left to right in that Pioneers merely laid harassment devices and did not know how they were made, while Engineers knew how the weapons fit into more sophisticated defensive planning. There were also Facilitators, who were essentially logisticians.

Mitigation techniques like electronic countermeasures, EROC, and dismounted searches could address some of the effects of IED attacks. Targeting Pioneers with nighttime airstrikes was another. These were only tactical and responsive in nature, however. How did TF Kandahar shut down the whole chain? Should the Facilitator or the Manufacturer be targeted? And with what? Special operations forces? Conventional forces? Armed UAVs? Finally, how did one find those people and their factories? How did TF Kandahar synchronize this with the actions of other forces in the province?

The first move was to deepen the analysis. For that, detailed knowledge of who was who and how they were linked together was crucial, as was linking a particular bomb maker to a given bomb or attack. This sort of link analysis was not new in 2007 and had been ongoing for several years, but there were problems focusing it. Level I analysis was what the Tactical Exploitation Team did at a blast site. Level II was the “CSI”-like forensics analysis done at the American laboratory at Bagram Airfield: DNA from the bomber, device

comparison to known bomb makers and their “signatures.” Level III was connecting this biometric and technique data to cells and personalities. This was usually conducted in the United States by specialized agencies. The problem was that Canada could conduct Level I and II operations in Afghanistan, but the data from Level III were not coming back down to in-theatre Canadian forces in a form that could be meaningfully employed.⁶⁰ Ultimately this led to the creation of a Canadian Level III capability, which was leveraged to access American Level III data because Canada had something to contribute. And a specialized position in the ASIC was later added to handle C-IED operations.

What did this mean? C-IED Squadron could determine who built a given device and the likely area where those builders were located. That allowed deployed units to adapt their tactics, techniques and procedures in their given area of operation to offset the capabilities of the IEDs employed by the enemy in that area. It also fed the Canadian and coalition targeting systems so that IED makers could be subjected to special operations forces strikes or UAV strikes if they popped up in ISTAR reportage. It leveraged Canadian data for allied data. Ultimately, it saved Canadian and Afghan lives.

For example, the media exposed the fact that vehicles were equipped with electronic countermeasures systems.⁶¹ Up to that point, the enemy were repeatedly frustrated because their remote controlled IEDs (RCIEDs) were not working.⁶² In another part of Afghanistan, allied counter-IED exploitation teams discovered that there were lengths of command wire from the blast sites leading to nowhere. This was recorded and disseminated. The lengths of wire found at several sites over time were found to be longer and longer. Analysis determined that the enemy employed a receiver attached to the wire, which was attached to the explosive. They were testing the size of the invisible electronic countermeasures “bubble” around the vehicle and modifying the wire so they could send the command to the bomb. This was called a “spider device.” Some of these devices were later found to be factory-built in Iran, who had also acquired American electronic countermeasures systems in Afghanistan from the Taliban and technically exploited them.⁶³

One approach to spider and similar devices was the “ECM Burn.” The idea was to sweep suspected routes from the air using U.S. Navy EA-6B Prowler electronic warfare aircraft. Systems onboard swept through the frequency spectrum as the plane traversed the route to detonate emplaced devices. The obvious problem with this approach was the unintended consequences if a device detonated near civilians on the road or, say, in a factory in a built-up area. ECM burns could only be used in certain areas and had to be carefully coordinated.⁶⁴

When the nature of the threat was disseminated to the forces in the field, techniques were established to counter spider devices. When the enemy observed and analyzed these counter measures, they responded by building “command-pull” devices that did not rely on

electronics. This, in turn, led to another round of technique-based countermeasures. When the enemy observed that there were morning dismounted patrols along routes looking for command wires, they laid anti-personnel mines near the ambush site, and so on.

During the second half of 2007 and early 2008, the enemy assessed the capabilities of the EROC systems and modified their behaviour accordingly. Within weeks of the first EROC deployment, C-IED Squadron observed that the enemy were removing explosive material from mines and unexploded ordnance, and packing it into plastic water jugs in order to reduce the metal signature of the devices. Another new method was to dig holes in the roads and fill them with a powdered aluminum explosive. Again, the Husky vehicle was incapable of detecting such a device. Aware of the electronic countermeasures capabilities already, insurgent manufacturers produced more and more pressure-plate IEDs. They shifted what radio-controlled IEDs they still had to areas where the ANSF were operating as the Afghan army and police had no electronic countermeasures capability. Whether due to personnel losses, local greed or an increasing desire to implicate local people, more and more emplacements were non-ideological hired hands, paid for a one-off action.⁶⁵ Knowledge that Canada was employing specialist counter-IED people led to the deployment of anti-handling devices on IEDs and secondary devices by early 2009, making the EOD job all the more difficult.⁶⁶

IEDs became larger and larger in an attempt to catastrophically destroy armoured vehicles. As a result, more and more of the Telerob explosive ordnance disposal and observation robots, nicknamed “Johnny 5,” were getting “killed” during disarming attempts. It was the never-ending vigilance by C-IED Squadron that significantly reduced the enemy’s ability to generate larger numbers of casualties.

Relief in Place, February–March 2008

There were more simultaneous moving parts during this rotation than in any of the previous rotations. The battle group relief in place was relatively straightforward. TF 1-08 was based on 2 PPCLI and led by LCol David Corbould. 2 PPCLI Battle Group was structured the same way that Alain Gauthier’s battle group was, with two infantry companies of four platoons instead of three infantry companies. In this case, B Company was under the command of Maj Mike Lane, with C Company under the command of Maj Stacey Grubb. Maj Trevor Gosselin handed over the Leopard tank squadron to B Squadron, led by Maj Chris Adams. Maj Jamie Vieveen was in command of the incoming artillery battery, B Battery 1 RCHA, while 12 Field Squadron commanded by Maj Nathan Packer took over combat engineering tasks. Recce Squadron came from D Squadron, 12 RBC, and was led by Maj Stéphane Boivin.

LCol Corbould realized, once on the ground, that the situation was dire. TF Kandahar had built a lot of “tactical infrastructure” in Zharey and Panjwayi Districts, but there was a serious manning problem. There were two four-platoon infantry companies. One company was in Shah Wali Kot patrolling, while the other had to occupy the police sub-stations and combat outposts along Route Fosters West. For a platoon-sized base, at least one section had to be left behind to protect it while the other patrolled. For a section-sized position, no patrolling was possible. The P-OMLT was holding some positions on their own with teams of five to seven soldiers. The battle group had no reserve other than the tank squadron, which could not operate on its own given the combined-arms requirements of the environment.

The OMLT’s situation was different. The incoming OMLT, based around 3 PPCLI and heavily augmented, had to adjust to the command and control changes underway at TF Kandahar. LCol Dan Drew had to relinquish command of the OMLT to Col François Riffou, in part to reflect greater emphasis on brigade-level mentoring and the expansion of the OMLT across the whole of 1-205 Brigade of the Afghan National Army.

The concept of “TF Zharey,” whereby the OMLT became a battle group-like “landowner” for that district alongside an associated kandak and the Joint District Coordination Centre and Afghan police, achieved greater definition between the time 3 PPCLI started training for the OMLT role and their deployment to Afghanistan. The political requirement to maintain a Canadian infantry company at FOB Frontenac meant that someone else had to handle command and control in Zharey.⁶⁷ In essence, the need to coordinate Afghan police, P-OMLT, Afghan National Army and OMLT operations led to something akin to an augmented Joint District Coordination Centre, which then evolved in March–April 2008. The OMLT established TF Zharey and a command post was constructed in the OMLT buildings at TF Kandahar. This also meant obtaining unscheduled and unprogrammed signals support so that TF Zharey could communicate with both the Afghan National Army systems and the Canadian systems.⁶⁸ (See Figure 3-2.)

This state of affairs called into question what the OML’s purpose was: was it to mentor the Afghans or hold ground? And to whom did it report? Technically, the OMLT was cut by Canada to NATO ISAF and Regional Command (South). But was it operational command, or operational control? TF Kandahar behaved as if it was under its command and included the OMLT in its planning and operations orders. This ran counter to the OMLT’s work up training and led to two camps within the OMLT. Col Riffou resolved this situation by accepting the TF Kandahar view. The OMLT became a battle space coordination entity in addition to its other tasks, and the kandaks, to some extent, were treated as manoeuvre units within TF Kandahar, though with reference to 1-205 Brigade and General Bashir, to whom Col Riffou was the go-between.⁶⁹

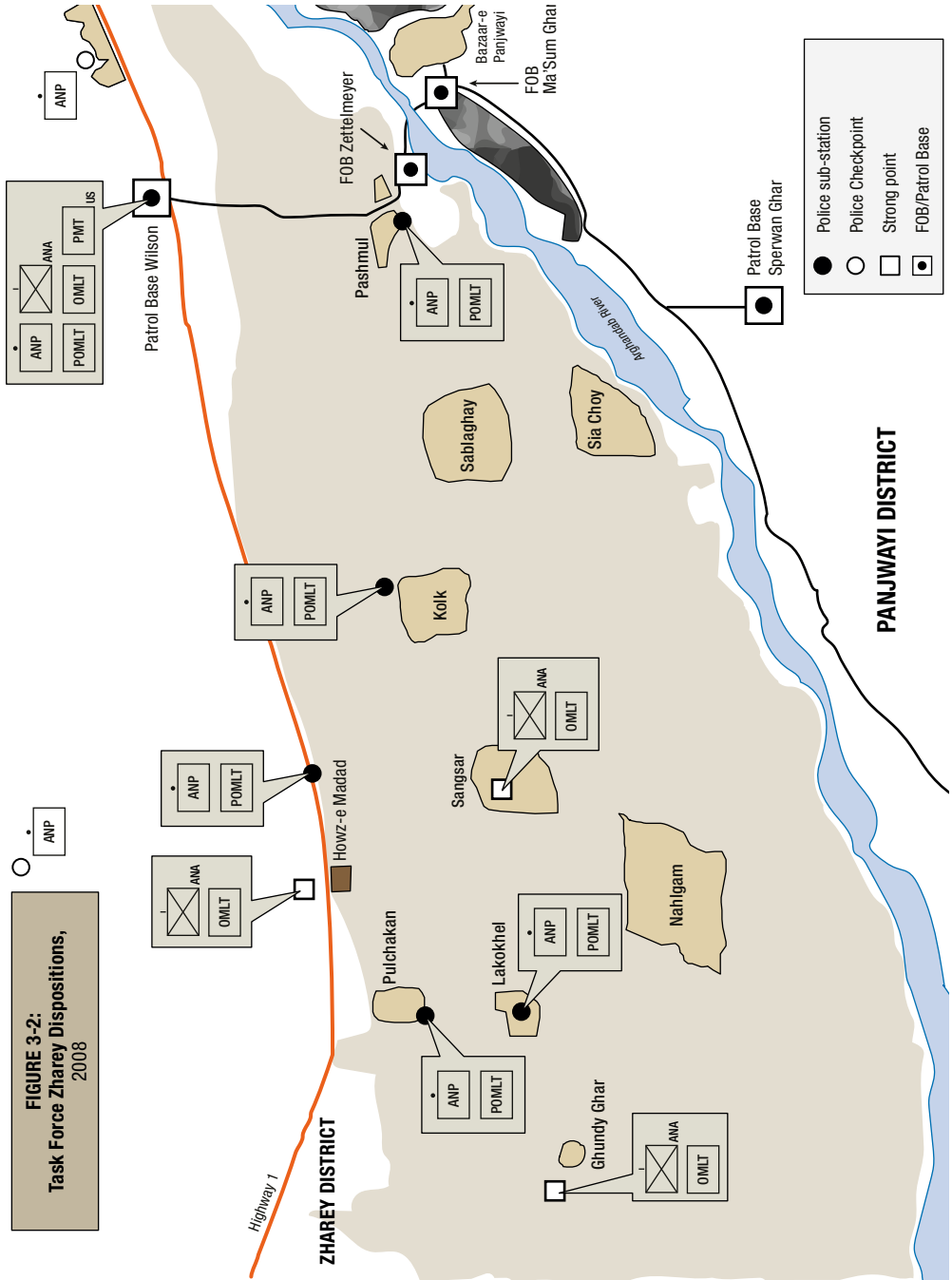


Figure 3-2: Task Force Zharey Dispositions, 2008

By mid-March 2008, 1st Kandak and its mentors were operating in Panjwayi District, while 2nd Kandak and its mentors occupied positions in Zharey District. 3rd Kandak deployed some mentored elements to FOB Nevermind in Ghorak. The concept of a “TF Panjwayi” was not pursued yet, but BGen Laroche’s intent was still to move the entire battle group to FOB Frontenac in Shah Wali Kot.

The P-OMLT continued with its close mentoring of the police in Zharey and Panjwayi. During the Canadian relief in place, however, the American-led Afghan Regional Security Integration Command (South) and the Afghan Ministry of the Interior scheduled a Focused District Development process for the police in Zharey and in Panjwayi. Overnight, the Afghan National Civil Order Police (ANCOP) arrived, and the district police were put on buses and sent to the Regional Training Center in Herat for drug screening and retraining. One fifth failed the drug testing and were released. On the downside, there were not enough ANCOP to backfill the Zharey police, so the P-OMLT was stretched to the limit and the patrolling tempo dropped. It dropped even further when the ANCOP declared they had not been paid in four months and threatened to walk off the job.⁷⁰

Some new capabilities came online during this rotation. The first was the Boeing ScanEagle UAV, called the SUAV to distinguish it from the Sperwer TUAV. ScanEagle was smaller than the TUAV, quieter, and carried a colour camera. Maj Gilbert McCauley, a helicopter pilot, was put in charge of fusing the TUAV troops, who were artillery, with air force crews that were now being integrated with UAV operations because of higher-level Canadian changes demanded by legal circumstances. Only trained pilots were permitted to fly UAVs. As a result, the Air Command and Royal Canadian Artillery flags now flew over the expanded UAV launch site at KAF. ScanEagle provided the Canadian contingent with a dramatic leap in situational awareness on the battlefield in 2008.⁷¹

With more sensors available, more flat screen TVs were required in the Provincial Operations Centre and the Tactical Operations Centre, which meant an increase in Signals capacity to move the data throughout the headquarters. In addition, the increase in DFAIT and CIDA activities meant that their information systems had to be accommodated as well. Similarly, there were several temporary or even ad hoc systems in play at the battle group and elsewhere, which complicated command and control at the TF Kandahar level. Further complications were encountered with the expanded OMLT in that Afghan forces used different radios and had no data capacity. As a result, a complete reorganization of Canadian information and communications systems was conducted in 2008 and a Signals Squadron was established to handle it.⁷²



Photo Credit: Author

The Boeing Insitu ScanEagle unmanned aerial vehicle arrived in 2009. Smaller than the Sperwer UAV and with greater endurance and sensor capabilities, the ScanEagle was a significant contributor to battlefield surveillance west of Kandahar City.

Another change was a reorganization of artillery assets. The HALO acoustic detection system was expanded with more sensor posts and more Light Counter Mortar Radar systems were deployed, including one to Strong Point Mushan. Data from these systems and the UAVs were fused by the Fire Support Coordination Centre and fed to B Battery's M-777 gun detachments as they moved between Patrol Base Sperwan Ghar, Patrol Base Wilson, the forward operating base near Huta or any of the temporary gun positions (see Figure 3-3). B Battery also brought the new GPS-guided Excalibur high-explosive and fragmentation rounds with them for the M-777 guns for precision engagement.⁷³

This relief in place itself went faster and was more efficient than the previous one, with 2 PPCLI Battle Group assuming tactical control of operations in Panjwayi District on 16 March 2008. LCol Corbould deployed B Company to Panjwayi, and C Company to FOB Frontenac in lower Shah Wali Kot. Maj Grubb wasted no time and attended the shura at Shah Wali Kot with a CIMIC team from the PRT to gain situational awareness, while Maj Lane established his headquarters at Patrol Base Sperwan Ghar, and deployed his platoons to the PSSs Talukan and Zangabad, and Strong Point Mushan along Route Fosters.⁷⁴

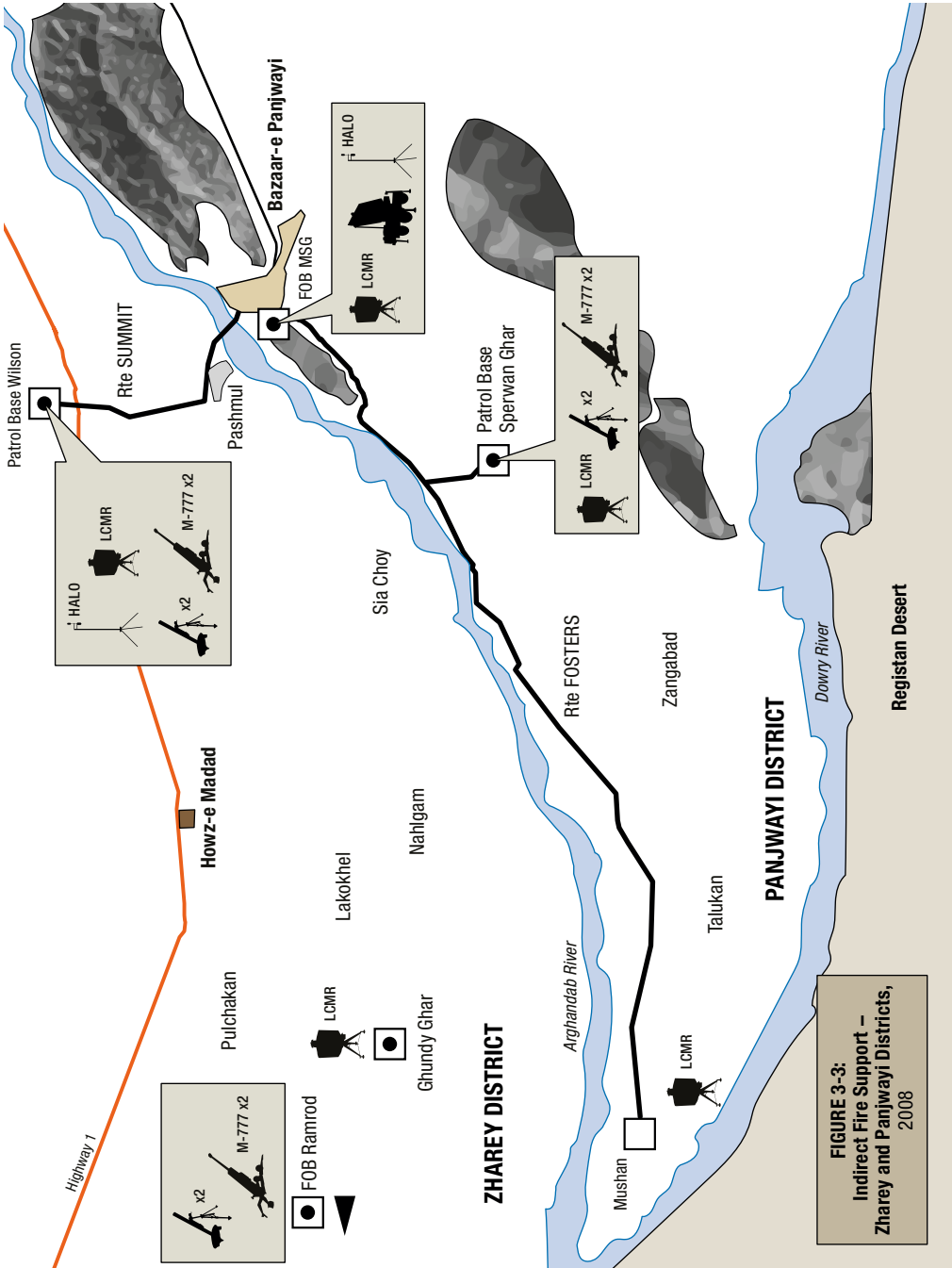


Figure 3-3: Indirect Fire Support – Zharey and Panjwayi Districts, 2008

While the relief in place was in progress, however, Sgt Jason Boyes from B Company was tragically killed by an IED during a dismounted familiarization patrol near Zangabad.⁷⁵

As part of the relief in place, the tank squadron had to undertake Operation RIP MUSHAN to get the new Afghan National Army company and its Canadian mentors rotated into the remote facility. The IED threat on Route Fosters was such that C Squadron resorted to trickery, deceit and every possible deception method it could employ to conceal their real objectives and directions of travel whenever they deployed the 70-tonne vehicles outside the gates of FOB Ma'Sum Ghar. Now that Strong Point Mushan was online, it had to be resupplied. So did the police sub-stations along Fosters at Talukan, Zangabad and Haji. As there were no Canadian helicopters, resupply had to go in by ground. The enemy knew this. OMLT and P-OMLT teams received indications that the enemy were having problems deploying a "watermelon" in front of a tank convoy because of the disruption caused by constant UAV flights over the area of operations.⁷⁶

The resupply force escorted by C Squadron ran into serious trouble on 2 March. After sweeping south from Highway 1 and entering the Arghandab riverbed west of Mushan, a Leopard C2 with a roller hit and detonated an explosive device. As a Leopard 2A6M was manoeuvring, it also struck an explosive device, disabling it. A Leopard C2 equipped with a plough then detonated two or possibly three more devices, killing the driver, Trooper Mike Hayakaze. With five mine strikes, two mobility kills and one death, Maj Gosselin established three defensive leaguers in the riverbed for the night until engineers with an EROC could make their way to the area and clear it so that the stricken vehicles could be recovered. UAVs orbited all night, waiting for the enemy to attack. ISTAR reportage indicated that the insurgents had "eyes on" but lacked enough RPG rounds to take on the leaguers, and this frustrated them to a great extent. Knowing that the ISTAR systems were monitoring them, one insurgent commander exclaimed into his radio that "ISAF, you are too brave and you must be put in your place." Maj Gosselin recovered his vehicles, delivered the supplies and personnel to Strong Point Mushan, and returned to FOB Ma'Sum Ghar via Highway 1 and the Dori riverbed without further incident. The next day, Gosselin handed the torch over to Maj Chris Adams and B Squadron.⁷⁷

As it stood in mid-March 2008, Canadian troops were arrayed in several districts but with distinct mandates that did not necessarily overlap. The battle group infantry companies were in Shah Wali Kot and Panjwayi, while Recce Squadron was in Spin Boldak. The OMLT was in Ghorak, Zharey and Panjwayi, while the P-OMLT was mostly in Zharey. PRT CIMIC was in Arghandab, Dand, Zharey and Panjwayi. The new Construction Management Organization teams were scheduled to go into Zharey and Panjwayi. There were Joint District Coordination Centres in Spin Boldak, Zharey and Panjwayi, but none in Shah Wali Kot, Arghandab or Ghorak. Though he was moving toward increased

integration of the wide variety of forces at hand, the end state desired by BGen Laroche was not in sight toward the end of his tour, which produced a level of incoherence that his successor, BGen Thompson, sought to correct when he arrived to take command in early May. TF Kandahar forces had to ride out that incoherence in March and April, fighting on several seemingly disconnected fronts alongside a somewhat bewildered Afghan ally, sporadically reinforced by a plethora of NATO allies that moved in and out of the province, and not backed up with coordinated reconstruction and development projects as required.

The Ghorak Distraction, March 2008

Upper Ghorak District remained a festering boil well into March 2008. A 50-man “lost command” from Weapons Company, 1st Kandak, and a Canadian OMLT of five Canadians, led by Capt Slade Lerch, were ensconced in the hot and remote FOB Nevermind, the Ghorak District centre. The Canadian team goaded the Afghans, when they could, to conduct vehicle checkpoints at the Ghorak Pass and attempted to get them to patrol more than 5 kilometres away from the forward operating base. Morale was low. On 6 March, for example, only six Afghans were willing to patrol. The others demanded fuel and water before they would go out. An aerial resupply was botched and only half of the needed supplies arrived. The company then threatened to go absent without leave back to Kandahar by their own means. The Canadian mentors determined that half of the company was actually in the “red” rotation, that is, supposed to be on leave. With no enemy activity in the area, the decision was eventually made to replace Weapons Company with Afghan police (Operation TEEZ SPAAR). Led by a troop from Recce Squadron and Canadian engineers in an EROC suite, the police made their way in and the men of 71C redeployed with Weapons Company to KAF on 19–20 March.⁷⁸ On the way out, an orbiting MQ-9 Reaper spotted a sports utility vehicle with armed personnel signaling to other insurgents. The Reaper tracked this vehicle to a rendezvous with two others loaded with insurgents. A 500-pound bomb took out the target, killing 12 enemy: “Immediately following the strike numerous local nationals flooded the scene and quickly removed the bodies.”⁷⁹ When the extraction force halted for the night, an MQ-1 Predator spotted an IED “dig team” on the extraction route. An A-10 came on scene to strafe but the enemy escaped.⁸⁰

Spin Boldak: Return of the “Lost Command,” March–April 2008

TF Kandahar’s other “lost command” was in Spin Boldak. Maj Stéphane Boivin took over from Maj Pete Huet in late February. Equipped with two troops of eight Coyote surveillance vehicles, and supported with small engineer and artillery detachments, Boivin and his men continued with the effort to define what was happening in the district. The overall Spin Boldak status quo revolved around Coyote patrols along the border

observation post lines that radiated like wings northeast and southwest from the Spin Boldak border crossing point; key leader engagements with the exasperated district leader; attempts to mediate the unending Noorzai-Achakzai feud; PRT CIMIC observation of the usual Spin Boldak District development assembly corruption; and repeated attempts by suicide bombers to kill Col. Abdul Raziq. D Squadron also provided a QRF for incidents, and supported the American Afghan Border Police embedded training team that took up residence with the DynCorp police mentors. From time to time, TF 49, the Polish special operations forces operating in Maruf, made an appearance to rewater and resupply.⁸¹

At this point in the war, Spin Boldak acted as a primary line of communication for Taliban forces operating west of Kandahar City. With 5 000 people moving through the border on Highway 4 per day, the ability to intercept small numbers of unarmed infiltrating fighters was minimal. Similarly, as a main border town, every form of criminal activity conceivable was present and, in many cases, there was considerable overlap in every direction. Development and governance in Spin Boldak was hampered by a revolving door of district leaders. There was only a small World Food Programme detachment, periodic visits by a DFAIT representative from the PRT, and a single CIMIC officer attached to the squadron from the PRT. It was very much an economy of effort mission. Boivin and his men learned that the leaders running the Spin Boldak reconstruction shura were not even living there: they lived in Chaman. When Boivin managed to have the money shut off to the problematic reconstruction shura, Governor Asadullah Khalid intervened and brought the Chaman-based elders back into the process. It seemed as if Col. Raziq's provision of alms consisting of one-third of his illicit earnings to the population had greater impact than the district leader and the development assembly on the welfare of the community.⁸²

Ongoing manoeuvre-to-collect operations by Recce Squadron re-confirmed that the Lowy Kariz area was a significant part of the enemy's logistics chain that went from Chaman in Pakistan, to Spin Boldak, into Arghistan, and then into Kandahar City. Again, Arghistan was known to have historical links to the original Taliban groups that seized Kandahar City back in the 1990s. Recce Squadron patrols and engagement in the Lowy Kariz area had a measurable impact on enemy movements through the area.

However, when Col. Raziq mounted counternarcotics operations to demonstrate to the coalition forces that he was "serious" about such matters, there was push-back. Narcotics producers in Pakistan staked the poppy growers in the area and when Raziq cleaned up the fields, those growers owed substantial sums of money that could not be recouped. Shadowy men arrived at night with mines and IEDs, and explained that their debts could be worked off if they laid them to interfere with coalition force activities. The growers benefited from the additional security of the coalition troops staying away from IED'd areas and were able to reduce their debt load. As a result, there was a spate of IED strikes.⁸³

The real bellwether was a bombing on Highway 4 on 15 April. Four Afghan police were bypassing a construction site when they spotted a suspicious vehicle, which turned out to be a suicide car bomb. The bomber detonated the vehicle, wounding the Afghan police. Two days later, a D Squadron Coyote hit an IED, wounding the driver, who was evacuated to the Role 3 Hospital in KAF. When the IED exploitation team arrived, they were treated to the detonation of a secondary device. Fortunately, nobody was wounded or killed.⁸⁴

Neighbouring Shorabak District was threatened in March 2008 when 150 insurgents and eight vehicles crossed at a remote location to get around the observation post chain. Without any forces in the area, little could be done. Col. Raziq did send a QRF but the enemy dispersed into the Reg Desert. At the same time, a firefight broke out between Afghan border police and Pakistani forces, which resulted in high-level involvement to reduce tensions. One Afghan cop was killed and two wounded. It was possible that this was a distraction so that the Shorabak insurgents could infiltrate, but it is equally possible that other less malevolent reasons were the cause.⁸⁵

The insurgents upped the ante on 22 April by assaulting two Afghan border observation posts with 50 fighters operating from the Pakistan side of the Durand Line. The Afghan Border Police put up a furious fight, resulting in six dead, two wounded and two missing. A border police patrol, responding to the attacks, hit an IED, wounding two more. A TF 49 patrol was in the area and responded. A Polish joint terminal air controller was able to raise a B-1B bomber to provide support and joint direct attack munitions (JDAM) bombs took out around ten insurgents and the others retreated. D Squadron assisted with evacuating the wounded. The next day, Maj Boivin, who was attending a shura, was nearly killed when a suicide bomber approached the shura and detonated himself. Things were heating up in Spin Boldak, but nobody was sure exactly why or what changed since 2007.⁸⁶

Operation AGILE SCORPION, mounted on 27–30 April, surged D Squadron patrols out into the communities of Lowy Kariz. After a number of key leadership engagements, Maj Boivin and his men were able to determine that a new group of insurgents in the area, along with fresh leadership, were intimidating the local population and then running to the hills when any patrols came near. “Unfortunately,” D Squadron reported, “our ability to directly influence this area remains limited.”⁸⁷

As a sidebar, Recce Squadron patrols discovered a community of 30 people in a remote area of the district. This community was not on any map. When approached, the patrol was told to go away, that they were Barakzais from Pakistan, and that they wanted to get away from all of the violence. It was not clear how many decades they had been there as there was evidence of inbreeding. The horrible living conditions were such that contact with this community had a marked psychological impact on some of the Canadian soldiers. It was as if these Barakzais were the descendants of a several-hundred-year-old Diaspora.⁸⁸

Shah Wali Kot and Arghandab, February–March 2008

C Company, led by Maj Stacey Grubb, established themselves at FOB Frontenac in February before the main body of 2 PPCLI Battle Group arrived. At this point, they were under the command of 3erR22eR Battle Group but received no guidance. “I’d studied enough COIN [and] I put together my own guidance. This was after 24 hours on the ground. I said, ‘This is what we’re going to do,’ to my guys. ‘Here’s my intent.’ And it was all about not being tied to infrastructure; it was about getting out into the population, getting to know our neighbours first.”⁸⁹ Grubb, however, was confronted with the huge size of FOB Frontenac. It was designed to house a whole battle group, but there was only C Company and its attachments, which included a MEWT. The enemy were perplexed at FOB Frontenac: “They couldn’t understand when we first got there what the heck we were doing...They could not understand why we’d built this massive thing there... [FOB Frontenac] wasn’t linked to anything.” C Company used it as a refit facility between patrols: “We only stayed there long enough to get ready for the next patrol.” Grubb established four patrol boxes in the lower Shah Wali Kot–upper Arghandab District area. Each of the four platoons patrolled on a 72-hour basis and soldiers “lived off of their backs.” If enough information came in on a target, Grubb would launch the company for a 96-hour operation.⁹⁰ (See Figure 3-4.)

The patrols gathered significant information but they needed better means to connect with the population. Relations with the police were minimal: the Kandak Amniate Uruzgan (KAU) patrol force on the Tarinkot Road worked for a power broker in Oruzgan and with the American special forces. There was no Afghan National Army presence. In time, a CIMIC team arrived, and Grubb was able to make contact with the district centres in Shah Wali Kot and Arghandab. When that connection was made, “the district centres gave a lot of stuff...we gave them CB radios so they could talk to us. The CIVPOL put in a 911-like number for the cell phones. We got tons of int from the district centres. And our patrols would corroborate some of that intelligence.”⁹¹

At this time, American forces, in this case TF 32, were operating with the KAU security forces on the Tarinkot Road, and in an arc from upper Shah Wali Kot and into northern Khakrez District, where they engaged in disrupt activities. In one encounter, they lost an RG-31 in a remote area and needed recovery. 2 PPCLI Battle Group launched Operation SHAMSHIR TEZ [Sharp Sword] to assist. An engineer route clearance package, a Leopard tank troop from B Squadron, an AEV and an infantry platoon from C Company made their way through the tough terrain in the Gumbad region to link up with TF 32. Predator coverage identified possible IED locations, and these were cleared with dismounted vital point searches. It was exhausting work, but eventually the vehicle was recovered and the forces returned to their home forward operating bases.⁹²

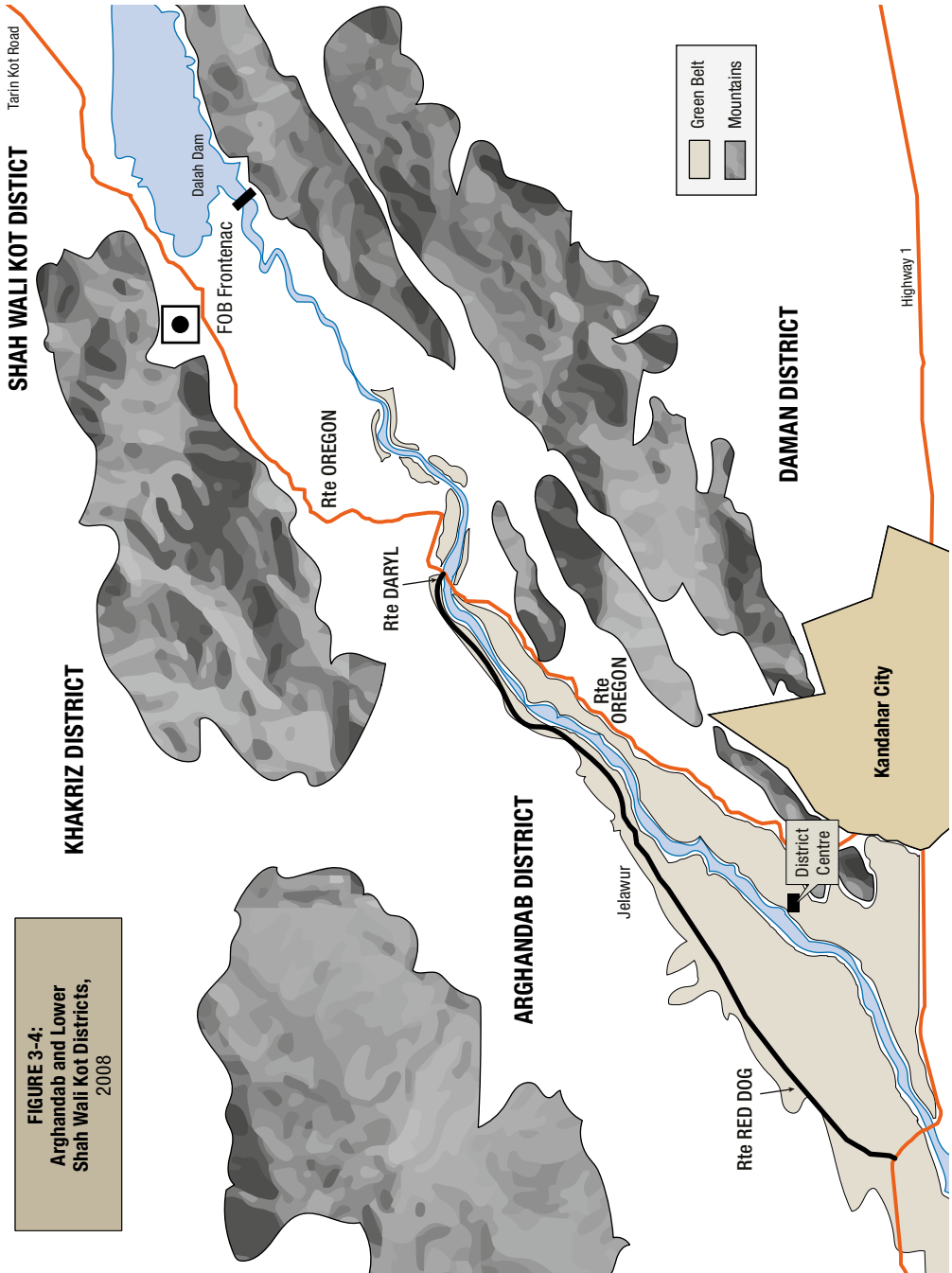


FIGURE 3-4:
Arghandab and Lower
Shah Wali Kot Districts,
2008

Figure 3-4: Arghandab and Lower Shah Wali Kot Districts, 2008

Information from constant patrolling and connections with the population led to a cordon and search operation, CHATAK KOCHNIE KULE, in the village of Acakzo Soznay. This was an IED production site but it was derelict. By April, C Company was able to extend its patrolling area south into upper Arghandab District and was directed to define the area for white situational awareness purposes and gather intelligence on possible enemy approaches into upper Arghandab. With 80% of its efforts now focused on Arghandab, C Company operating methods had to change. Shah Wali Kot was arid and hilly, while Arghandab was a fertile green zone with desert hills to the northwest. Instead of using Route Oregon or Red Dog, which were susceptible to IEDs, C Company used the arid desert-like areas to manoeuvre and then insert into the green belt areas. “They didn’t know where we were going to show up. LAVs can go anywhere, so you can pop up wherever. [The enemy] can see the desert plume but they don’t know what’s going on, and they don’t know what size you are. Everything was disrupted.”⁹³

Maj Grubb was able to report in early May that “insurgent presence is increasing” in Arghandab and that the unfriendly town of Jelawur, which some heard was the hometown of Mullah Omar’s wife, was one of the nodes of this activity.⁹⁴

Zharey District Operations, March–April 2008

The situation in Zharey was significantly different in quality, scale and quantity. The newly inaugurated TF Zharey’s laydown was a patchwork quilt of Afghan army, Afghan police, ANCOF, P-OMLT, OMLT and many other acronyms. The Afghans deployed 2nd Kandak, with company-sized strong points in Howz-e Madad, Ghundy Ghar, Sangsar and Patrol Base Wilson. These were all OMLT-mentored. The police forces had two sets of police sub-stations. The first were along Highway 1, now called “Ring Road South”: Spin Pir, Patrol Base Wilson, Asheque and Senjaray. There was another at the refugee camp north of Zharey. The second set was south of Ring Road South: Pulchakan, Lakokhel, Kolk and Pashmul. For the most part, the interior police sub-stations were supported by Canadian P-OMLT, while the Highway 1 police sub-stations were American-mentored. Due to Focused District Development, there were fewer Afghan National Police and the rest were backfilled with ANCOF from Kabul, again mentored by American police mentors. (See Figure 3-5.)

The men who sorted and coordinated this “Tower of Babel” as best they could were Maj Bob Ritchie and Capt Jon Snyder, both from the OMLT. Over the course of March–April 2008, they used the Joint District Coordination Centre and force of personality to make this system of systems work as best it could. The OMLT and P-OMLT mentors worked long days in isolated, alien environments, alongside men whose loyalties appeared to be uncertain at any given time. It was exhausting and potentially soul-destroying work, where mentoring under fire extracted every ounce of energy it could.

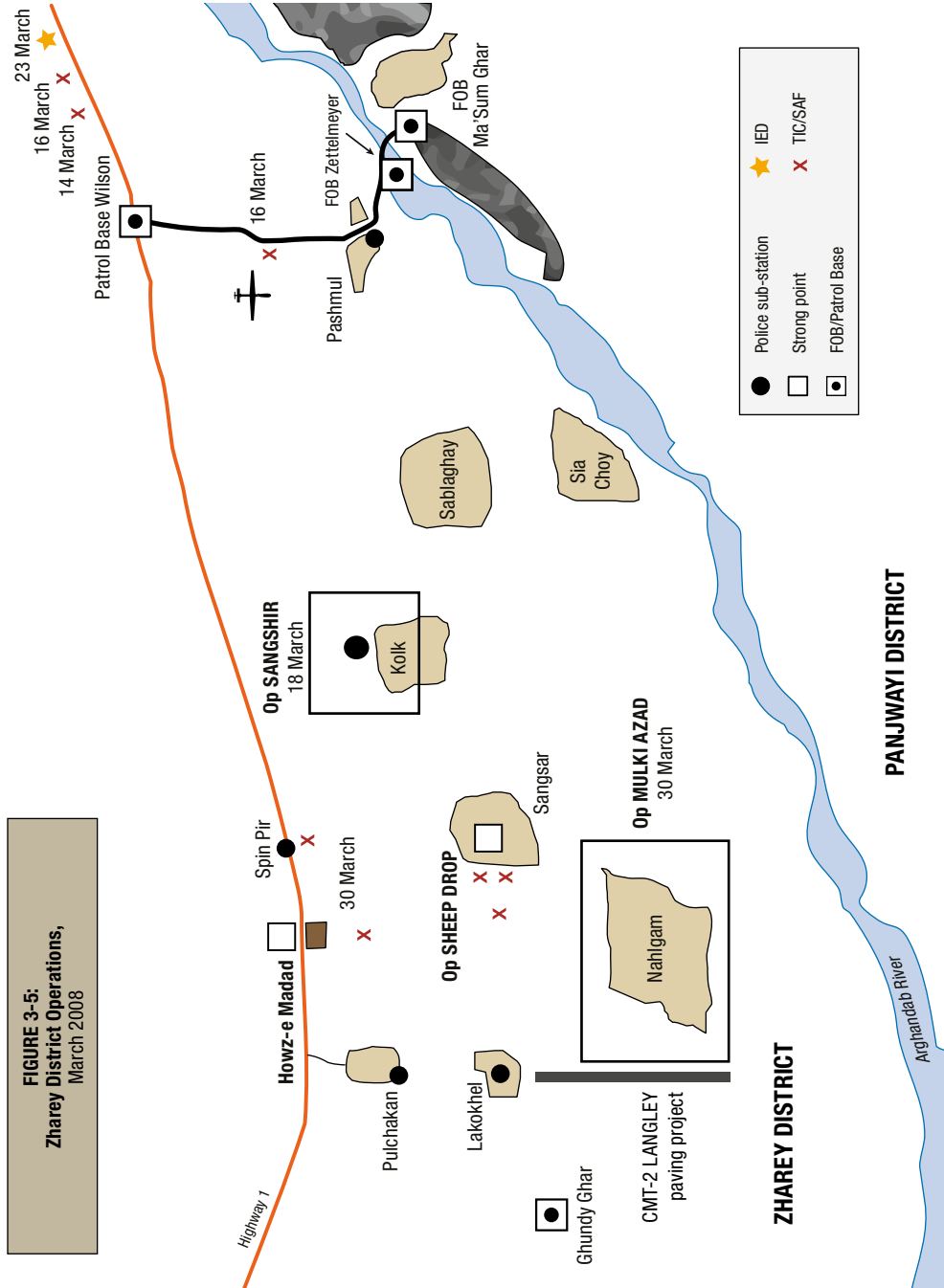


Figure 3-5: Zharey District Operations, March 2008

CIMIC teams from the PRT were also involved in Zharey operations. By the end of March, CIMIC coordinated with the Zharey District coordination centre. Ritchie, who served as the PRT operations officer in 2005, knew the district leader, who had been the Panjwayi District leader in 2005, and worked closely with the District Development Assembly, such as it was.⁹⁵

Throughout March, the CIMIC teams learned that the pressing issues in Zharey related to property expropriation for the creation of the “tactical infrastructure,” damage caused back in 2006 during Operation MEDUSA, and Route Summit irrigation issues. In many cases, it was a circular argument: “This is a continuing theme with claimants where ISAF absolves itself from responsibility for private land occupied by the ANSF and defers assistance requests to the Government of Afghanistan. This only fuels discontent and lack of faith with the Government of Afghanistan and paints ANSF/ISAF in a similar light.”⁹⁶

As for the district processes, people in Zharey “have not seen their shura rep in over a year. ... Farmers stated that they had no confidence in the shura or the Zharey District leader. They claimed that the shura rep would keep any money given to [them] for development and reconstruction and not get to those in need.”⁹⁷ Summit was still a bleeding wound: “The lack of public consultation regarding the paving of Route Summit has left many farmers in Pashmul angry with CANADIANS in particular. Angering the farmers has led to a dramatic reduction in cooperation and could lead to IEDs and INS activity not being reported, or worse, farmers assisting insurgents.”⁹⁸

In another case, a special operations forces operation near Ghundy Ghar detained a local person. When that person’s return was not forthcoming, his family attempted to go through channels to get him released. The family stopped providing water supplies to the Afghan National Army and Canadian OMLT out of frustration when they received no answer over a protracted period: “they have been essentially shunned by the [-----] family which whom they previously had an outstanding working relationship.”⁹⁹ Understanding the value of local religious engagement, however, the OMLT developed relationships with a number of mullahs in Zharey. These men provided warning of IED placement, and insight into how the Taliban were intimidating the population to assist them. They also identified a key insurgent command node.¹⁰⁰

The insurgency in Zharey throughout March initially appeared dormant. In early March, however, the Taliban in Kandahar Province started what amounted to a “war of the cell phones.” Correctly assessing that cell phones were the primary means by which the population connected with the police in Zharey, Panjwayi, and elsewhere through the Joint District Coordination Centres or the JPCC, they ordered the Roshan and AWCC (Afghan Wireless Communication Company) cell phone companies to turn off their systems at night. Both companies complied after the insurgents in Kandahar City burned a Roshan

tower and two other towers in the city were destroyed by other means. In one week, five cell towers were destroyed. TF Kandahar was warned that “as cellular coverage degenerates, the perception of security throughout the district will also diminish.”¹⁰¹ By mid-March, citywide coverage was restored but the companies kept the systems off at night west of the city, particularly in Maywand, Zharey and Panjwayi.¹⁰²

Another enemy activity designed to demonstrate their power to the population was the creation of numerous temporary vehicle checkpoints. This served not only as an intimidation measure but also reinforced the perception that there were Taliban-controlled “no-go” areas, whether they be virtual or real. The more there were, the less virtual they became. This tactic was difficult to counter if there was no enduring presence by the security forces. Combined with the “war of the cell phones,” it served to decouple the population from the government.

There were also new enemies in town. Three Quetta-connected leaders accompanied by a team of IED training specialists were identified as being in Zharey District. Some of these personnel appeared to understand the limitations that existed regarding ISAF Rules of Engagement:

Following the strike by a Reaper on 22 March 2008, an assessed insurgent was seen to use a child or adolescent as a shield against further ISAF attack....He then picked up the wounded insurgent and appeared to compel one of the children to walk in front of him. He was seen pushing the child several times, keeping the youth moving in front of him. This continued to 400m.... At no time was the youth employed to assist in carrying the wounded insurgent.¹⁰³

The OMLT and 2nd Kandak focused on training for night patrols and it took most of the month to work up to the first one. Operation MAAR PUTH [Hiding Snake], a cordon and search operation, resulted in no contact. Eventually, the commanding officer went on leave and gave instructions that no kandak-level operation was to be mounted when he was away. When supplies ran low at Strong Point Sangsar, the kandak leadership planned Operation SHEEP DROP and mounted its own armed resupply mission. There were two contacts with six insurgents who implemented a “shoot and scoot.” The OMLT had a joint terminal air controller along who called in a pair of French fighter bombers, but they were unable to acquire the insurgents. This was a successful mission and demonstrated a level of capability unthinkable in 2006. There were several encounters with insurgents in the following days, leading the OMLT to report that “increased problems around Strong Point Sangsar highlights the threat to Ring Road South...both this location and the area east of FOB Wilson will require a deliberate clearance operation to ensure security.”¹⁰⁴ A suicide attack then occurred against BGen Laroche’s 99 TAC convoy on 12 March, wounding one Canadian, killing one Afghan and disabling an RG-31.¹⁰⁵

By this time, the OMLT developed a system whereby the SECFOR team in its RG-31s (used to resupply the Canadians in the various sub-stations and strong points) had a joint terminal air controller attached. If the security forces found themselves in a contact, this reaction force deployed and called in close air support, as the Afghan army and police had no means to do so. The tank squadron at Ma'Sum Ghar played a role in Zharey security, acting its role as "battleship." Leopard 2 tanks in run-up positions held observation over the southern part of Route Summit. The tanks' optical systems observed an enemy dig team and the battle group Tactical Operations Centre was able to vector an MQ-1 Predator over the road, which subsequently engaged and killed the two-man IED team.¹⁰⁶

The enemy applied a variety of pressures to PSS Kolk and it appeared as though their PSYOPS was working and the Kolk police were going to walk away from the police sub-station. A combination of information from the American police mentors on a cache, plus the need to mount a show of force, produced Operation SANGSHIR on 18 March. 2nd Company from Howz-e Madad and Weapons Company from Patrol Base Wilson manoeuvred around Kolk to block while ANCOP and U.S. police mentoring teams conducted a cache search. Afghan police and the P-OMLT mentors established vehicle checkpoints to catch anybody coming out. Though there was no cache found, this size of multi-agency operation was a major breakthrough in that it was planned and led by the Afghans (though heavily mentored by Maj Ritchie and the OMLT).¹⁰⁷

The insurgent operational tempo picked up dramatically the last week of March. Police and P-OMLT patrolling from Kolk got hit and called in a QRF consisting of the OMLT SECFOR and an air controller who brought an F-15 to bear. A Strong Point Sangsar resupply mission was hit the next day. In both instances, the enemy used "shoot and scoot" tactics and there were no friendly casualties. The enemy then shifted attention to Highway 1. Two civilian resupply convoys were shot up, back-to-back. A huge IED targeting a TF 32 convoy killed two Americans, wounded three and threw a HETT transporter truck 50 feet and flipped it upside down, cratering the whole road.¹⁰⁸ Afghan army and police patrols along the highway kept uncovering device after device. The OMLT once again reported that "There are too many IEDs east of FOB Wilson on Ring Road South. Communications with ANCOP checkpoints [in Asheque and Senjaray] are non-existent. When local national intelligence is collected and passed on it must be acted on in a more timely fashion."¹⁰⁹

Another larger kandak-police operation, MULKI AZAD, was planned for 30 March. The OMLT liaised with B Squadron and was able to gain their support to establish a block on Route Langley, while the Afghan army and police ranged into the Nahlgam area. During that operation, a Leopard 2A6M struck an IED and had to be recovered by the armoured recovery vehicle. 2 Platoon from C Company and 2 Troop covered the extraction, but damage to the road, coupled with the high water table, bogged the entire column.

Indeed, the mud was up the turret rings on some tanks as the road collapsed. A major effort had to be mounted into the first week in April to recover all eight vehicles, with the combat engineers gravelling Route Langley to the site first, followed by extraction of the vehicles.¹¹⁰ The silver lining in this otherwise embarrassing incident was that it led to the possibility of prioritizing a paving project for Route Langley.

The clearest indication that the enemy were back occurred on 30 March. PSS Spin Pir and the strong point at Howz-e Madad were attacked simultaneously. The Howz-e Madad attack was “shoot and scoot” to pin down the defenders but the Spin Pir attack was protracted: The enemy poured heavy fire at the Afghan police and the P-OMLT. An RPG round hit the station watch tower, wounding three Canadians. WO Milton Verge was severely wounded but engaged the enemy with suppressive fire and was able to direct the police to conduct an effective point defence of the position, which stalled the enemy attack. He was later decorated with the Medal of Military Valour for his actions. C Company’s platoon on Route Langley responded, as did the Afghan company and Canadian mentors based at Howz-e Madad. From FOB Wilson, the PRT force protection platoon and a CIMIC team deployed, with all forces converged on PSS Spin Pir. With overwhelming force arriving, the enemy broke contact and fled south. The Afghan company and the CIMIC team pursued groups of insurgents, and engaged eight enemy, killing or wounding five. The enemy withdrew again, this time to the southeast, where a Sperwer TUAV observed them dispersing. Close air support was on station but positive identification was lost.¹¹¹

At this time, the Construction Management Organization deployed CMT-2 to Zharey District. CMT-2’s purpose was to hire local people as part of a paving project on Route Langley, much like the Fosters paving project did in Panjwayi. CMT-2, consisting of 23 personnel, TLAVs and trucks, moved to a combat outpost south of Howz-e Madad and opened up shop. The initial response was encouraging: 120 people arrived to be hired and work started. However, CMT-2 learned very quickly that these workers arrived from Kandahar City in black SUVs escorted by private security. They obviously were not local people. And, when a junior officer inexperienced in “Afghan time” prevented a number of individuals from working because they were late, RPG fire was directed at the CMT-2 combat outpost. Over the course of the next months, CMT-2 was regularly subjected to harassing fire, which led to defensive measures, even to the point where MWO Alison Clark, a pay clerk assigned to CMT-2, manned a Carl Gustav. Despite these challenges, the team was able to connect with the local population on a limited basis and even collect information on enemy activity. For example, one insurgent team consisted of four Afghans, led by a Chechen. The Afghans on these teams were either out-of-area fighters or locals, or both.¹¹²

Panjwayi District Operations, March–April 2008

On 16 March, 2 PPCLI Battle Group took operational control of Panjwayi District. There was no “TF Panjwayi” equivalent for the ANSF, and the command relationship or coordinating relationship between the ANSF and the battle group was confusing. Two of Maj Lane’s four platoons were deployed in Ma’Sum Ghar as the QRF with the tank squadron, and as defence and security for Patrol Base Sperwan Ghar. One platoon was spread out at PSSs Mushan, Talukan, Zangabad and Haji along Route Fosters West, with Afghan police and P-OMLT mentors. The fourth platoon handled security for the Fosters West road-paving project, which was just getting off the ground. Because of the Focused District Development programme, the police were eventually replaced with Afghan army and Canadian OMLT.¹¹³

The problem with this deployment related to the small numbers of personnel in each police sub-station. There were usually eight Canadian infantry, two Canadian Military Police, an interpreter and eight Afghan policemen, or later, 14 Canadian infantry, six to eight Afghan soldiers and an interpreter. This meant that the patrols that went out were small, basically section-sized, because the remainder had to hold the sub-station. These patrols were extremely vulnerable and the insurgents could overwhelm them if there were not enough enablers on call. Ground QRF was problematic given the IED situation on Fosters West. Thus, these four sub-stations were very small security bubbles along the road and were not able to deliver enduring security in the communities south of the road.¹¹⁴

That said, however, the Canadian junior leaders in the police sub-stations established as aggressive a patrol matrix that they could, given the circumstances. They were able to range out about 1.5 kilometres away from their bases and gather pattern of life information and White SA. They uncovered an extensive intimidation campaign in Zangabad and did what they could to tap into the local psyche.¹¹⁵ But then, the enemy took notice and ambushed a patrol outside Talukan. Overwhelmed, the Canadians and Afghans withdrew into the sub-station and close air support was called in. By the time an F-15 arrived, the enemy were gone. Aggressive patrolling resumed, within the limits of capabilities.¹¹⁶

The situation was different over in Strong Point Mushan, which boasted an Afghan army company and Canadian mentors. Mushan had the manpower to hold the strong point and range out patrols to 5 kilometres. This put the population centre and bazaar in Mushan within the bubble. Slowly, trust and an economic relationship was established between the strong point’s occupants and the community and, with that as a basis, information started to flow about what the enemy was up to. The Taliban had a new IED cell active and it was focusing on the horn of Panjwayi.¹¹⁷

TF Kandahar decided to mount another clearance of Fosters West with the stated intention of gaining freedom of movement in Panjwayi District's "vital lines of communication" to facilitate "ADZ expansion." Operation TOORA AZADI (see Figure 3-6) included B Company, tanks from B Squadron, 23 Field's EROC Huskies and Buffalos, and a composite Afghan army company supported by the OMLT. Lasting nearly three weeks, TOORA AZADI was an expensive operation from almost every perspective. Launched on 26 March, the force cleared up to PSS Zangabad with no IEDs found. A brace of 107mm rockets struck FOB Ma'Sum Ghar as the troops leaguered for the night. On the morning of 27 March, a Coyote from D Squadron detonated an IED based on a 155mm artillery round as it patrolled the cleared route east of Zangabad. Three Canadians were seriously wounded. That night, an MQ-1 Predator got "eyes on" a three-man IED dig team and two sentries. An F-16 came in and strafed them, ending their activities. Moving out on 28 March, the force cleared west to 1 kilometre away from PSS Talukan. A LAV III struck an anti-personnel mine. Notably, this was a Soviet-designed PMN anti-personnel mine, not an IED. The force leaguered again for the night and prepared to clear back to Route Brown near Sperwan Ghar the next day. That operation occurred without incident. ISTAR reportage indicated that the enemy were frantically digging up mines from other locations and trying to move them to emplace them ahead of the column.¹¹⁸ After a day of aggressive patrolling around PSS Haji, the column headed west again to Zangabad on 31 March, where a Husky hit an IED and was disabled. At this point, the decision was made by TF Kandahar to continue the operation into April after repairing the damaged EROC equipment. Stepping off yet again, on 2 April, headed west to Talukan, the EROC Buffalo was disabled, wounding a Canadian engineer. Then there was another IED or mine strike. TF Kandahar ordered the TOORA AZADI force to halt. ISTAR reportage indicated that "the IED strike area was cleared a few hours before the incident by the [route clearance package]. This indicates that the insurgents have the capacity to hastily install and arm IEDs on Route Fosters with CF operating nearby."¹¹⁹

The column was now ordered to proceed to PSS Talukan, conduct dismounted patrols, reconstruct the sub-station and resupply the forces. While this was taking place, a P-OMLT RG-31 Nyala vehicle hit an IED west of Zangabad, wounding three Canadians and wrecking the RG-31. In due course, a B Company LAV III was IED'd in the same area, killing Pte Terry John Street. On 5 April, the column proceeded back to Patrol Base Sperwan Ghar. To cap things off, the enemy attacked PSS Talukan on 14 April in a coordinated assault from the east and southwest. 82mm recoilless rifle fire was directed against the sub-station. Firing back with every weapon available, the Canadians and Afghans were able to call in the M-777 guns. Despite the violence of the attack, there were no

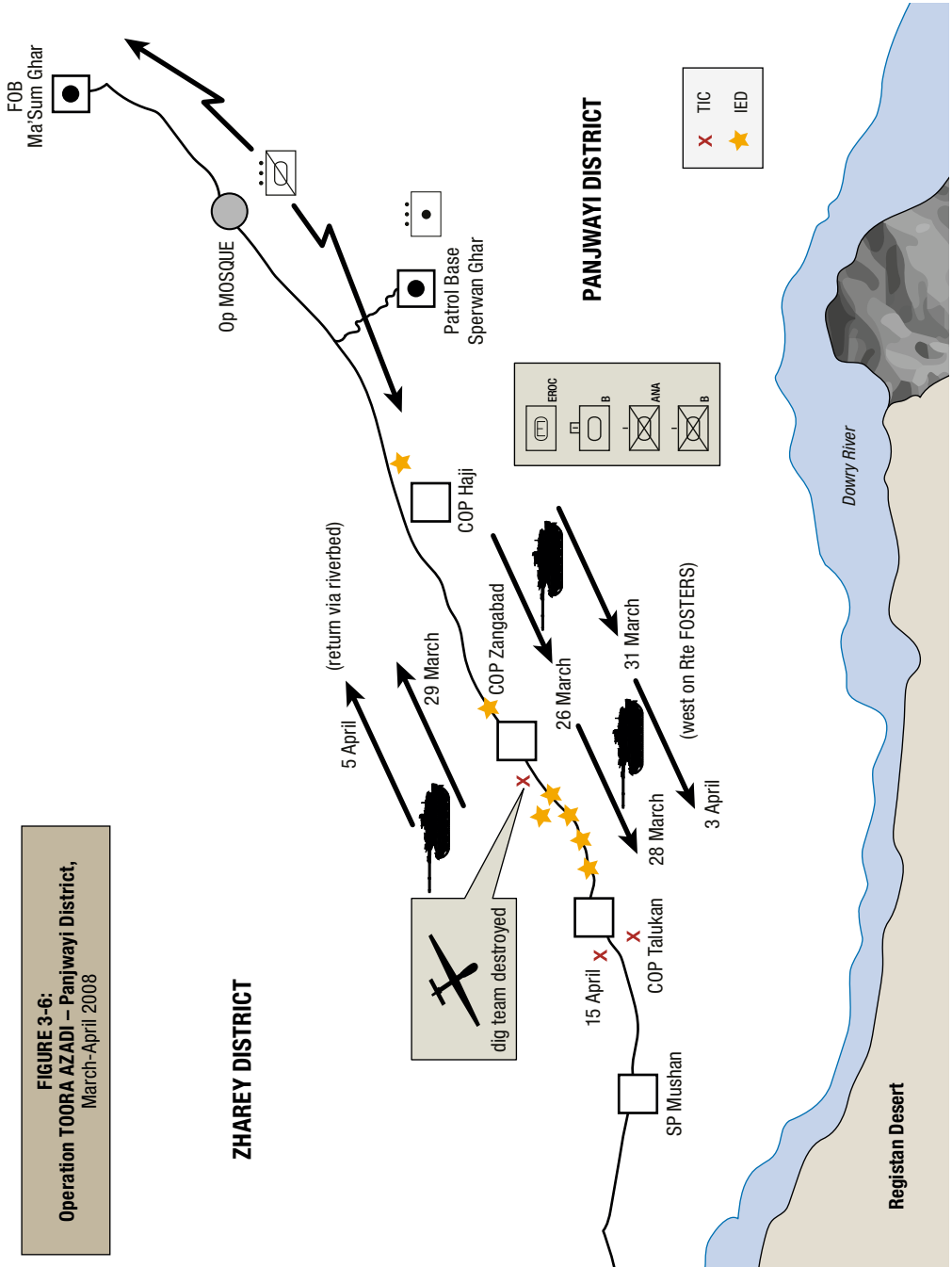


Figure 3-6: Operation TOORA AZADI – Panjwayi District, March–April 2008

Canadian casualties.¹²⁰ Operation TOORA AZADI confirmed that keeping Route Fosters West open was extremely problematic. Strong Point Mushan was, in the absence of dedicated Canadian or Afghan helicopters, cut off for the time being. The enemy were now on the ascendency in the horn of Panjwayi.

In the rest of Panjwayi District, Canadian CIMIC continued with its interactions with the district leader, Haji Baran. A CIMIC team report captured the nature of this relationship:

[Haji Baran] seems to think that the PRT exists to give him money and do him personal favours. Most of his requests appear to revolve around personal needs and he has little concept of community responsibility. This will be a huge challenge to overcome. Recommend – Continue to work with the DL. Continue to foster the concept that public office entails more than stuffing one’s pockets with cash and springing one’s friends from prison. This may take some time and effort....¹²¹

That said, however, Haji Baran provided valuable insight for the Canadians. In his view, Baran noted that “many of the Afghan refugees returning from [Iran and Pakistan] have been influenced by propaganda and either become insurgents or support them.”¹²² The American Police Mentoring Team working with the ANCOP during the focused district development project built a checkpoint next to a mosque on Fosters East near Salehan village. ANCOP took over the mosque, which agitated the local people and created “negative [information operations].”¹²³

Baran mentioned that the reason Afghans resisted the Soviet invasion was because they interfered in government with a lack of respect for Islam. He said that if ISAF did not respect Islam, he would not be sitting with ISAF under any circumstances. He said that the insurgents spread lies that Haji Baran is the “son of Canadians” who are the enemies of Islam and Afghanistan. The insurgents are making large IO gains by painting ISAF as enemies of Islam and the Government of Afghanistan as ISAF’s puppets.¹²⁴

It is in this regard that the CIDA and DFAIT policies of non-engagement with religion were highly flawed. CIMIC operation Capt Michel “Bunny” Larocque, after spending months dealing with Panjwayi District, understood that the upcoming paving project on Fosters West was an ideal opportunity to cement Canadian–Panjwayian relations. The Sheikh Qalandar Baba mosque and the Haji Goloon Baba shrine lay astride the projected route. Working around these facilities could become problematic if it were not handled properly. Capt Larocque wanted funds for refurbishment for both. With the blessing of the population and their mullahs, it would be much easier to make headway in that area

while deflecting enemy information operations.¹²⁵ CIDA and DFAIT were unwilling to get involved, so the money for refurbishment came from Army coffers.

Another view came from a village elder from Sperwan, who was concerned that his people were losing support for the government:

The GoA is its own worst enemy. Because of rampant bribery and corruption services have failed to appear. They have lost the faith and the good will of large segments of the population in Panjwayi which in turn allows the insurgents to flourish....This is the vital ground in this war. If there is a perception that the GoA is not worth fighting *for* we will inevitably lose ground to the insurgents. This could be the reason for the lack of progress in Panjwayi.¹²⁶

The CIMIC teams reported also that the Route Brown land compensation issue remained a major grievance:

The longer this drags on (among others) the more the population swings away from government support. The lack of compensation for expropriated land is a huge obstacle to building confidence in government in Panjwayi. As Panjwayi is a volatile district with a propensity to insurgent activity, a sense of urgency should fuel efforts to placate the population.¹²⁷

Working through the international organizations to get things done remained problematic. For example, the refugee camp leadership asked once again for PRT help with humanitarian assistance and were informed that the “appropriate UN agency” would help. The refugee camp leadership told CIMIC that the camp needed help, now, and they had “very little faith in the UN coming to their assistance.”¹²⁸

The more CIMIC probed, the more skulduggery they uncovered. By April, the skepticism level reached dizzying heights as the Construction Management Organization arrived in the district to work with CIMIC and look into how the hiring process for the Route Fosters paving project should work in conjunction with the district government. They were informed that Haji Niamatullah Halimi, the head of the District Development Assembly, had been assassinated. Baran played this down, telling everybody it was a Taliban standing order to target shura members.¹²⁹ Others were not assured by this statement. However, before a serious probe could begin, an airstrike on the night of 2 April killed three insurgents who were laying an IED on Fosters. Rumours abounded in the district that these men were merely farmers killed indiscriminately by ISAF and there was talk of riots and burning government buildings. Haji Baran told the Canadians that he personally intervened to stop all of this to protect his Canadian friends.¹³⁰ The reality, however, was that there was TUAV footage that clearly depicted what the insurgents were up to but it could not be shown to the population.

When the CIMIC and Construction Management Organization teams returned to the issue of the paving project, it was a little too convenient that the District Development Assembly leader was recently deceased. When they contacted the UN representatives who were supposed to handle the District Development Assembly, they were told that “the DDA had been functioning well about two years ago.” However, it “had transformed from a body for developing long-term economic strategies and instead had changed into a project generating machine...it was the DDA’s role to determine district development priorities, where it fell to the district leader to step back and provide political leadership.”¹³¹

And there was more. USAID approved money for fixing Route Brown and it sub-contracted to the Wara Construction Company to handle this project. One of the workers was murdered and Wara told the elders in Sperwan that they would not continue with the project. However, the Dastagiri Construction Company materialized and told the elders that they could do the job as they had their own security force. When CIMIC investigated, they learned that the Dastagiri security were all off-duty Afghan police, who were getting paid nearly ten times their government pay rate.¹³² It is unlikely that these arrangements went through the Panjwayi District Development Assembly for consideration.

It was at this point that the PRT was permitted by Ottawa to temporarily deploy a DFAIT member to Panjwayi to augment the activities of the Joint District Coordination Centre, and the tank squadron leadership, who were about to assume more involvement in development, governance, and reconstruction matters. Putting their heads together, Maj Chris Adams, Capt Tory White and Karen Foss reviewed the structure and concluded that the Community Development Councils should retain their connection to the Ministry of Rural Reconstruction and Development. The UN was useless when it came to dealing with the District Development Assembly, so the Department of Foreign Affairs would try and mentor this process with Haji Baran, given there was no development assembly leader, until UN HABITAT could get its act together. For any other PRT-supported projects, the three agreed to work together at the district level to make them happen. It is precisely this sort of ad hoc arrangement that permitted Canada to move forward incrementally in places like Panjwayi.¹³³

CIMIC’s role in this was to monitor what was really happening outside the district centre. In a series of interviews in Bazaar-e Panjwayi, they were told that “the district shura and leader were corrupt, and any aid filtered through them would not reach the poor people of Panjwayi. They recommended direct visits to the villages to talk to the leaders of mosques who could then select four representatives per village to identify needs.”¹³⁴ That was essentially in line with the Community Development Council concept, but it apparently was not operating. Probing further, CIMIC reported that:

The DDA appears disorganized, evasive, and ineffective. It is the opinion of KPRT Det 52 that there are probably no CDCs in existence and the DDA have been giving projects of their own choosing to recipients of their own choosing.¹³⁵

Furthermore, the CIMIC team assessed that:

It is possible that Haji Baran recognizes that he will hold less power in Panjwayi if the power dynamic changes and would therefore be uncomfortable with the idea of tribal/political strife being settled. This is merely one theory to explain his motivations but would explain some of his behaviour.¹³⁶

It did not help matters when Haji Baran conducted poppy eradication operations in the district by appropriating tractors at gun point, using the police.¹³⁷ Panjwayi was in trouble and it was only going to get worse.

Development and Reconstruction: The Provincial Reconstruction Team from March to April 2008

In February 2008, LCol Dana Woodworth took over from LCol Bob Chamberlain as the PRT commanding officer and was off to a running start along with his Deputy Commanding Officer, Maj Eric Perey. Having studied the PRT for some time before deploying, LCol Woodworth instituted several changes on arrival. He asked for and got an increase of CIMIC teams and capacity. While retaining the existing structure whereby a CIMIC team was responsible for a particular district, the number of districts the PRT was hoping to operate in was going to increase, therefore there was a need for more teams. The Specialist Engineer Team also evolved from a contracting authority and mentor to the business community, to having a validation capability vis-à-vis the expenditure of Canadian reconstruction money in Kandahar Province. This move increased accountability and provided more “metrics” on reconstruction activity as a whole. The project targeting/synchronization board process was streamlined to speed up the ability to spend reconstruction money. All of these changes were designed to increase the Canadian government’s ability to measure what was going on in terms of development and to demonstrate that there was an increased effort in this area.¹³⁸

In the early months of the new PRT, there was also an increase in the numbers of civilian PRT personnel from the OGDs. Few of these people had experience with a place like Afghanistan, and it took some time to integrate the military side of the PRT with the civilian side. That situation was affected by changes at the TF Kandahar level and by the creation of the Representative of Canada in Kandahar in April 2008, which will be touched on later.

Operationally, the PRT became district-focused. In March, for example, the PRT assigned CIMIC teams to Zharey, Panjwayi, Spin Boldak, Arghandab and Dand. Issues related to electricity and the loss of capacity of the Kajaki Dam meant that the PRT started to look more and more at Kandahar City as well. The PRT chose to focus on the District Development Assembly as its point of main effort in each district. Ideally, LCol Woodworth wanted increased Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development involvement in the province. This in part related to the increased belief among the population and the power brokers that the PRT was becoming the “Bank of CIMIC”:

KPRT Det 52 has decided to refocus efforts away from quick impact projects (QIPs) and more towards strengthening governance and gathering of White [Situational Awareness]. KPRT Det 52 wants to move towards strategic sustainable goals. This may be an unpopular decision among the select few locals who have been benefitting financially from KPRT QIPs.... The QIPs are offering diminishing returns in terms of goodwill and long term effects in the region and a change of strategy is long overdue.¹³⁹

Of course, crossing paths with local power brokers would cause problems later, particularly on the Route Fosters West paving project, but this direction was undoubtedly the correct one at the time. The PRT was not the provincial government. Steps were also taken in the PRT to regain momentum at the provincial level by trying once again to work with Asadullah Khalid’s people to formulate a provincial development plan. This exercise in frustration lasted for months until there were changes to provincial governance.¹⁴⁰ The districts that had some form of functioning development assemblies in early 2008 were Dand, Spin Boldak and Arghandab. To suggest that there was a seamless transfer of reconstruction and development funds from Kabul to Kandahar, to those districts and then to the development councils at the community level would be a gross exaggeration. Arghandab had a functioning development assembly but, apparently, only one development council.¹⁴¹ The situation in Dand, according to the district leader, was “the best it’s been in ten years.”¹⁴² There were 56 confirmed Community Development Councils active in Dand and word came in that the rural development ministry was also active in Daman District. CIMIC teams reported that Dand District Development Assembly members “were very excited to have the KPRT in their district.”¹⁴³ And, with a new district chief of police replacing the infamous Col. Akka, security improved. As for Spin Boldak, the usual rough and tumble of Achakzai–Noorzai politics played out but by April, CIMIC teams reported that “The fact that the DDA is now operating in a cooperative fashion for the good of the people is a landmark step for a group that has garnered a reputation for mismanagement

and general dysfunction.”¹⁴⁴ On the downside, the PRT failed to develop an appropriate strategy for religious engagement. Some of the CIMIC teams were dismissive of this aspect of local power brokerage:

The District Scholars Shura represent yet another power broker in the district. As with the others, they tout their influence with the population and request special consideration for the provision of development dollars. They are a competing source of influence that come to associate ISAF with development funds and despite efforts to promote unity and cooperation, appear interested in their own agendas.¹⁴⁵

Only two CIMIC teams reported on religious engagement during this period. Some operators understood the role religious leaders played at the community level, but attempts to get the PRT to understand the importance of religious engagement were unsuccessful.

Another change of emphasis was in Kandahar City. Previously, the PRT focused on police support (Operation PORTCULLIS, for example), but with the separation of policing support into a whole new line of operations, the PRT retained less and less involvement. It continued to support Canadian civilian police trainers dealing with the Regional Training Center and the in-house police training facility and housing the American Police Mentoring Teams at Camp Nathan Smith. The PRT also improved its contacts with the mayor to determine the best means to support his efforts. The PRT made contact with a variety of organizations and commands trying to address the Kajaki Dam–Kandahar City power grid issue. The details are beyond this study here but, in effect, this was a DFAIT/CIDA/USAID problem that involved the acquisition of generators located in New Orleans as a temporary measure until a turbine could be delivered and installed at Kajaki Dam later in 2008.¹⁴⁶ Until that was addressed, rolling blackouts in the city became the norm, leading to all sorts of dire conspiracy theories among the population and undermining support for the government.

The Dahla Dam project was essentially a whole-of-government portfolio handled by the Representative of Canada in Kandahar, with the PRT providing protective support and local contact knowledge as required. In addition to embassy diplomacy, SAT-A’s influence was leveraged in Kabul as required, especially their contacts in the Ministry of Energy and Water. By April, ambitious plans regarding the dam’s refurbishment were under consideration by the OGDs. TF Kandahar’s concern, expressed to Ottawa, remained the fact that:

It will require significant coordination and cooperation with both Coalition and Afghan security forces to establish the conditions necessary for the project to proceed and it will be necessary to compromise both efficiency and work sequencing to keep the security burden manageable during project execution....Many international donors have expressed concerns about involving themselves in what is seen as a high-risk environment and it will likely be necessary to complete the advanced works as a demonstration that development is possible before full project funding can be achieved. In support of this it is important that communications programmes be initiated to inform the public how critical it is that this work proceed unimpeded and to telegraph to the Taliban that attacking this project would negatively impact their own local support.¹⁴⁷

Governance Matters, March–April 2008

The Canadian government was more and more attuned to the fact that Governor Asadullah Khalid was a hindrance to the coalition effort in Kandahar Province. There were media allegations that Khalid had a private prison at the Governor's Palace, where detainees had been abused. There were frequent allegations of his involvement in the narcotics trade. That said, however, provincial council leader Ahmad Wali Karzai was undermining Khalid, subtly. Karzai planted the seed with Canadian representatives that Khalid was increasingly problematic because of his poor treatment of tribal elders, and that this was undermining government legitimacy.¹⁴⁸ Indeed, "The recent suicide bombing targeting an Alikozai police chief in Arghandab District further divided the Alikozai from Khalid....The dismissal of the deputy chief of police, another Alikozai, and the Presidential 'crowning' of Karimullah as tribal leader of the Alikozai without prior consultation further lower their support for the government."¹⁴⁹ Certainly, Khalid's lack of emphasis on the reconstruction and development aspects of governance was noticed by TF Kandahar,¹⁵⁰ as was his appointment of problematic district leaders and district chiefs of police. Attempts to produce a provincial development plan were stalled, and this was seen by CIDA to be one of the keys to breaking the deadlock on getting more Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development involvement and thus more monies flowing from Kabul.

At Regional Command (South), MGen Lessard and his staff concluded that:

The influence of local power brokers, which during recent weeks has become more significant, is one of the most destabilizing factors effecting governance in the South. The interference by certain individuals, many of whom have held positions of authority in the past, is undermining those governors and leaders formally appointed. The situation is compounded by [the Government of Afghanistan's] apparent reluctance to publicly back the appointed individuals in favour of the power brokers.¹⁵¹

Canadian tolerance of Asadullah Khalid's behaviour ended in early 2008. The policy of what might be called "better the devil you know than the one you don't" had been in place since 2006,¹⁵² but with more and more negative information in play, both public and internal, coupled with Ahmad Wali Karzai's apparent "green light," enough was, perhaps, enough. Khalid was a block to Canada's development strategy in Kandahar Province. On 14 April 2008, Foreign Minister Maxime Bernier asked the media rhetorically on a visit to Kandahar, "Is it the right person, at the right place at the right time?" The media took this as open criticism of Asadullah Khalid and concluded that Bernier was going to ask Hamid Karzai to replace Khalid.¹⁵³

Kabul perceived this as Canadian interference with sovereign Afghan prerogatives and resulted in a cooling of the Canadian–Afghan relationship. Khalid remained in place for the time being to save face. In any event, the whole issue of Asadullah Khalid was mishandled and because of its proximity to the detainee issue, led to gridlock in Ottawa. Canadian media quoted a senior government official that "There was no policy for dealing with something like this, something sensitive. No one knew quite what to do."¹⁵⁴ Once again, the heightened expectations of a Canadian culture steeped in idealism clashed with Afghan realism and generated obstacles to larger Canadian strategic objectives.

The day after Bernier's comments were reported by Canadian and Afghan media, personnel from a CIMIC team and the Specialist Engineer Team working at Sarposa Prison were approached by jailed insurgents and told them they supported Bernier:

Another theme was extreme happiness at the perception that the Canadian Government wanted to have the Governor of Kandahar replaced. Somehow the prisoners had heard of this and said it brought them great joy that "as long as [the Governor of Kandahar] and [Ahmad Wali Karzai] were in power they would fight 'Jihad' because GOK and AWK were 'abusing their positions, not taking care of human rights, and influencing tribal quarrels.'" The prisoners indicated that as long as the Canadians advocated the removal of [Khalid] that "not a single bullet would be fired at Canadians by insurgents". Furthermore since the political prisoners now "like" Canadian soldiers, they would like to see all Canadian soldiers convert to Islam so as not to be condemned to Hell upon death....The theme of hatred of [Khalid] is consistent with that put forth by a large proportion of the population throughout the province.¹⁵⁵

Relief in Place: Thompson Replaces Laroche, May 2008

It was time for BGen Guy Laroche and his headquarters to depart and on 2 May, BGen Denis Thompson took command of TF Kandahar. The main units under command remained the same, while the ASIC was new and led by Maj Paul Chura, and LCol Dwayne Hobbs took over the JPCC to become, in effect, BGen Thompson's

personal representative to the Governor. There were substantial changes to TF Kandahar to reflect the post-Manley report process. The first was the addition of the Representative of Canada in Kandahar.

The question was: did Commander TF Kandahar report to the Representative of Canada in Kandahar? Was she a “co-commander”? And if so, what effect would that have on the Afghans? Were there two solitudes, with the armed forces in one box and the OGDs in another, reporting to TF Kandahar and the Representative of Canada? Was the Development Advisor to Commander TF Kandahar now the Head of Aid for Kandahar or not? Where did the PRT fit into this? And what about SAT-A? None of this was clear when the new headquarters took over.

The drive by David Mulroney to assert civilian leadership over Canadian operations in Afghanistan led to the imposition of what came to be called the whole-of-government approach on TF Kandahar. Unsatisfied with previous efforts to synergize the Canadian effort in the Afghanistan task force, and now in a position to assert more control because of his relationship to the Cabinet Committee on Afghanistan,¹⁵⁶ David Mulroney continued to assert control over the foreign affairs positions in Afghanistan. These people, unfortunately, reflected Mulroney’s lack of experience and qualifications in strategy formulation, operational planning, military operations or interdepartmental operations in conflict zones.

Arif Lalani remained as ambassador, with the Representative of Canada reporting to him. The 34-year old representative, Elissa Golberg, lacked any ground-level experience in either conflict zones or humanitarian relief operations, and had no operational planning expertise or experience.¹⁵⁷ Like Lalani, Golberg had credibility with Mulroney and the Ottawa bureaucracy, but she lacked credibility with the Kandahari power brokers. According to JTF Afghanistan headquarters personnel, the Afghan leadership in Kandahar frequently deferred to BGen Thompson rather than Golberg during meetings.¹⁵⁸ Thompson and Golberg formulated a détente so that business could proceed between the Canadian government departments in Kandahar.

Mulroney, Lalani and Golberg were overmatched in the Afghanistan environment long before they even set foot on the ground. Why more experienced and perhaps culturally appropriate personnel were not selected for these positions at this time, is a legitimate question for those involved in selecting Canada’s senior civilian leadership for Afghanistan. Attributes that may have been appropriate in Ottawa bureaucratic circles were less than useful in a Kandahar environment, where respect and credibility was measured differently. Military commanders carried more weight with the Kandahari power structure, a point brought home time and again, quietly and subtly, by the Afghans to those who would listen.

It is crucial to understand at this juncture that these comments are not personal attacks on the senior Canadian diplomatic leadership in Afghanistan. Their purpose is to highlight extant insensitivity on the part of the Ottawa bureaucratic culture¹⁵⁹ that generated unnecessary interdepartmental friction and produced questionable national objectives at a time when Canadian soldiers were getting killed and wounded. In Afghanistan male elders, especially male elders that carry weapons and have demonstrated access to more and bigger weapons, simply have more credibility in Pashtun culture than those who are not male, are not elders, and do not know how to use force. Though unpalatable to some vis-à-vis Canadian culture and values, this was the cold, hard, reality in Afghanistan.

Back in Ottawa, the Manley Panel recommendations were well-received by Prime Minister Harper. The Cabinet Committee on Afghanistan was to implement the recommendations, define priorities and staff all of this activity. This process was dubbed ROLLING START. According to David Mulroney, Manley Panel member Derek Burney pushed for measurable objectives and an end date for the mission. The Prime Minister also agreed with the idea of an end date. The logic was that the proposed objectives needed an end date so that they could be measured and thus their effectiveness derived and explained in the Ottawa environment.¹⁶⁰

The process by which the Cabinet priorities were generated involved a back and forth dialogue between the Cabinet Committee on Afghanistan and the Secretariat with input from the interested departments and agencies. The Canadian Forces, DND, CIDA and DFAIT fed David Mulroney as he had several dialogues with David Emerson, while the OGDs fed the Secretariat. The objective of the exercise was to gain bureaucratic “buy-in” in Ottawa, “to get them to own the project and collaborate,” produce a draft memo to Cabinet and get that memo accepted by Cabinet. That process took several months.¹⁶¹

During the process, Emerson moved on and the Cabinet Committee on Afghanistan “became less cohesive.” Mulroney believed that Peter Van Loan, Bev Oda and Lawrence Cannon were not “engaged” as much as they could or should have been. For example, Oda micromanaged CIDA money in Afghanistan: everything above \$10 000 had to be signed off by her personally. In another case, the RCMP demanded that its chain of command approve the deployment of CIVPOL officers outside the PRT compound.¹⁶²

From March to May 2008, the Cabinet Committee and the Secretariat interfaced to produce the first public report to Parliament. In this report, the Canadian government effectively replaced the long-standing strategic objectives that governed the Canadian mission since November 2001. Instead of eliminating the Al Qaeda organization as a continuing terrorist threat, denying Al Qaeda the use of Afghanistan as a base for global terrorist operations and assisting in the reconstruction of Afghanistan:

The strategic objective of the Canadian engagement in Afghanistan is to make measurable progress between now and 2011 toward building a more secure Kandahar that is better governed and can deliver base services to its citizens, supported by a more capable national government that can better manage Afghanistan's borders and sustain stability and reconstruction gains over the longer term.¹⁶³

In addition to a lack of a clearly stated rationale for all of this, a number of points fall out of this paragraph alone. Kandahar was an operational and tactical problem, not a strategic one. This opened the doors to far too much control over operational and tactical matters by elements that were removed from the realities of Kandahar. Second, by focusing exclusively on Kandahar, important and crucial arenas for Canadian engagement like Kabul and Pakistan were neglected. This approach severely restricted or even neglected the existing vertically integrated Canadian system for engaging Afghanistan from Kandahar to Kabul. Indeed, according to some observers, there were elements that even wanted that structure dismantled because there was supposedly too much Canadian military influence. What the June 2008 report did note was the establishment of six Cabinet priorities and, in time, measurable benchmarks that would follow so the Canadian public could see progress.¹⁶⁴

1. Enable the ANSF in Kandahar to sustain a more secure environment and promote law and order;
2. Strengthen Afghan institutional capacity to deliver core services and promote economic growth, enhancing the confidence of Kandaharis in their government;
3. Provide humanitarian assistance for extremely vulnerable people, including refugees, returnees and internally displaced people; and
4. Enhance border security, with facilitation of bilateral dialogue between Afghanistan and Pakistan authorities.

Nationally, Canada will help:

1. advance Afghanistan's capacity for democratic governance by contributing to effective, accountable public institutions and electoral processes; and
2. facilitate Afghan-led efforts toward political reconciliation.

Nowhere was there mention of the insurgency, why it existed, what fueled it, who created it, or how to challenge and defeat it. Indeed, defeating the insurgency did not appear to be a Canadian strategic priority. It was as if the Canadian government did not believe the insurgency could be defeated and Canada should gracefully exit stage left three years hence. Or, taken another way, it appeared that those formulating the priorities believed that by merely strengthening the Afghan government, the insurgency would simply run out of steam and disappear.

It took from June to December 2008 to articulate those and other benchmarks fully. During that time, JTF Afghanistan had to respond to guidance from ISAF; Regional Command (South); and CEFCOM. All of these entities were revamping their approaches, but only CEFCOM was able to peek into the inner workings of the Cabinet Committee and what it wanted to see happen in Kandahar. All of that to say that there were multiple concurrent processes that were not necessarily meshing for the first half of 2008, but that Canada's soldiers continued to conduct operations in an increasingly violent Kandahar environment.

The post-Manley demand by Ottawa for metrics played a greater role in how TF Kandahar did business. Now that the Canadian government promised measurable progress, a common language was needed to explain to the media, the government and the Canadian people what Canada was accomplishing in Afghanistan. This, in turn, had a serious impact on the BGen Thompson headquarters.

CIDA and DFAIT, let alone the RCMP and Correctional Services Canada, had no planning process comparable to the Canadian Forces one. Where the Canadian Forces viewed things in a tactical/operational/strategic framework, this language was non-existent in the cultures of the OGDs. Memorandums from Cabinet drove the "strategic" end of CIDA and DFAIT. CIDA had no "tactical" level: this is why CIMIC and the Construction Management Organization seemed to be doing all of the development work in the districts, for example. There was no "operational" level (see Figure 3-7) for CIDA or DFAIT, though the RCMP, with its involvement in training and mentoring, had a pseudo-operational level function.¹⁶⁵ Without having these basic building blocks aligned, no common measurements of effectiveness could be formulated to feed Ottawa's "benchmarks," whatever those were, when they were released in summer or fall 2008. Operation SHA AYENDA, the Laroche TF Kandahar plan, was now discarded eight months after it was conceived. CEFCOM campaign planning almost became null and void as it had no OGD input. A new Canadian plan that was inclusive of the OGDs and had their input was now required and would have to be formulated. That would take time. Some "bridge" plan was needed to get Canada from SHA AYENDA to the projected whole-of-government Provincial Action Plan.

This “bridge” was dubbed the “Interim Provincial Action Plan, or IPAP.”¹⁶⁶ At the same time, MGen Lessard’s Regional Command (South) headquarters was in the process of altering course from SHAM SHIR to a new ISAF plan called TOLO. The importance of this change was that NATO ISAF policy on counternarcotics contradicted Canadian policy on counternarcotics, so there was the potential for conflict between a NATO command (that happened to be led by a Canadian) and a Canadian national command.¹⁶⁷ This meant that the entire baseline plan for what TF Kandahar was doing in Afghanistan had to change. This was not going to happen overnight.

CF	DFAIT	CIDA	RCMP	CORRECTIONS
STRATEGIC	Yes	Yes	No	No
OPERATIONAL	RoCK	No	Yes (trg)	No
TACTICAL	No	No CIMIC CMO	Yes P-OMLT	Yes




Figure 3-7: Disconnection in Operational Planning Levels, Canadian Whole-of-Government Structure in Afghanistan, 2008

The process started in mid-May 2008 with the establishment of the Interim Provincial Action Plan planning group by BGen Thompson.¹⁶⁸ Thompson’s views on what was happening on the ground in Kandahar, however, flowed into the process as well and these amounted to several important mid-course guidance changes to TF Kandahar’s direction. BGen Thompson laid out his preliminary thinking and sought unit and staff input. He liked the “Clear-Hold-Build” concept and added “Define” and “Enable” to it to reflect information gathering and capacity-building efforts. Kandahar City was the vital ground and was largely self-securing because “the population, through reason, does not buy the Taliban’s ideas and is thus vulnerable only to intimidation tactics.” Kandahar City, thus, was in Build-Enable. Arghandab and lower Shah Wali Kot, “being virtually mono-ethnic (Alikozai) has the potential to be self-securing as they are loyal to the present government.” Arghandab was also in Build-Enable. Zharey and Panjwayi were “high risk districts” and, “by our own estimation we are not providing an enduring presence throughout.” Zharey and Panjwayi were in Hold with some Build-Enable. Maywand would remain “the focus of many ISAF disruption operations.” It was in a Define-Shape-Clear band of activity. Spin Boldak, on the other hand, was “generally satisfied with the status quo” and was in Build-Enable. Finally, “the rest of Kandahar Province enjoys no enduring presence.” Ghorak, Khakrez, Mianishin, Upper Shah Wali Kot, Arghistan, Maruf, Shorabak and Registan Districts were all in Define-Shape.¹⁶⁹

A number of deductions fell out of this plan:¹⁷⁰

1. Kandahar City: reinforce all institutions as an example to the districts;
2. Arghandab: engage local leaders to ensure wobbly tribal structures stay up;
3. Zharey and Panjwayi: divide into manageable bites that can be retained with an enduring presence, more ISAF, more Afghan National Army and Afghan Uniformed Police with population;
4. Maywand: stretch objective;
5. Spin Boldak: no change; and
6. Rest of the province: Define and Shape.

BGen Thompson established several key areas he wanted TF Kandahar to focus on. The first was to actually “Hold” a district, and, given that all the districts were unique, detailed analysis was required to separate out the problem into manageable pieces. The Americans might deploy forces in response to the Manley Report. Where could they be employed most effectively? Second was police capacity-building, “where a truly multinational, interagency approach is needed to deliver the ultimate HOLDERS of the ground: the Afghan Uniformed Police. There are no shortage of horses in this race so it will need a skilled touch to deliver effective police province-wide.” Third was Human Geography, or what came to be called White Situational Awareness. More was needed to support the district approach and there was not enough horsepower in this field.

The fourth focus area were the Joint District Coordination Centres, seen by BGen Thompson as a means to “deliver on all three lines of operations at the district level.” Thompson thought there was not enough definition at the Joint District Coordination Centre level and he wanted better coordination between the OMLT, Afghan army and battle group with the police, CIMIC and P-OMLT. On the development side, it was not clear to TF Kandahar what CIDA was doing about Dahla Dam and how that might relate to FOB Frontenac. That demanded resolution. The idea that security contractors could be used to free up Canadian combat troops was also mooted. Finally, where Maywand fit into the larger picture had to be defined.¹⁷¹

BGen Thompson also established “Operational Philosophy.” This was an expansion on the Laroche headquarters “Concept of Operations.” Elaborating on “Clear-Hold-Build,” As Thompson put it, “Notwithstanding individual service, interdepartmental or agency accountability, the TFK multinational civilian and military team will work together and share the responsibility to build on successes to date. Recognizing that the support of the people is the main objective, and that we are engaged in a competition of ideas (sold through reason, incentives or intimidation), we must:¹⁷²

1. have a comprehensive understanding of the human geography to determine the laydown of constituent groups of people [DEFINE];
2. determine which levers will deliver each constituent group of people to the GIRoA and IC ideas of the way forward in Afghanistan [SHAPE];
3. remove the insurgent influence over the people [CLEAR];
4. provide an enduring presence to reassure the people and isolate the insurgents [HOLD];
5. provide meaningful and focused reconstruction and development that addresses the needs and raises the quality of life of the people [BUILD and ENABLE]; and
6. build institutional capacity across all government sectors to ensure basic services including law and order, are provided to the people [BUILD and ENABLE].

The existing laydown of Canadian and Afghan forces in the province did not reflect the needs of the new direction that TF Kandahar was now going in Zharey District, which needed, in Thompson’s view, “to be re-occupied as we had abandoned it to the OMLT and a Kandak.” Canada had to “get out of Spin Boldak and get Recce Squadron doing more appropriate things.” The threat level did not warrant having an infantry company in FOB Frontenac, so it should go to Zharey. Recce Squadron was better employed helping “make Shah Wali Kot and Arghandab self-securing through key leader engagements and development.¹⁷³ That was a start. Thompson wanted the Interim Provincial Action Plan co-signed by Elissa Golberg to ensure a unified front. That, however, proved to be an elusive proposition, in part because the Cabinet Committee on Afghanistan was still formulating “benchmarks” and “signature projects” for public consumption. TF Kandahar’s plan remained unsigned three months later in August 2008.¹⁷⁴

Operation SOHIL LARAM: Actions in Maywand, April–June 2008

In Maywand, the Gurkha battalion, supported by Canadian CIMIC, PSYOPS, engineers and artillery, swept Band-e Timor and backed up a whole new police force by building several checkpoints on Highway 1 and refurbished facilities at what became called FOB Huta. Recce Company from 4th Kandak, the Combat Support kandak, deployed with Canadian OMLT mentors and a PSYOPS team to Huta, where the mentors worked with both the Army and police on joint patrolling and IED response measures.¹⁷⁵ (See Figure 3–8.)

Maywand was still led by its district leader, Haji Saifullah, who was connected to Ahmad Wali Karzai and appointed by Governor Asadullah Khalid. The enemy slowly filtered back into the Band-e Timor region and quietly re-established their logistics and medical “ratlines” into western Zharey and the horn of Panjwayi. All remained quiet until early April, when Saifullah started conducting unilateral and selective poppy eradication with “his” police, who came all the way from Jalalabad. The locals promptly engaged them with small-arms fire. On one operation, seven police were seized, mutilated and killed.¹⁷⁶

TF Kandahar had little visibility on what was happening in Maywand and, for the most part, it remained a Regional Command (South) issue because it was at the operational-level. Regional Command (South) eventually deployed the Portuguese Commando Company to Maywand again in March. This lash-up of local police, a Canadian OMLT team, an Afghan Recon Company, the Portuguese company (and later a U.S. Police Mentoring Team and two U.S. Special Forces ODA’s), dubbed Operation SOHIL LARAM, held sway from April to May. The idea was to patrol Highway 1 to keep it open, and conduct forays into Band-e Timor and the Garmabak area to keep the insurgents off balance. The Portuguese were unwilling to leave the highway and were problematic in other ways. The Canadian PSYOPS team noticed that Afghan “fence sitters” were now siding with the Taliban against them and this set back efforts in the district.¹⁷⁷ So was the Afghan Recon Company who went on strike and refused to patrol until they received resupply from Camp Hero, which they could not because of a problematic logistics system.¹⁷⁸

During the course of May, the Governor removed Haji Saifullah and the chief of police after substantial pressure was brought to bear by Regional Command (South) headquarters. When the Portuguese redeployed at the end of May, the level of violence in the district increased dramatically. ISTAR reportage identified the newly activated Multan Network as the culprits. The Taliban conducted a substantial intimidation campaign, followed by a stepped-up series of ambushes on Highway 1. The situation was aggravated by the Focused District Development programme, which ripped out 200 police and replaced them with less than 100 ANCO, which in turn reduced the patrolling tempo.

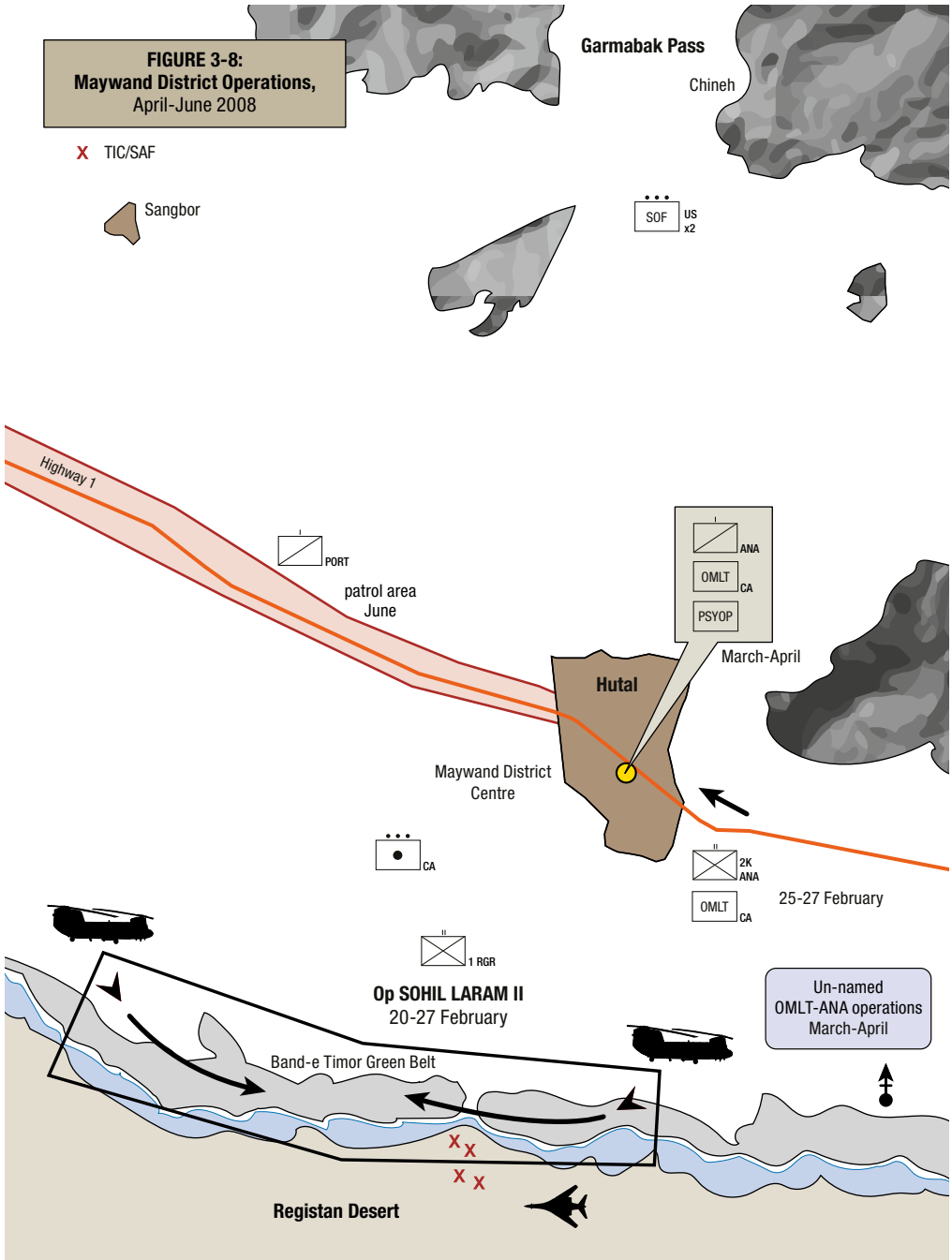


Figure 3-8: Maywand District Operations, April-June 2008



Photo Credit: Author

Civil-military cooperation and PSYOPS teams were a feature of practically every Canadian operation in southern Afghanistan by 2008. Here a Canadian team supporting 1 Royal Gurkha Rifles provides restitution for damage incurred during a raid.

In order to regain the initiative and shame the Afghan soldiers and police into action, Capt Tyler Wentzell led an ad hoc team consisting of three Canadian OMLT mentors, a CIMIC operator, four PSYOPS operations, 14 American police mentors and two Afghan interpreters to conduct a “PSYOPS raid” in the communities southeast of Hatal on 5 June. Staying off the roads, the force popped up in several villages, delivered their message to the locals, and in 20 minutes was on their way to the next destination. In this way, it appeared to the enemy that ISAF was blanketing the area between Hatal, Band-e Timor and western Zharey District.¹⁷⁹

During the course of these visits, documentation on the Taliban’s efforts at parallel governance was acquired. Halfway through their programme, the force was engaged near the community of Zarzadeh with some form of crew-served weapon. Moving into a leaguer, the Canadians, Americans and Afghans observed several SUVs and pickup trucks loaded with armed fighting-age males converging on them. Then there was another explosion: the leaguer was under mortar fire, so Capt Wentzell repositioned, only to come under registered mortar fire a third time. The LAV III and RG-31 engaged the insurgent vehicles

and, after careful searching, identified mortar positions equipped with overhead cover. These were engaged with direct fire and destroyed. There were insurgents pouring out of buildings, and an SVD-equipped sniper was spotted and engaged. Unable to call in air or artillery support, the force withdrew toward Huta. But the fight was not over. There were seven more contacts with a PKM team, and RPG fire was directed at the vehicles all the way back to Huta. The enemy complained to their command system that they lost a lot of personnel, used up precious ammunition, and needed reinforcement immediately. The Afghan Recon Company was subsequently energized into patrolling Maywand again.¹⁸⁰

Assisting the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit

The Maywand operations were important for strategic as well as operational reasons. The Canadian complaint in the Manley Report regarding a lack of NATO national participation in southern Afghanistan operations was in part answered by the Americans, who committed the 2,200-person 24 MEU to Afghanistan for a six- to eight-month period. 24 MEU consisted of a Marine infantry battalion, plus an aviation battalion with attack helicopters, medium lift helicopters and Harrier fighter bombers, making it a mobile and potent unit. In other words, it was not designed to conduct long-term Hold or Build operations. The decision was taken in ISAF headquarters, however, to commit 24 MEU to Helmand Province.¹⁸¹

One officer involved in assessing the planning that led to the decision noted that:

initial determination pointed to Kandahar as vital ground in Regional Command (South) and [CSTC-A] recommended deploying the MEU there in its mobile role and then pushing west into Helmand if time and circumstances allowed. However, aggressive politicking at diplomatic and senior military levels by [the British] led to an executive decision to deploy it to Helmand.¹⁸²

24 MEU arrived at KAF in February and was operational by April. Ignoring Canadian expertise in counter-IED operations in the province, 24 MEU decided to drive from Kandahar to Helmand and promptly lost two Marines on 15 April to a large IED attack on Highway 1. After that, 24 MEU liaised with TF Kandahar. All of the initial 24 MEU moves from KAF to Helmand were escorted or guided by Canadian units through Kandahar City and a “tunnel” on Highway 1. U.S. Marine Corps Sea Cobra attack helicopters, learning from the Banshee’s operations with OH-58Ds, flew top cover. The Marines also operated Boeing ScanEagles, so a relationship developed between Maj McCauley’s UAV organization and 24 MEU: they shared launchers and could hand off aircraft in stages because of the

distances between Helmand and KAF. Ammunition and spares were also interchangeable, given that the Marine LAV 25s were “related” to the LAV III and Coyote vehicles. The relationship strengthened throughout summer 2008.¹⁸³

24 MEU arrived safely in Helmand and commenced operations in the Garmsir region in May–June. Though a province away, the Garmsir operations had a deleterious impact on the enemy’s logistic ratline into Band-e Timor in Maywand District and ultimately Zharey and Panjwayi. When enemy forces in Zharey and Panjwayi complained to their superiors that summer about weapons and ammunition shortages, this was due to the combined effects of 24 MEU in Garmsir and the Canadian/Afghan forces in Maywand, Zharey and Panjwayi.¹⁸⁴

Reorganizing Facts on the Ground, May 2008

As we have seen, BGen Thompson’s concept of operations differed from the previous rotation’s views. First, Spin Boldak was to be turned over to a variety of American police mentoring organizations working with Col. Raziq.¹⁸⁵ Recce Squadron could be more properly employed elsewhere. PRT CIMIC could handle Spin Boldak on the development front. C Company was in FOB Frontenac. This was seen to be too far away from the main fight in Zharey and Panjwayi. Thompson and Corbould wanted a mobile company that could base out of any infrastructure in Zharey and not be pinned down. Arghandab was considered “self-securing,” and a combination of Recce Squadron and PRT CIMIC could work with the Afghan forces there.

A variety of American special forces’ task forces worked with the KAU “police” on the Tarinkot Road and other forces loyal to Asadullah Khalid conducted disrupt operations in Khakrez and upper Shah Wali Kot. This was generally seen by TF Kandahar to be a “covering force” of sorts for the Arghandab front. Though those units were not under their control, TF Kandahar had good relations with MGen Lessard’s Regional Command (South), who did have strong connections to TF 71.

As for Panjwayi, this district posed several problems. The diversity of the terrain and the geographical dispersion of the district from Mushan to Nakhonay made it difficult for a single company commander, in this case Maj Mike Lane, to focus his resources. Again, this was not a new problem as Maj Pat Robichaud and Maj Chris Henderson both previously encountered this dynamic. LCol Corbould decided to establish Panjwayi East and Panjwayi West. B Company would handle west, while B Squadron would handle east. How the redeployed forces would interact with the Afghan kandaks and the OMLT’s TF Zharey structure, let alone the PRT, remained unclear initially. Later on, the tactical infrastructure along Route Fosters shifted from section manning to platoon manning at each outpost. Mushan had an Afghan company and Canadian mentors, while Talukan and

Zangabad were manned by a Canadian platoon and an Afghan platoon each. A Canadian section and an Afghan section went into Haji. All the police sub-stations were renamed “combat outposts,” or COPs.

To confuse matters ever further, some higher entity in Kabul renamed the JPCC in Kandahar City and called it the “Operations Coordination Center-Province” or “OCC-P” in June. The Joint District Coordination Centres were still called Joint District Coordination Centres, but it was equally unclear at this point how they related to the OCC-P and the PRT, as they tended to be manned by Canadian mentors from the OMLT and the P-OMLT. Another change was the decision to hire private security to handle forward operating base security. The creation of an Afghan government process to licence and equip security contractors earlier in 2008 led to the increased availability of security forces in southern Afghanistan. Canada formulated a complex process to vet these companies so that they could be used to relieve Canadian and Afghan troops from security duties at the larger forward operating bases and free up more manoeuvre forces. TF Kandahar hired 200 security contractors to handle security at the JPCC, FOB Frontenac, the PRT, Patrol Base Wilson and FOB Hotal in Maywand. FOB Ma’Sum Ghar was next on the list.¹⁸⁶

The amount of money that went into the Afghan economy as a result of the licensing and equipping process (not to mention the stimulation of the Afghan life insurance industry) was significant. As a result, numerous entities in the Kandahar power structure wanted in on the action. This included some government leaders, police commanders and the men loyal to them. The line between police, militia, and security contracting continued to lose its definition in some areas. If a government official or a security official owned a security company employing off-duty police from a single tribal group, was this a militia or not? And, given the Afghan predilection toward commercial violence as a dispute resolution mechanism, how were the Canadians to delineate between commercial violence, insurgent violence and inter-tribal violence?

This change simplified Canada’s operations in some areas but complicated them in others. For example, the Kandahar power structure sought to consolidate all private security not only to make significant amounts of money, but also to edge out tribal competitors and to create a parallel power alternative security force that reported to tribal interests instead of national ones. It was not clear to TF Kandahar that there would be longer-term ramifications for Canadian interests in Kandahar.¹⁸⁷ They were focused on increasing available manpower and were not looking at the larger problem of the development of a private army that was not under legitimate control. It was a *de facto* reversal of the original intent of the DIAG programme (see Volume I), but with the analytical focus on the insurgency, little attention was paid to this growing issue at the time.

Operations in Arghandab and Lower Shah Wali Kot, May–June 2008

LCol Corbould was concerned about the situation in Zharey and Panjwayi. B Company had been under significant contact and needed relief, while C Company was under less pressure in lower Shah Wali Kot and Arghandab at this time. As a result, the decision was made to pull Recce Squadron out of Spin Boldak and move it up to FOB Frontenac as an economy of effort measure.¹⁸⁸

Maj Boivin and Recce Squadron made their way to FOB Frontenac, where they set out to define the situation as best they could. They were hampered by the fact that there was no district equivalent to Col. Raziq, nor was there any organized police force on par with the Afghan Border Police in Spin Boldak. When they were able to move about, Recce Squadron rapidly came to the conclusion that upper Shah Wali Kot was a write-off: only the KAU mercenaries could handle the Tarinkot Road, and they shot at everything that came anywhere near them as they were escorting convoys to and from Oruzgan. Khakrez was a complete write-off as well: it served as an insurgent bed-down and transit area to connect Zharey and Panjwayi operations with Oruzgan and Helmand, and as a support structure for operations in Arghandab. Arghandab was itself increasingly problematic because of the divisions within the Alikozai over Naqib's replacement.¹⁸⁹

Recce Squadron operations fulfilled yet another economy of effort task. The Canadians could define the area of operation, and maybe stabilize certain communities, but there were not enough ANSF working together in the area to have a significant security effect across the district. And, as a result, any development was problematic. Maj Boivin focused on the hills west of FOB Frontenac on the seam between Arghandab and Shah Wali Kot. A ratline connected all three districts and then moved on into the infamous District 9 in the "cone" of Kandahar City (see Figure 3-9). As soon as Recce Squadron and the Afghan police put patrols into this seam, they were hit with IED after IED. Lacking forces to generate a significant disruptive presence, Recce Squadron did what it could to keep the lines of communication open between FOB Frontenac, upper Arghandab and Kandahar City.¹⁹⁰

Questions over the Centrality of Kandahar City

It was well known that there were enemy terrorist cells in the city: usually, they operated from the northern and southwestern districts. And, as we have already seen in previous chapters, there was a security plan for the city that was police-centric and supported by the PRT (Operation PORTCULLIS), and there were occasional coalition operations to go after the cells, which was also subject to the principle of police primacy. BGen Thompson's headquarters was comfortable with this state of affairs. While the staff developed its assessment, the Lessard-led Regional Command (South) headquarters expressed concerns internally that all was not well in Kandahar City. The Regional Command (South) staff

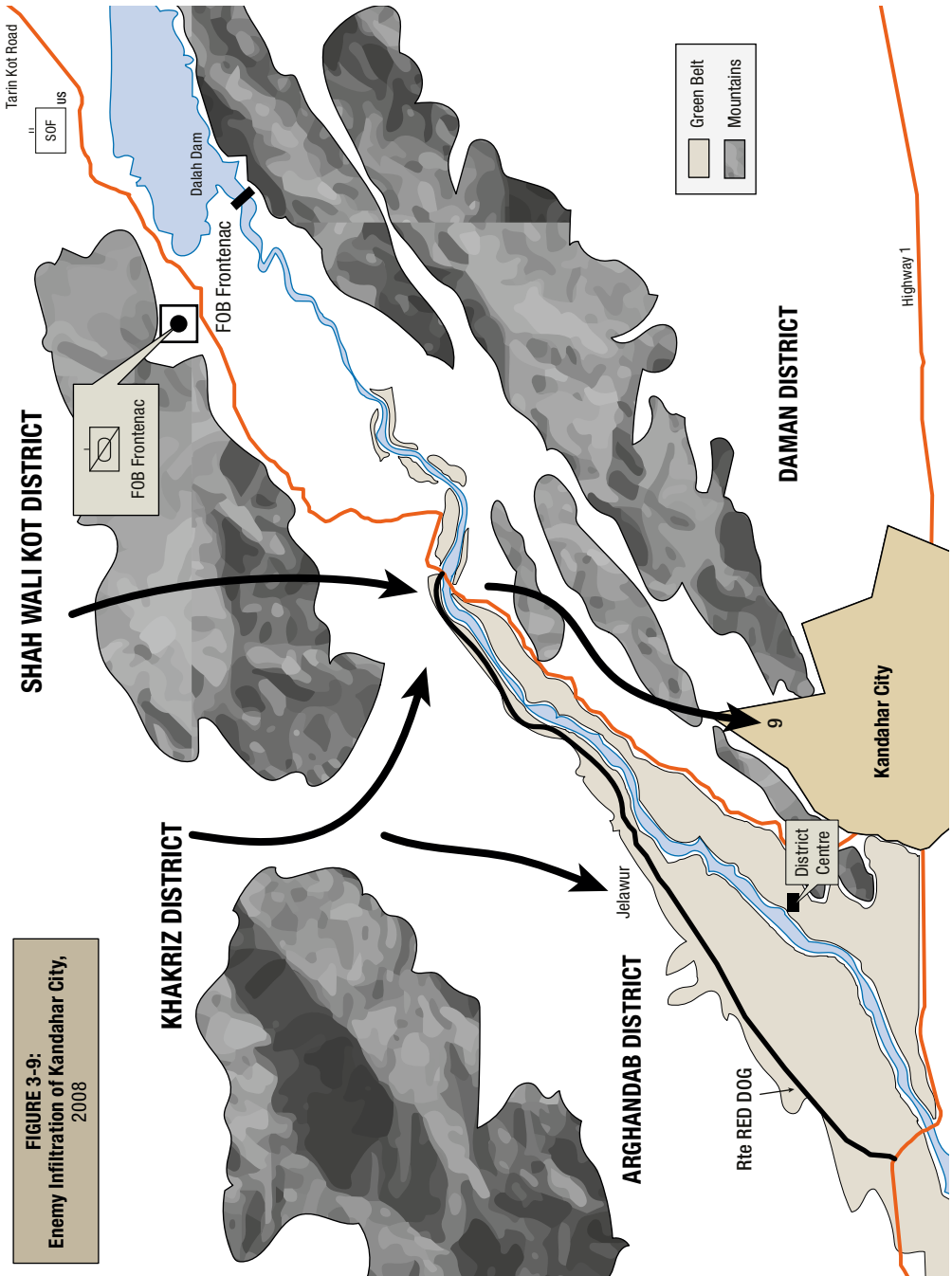


FIGURE 3-9:
Enemy Infiltration of Kandahar City,
2008

Figure 3-9: Enemy Infiltration of Kandahar City, 2008

were increasingly concerned about the destabilization of Arghandab District. It was noted that “there is evidence that the leadership in Kabul views the cohesion and strength of the Alikozai as a threat and is attempting to undermine Alikozai dominance...were either an internal Alikozai rift to develop or were the Alikozai to turn against the current government, then Taleban [sic] intent to dominate Kandahar City would be much closer to becoming reality.”¹⁹¹ Citing data that indicated a serious downward turn in governmental support in the city itself, the study noted that there was “open hatred of the Provincial Governor, in reports that that some families are already leaving the city and reports of Alikozai dissatisfaction at their treatment at the hands of the Karzai government and, in particular, the President’s immediate family,”¹⁹² that is, Ahmad Wali Karzai.

Regional Command (South) wanted better information, up-to-date atmospheric, better and more policing as a priority effort, and a complete study of the power structure. This had to be linked with ISAF headquarters and its ability to apply pressure in Kabul: “[We need] to take action now...we need to apply robust mentoring...in order to stop the corruption spiraling out of control. This will include the selective removal of certain individuals and moves to block the influence of others, including local power brokers.” Regional Command (South) concluded that the effort could lose a province like Helmand but “If we and GIRoA lose Kandahar, we have lost.”¹⁹³

BGen Thompson did not agree. There was some skepticism on the Alikozai situation because of the primary sources of information on that issue. Thompson believed all was being done that could be done on the policing front for the time being. As for dealing with the Kandahar power structure, Thompson noted rhetorically, “Are we kingmakers now?” And, as for Helmand versus Kandahar priorities, the TF Kandahar commander countered by asking “Why are all the assets in Helmand and Zabul?” Finally, he disagreed with the assertion made by Regional Command (South) planners that “knowledge and understanding of [Kandahar City] is pitifully small.” In effect, BGen Thompson’s headquarters believed that Kandahar City remained “self-securing” and focused its limited resources elsewhere in the districts. The headquarters retained a non-interventionist view when it came to Kandahari power politics.¹⁹⁴ “Better the devil you know” remained the policy, as it had since BGen David Fraser in 2006.

The Panjwayi East Combined Operations Centre, Home of the WHOPPER: Panjwayi District, May–June 2008

LCol David Corbould and his staff realized, after two months of operations, that Panjwayi District was just too large for an infantry company to cover, especially one that was trapped in the tactical infrastructure. The decision was made to create sub-areas of operation: Panjwayi West under B Company, and Panjwayi East, under B Squadron.

Again, with the passage of time, both organizations understood that greater synergy was required to deal with the plethora of problems in Panjwayi. The Joint District Coordination Centre was positioned at FOB Ma'Sum Ghar: it belonged to the OMLT and the P-OMLT fed information into it. There were unlimited opportunities to gain momentum at the district level, but the main obstacle was that the PRT was unwilling to deploy DFAIT and CIDA representatives on a full-time basis to Panjwayi. Sporadic monthly visits were not enough. Another inconvenient truth that emerged was this: what does a diplomat know about municipal politics and services delivery? The idea of the Whole of Government Panjwayi Programme for Enhanced Revitalization (or Reconstruction) (WHOPPER) emerged. This was the tongue-in-cheek name for informal means to coordinate all Canadian and Afghan activities in the district, with B Squadron in the lead manning the Panjwayi East Combined Operations Centre.¹⁹⁵ The WHOPPER's constituent elements included all of the Canadian organizations operating in the district, but most importantly, the Joint District Coordination Centre, the P-OMLT, B Squadron and CIMIC.

The WHOPPER was necessary because of the deterioration in relationship between the forces deployed in Panjwayi on one hand, and the PRT's OGDs and Representative of Canada in Kandahar on the other. The Panjwayi shura was active, but split into two factions, led by two men: Haji Baran and Haji Agha Lalai Dastagiri. The community councils were not working. The District Development Assembly was trying, but the Dastagiri faction subverted it. CIDA's plans to get the Central Asian Development Group to act as an arms-length "implementing partner" were not working. As a result, the National Solidarity Programme was failing in the district. Then the PRT turned off all project funding for three months until corruption could be identified and rooted out. The WHOPPER was able to get CIMIC to help out with some quick impact projects, but the rest of the planned projects were not happening. There was a "shopping list" that was partly underway when the funding was cut off: a medical clinic, a grape co-op, a sanitation department, and electrification. The members of the WHOPPER were, in their words, "snubbed" by the PRT's OGDs and told that the Representative of Canada had established Kandahar City and the Dahla Dam as priorities, not Panjwayi.¹⁹⁶

Indeed, CIMIC reporting to the PRT reinforced the belief that development was problematic in the district:

The full extent of the lack of coordination between the DDA and the district shura is now evident [to CIMIC]. Over the past three months the relationships between DDA, District Shura and the people of Panjwayi are now apparent. The DDA has not once in over three months, met in any form of shura. [CIMIC] has yet to see any evidence that any active

CDCs exist....DL Haji Baran and Shura Secretary Haji Fazil Mohammad are unaware of how the DDA and CDCs operate, when or where they meet, what initiatives they are involved in or any projects they are undertaking.¹⁹⁷

This left the WHOPPER members with no leverage, and significantly decreased credibility with the population and its erratic leadership. The UN would not deal with Baran as he was only an acting district leader in that he did not meet literacy requirements established by government criteria. There were constant grievances against Baran et al. with local accusations that humanitarian aid was diverted from their intended recipients.¹⁹⁸ By June, there was a complete breakdown in governance: “the District Development Assembly, Shura Secretary, and two other shura members are on strike and not doing their jobs until the issue of leadership is resolved.”¹⁹⁹ Where was the Governor? Where were the governance experts from the PRT? Why were a tank squadron commander, a captain from the P-OMLT, and a major in the Joint District Coordination Centre left to broker this complex state of affairs?

B Squadron did not relinquish its other responsibilities, however. The FOB “battleship,” “HMCS *Ma'Sum Ghar*,” still regularly engaged enemy rocketeers and mortar-men in Operations Box ELTON²⁰⁰ with the Leopards from the run-up positions, and still deployed QRFs and protected combat engineer road remediation teams when they filled in IED craters. And then there were the “River Runs,” better known as Operation ROOM SERVICE, and later called Operation MUTAFIQ TANDER when ISTAR resources were superimposed on it watching for enemy targets (see below). (See Figure 3-10).

The dominating issue at this time was how to rationalize the Canadian battle group, Afghan army and Canadian mentors, and Afghan police and their Canadian and American mentors to provide better security in Panjwayi District. The inertia generated by the confusing number of organizations generated paralysis whenever this matter was raised. The WHOPPER became one mechanism but for the most part, progress was slow throughout May. Boiled down, the Afghan army did not want to occupy security checkpoints: they wanted to patrol and conduct mobile operations against the enemy. The police were still being “Focused District Developed” and the AN COP did not want to be considered light infantry.

One partial solution was Operation TOORA AZADI II, conducted 13 May. The Strong Point Mushan company was scheduled to rotate out, and 1st Company from 1st Kandak would go in. Two platoons from Weapons Company, 1st Kandak, would take over from the police in PSSs Haji and Talukan. The police would remain in Zangabad for the time being. B Squadron led the operation with a breaching team consisting of two

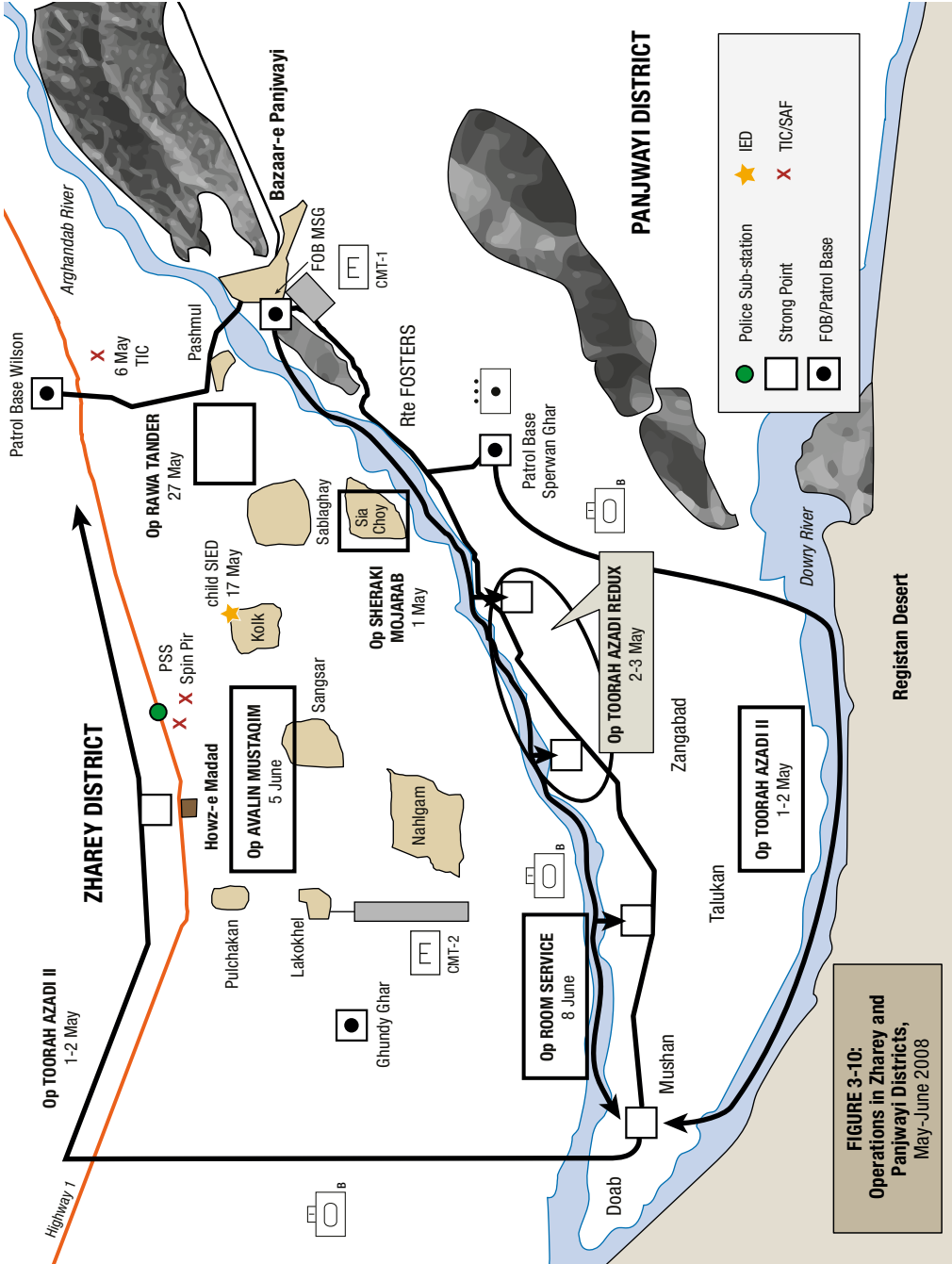


FIGURE 3-10:
Operations in Zharey and
Panjwayi Districts,
May-June 2008

Figure 3-10: Operations in Zharey and Panjwayi Districts, May-June 2008

roller-equipped Leopard C2s, a Badger AEV and an engineer section leading a column down the Arghandab riverbed. Behind them were four “RIP Teams,” one for each strong point or sub-station. The Breach Team would move in, while the RIP Team would relieve its forces, and so on. B Squadron Combat Team leaguered next to Mushan, resupplied the position, conducted repairs on LAV III and a Leopard, and then moved south to the Dori riverbed, west to the junction of Maywand, Zharey and Panjwayi, north through the Dasht to Highway 1, and back to Ma’Sum Ghar. There were two IED strikes, with some wounded taken by the EROC engineers, but no contact.²⁰¹

However, the Afghan police refused to occupy Zangabad citing equipment deficiencies. At the same time, 1st Kandak did not want to occupy the Three Tank Hill position south of Bazaar-e Panjwayi. With the Focused District Development in progress and the previous problems with the district leader and the chief of police, there were simply not enough police to handle anything west of Sperwan Ghar. 1st Kandak abandoned Three Tank Hill and were replaced with six policemen. In addition, enemy pressure on the population in Talukan meant that the Afghan troops there could not buy bread at the bazaar. With the poor state of the Afghan logistics system, the Canadian mentors had to dive in and pay for food themselves.²⁰²

To address all of these issues, the battle group and the OMLT planned Operation TOORAH AZADI REDUX. This operation was designed to remove all remaining police in western Panjwayi, and convert the police sub-stations into combat outposts manned by the Afghan army and Canadian mentors in the way Strong Point Mushan was. Departing on 23 May, B Squadron Combat Team moved down to PSSs Haji and Zangabad, breached in, replaced the police in Haji with a Canadian section, and moved an Afghan platoon to Zangabad. All positions were resupplied with food. B Squadron was covered by OH-58D Warrior helicopters provided by the Banshees on this operation. When the ground force came under contact, the helicopters were able to spot for the Leopard tanks, which then engaged the RPG and PKM teams with 105mm fire. The ground convoy returned to Ma’Sum Ghar without further incident.²⁰³

In mid-May, the Panjwayi security shura learned from local elders that they were concerned about new enemy activity in the area between Bazaar-e Panjwayi and Nakhonay. They wanted more checkpoints along Routes Fosters East and Lake Effect and possibly an Afghan army strong point near Nakhonay. Haji Baran concurred that something was going on in that area but he believed it needed better definition.²⁰⁴ As a result, Capt Sheldon Maerz from the P-OMLT, and the police increased patrolling in the bazaar and on Fosters East. In early June, they uncovered emplaced IEDs north of Salavat near the Salehan checkpoint. By this point, more Focused District Development police were back from the Regional Training Center in Herat and, being better trained, were more inclined toward joint patrols

with the Afghan army. The Joint District Coordination Centre, by this time, was in a better position to handle the intake of information from the population. The result was more and better patrolling in eastern Panjwayi, which produced better information. As it turned out, there was a significant increase in enemy activity in the area that had gone undetected.²⁰⁵

After the Sarposa prison break in June, Haji Baran and other leaders in the security shura “expressed great apprehension at the state of security in Panjwayi District...from the comments of the local nationals something must be done about Nakhonay.”²⁰⁶ Haji Baran pleaded with Canadian CIMIC teams: “Please do something. We need an operation in the Nakhonay area.”²⁰⁷ Eastern Panjwayi was heating up, and this also affected the otherwise quiet Dand District.

Panjwayi West was a different story, almost a different war. Operation ROOM SERVICE/MUTAFIQ TANDAR had B Squadron Combat Team resupplying Strong Point Mushan and the combat outposts along Fosters West on 8 June. The operation was similar to TOORA AZADI II in its execution, except this time a Leopard was IED’d near Talukan and another’s rollers detonated a mine. Searches uncovered more IEDs in the potential breach areas, while OH-58D Warrior helicopters engaged a fleeting enemy target.²⁰⁸

According to Maj Lane, OC B Company, “At the end of spring, it was like switch was turned on. We went from limited TICs to ‘Boom! There’s a war on!’”²⁰⁹ The manpower situation in Panjwayi was so bad, and the situation so irrational, that the decision was made to deploy B Company into Talukan, Zangabad and Haji. By summer, the Canadian platoons occupying the former police sub-stations (now renamed combat outposts or COPs) along Route Fosters had to be resupplied regularly and, without Canadian helicopters, this proved to be problematic. Each platoon settled in to what amounted to separate mini-wars that, to them, appeared unconnected to the larger fight. It was hot, dangerous work conducting dismounted patrols and interacting with the population.

For example, the platoon in COP Zangabad, led by Lt Reg McMichael, learned that there were heavily armed local criminal elements that overlapped or facilitated local Taliban fighters, as well as out-of-area fighters. The out-of-area fighters sometimes had their own “OMLT” of experienced Afghan or non-Afghan fighters. On one occasion, a pair of enemy leaders were heard conversing in Russian, which suggested a Chechen presence, while other out-of-area fighters spoke Pakistani-accented English. Enemy leaders in the area ensured they were unarmed and accompanied by children everywhere they went.²¹⁰

The population around Zangabad was cowed by the presence of all four types of enemy, but recalled the days of 2006 when the Taliban and their allies were “mowed down at Sperwan Ghar.” Once the Canadian platoon exerted its admittedly tenuous presence and publicly demonstrated that they would not be psychologically intimidated by the local

leadership, however, and information flowed in on enemy movements and activities. Indeed, one criminally oriented facilitator changed sides once he saw that the Canadians were not leaving, and became an informant.²¹¹

Maj Lane made the case in retrospect that this was guerilla war, not counter-insurgency: “There was NO development piece, no reconstruction. The environment was not conducive for that. We could not get local empowerment going [west of Sperwan Ghar].”²¹² Occasionally, B Company was directed to patrol across the river into Sia Choy with 2nd Company, 1st Kandak and Canadian mentors in order to generate enemy “chatter” and help define their locations. On 2 June, this force crossed the Arghandab and was in immediate contact with an insurgent force firing from four different locations. With limited fire support and declining UAV support as the day went on, the force eventually incurred several casualties from a mine or IED: four Canadians and two Afghans. Sgt Martin Côté, who was concussed, was still able to triage the wounded and command a fighting withdrawal. The enemy reinforced from Burmohammad without resorting to radio communications, further confusing the situation.²¹³ Capt Richard Leary from B Company was one of the wounded. Cpl Brent Gallant, a medic, covered Leary with his body, while working to keep him alive. Capt Leary died from his wounds. Gallant and Côté were awarded the Medal of Military Valour for their actions.

Zharey District Operations, May–June 2008

TF Zharey, with its eclectic mix of kandaks, OMLTs, P-OMLTs and other supporters, continued their operations into May. Operation SHERAKI MOJARAB swept into Sia Choy on the morning of 1 May. The Afghan army and OMLT mentors cordoned off the community, while Afghan Uniformed Police (as the Afghan National Police were renamed) and their P-OMLT, American police mentors and the National Directorate of Security processed 160 people. Five were identified as insurgents and detained. No shots were fired and the artillery on call was not needed.²¹⁴ (See Figure 3-10.)

Patrols continued to push out from Pulchakan and some CIMIC projects were conducted in the Howz-e Madad bazaar. A major shura held with the district leader resulted in an agreement to establish two police stations: one in Senjaray and another in Makuan. CIMIC teams from the PRT continued with their assessments, but on 6 May a CIMIC team was engaged with small-arms fire and an RPG. They returned fire, and the enemy seemed to quit the area. However, when the QRF from Patrol Base Wilson arrived, it was engaged with an intense volume of fire from three sides: south, southwest and southeast. The PRT patrol, led by WO David Schultz, manoeuvred and shot their way out of the trap, while MCpl Paul Rachynski and Cpl Anthony Rotondi provided covering fire and medical aid

to the wounded. Both were awarded the Medal of Military Valour for their actions, while WO Shultz received the Star of Military Valour. The forces broke out and recovered to Patrol Base Wilson. Cpl Michael Starker, a medic with the PRT, died from his wounds.²¹⁵

CIMIC was having problems making headway in Zharey. When CMT-2 set out to hire local people to work on Route Langley, local leaders were unable to get enough people interested. With the district leader taking leave for most of May and the deputy district leader being next to useless, TF Zharey noted that “the absence of the whole-of-government representatives in FOB Wilson is significantly restricting the implementation of a multi-dimensional Secure-Hold-Build strategy to stabilization in Zharey.”²¹⁶ By complete coincidence, the Clerk of the Privy Council, Kevin Lynch, visited FOB Wilson two days later, where the team vented about the OGDs not wanting to come out to where they were needed: “The current deficiencies in terms of tangible whole-of-government effects in Zharey was identified in detail.” Three days after that, UNAMA, DFAIT and CIDA representatives from the PRT arrived at FOB Wilson to have preliminary discussions on formulating a district development plan.²¹⁷

Maj Bob Ritchie wanted to

create a discernable tear line between the people that you work with around the police sub-stations because they enjoy greater security and, as a result, development and governance opportunities. You progressively expand the goodwill, you get trusted actors inside your bubble, when they’re starting to inform your security operations through intelligence and progressively the ink dots expand to the point where you have autonomy in greater areas. The problem was, as the insurgents came in we didn’t get to a whole bunch of these ambitious objectives because we were trying to prosecute operations.²¹⁸

The Kolk area generated problems, especially after the police abandoned the sub-station there. On 17 May, 17 Canadians (OMLT, PSYOPS, and a JTAC team), 16 Afghan army soldiers and three interpreters moved into the Kolk area for a series of patrols in order to reassert presence. A 12-year old boy, led by an older man, walked up to the patrol. The man took his leave and the boy detonated the bomb he was carrying. An Afghan soldier was killed outright and two Canadians and another Afghan soldier were wounded.²¹⁹ This shocking event went unrecognized by Canadian critics of the Afghan mission, who continued to direct their attention at detainee issues.

TF Kandahar tried to focus on the Route Langley paving project. The idea of connecting Highway 1 with Mushan in Panjwayi District encountered geographical reality. 2nd Kandak conducted Operation ARAM OKAB [Silent Eagle] to clear an area near Abdullahkhan

and establish a new strong point. When the Canadian engineers arrived, they found they could not construct the base because of a high water table. Furthermore, Route Langley was not assessed “as being capable” of supporting heavy equipment. Ten vehicles got bogged during the course of ARAM OKAB.²²⁰ Combined with the inability to get local buy-in, which, in turn, was related to security issues and intimidation, CMT-2 was forced to throw in the towel. The Langley paving project was shelved.²²¹

The enemy were increasingly drawn to Spin Pir, now nicknamed “Spin TIC,” where they mounted more and more ambushes against traffic on Highway 1. They got more than they bargained for. On 28 May, OMLT mentors were ambushed with small arms and RPG fire. Two CIMIC teams and two infantry platoons mounted in LAV III responded and piled on, pouring fire into the insurgent’s positions to the south of the road. A Banshee OH-58D helicopter came on station and emptied its rocket pod and .50-calibre machine gun at the enemy. M-777s fired a smoke mission and the Canadians extricated from the site.²²²

Regional Command (South)’s ongoing concerns over Highway 1 and IEDs led to the implementation of Operation ARAM TANDER [Silver Thunder] in mid-May. Higher-level ISTAR and special operations resources were cut to Regional Command (South) with the aim of targeting the IED networks operating in Zharey and Panjwayi. Working with the ASIC, the concept of operations was to superimpose these forces on top of existing operations to identify the IED portion and, if it could be sifted out, strike the IED makers with special operations forces. At the same time, TF Kandahar and the battle group used collateral data on enemy commanders to target them using their resources.²²³ The upcoming Operation RAWA TANDER [Constant Thunder] was conducted under the framework of ARAM TANDER.

A new kandak was in town by the end of the month, with 3rd Kandak replacing 2nd Kandak. The new organization retained the existing laydown: companies at Howz-e Madad, FOB Wilson and Pulchakan and a platoon at Ghundy Ghar. The relief in place was completed just in time for Operation RAWA TANDER.

By this point, BGen Thompson wanted out of FOB Frontenac and wanted increased battle group operations in Zharey District (see below). In order to define the enemy presence that might threaten planned development objectives in the Pashmul area, C Company and an Afghan company from 1st Kandak launched a one-day operation called RAWA TANDER into the Burmohammad area.²²⁴ In the regrouping leading up to RAWA TANDER, however, Maj Grubb’s vehicle was hit with a suicide vehicle-borne IED on its way through Kandahar City. Four Canadians were wounded, including Maj Grubb.²²⁵

One of C Company’s platoons and 3rd Company, with its mentors, made their way west toward Burmohammad from Route Summit after 0600 hours on 27 May. A section of insurgents fired from a concealed position but was suppressed with 25mm fire as Predator and Reaper missiles were brought to bear. This situation repeated itself two more times on

the way in. They cleared two objective compounds, dubbed MEADOWS and LARKHILL. The next day, another C Company platoon, this time with 2nd Company and its mentors, deployed dismounted from FOB Wilson into Objective WAVERLY. There they encountered sporadic small-arms fire followed by RPGs in five separate encounters. The enemy used “shoot and scoot” tactics and disappeared, while at the same time, ISTAR resources observed the enemy reinforcing. An OH-58D Warrior helicopter covering the western flank caught an insurgent PKM machine gun team mounted on motorcycles in the open as it moved to reinforce. An estimated seven enemy were killed.²²⁶

The next day, the Canadian and Afghan companies regrouped to FOB Ma’Sum Ghar. Recce Platoon led the dismounted forces into Objectives WESTMAN and PARKDALE, after crossing the Arghandab from Operation MOSQUE, around 0400 hours. A four-man 82mm recoilless rifle team opened up from PARKDALE, but it was eliminated by close air support. Again, two more groups of enemy fighters equipped with small arms and RPGs opened up on C Company’s platoons, prompting a response in the form of a pair of Hellfire missiles from orbiting UAVs and from M-777 artillery. These engagements yielded an estimated 18 enemy wounded and 18 enemy killed, one of whom was a Taliban commander. The actions were over by 1430 and the enemy fled the area. The lack of water, combined with the heat, made pursuit impossible, but IED factories were found in Objective WESTMAN. The forces returned to their respective bases.²²⁷ ISTAR reportage suggested that “The insurgents’ determination to hold the Pashmul defensive area [near] Mollyan Burmohammad is clear. Despite losses incurred in this morning’s engagements with the battle group, insurgent command and control remains robust and the insurgents are eager to fight.”²²⁸

The ASIC assessed that Taliban commander Kaka Abdul Khaliq was back in Pashmul and that one of his associates, Mullah Abdul Razzaq, brought fighters from Waziristan with him to the fight. These external fighters had problems navigating in Zharey, which increased their vulnerability to coalition close air support.²²⁹ From the information derived by ARAM TANDER via RAWA TANDER, the ASIC was able to define the Razzaq Network located in the Pashmul area, and how it connected to the other cells in Zharey and Panjwayi. Haji Salim, the Taliban commander for Panjwayi District, was identified and killed on 3 June, for example, because of his connections to the Razzaq Network, while others like Sadiq Agha (the overall Zharey and Panjwayi operational commander), Khan Agha (the Zharey and Panjwayi IED facilitator) and Jabar Agha (the IED commander for Kandahar City and environs) were identified and tracked.²³⁰

The events of 3 and 4 June gave everybody dealing with Zharey District some pause. On 3 June, a small enemy force ambushed an Afghan patrol and Canadian mentors. As the patrol went to ground, they found that the cover was booby-trapped with IEDs. One of

these detonated, seriously wounding four Afghan soldiers. Sgt Joe Côté, suffering a severe concussion, initiated first aid on the wounded. The patrol was unable to fall back, so Sgt Côté continued to work on the wounded as the firefight went on around him. Eventually, the patrol leadership mounted a fighting withdrawal and Sgt Côté continued to treat the wounded as they pulled back under fire. He was awarded the Medal of Military Valour for his actions.

3rd Kandak decided to mount Operation AVALIN MUSTAQIM [First Strike], a clearance patrol from Howz-e Madad to the Sangsar area, using 3rd Company and Canadian mentors. Just as the force crossed its line of departure, it was in immediate contact southeast of the strong point while in virtually open ground. The kandak executive officer was unable to react or lead effectively, and then the company started taking fire from the northeast, east, south and southeastern quadrants from all available enemy weapons systems, from mortars to recoilless rifles. Canadian mentors noticed that the enemy were using single shots and producing disciplined, “intense, effective fire.” Afghan casualties started to mount. Capt Jon Snyder took command, ordered the Afghan troops to recover the wounded, called in medical evacuation, and planned an extraction. Cpl J.D. Ball took two men to find a way through the terrain to extract the force, while Capt Robert Peel, Cpl Carey Baker and Cpl Steven Bancarz led the fighting withdrawal along Ball’s route. All were later awarded the Medal of Military Valour for saving 3rd Company. This action was supported by Weapons Company at the strong point and OH-58D Warrior helicopters came on station and covered the medical evacuation with .50-calibre machine gun fire. When all was said and done, “[the] insurgents have assumed control of a significant piece of ground since the [closure of SP Sangsar and PSS Kolk]. Their freedom of movement is immense and their level of coordination is disturbingly effective as is the proficiency of the use of weaponry.”²³¹

The Canadians and Afghans continued with patrols into Zharey but they had to be backed up with more and more firepower “on tap.” Night patrolling was increased to keep the enemy off balance as much as possible. Unfortunately, Capt Jon Snyder, the man who so valiantly inspired the Afghan soldiers and led their extrication during Operation AVALIN MUSTAQIM, stepped into a deep *karez* [well] during a night patrol and, after heroic measures were taken to extricate him, he died on 7 June.

The Tactical Deep Fight and the Kandahar Airfield Cigar Club

As we have already seen, informal relationships between American UAV units and Canadian units existed dating back to TF Orion in 2006, when improvised means were used to have Canadian forward observation officers call in “drops” of Hellfire missiles for specific precision targets. By 2007, Canadian and American UAVs were used interchangeably for surveillance purposes in the Kandahar Province. By late 2007, armed American UAVs

were working in concert with TF Kandahar to observe and kill enemy IED “dig teams.” An informal relationship between the U.S. Air Force’s 451st Air Expeditionary Group (AEG) and the Laroche headquarters was strengthened further with the January arrival of Col. Trey Turner, U.S. Air Force. Working with the Canadian battle group, the 451st AEG facilitated the battle group Tactical Operations Centre’s control of 33 MQ-9 Reaper and five MQ-1 Predator strikes from January to June 2008. This amounted to 50% of the MQ-1/MQ-9 strikes conducted throughout Afghanistan during that time.²³²

Col. Turner directed that any “residual Pred time” be handed over to the battle group for use in the Canadian area of operations. There were several reasons for this. First, Col. Turner wanted to get into the fight and the fight was in Kandahar. Second, technical limitations meant that many UAV operations were restricted to line-of-sight missions controlled from Kandahar. The Canadian area of operation was within this radius. Third, until BGen Thompson arrived in May and reorganized things, 2 PPCLI Battle Group was “trapped in the TI” and had no ability to manoeuvre beyond their positions.²³³

It was this last point that caught LCol Corbould and his operations officer, Maj Jay Adair. 2 PPCLI Battle Group had to have the ability to surreptitiously observe and strike in areas where they could not be present. The Sperwer TUAV could observe but strike resources, that is, “fast air” close air support or aviation (helicopters), were not necessarily available when they needed to be. Out of these considerations emerged what was called the “Tactical Deep Fight” (the previous rotation called it “Deep Battle”).²³⁴ Col. Turner had a fibre optic cable installed to the 2 PPCLI Battle Group Tactical Operations Centre to provide “feed,” while Maj Adair worked with Maj Louis Hamel, an Air Command CF-18 pilot turned joint terminal air controller to establish tactics, techniques and procedures.²³⁵

Plundering special operations methodology, the battle group developed tactics like flying in jets or helicopters, to make a lot of noise, hoping the enemy would go to ground. Then an MQ-9 Reaper would come on station, orbiting above with no noise signature, but keeping the “unblinking eye” focused on where the enemy were located. Once the jets and helicopters were gone, the enemy would emerge. Once positive identification was made, they were engaged with the MQ-9’s weapons. On other operations, the UAVs observed and “removed” enemy early warning sentries before ground operations took place to give the battle group additional surprise. Such operations could be conducted day or night, usually in Zharey and Panjwayi, in areas that could not be occupied or patrolled by coalition ground forces. Strict procedures were established, in consultation with the battle group legal advisor, to avoid killing civilians. The Commanding Officer, LCol Corbould, or the Deputy Commanding Officer, Maj Stephen Joudrey, had the authority to “drop.” The motto for Tactical Deep Fight team in the operations centre became “We can never be wrong.”²³⁶



Photo Credit: Author

The lack of an armed Canadian UAV forced Task Force Kandahar to develop informal relationships with American UAV units. In many cases, American MQ-1 Predators returning from operations still loaded with weapons were handed off to the battle group or Task Force Kandahar forward air controllers to engage targets of opportunity.

It is impossible to depict every Tactical Deep Fight strike in this narrative. From March to September 2008, 2 PPCLI Battle Group conducted 93 strikes, killing a confirmed 400 insurgents, with no civilian casualties.²³⁷ The bulk of these strikes occurred in Zharey and Panjwayi Districts. There were several effects of the Tactical Deep Fight. First, it gave the battle group momentum while they were “trapped in the TI.” The battle group was able to inflict serious casualties on the insurgents in a low-risk high-payoff environment, which degraded their ability to conduct anything like the larger 2006-style operations. By fall 2008, the enemy were intimidated enough not to move around in groups of more than five, and they knew enough to conceal their weapons in blankets and other items to prevent positive identification and destruction. The attrition of available insurgents generally reduced their ability to sustain activity in both districts, and probably drew off heat that would have otherwise been applied to the vulnerable tactical infrastructure situation.

Of crucial importance was the undermining of the enemy command structure through the constant, focused attrition of their leaders. Normally, this was a special operations forces bailiwick. The idea of killing the enemy’s most experienced leaders so that a generation of less experienced, mistake-prone leaders would take over and then be more easily killed was not new in Afghanistan. However, TF Kandahar now had the ability to undertake



Photo Credit: Author

The success of the informal Canadian-American UAV relationship at Kandahar Airfield led to more formalized cooperation. MQ-9 Reapers like this one, equipped with 500-pound bombs and Hellfire missiles, regularly supported Canadian ground operations. The U.S. Army Warrior Alpha, their version of the Reaper, was used in the identification and destruction of enemy improvised explosive device emplacement teams targeting Canadian forces.

a similar process in its area of operations without being burdened with the coordination issues that existed between ISAF and the non-ISAF special operations forces. In time, the ASIC wanted to use the new process to target extremely troublesome insurgent leaders. The issue at the time was, to what extent was this different from taking out regular insurgents in the battle space that the battle group could not get into? Then the TF Kandahar Provincial Operations Centre wanted to control the process and connect it to Operation ARAM TANDER, the intelligence-cued anti-IED effort. There were many unanswered questions by summer 2008 on matters of control and coordination.

The Tactical Deep Fight system, as established in early 2008, was, however, personality-dependent and informal. In time, the U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates took notice and sent a study team to examine what 2 PPCLI Battle Group and 451st AEG were doing, and ultimately gave his retroactive blessing to the whole set-up. In the interim, however, the informal relationship was sustained partially through the KAF Cigar Club, a gathering of Canadian and American cigar aficionados who met weekly. Col. Turner's successor, Col Ted "Oz" Ozowski, was a member, as was the TF Kandahar deputy commander, Col Jamie Cade, among other notables. In addition to the Tactical Deep Fight, a wide variety of other Canadian and American matters requiring deconfliction were discussed informally in this venue, to everyone's mutual benefit.²³⁸

Stability Boxes

Stalled out in other areas by late May, BGen Thompson sought means and ways of remaining engaged in the fight and regaining initiative on the stalemated reconstruction and development front.²³⁹ Recall that the Laroche headquarters identified “bubbles of stability” and sought means of securing them late in their tour (Operation SHNA DARA). This concept was not fully adopted, in part due to lack of OGD input, and in part due to the timing of the relief in place at the PRT, as LCol Chamberlain departed and LCol Woodworth took over. The original SHNA DARA plan had three disconnected operations boxes in Zharey. Looking at the situation, LCol Fraser Auld and the other TF Kandahar planners believed that if they concentrated resources in a single operations box and superimposed that operations box in an area that was geographically and socially critical, they could create positive effects on all three lines of operation: security, governance and development.

The Pashmul area in Zharey District was selected for Operation SHNA DARA II. Senjaray was another possibility, but under Habibullah Jan, it was considered self-securing. “We bore some responsibility for its condition (Operation MEDUSA); we could reach it easily (Route Summit); it was backed by two of our key locations (Wilson and Ma’Sum Ghar); it was a key insurgent node and transit route. In addition, CIMIC could reach it, local contractors were willing to work there (with military security support) and it was reported that the Central Asian Development Group would consider working there.”²⁴⁰

SHNA DARA II was seen initially as “deepening the HOLD” in Zharey District, but as time went on, it was clear that the Canadians and Afghans did not hold the district. During the course of SHNA DARA II planning, the term “chunking” emerged in the planning cells. Taking the original ADZ strategy, where each district was subjected to Clear-Hold-Build, the planners looked at applying Clear-Hold-Build at the sub-district level. That is, Clear- Hold-Build the district in manageable pieces by applying the resources in “chunks,” as opposed to, say, Operation BAAZ TSUKA in 2006, which swept through the entire and assumed clearance while delivering CIMIC (see Volume I). (See Figure 3-11.) The stability box approach was designed for contested areas. The first test would kick off with Operation NOLAI and Operation ISTINGA SANGA.

Operation NOLAI, 14-17 June 2008

The TF Kandahar planners understood that if they were going to get Operation SHNA DARA II off the ground and establish the new police station and Stability Box JUNO, they were going to have to give the enemy pause west of Pashmul. The result was Operation NOLAI [Mongoose], scheduled to go in on 14 June. NOLAI’s general outline had Maj Boivin’s Recce Squadron establishing observation posts along Highway 1, with ISTAR systems on Gundy Ghar as the first moves. Operation Box KAPYONG, with

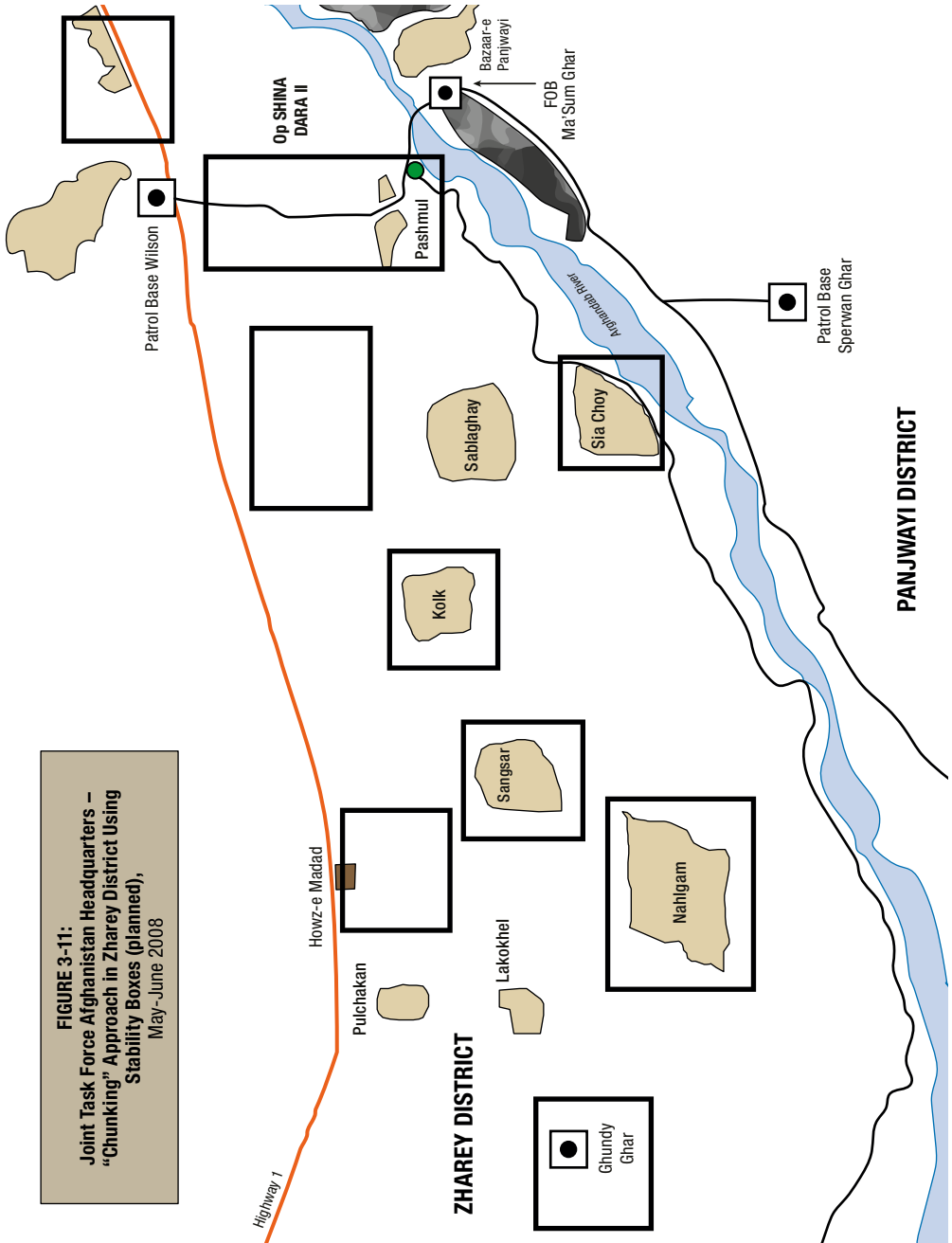


FIGURE 3-11:
Joint Task Force Afghanistan Headquarters –
“Chunking” Approach in Zharey District Using
Stability Boxes (planned),
May–June 2008

Figure 3-11: Joint Task Force Afghanistan Headquarters – “Chunking” Approach in Zharey District Using Stability Boxes (planned), May–June 2008

the communities between Summit and Sablaghay broken down into objectives B-1 to B-4, was the main objective of this disruption operation (see Figure 3-12). C Company, the main effort, was responsible for them. There would be three feints: the OMLT and 1st Company, 1st Kandak in Mushan would sortie north of the Arghandab River, as would the platoon stationed at PSS Zangabad. B Squadron's Leopards, a platoon from B Company, and 3rd Company from 1st Kandak were another diversion. The intent was to completely overwhelm the enemy's early warning system with too much information. That would, hopefully, get the enemy leaders to unmask and move their reserves, and then identify and engage them. The new police station would be quietly constructed while all this was going on.²⁴¹

Maj Stacey Grubb's C Company, having deposited its LAV IIIs at PSS Pashmul, patrolled through the dark to link up with Capt Steve Davies and his Recce Platoon, who had "eyes on" the objective compounds. At dawn, as Lt Alex Duncan led his platoon into the foliage-enwrapped village, a small number of enemy fighters opened fire with PKM and ran off, leading the Canadians into a 30-man L-shaped ambush at a "T" junction in the village. Sgt Russell Gregoire from Recce Platoon recovered one wounded Canadian, while Sgt Jayson Kapitaniuk, his section split in half on either side of the road, rallied them and got them into positions to respond with fire. Both men were later awarded the Medal of Military Valour for their actions.

Maj Grubb's headquarters also came under contact from insurgents pouring out of grape huts and onto roofs, firing down onto the Canadian platoons that took cover. According to Lt Duncan, "We were there for half an hour trying to extract ourselves. We couldn't move forward, we couldn't go back, we're just stuck behind this wall. Almost every one of my guys fired off all of their ammo."²⁴² The artillery observation officer, Capt Tom Hicks, could not fire on the targets because of the close proximity of the lead sections. A C-6 machine gun was brought forward to provide cover fire as RPGs started to explode around them. Duncan's platoon extracted under fire to a better location in a compound complex, while 155mm rounds detonated less than 40 metres away. The Canadians had shrapnel embedded in their body armour because the rounds were landing so closely to them. A GBU dropped onto one compound, flattening it, and the fire slackened off. C Company "went firm" into an all-round defence and set up Claymore mines.²⁴³

The two feints across the Arghandab River were in contact with enemy forces immediately on the morning of 14 June. North of Mushan, an Afghan army platoon mentored by three Canadians bumped into about 15 enemy fighters and a gunfight in a walled orchard area ensued. They were joined by an OH-58D from the Banshees, but with no interoperable communications, it was up to Cpl Tyler Latta to mark the target with a 203mm grenade round. The helicopter emptied its rocket pod and .50mm machine gun into the insurgents. A Sperwer TUAV

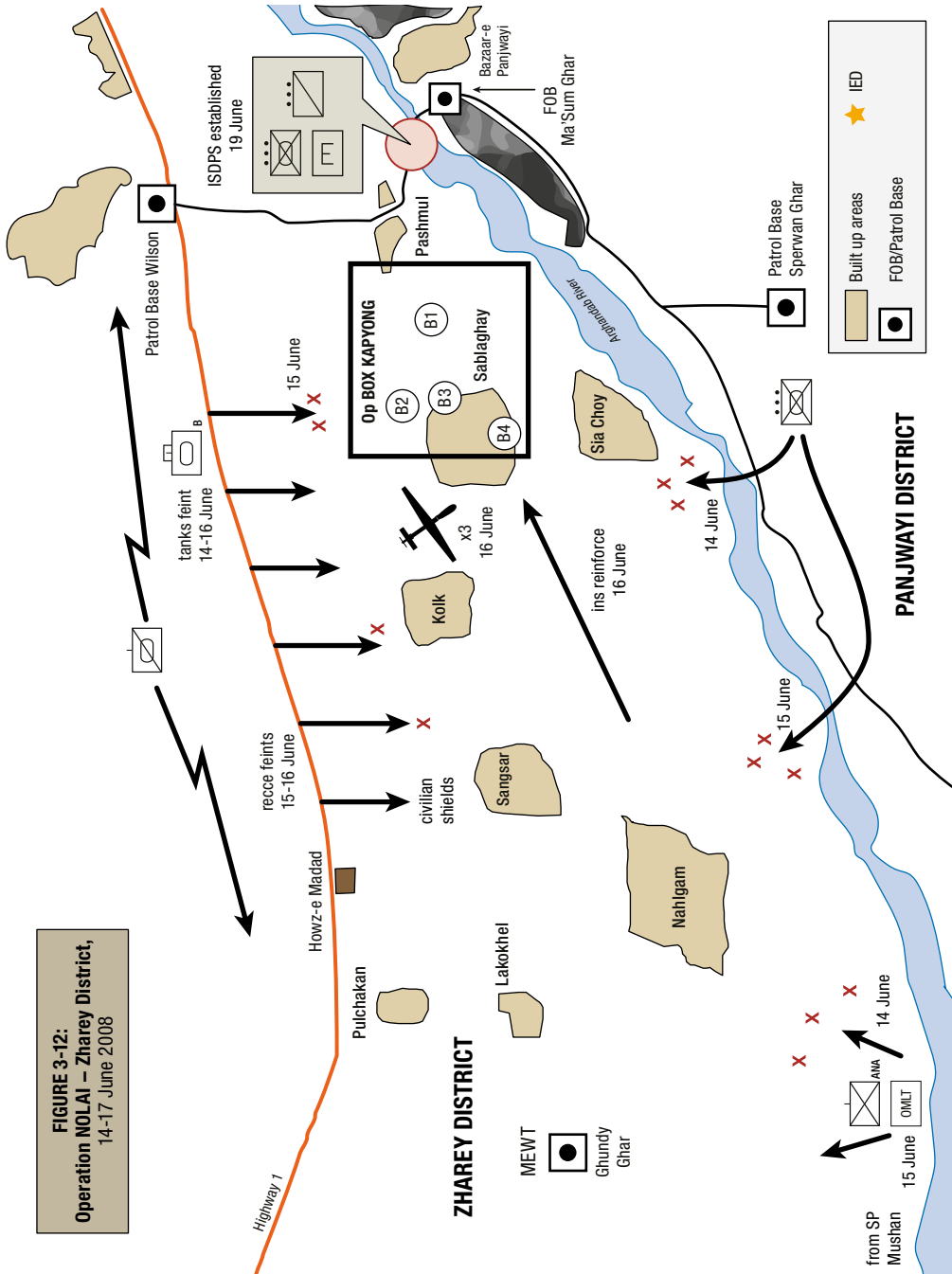


Figure 3-12: Operation NOLAI – Zharey District, 14-17 June 2008

then spotted an enemy 82mm recoilless rifle team and other reinforcements moving in. An MQ-9 Reaper engaged them with a 500-pound bomb. The OH-58D, low on fuel, departed, which prompted more enemy to break cover, and another engagement ensued. Approximately 12 enemy were killed in these encounters. The OMLT and the Afghans retired to Strong Point Mushan, where three mortar rounds received them on the way in.²⁴⁴ A similar situation replicated itself with Maj Mike Lane's B Company platoon operating north of PSS Zangabad. Crossing the river and feinting toward two objectives, they encountered sporadic fire, but with orders not to become decisively engaged, they retired back across the river by late morning. Maj Chris Adams and B Squadron Combat Team conducted a pair of breaches south from Highway 1 as well. Like the B Company moves, these were diversionary in nature and resulted in no contact.²⁴⁵

The next morning, on 15 June, C Company lined up three platoons and assaulted the enemy-held compounds across the road. There was room-to-room fighting throughout the day as the enemy reinforced from Ghariban to the north. "We threw a grenade into every single room, shot in every single door, we counted the blood trails and then we got on the roof of the hotel and did the same thing," recalled Lt Duncan, "All day it was just contacts when they started probing us from Ghariban. I just sat on that roof and I had a sniper up there watching....It was just beautiful. Icom said at one point we killed like, 90 guys or something ridiculous and we sat there for three days just dropping bombs. My body was just wrecked with the heat and the guys were getting IVs every night because they were so dehydrated. We melted the hand guards on all of the weapons and new ones had to be brought in by helicopter."²⁴⁶

These reinforcing insurgent fighters were dispatched with artillery fire and a sniper with an AR-10. The snipers were, throughout the course of Operation NOLAI, able to call down 155mm fire from the guns on several occasions against reinforcing insurgents who approached the battle area in small numbers.

The OMLT and Afghan platoon then crossed the Arghandab again to the west of their original crossing point. This was a navigation error, but the ISTAR systems watched as the enemy command system "just went nuts" at this incursion and poured reinforcements into the area. Artillery was called in on them as the Afghan platoon, with no cover in the riverbed, withdrew south, where they were engaged from the Panjwayi side of the river. The Canadian mentors then "walked" artillery onto the insurgent position and retired once again back to the strong point. An MQ-1 Predator then engaged more enemy as they were moving around on the Zharey side.²⁴⁷

The B Company platoon from PSS Zangabad crossed the river again, this time displacing west, where insurgents occupying a grape hut engaged them. M-777 artillery was called in, flattening the structure, and the Canadian platoon retired back across the Arghandab.

Maj Boivin's Recce Squadron also mounted a series of feints with their Coyotes, south from positions on Highway 1. In one case, the enemy used children as shields, preventing one engagement, and the other feint was engaged with mortars and small-arms fire.²⁴⁸

Maj Adams then took B Combat Team south and breached toward Objective B-2. This was designed to draw off pressure from C Company over in B-1. After clearing B-2, the Leopards and the Afghan company leaguered for the night, but were attacked after dark. Twelve enemy were killed with 105mm and 120mm tank fire.²⁴⁹

The enemy reinforced their positions in B-4 and B-3 on 16 June. ISTAR resources carefully monitored the course of the fight and detected a number of vehicles containing enemy leaders moving around B-3 and B-2. An MQ-9 Reaper was now on station and was cleared to engage. Three Hellfire missiles made short work of the vehicles. Post-battle assessment suggested that a prominent Taliban leader in Kandahar, commander Kako [Uncle], was killed in the strike along with a number of his men.²⁵⁰

Having recoiled, B Combat Team feinted again south from Highway 1, west of Objective B-2, while Recce Squadron made two more feints in Objectives C and D again. By this time, the enemy continued to feed reinforcements into the B-1 fight, where C Company continued to hold them there and call in close air support and artillery over a protracted period. The enemy did not notice that an Afghan army company quietly moved into Stability Box JUNO, accompanied by a platoon from B Company, Recce Platoon and combat engineers. Operation ISTINGA SANGA was on its way. By 19 June, the interim sub-district police station was constructed and waiting to be manned. Three days into the Zharey District operations, however, enemy forces were detected moving on Arghandab District and Operation NOLAI was put on hold.²⁵¹ The "Hold" for Stability Box JUNO was itself left suspended as forces were required elsewhere.

The Sarposa Prison Break, 13 June 2008

On 8 June, over 30 members (50%) of the Sarposa Prison staff, came down with food poisoning.²⁵² An earlier National Directorate of Security report on 8 March, however, warned that "The Taliban have received poisonous materials from a 'foreign' country. They plan to introduce this material to the water supply and foodstuffs of military and governmental organizations."²⁵³ Nobody connected these two pieces of information together at the time.

Some time after 1030 hours on 13 June, a large fuel truck approached the front gate of the prison, which was located in the west end of Kandahar City. A man leapt out of the truck's cab and was shot by one of the Afghan tower guards. An insurgent then stepped up and fired an RPG round into the truck, detonating 1 800 kilograms of explosives, and levelling the two towers and the gate. Another insurgent team moved in, shot at anybody in uniform, and opened the cell blocks. Minivans and taxis, prepositioned in the adjacent neighbourhoods,

arrived at the breach in waves and whisked away escaping prisoners. Responding local Afghan police encountered barriers and possible IEDs on their way to the prison.²⁵⁴ The PRT's EOD Team was alerted when word was passed that the QRF routes to the prison were mined.²⁵⁵

Word arrived at the JPCC, who alerted TF Kandahar. JPCC operations were attenuated in that two of the three Afghan interpreters uncharacteristically did not show up for work that day.²⁵⁶ MQ-1 Predators supporting Operation NOLAI were directed over the prison. LCol Woodworth at the PRT deployed his QRF, which consisted of an infantry platoon in LAV III and EOD team in Bisons. They arrived to find General Saqib, the provincial chief of police, directing police to cordon and then retake the prison. When the ANSF got inside, they found the armoury and pharmacy emptied, and 800 of the 1,100 prisoners gone. Of the 800 escapees, 385 were captured insurgents incarcerated at Sarposa. Six guards were killed and four wounded, while responding police had one killed and two wounded.²⁵⁷ The released insurgents were delivered in small groups to Asheque, Nakhonay and Arghandab. Within hours, Provincial Council leader Ahmad Wali Karzai "made statements...that exaggerated the situation. During subsequent days, his comments on the situation in Arghandab further inflamed the situation."²⁵⁸ It was not a coincidence that during the previous week, Malam Akbar, a respected elder and brother to the former police chief in Arghandab, was assassinated.²⁵⁹

The Sarposa "spectacular" stunned the entire coalition and made international news. It was a tremendous information operations failure which Canada, as a nation, had to wear. Of those 385 insurgents, many of them were IED emplacers, constructors and facilitators. The rest were trained and seasoned fighters and, as we have seen, the Taliban had a shortage of trained personnel. In one fell swoop, the breakout restocked the enemy's ranks in the middle of summer.

The Sarposa breakout, however, benefited a wide variety of interests. Outside players carefully planned it, with the active and passive assistance provided by those interests and, as such, the operation cannot be explained as a purely insurgent attack as it was endemic of the environment that Canada was dealing with (see Appendix B).

Sarposa was assessed to be an "outside job" in that it was planned outside Afghanistan and benefited from Al Qaeda advice and support. The "Afghan face" of the operation was Commander Mahmood, a former inmate of Sarposa released by "accident" (that is, bribery), but the personnel who executed the attack were a special team hired from Pakistan for the job.²⁶⁰ The infamous Jabar Agha also provided support from his network in the city. Canadian and American officers co-located with the various ANSF that day all noted that the Afghan police under Saqib's control were not activated in anything resembling a prompt manner, that is, the city was not locked down with checkpoints as the police had done in the past, and escaping prisoners were not pursued at all. It took the



Photo Credit: Author

Sarposa Prison was the scene of a mass escape of insurgents on 13 June 2008. The enemy used Sarposa as a command and control node, as well as an indoctrination and training facility, much in the same way the Irish Republican Army used British prisons during The Troubles.

American Police Mentoring Teams to apply “heavy mentoring” to get the police out of barracks and into the streets. The Afghan army, however, was able to respond, and launched 5th Kandak from 1-205 Brigade into the city as soon as they could to establish checkpoints, but this took hours. There was extreme suspicion, from a variety of Canadian observers, that the Afghan police in the city were deliberately dragging their feet, and a number of Canadians expressed the belief that Saqib and people working for him had been bought off or told not to respond.²⁶¹ LCol Woodworth directed that the PRT force protection company patrol with the Afghan police and army throughout the city to re-establish the psychological high ground. The Sarposa attack hit the coalition at five weak points all at once: Canada–United States relations were affected, as were Canadian–Afghan relations. The Afghans, not surprisingly, pointed fingers in every possible direction internally and the blame fell on the Canadians as Sarposa was a Canadian project. Security, obviously, was undermined by the attack, as was governance.

Canadian responsibility was overlooked in the subsequent Afghan autopsy of the incident that was conducted by low-ranking personnel.²⁶² The reality was, Sarposha was a showpiece of Canadian human rights, gender equality, and rule of law. The Correctional Services Canada assessment team that deployed earlier in the year had no Afghan context to make its analysis. Therefore, it made recommendations based on Canadian cultural standards that focused on lack of beds, and electrical wiring that was not up to Canadian code. (Traditional Afghans do not use beds and the idea that any Afghan structure would meet Canadian electrical standards was, in a word, unrealistic; a Canadian prison would be heaven to an average Afghan, let alone an insurgent.) Correctional Services Canada was simply not attuned to the possibility of external assault.²⁶³

That facade masked what was really going on at Sarposha: the enemy within. In an insurgency, prisons are not facilities that merely hold insurgents. They are training and indoctrination facilities for insurgents. In Canada, people in prisons are criminals sent there by the legal system for punitive measures, not prisoners of war captured on the battlefield. Correctional Services Canada had no experience dealing with hard-core ideologically-motivated terrorists until the Millhaven holding facility opened in 2006–2007. Correctional Services Canada was philosophically and doctrinally unprepared to handle a handful of terrorists who employed the Al Qaeda “conduct after capture manual” in that facility. They also backed off under the pressure of a handful of human right lawyers when they tried to get tough.²⁶⁴

The use of prisons for insurgent training and ideological hardening is not new in history: Nelson Mandela is but one example, as is Sayyid Qutb, Michael Collins and Gerry Adams. The Irish Republican Army was able to revitalize itself in 1917–18 and in the 1970s because its leaders were all imprisoned together with nothing better to do than plan. The young diplomats from DFAIT and older social developers from CIDA at the PRT had no experience with such things. Neither did Correctional Services Canada personnel, who had prison gang experience but no experience dealing with politicized Islam in its violent forms. Sarposha was a major failure of imagination for the OGDs, those directing them in Ottawa, and those pursuing the human rights agendas from comfortable offices in Western capitals.

As the PRT Specialist Engineer Team worked with Afghans to rebuild the prison, Canadian CIMIC reporting caught the mood of the population. In several districts after the Sarposha attack: “the people view the incident as a demonstration of the strength of the Taliban and the insurgents in the province and the ineptitude of the Government of Kandahar to maintain control of the security situation...confidence in the Government of Kandahar is at an all-time low....”²⁶⁵

Operation DAOR BUKHOU: Arghandab II

The events leading up to the second Taliban incursion into Arghandab District were concurrent with those of the Sarposa break out. On 7 June, a day before the Sarposa staff were poisoned, Malim Akbar Khakrezwal, the brother of the former Arghandab police chief and a key Alikozai leader, was assassinated. The Deputy Governor (Asadullah Khalid was not in the province at the time) called the JPCC and warned the staff that Arghandab District centre was going to come under attack. He directed General Saqib to increase patrols in the district. Those patrols reported in on 9 June: there were 40 or 50 fighters converging on and meeting in Jelawur. It was unclear as to what their intentions were. Insurgents also attacked two checkpoints in southern Shah Wali Kot. Canadian assessments suggested this was “a prelude to future insurgent operations in Arghandab.”²⁶⁶

The attack on Sarposa took place on 13 June. Less than two hours after the breakout, the Arghandab chief of police, Haji Rahmatullah, was targeted with an IED. He survived, but was somewhat distracted by this event.²⁶⁷ Despite this decapitation attempt, the Arghandab police relayed information that two separate insurgent organizations were now operating in the district “in order to unsettle the area as further preparations for a broader attack in the future.” The day after Sarposa, reporting continued to pour in. One insurgent group was going to enter from Senjaray, and the other from Shah Wali Kot. Another group from Sangin would move to Khakrez via Ghorak. The Afghan assessment was that “there are too many reports of insurgents’ intent to be ignored.” Three weapons caches in Jelawur and two other villages in Arghandab were in the process of being emptied. Small groups of Taliban moved among the villages instructing the people not to cooperate with the government, while Afghan police found mines on the roads.²⁶⁸

The Canadian response to the deteriorating Arghandab situation and Sarposa was initially convoluted: were the Afghans, TF Kandahar or Regional Command (South) in charge? Regional Command (South) took command of the response on 16 June, as close coordination was required between Kabul and Kandahar; between Regional Command (South) and 205 Corps; and between ISAF and Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. MGen Lessard met with the Deputy Governor and Commander 205 Corps. Subsequent to this, a request went to Kabul for another kandak and the Operation DAOR BUKHOU [Turn Around] operations order was issued.²⁶⁹ (See Figure 3-13.)

Operation DAOR BUKHOU became a large multinational operation. Regional Command (South) moved a British infantry company from the Regional Battle Group (South) to Kandahar, where it initiated patrols in the southwest quadrant of the city. 205 Corps sent 5th Kandak into Kandahar City to establish a ring of checkpoints, backing up a ring of police checkpoints on the periphery of the city. U.S. TF 71 immediately sent

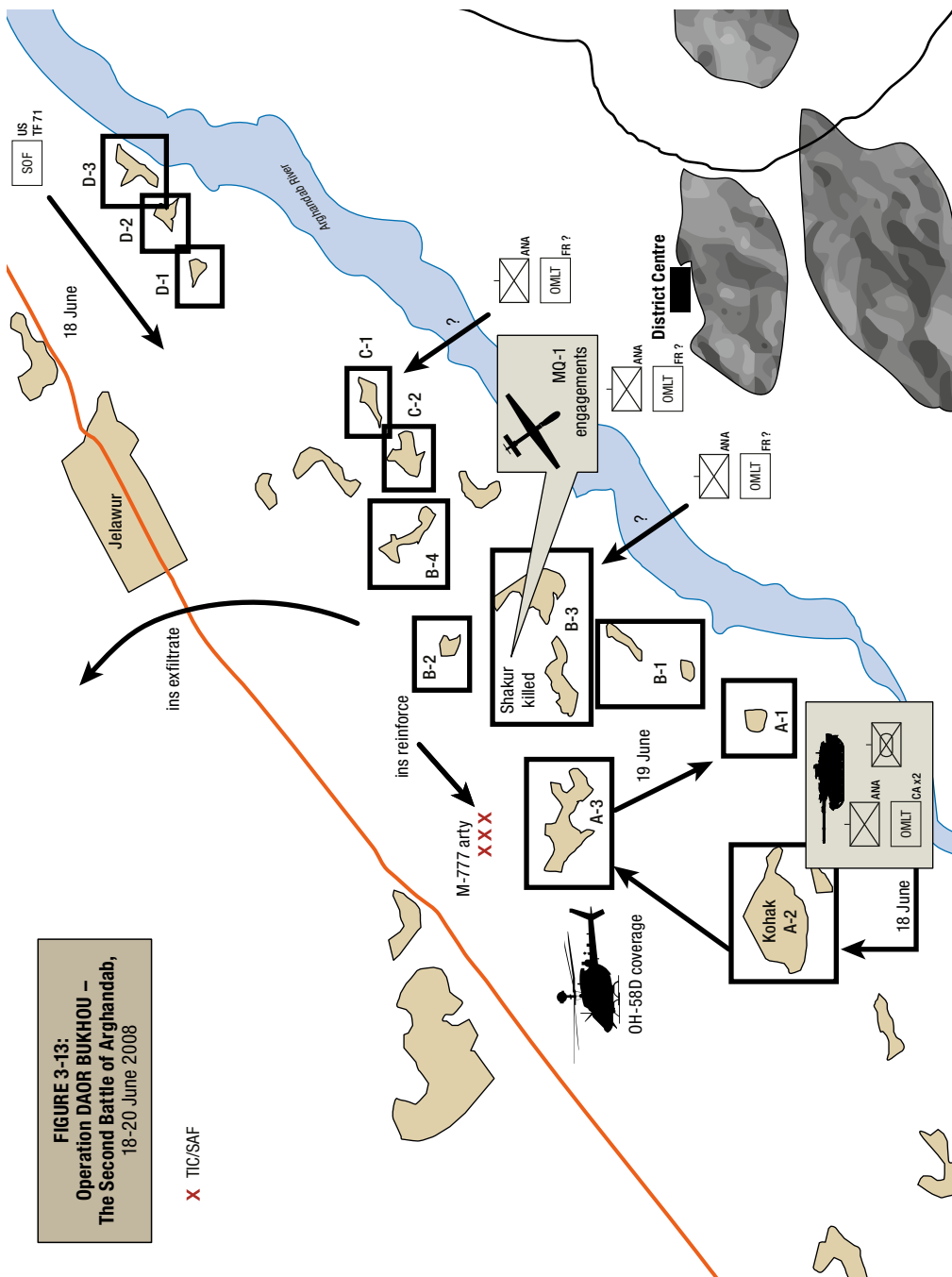


Figure 3-13: Operation DAOR BUKHOU – The Second Battle of Arghandab, 18-20 June 2008

a detachment south from Shah Wali Kot. TF Kandahar instructed LCol Woodworth to deploy the PRT's force protection company from Camp Nathan Smith to patrol the inner part of the city.²⁷⁰

With Col Riffou away on leave, LCol Drew of the OMLT received verbal orders from BGen Thompson on 17 June "to get up to the Arghandab District centre and hold it as soon as possible." Canadian combat engineers deployed with them, in part because they were mounted in LAV III and could boost the firepower of the kandak if required. Drew had no information on enemy dispositions. 1-205 Brigade also ordered 1st Kandak to establish a series of checkpoints to the west of the city. Drew ensured that this took place.²⁷¹ He was joined by the 12-man TF 71 detachment that night.



Photo Credit: DND AR2008-K031-43

The enemy tried, once again, to move in and take Arghandab District in June 2008. Operation DAOR BUKHOU, led by BGen Denis Thompson, in conjunction with his Afghan army and police counterparts, rapidly retook the district. This press conference was conducted at the district centre: beyond the Arghandab River lies the "green belt" occupied by enemy forces.

LCol Corbould was also away on leave, so Deputy Commanding Officer Maj Stephen Joudrey handled the battle group response. Maj Grubb, Maj Adams and Maj Vieveen were ordered to prepare a combat team, while Maj Boivin's Recce Squadron was to be prepared to conduct operations in Arghandab.²⁷²

With more ISTAR resources directed at Arghandab, and with reports coming in from the PRT CIMIC teams who retained connections with the population in the district,²⁷³ the enemy picture was defined. Taliban forces were in control of Jelawur and Kuhak, each of which appeared to have 50 fighters. The enemy surrounded two Arghandab police positions southwest of Jelawur but the police had not surrendered and fought on. Insurgents disguised as police occupied checkpoints along the road down to Highway 1: they blew up culverts and tried to damage bridges. In the northeast, another enemy force destroyed culverts along the roads. Mullah Mahmood seemed to be in command, relaying order to four sub-commanders. Teams of insurgents told the civilian population that they had seven days to get out of the district.²⁷⁴ This implied that the enemy forces operating in Arghandab were the precursor for a larger number of reinforcements that were on the way and were planning on fighting for the district in the same way the enemy had in Zharey back in 2006.

In Kabul, Maj.-Gen. Al Howard at Combined Security Assistance Command Afghanistan watched the Afghan ministry of defence react to the situation down south:

Bismillah Khan mounts up, takes [a] number of troops from 201 Corps and arrives in Kandahar with them. And the way we marked it at the time it [took 36 hours to respond]. We at NATO provided the air flow. We were shocked. There was very little battle procedure. They just did it. They followed orders closely. When the Afghans want to do something, it gets done. No bureaucracy, no long order process. Everybody just seems to have an innate sense. We were just absolutely flabbergasted.²⁷⁵

Several companies from 1st Kandak, 201 Corps, arrived by air from Kabul, along with senior Afghan National Army and Ministry of Defence leaders. This kandak's mentoring organization was French, but the French OMLT refused to deploy south with their charges. The 201 Corps kandak companies moved to the eastern bank of the Arghandab and established positions below the district centre, while more came into Camp Hero. A platoon of unmentored 201 Corps Afghans was cut to the TF 71, who moved out to establish blocks to the north. By this point, the district centre was, according to Maj Joudrey, a "zoo" with Afghan police, army, Canadian, American, British and French Army personnel, all present along with scads of international media, who wanted a front-row seat for another Operation MEDUSA and were filming the exodus of Arghandabis as they fled the district in cars, donkey carts and bicycles.²⁷⁶ Incredibly, as CIMIC reported from its contacts, "In Nagahan, followers of recently assassinated Abdul Hakim Jan began fighting the Taliban. [Jan] is seen as a martyr....This morning many of his followers took their weapons and warned the Taliban they would fight to the death....These same people are frustrated and do not trust the government but continue to defend themselves against the Taliban."²⁷⁷



Photo Credit: DND AR2008-K079-02

Personal relationships between Canadians and Afghans paid dividends over time. LCol Dan Drew from the OMLT and Lt.-Col. Habibi prepare for operations in Arghandab. In 2011, Habibi was promoted to command 1-205 Brigade, which worked closely with TF Kandahar.

“H” Hour was set for 0400 hours on 18 June. There were delays, as a number of Afghan trucks bogged as they manoeuvred into the blocks to the north. C Company, led by Capt Scott McGregor (Maj Grubb was on leave), and the Afghan company from 1st Kandak, moved into their positions in the riverbed, to move north and act as the “piston.” TF 71 and an Afghan platoon were in position to the northeast, while the unmentored 201 Corps troops screened the east bank.

TF 71 had the first contact at 0800, with an enemy observation post on the Arghandab–Shah Wali Kot boundary. As C Company manoeuvred, an AHSVS truck struck an IED, disabling it. An hour later, the Canadian OMLT with 1st Kandak reported sporadic fire directed at the Afghans from a compound complex. A pair of AH-64 Apache attack helicopters from TF Eagle Assault came on station, facilitated through Regional Command (South)’s air cell and leveled the building the enemy were firing from. The AH-64s were out of ammunition and were replaced with OH-58D Warriors, who covered the dead ground around the Canadians and Afghans as they approached objectives A-2 and A-3. B Squadron’s Leopards supported both axes of attack. To the west was 1st Kandak with

one company and two OMLT teams, 71B and 71D, and to the east was C Company. The force manoeuvred onto objectives A-2 and A-3, and around 0740 hours, A-2 was reported secure. A-3's compound complexes were reported cleared by 1040, and forces prepared to move onto Objective B-2. One OH-58D spotted insurgents reinforcing the objective area and was able to call in artillery fire from B Battery's M-777 guns, while another helicopter expended its rockets on another insurgent group.²⁷⁸

Around 1500 hours, C Company got into a TIC, but the enemy firing dropped off due to the presence of the helicopters. After 1800 hours, both OMLT teams and their Afghan charges engaged in two firefights, and broke contact after some Afghan troops were wounded. The enemy even engaged a Leopard with a sniper, to no effect.

In an eerie replay of November 2007's events, MQ-1 Predator and MQ-9 Reaper UAVs spotted what amounted to an enemy orders group around 1942 hours and engaged it with Hellfire missiles. The battle group Tactical Operations Centre team was able to conduct six separate engagements against clusters of enemy, killing eight in one pass and 12 in another. Four more engagements added to these and produced an estimated 70 enemy casualties. According to Maj Joudrey, it was "kill, kill, kill."²⁷⁹ The enemy commanders called for reinforcements from surrounding cells and networks, but none arrived.²⁸⁰

On 19 June, 1st Kandak and mentors, C Company and B Squadron shifted focus to Objective A-1. The tanks secured the line of departure at 0523 hours. At 0735, the assault went in with the Leopards breaching. By 1215, the compounds were cleared. The enemy leadership decided to withdraw, having "assessed that their losses over the past day were too great to sustain the operation." One of the Predator strikes apparently killed Mullah Shakur, a prominent Taliban commander, and wounded several other sub-commanders.²⁸¹

There were now international issues. The Afghans wanted to get the 201 Corps companies into the action and take Objective B-3, but their French mentors would not deploy from Kabul (it was crucial to have ISAF mentors with the Afghans so that they would show up in the ISAF command's systems and not be engaged by coalition air or artillery.) It took President Sarkozy's intervention to force them to do so, but they would not arrive in time. Meanwhile, a U.S. Marine Corps ETT arrived, but were having problems marrying up with the 201 Corps personnel. And then there were communications problems. Not all of the systems were interoperable and, at one point during the operation, the battle group's tactical headquarters became the only means of relaying information from the OMLT to higher headquarters. TF 71 and its Afghan company went into Objective D, cleared and pulled back. There was confusion in that they were supposed to move onto Objective B-4, but that now became an Afghan-French tasking. Then the French refused to go in with the 201 Corps kandak.

This left Jelawur unsaturated, and probably facilitated enemy exfiltration to the north. Attempts to insert the arriving Commando Kandak to block them were too late.²⁸²

The decision was made on 20 June to hand off operations in Arghandab from TF Kandahar to 1-201 Brigade and their French mentors and, on 21 June, Canadian forces withdrew from the district. This left three companies from 201 Corps, all now mentored by the French OMLT: two located west of the river and one at the district centre. None were in Jelawur. These forces were supplemented with: an unmentored company from 4th Kandak; Maj Boivin and his Recce Squadron, which moved into FOB Frontenac; and TF 77, a platoon of Lithuanian Special Forces. There initially appeared to be no consolidation plan involving the PRT and CIMIC. Some Afghan police returned but not in any organized fashion. Those that did patrol their communities found mass graves of insurgent fighters killed during Operation DAOR BUKHOU.²⁸³

The deficiencies in a Hold plan for Arghandab were belatedly addressed nearly a week later. A follow-on operation on 2 July, Operation PARDA, deployed Recce Squadron Coyote observation positions backed up with an infantry platoon to the Arghandab–Khakrez pass. PARDA rationalized Hold forces in Arghandab. By this time, five police checkpoints, two Afghan army checkpoints and four Afghan army “ambush areas” were established in the central part of the district.²⁸⁴ Psychologically, Operation DAOR BUKHOU had a positive effect on the Kandahar population: “The overall mood has done another 180 degree swing since the Sarposa incident and support for the insurgents appears to be rapidly declining.”²⁸⁵

The ragged consolidation that took place after Operation DAOR BUKHOU, coupled to the near-decapitation of Alikozai leadership, however, led to long-term problems in Arghandab District. Initial ASIC estimates suggested that there were 70–100 enemy casualties, of which 25 to 40 were killed in action. If this was an enemy vanguard force that was establishing itself and awaiting reinforcement, then its defeat and rout were as important as Operation INTIZAAR ZMAREY the previous fall. However, the insurgents left behind forces that emerged on 23 June to destroy two police checkpoints and the Jelawur clinic. A police shootout on 25 and 26 June resulted in the capture of 12 fighters. The Canadian J2 assessed that “most insurgents have left Arghandab with only local insurgents or those who could not promptly depart for other areas left behind. Insurgents are unlikely to conduct more than attacks in self-defence at this time.”²⁸⁶

Afghans kept reporting to the JPCC and to other Canadian venues that there was still enemy in Arghandab. TF Kandahar J2 altered its view slightly: “There are indications that rank and file insurgents, unlike some higher level commanders, were not downcast by the insurgent retreat from Arghandab. It is therefore possible that, not being under the impression that they were defeated, they intend to proceed with their normal activities....”²⁸⁷ Though Operation DAOR BUKHOU was completed, the battle for Arghandab continued.

Canadian Involvement with Combined Security Transition Command Afghanistan

In the last chapter, we saw how CSTC-A's American police mentor teams lay outside the ISAF chain of command, yet at the same time operated in the Canadian battle space in Kandahar Province. In May 2002, the U.S. Office of Military Cooperation-Afghanistan was renamed the Office of Security Cooperation-Afghanistan. On 4 April 2006, it was redesignated as CSTC-A, and assigned to the U.S. CENTCOM. CSTC-A became a combined joint interagency organization and was located in Kabul. The senior leadership staff included U.S. Army, Canadian, Polish and British officers. The Canadians were part of this organization under the umbrella of Operation ARCHER.

The CSTC-A mission was to plan, programme and implement structural, organizational, institutional and management reform of the ANSF, which consist of the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police, in order to develop a stable Afghanistan, strengthen the rule of law, and deter and defeat terrorism within its borders. CSTC-A provided advisors, mentors and trainers to help both the Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Interior organize, train, equip, employ and support the ANSF in order to do everything from defeating the insurgency and providing internal security to setting the conditions for economic development, and gaining the trust and confidence of the citizens of Afghanistan.

In early 2008, Canada identified that the existing staff officer contribution to CSTC-A should be increased, in part to provide greater situational awareness on activities in that command. BGen Al Howard and BGen Larry O'Brien eventually replaced BGen Dennis Tabbernor, who represented Canadian interests in 2007. Howard and O'Brien respectively worked in the army and police programme arms of this American command, while Col Jay Milne was the senior mentor to the Afghan National Army. Overall, the tasks involved mentoring the Afghan equivalent of National Defence headquarters, and harness CSTC-A's staff to improve Afghan National Army and Afghan police development.²⁸⁸

The Canadians at CSTC-A were in a position to see just how challenging it was to produce the ANSF and did what they could to influence the situation and to improve the position in southern Afghanistan and Kandahar Province. There were numerous issues, almost too many to list. The new Afghan National Army was a mix of leaders who were Mujahideen and others who were Soviet-trained. The illiteracy levels were staggering.

The largest problem was the template that this new army was being mentored to produce. Under pressure from American stakeholders who wanted to see progress, CSTC-A tried to generate large numbers of trained ANSF. The pressure produced, for want of a better phrase, quality control problems in already problematic organizations. And, as one observer put it, the Afghan National Army was not optimized for counter-insurgency operations:

“We built them a bunch of garrisons, as we would in North America and Europe, and then wondered why they weren’t living in the population....They’re living like we’re living back home, isolated from communities and at a much higher living standard.”²⁸⁹

Western technology was passed on to the Afghans, which they could not maintain, and thus they became dependent on Western contractors. They were not provided with a sustainable military structure. And the list continued.²⁹⁰ However, with the momentum established as far back as 2003, it was difficult to alter the trajectory of this system. Indeed, the near-post-apocalyptic environment of Afghanistan warranted at least some structure, no matter how imperfect it was.

CSTC-A was also divided on the type of policing that the Afghans should be mentored on. Were the police “beat cops” or were they militia?

Europeans wanted a much more deliberate street-cop approach to policing: traffic tickets.... But that’s not in a war environment. So [the Europeans] wouldn’t deploy their people forward. They bristled at the idea that you would train the police in what were basic infantry skills. When the Commanding General of CSTC-A was asked, “What training do the police need right now?” He said, “Basic infantry training.” His European colleagues would freak out.²⁹¹

When the Germans gave up and handed off policing, the mission went to CSTC-A so it was no surprise when the more military approach dominated. That put CSTC-A on a collision course with the Ministry of the Interior. The corruption level at the Ministry of the Interior was significantly higher than in the Ministry of Defence and the inability to reconcile that high-level corruption with effective police programmes in the provinces was an issue that dogged everyone involved. It had no apparent solution: the problem of having provincial governors appointing district leaders who had their own police undermined any attempts at proper central government authority.

This was where the Afghan Regional Security Integration Commands under CSTC-A came into play. They had existed since 2006 and with their increased involvement in the policing role, they developed an information collection function on the state of Afghan policing in their operating areas. Those data were sent back through CSTC-A and then employed by the commanders in Kabul as suasion whenever they could with their Afghan counterparts. The main disconnect was that the Afghan Regional Security Integration Commands had no formal connection to the ISAF Regional Commands and had information-sharing issues related to this. By having senior Canadians in CSTC-A, Canada was able to maintain awareness of what was going on at a higher level and then feed back down to TF Kandahar as required.²⁹²

It was an imperfect system that trundled along in 2008–2009. There were, as one observer explained, “several entities that were not glued together” but the Canadian Army played a significant role in making things happen both in Kabul and in Kandahar by getting all of the players in one room. The ability of the Canadian officers in CSTC-A and at TF Kandahar to communicate on the Canadian back channel was a significant factor in maintaining national situational awareness in the increasingly confused environment that involved multiple coalitions and varying agendas.

Policing in Kandahar Province

As discussed in the previous chapter, significant friction existed between the American Police Mentoring Teams’ leadership and the Laroche headquarters, and the lack of unity of effort in this area detrimentally affected policing in the districts. The Ministry of the Interior imposed Focused District Development to clean up the district police forces in spring 2008. General Saqib and the senior American police mentor openly disagreed with the Kabul government and CSTC-A’s bringing in “outsider” police to conduct Focused District Development. The Canadians in TF Kandahar were told by the senior American police mentor that it was none of Canada’s business because what he was doing lay outside the ISAF chain of command. The senior American police mentor further instructed “that his personnel break contact with TFK HQ.”²⁹³

Saqib then shook up the police by appointing Essa Khan as Panjwayi chief of police, with the former ex-district chief, Bismillah, as his deputy. Bismillah Khan from Panjwayi now went to Zharey District and Fida Mohammad replaced Col. Akka in Dand.²⁹⁴ These changes only aggravated a bad situation in Zharey and Panjwayi, alienating almost all factions in both districts and threw policing into confusion (personal loyalty to one commander meant that personnel followed him—with their weapons and vehicles). During this period, Governor Asadullah Khalid stopped communicating with the JPCC so there was no higher direction or liaison with the Governor on police matters.²⁹⁵

Even while the Focused District Development process was at work in Zharey and Panjwayi, there were other factors undermining policing in the province. First, there was the existence of the Governor’s private militia. This was the successor to Standby Police Unit 005, now called Battalion 02, and boosted with personnel who appeared to be Hazara in ethnicity.²⁹⁶ Battalion 02 apparently took tactical direction from the provincial chief of police but really belonged to Asadullah Khalid. Second, the decision by TF Kandahar to hire private security forces for base security to free up Canadian soldiers opened up the market for ANSF personnel to sell or resell their services to these companies. Some of those companies appeared out of the ether and had connections to various factions or elements of the Kandahari power structure. In some cases, for example, a member of the provincial

police might moonlight for a forward operating base security company or UNAMA, but retain his weapon and uniform. So could a member of Battalion 02. Other armed personnel from elsewhere arrived to sign up for the security companies. Once again, there was no unity of policing and each entity in the power structure retained an informal militia under the guise of another organization or organizations.

Several Canadians viewed the senior American police mentor to be too closely associated with Saqib and an impediment to Canadian attempts to establish effective policing in key districts. Afghan Regional Security Integration Command (South) was made aware of this problem but decided to wait until his tour was completed before returning him to the United States.²⁹⁷ His replacement was Col. James Walton, who arrived in late May 2008. Col. Walton and his team immediately initiated an investigation into what was going on and were believed to have uncovered information on Saqib's involvement with private security companies. They also started to investigate why Saqib's police responded so slowly to the Sarposa break out. On 21 June 2008, Col. Walton's MRAP vehicle was destroyed by an extremely large IED on Highway 1 in Senjaray. He was killed, along with three other American police mentors, in what turned out to be an IED-initiated ambush.²⁹⁸

Lt Reg McMichael led the QRF, consisting of a platoon of infantry and troop of Leopard tanks to the blast site. Highway 1 was cratered, 4 to 5 metres across and 6 metres deep. Col. Walton's MRAP vehicle was the only one destroyed in the convoy, and it was "completely obliterated." Another vehicle had been hit by heavy weapons fire, and there were wounded and dead all over the scene. McMichael and the QRF realized the American survivors were "combat ineffective," and in shock, so the Canadian platoon administered casualty care and secured the scene for the investigation.²⁹⁹

Investigators determined that the IED was a completely unique device, and employed methodologies not seen before. Or ever again. Several Canadian and American officers involved in policing issues in Kandahar Province believed that General Saqib or others in the Kandahari power structure were involved in some way in the Walton assassination, but could not prove it conclusively. Saqib was fired on 26 June, and the reasons given related to the Sarposa prison break and the failure to respond in a timely fashion.³⁰⁰ Saqib asserted, after he was fired that there was a deal made between the Kandahar power structure and the Taliban to permit the Sarposa raid and that he was being scapegoated for the failure.³⁰¹ Policing in Kandahar Province, the key piece in any Hold and Build, remained in disarray.

The Provincial Reconstruction Team and Development, May–August 2008

The role of the TF Kandahar Development Advisor in the post-Manley environment was supposed to be enhanced but how the Development Advisor related to the Representative of Canada, how both related to the PRT, and how all of this related to the embassy in Kabul

remained a source of tension throughout the first half of 2008. The OGDs lacked the levels of command that the Army did, which meant that there was no real chain of command culture. DFAIT and CIDA communicated in formal and informal networks and were generally not as hierarchical as the Army. Elissa Golberg, according to BGen Thompson, spent most of her time attempting to achieve rapprochement between the various departments in Ottawa to gain consensus on decisions and then having to do the same thing all over again in theatre.³⁰²

The problem, once again, was what was known and not known in the province. For the most part, the PRT had to re-establish its baseline regarding which district development assemblies and community development councils were active in the province. CIDA decided to work with locally employed personnel to liaise with UN HABITAT, and this was a laborious process.³⁰³ For example, the TF Kandahar Development Advisor, from CIDA, insisted that there were operational-level CIDA projects in Maywand. The Canadian tactical PSYOPS team assigned to Maywand went out and looked. They found no evidence that any of the CIDA-funded projects “were at a spade turning phase,” though a lot of Canadian money had been spent on them.³⁰⁴

The PRT CIMIC teams, led by Maj Jim Allen, did their best to provide visibility on what was happening in the districts, while the various principals at the PRT tried to rationalize how to approach development in the province. The ideas of a District Development Plan and a Provincial Development Plan were once again deployed, but there remained a question as to how those plans related to what the district and community assemblies and councils wanted. The Provincial Development Committee was once again moribund under Asadullah Khalid, and the Provincial Development Plan remained “an exercise, a check in the box.” The National Solidarity Programme was stalled, and the Community Development Councils were not functional in insecure areas. The District Development Assemblies remained ad hoc and also under threat in certain districts. Canadians therefore had to focus on the district level and work the problem district by district.³⁰⁵

There were increasing concerns about the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development and the money Canada put into it at the Kabul level. There was no means to account for it or track where it was used—if it was used. And in the post-Manley environment, it now had to be employed and then connected to metrics in order to demonstrate progress. The PRT decided that if the National Solidarity Programme was not operational and there was no money coming in, or if the district assemblies were otherwise corrupt, the PRT would use the best funding envelope available to deal with the projects. This was completely ad hoc: CIDA had its KLIP money, the Army had the Commander’s Contingency Fund, there was an “Information Operations” fund, quick impact project money, DFAIT’s Global Peace and Security Fund, and USAID with its money.

Every effort was made to pass ownership to the district leaders, but it was clear that the PRT and CIMIC, once again, despite LCol Dana Woodworth's and the PRT's best efforts, were acting as a de facto government in Kandahar because Asadullah Khalid and Ahmad Wali Karzai were unwilling or unable to do the job themselves.³⁰⁶

Connecting with non-governmental organizations providing aid in the province was extremely problematic as they viewed themselves as neutral and thus were able to work in areas controlled or influenced by the Taliban. Their activities may have benefited the people in those communities to a certain extent, but ultimately, they undermined the effort to establish governance and rule of law which, in turn, benefited the insurgency. In effect, they provided the services that a government should be able to apply but could not. This in turn permitted the Taliban to take credit for the aid activities with the population, and the government could not. Worse, the insurgents "typically take between 10–20% of the value of any project as the price to provide protection. The United States and the international community are unintentionally fueling a vast political economy of security corruption in Afghanistan."³⁰⁷

As for the rule of law portfolio, progress remained glacial. Efforts taken in Kandahar City had almost no effect outside it. Two senior tribal elders from a marginalized tribe approached the PRT and came right to the point:

They are feeling left out of the Government's decision-making and want some input into decision-making and think that the Government of Afghanistan are liars. They stated that they are unhappy with the judicial system and believes prisoners are being mistreated by the NDS.... They believe that the tribal shura deals with criminals and crime a lot better than the legal system. "We can solve problems in days that would take the government years."³⁰⁸

When the PRT looked into the polio eradication initiative that Canada already financially supported, CIMIC reported that a team leader in Panjwayi pocketed the money he was supposed to pay his field workers with.³⁰⁹ With almost no visibility on what was happening outside Kandahar City, it was virtually impossible to assess the effectiveness of this support. CIMIC patrols occasionally encountered teenagers who were hired by Mirwais Hospital to vaccinate the population of Kandahar City.³¹⁰ By August, CIMIC teams were reporting that the Taliban were kidnapping and intimidating vaccinators.³¹¹

After Sarposa, development and reconstruction priorities shifted toward Kandahar City. Furthermore, Ottawa would not permit OGD personnel to deploy for significant periods to the districts. As a result, CIDA contracted the Central Asian Development Group to act as an "implementing partner" for projects in Panjwayi District.³¹² This group preferred to

operate at the grass roots level and started operations in summer 2008. Nobody, apparently, told the WHOPPER group coordinating Canadian and Afghan activities in Panjwayi, so what the Central Asian Development Group did or did not do could not be measured or even verified.

With the shift of priorities toward Kandahar City after the Sarposa breakout in June, the relationship with the mayor, Ghulam Haider Hamidi, assumed increased importance. Assessed as “an educated, worldly, honest and apolitical Afghan patriot whose sole agenda is improving the quality of life” in the city, this was a man Canada could do business with. Like the provincial governor’s office, however, the mayor lacked the tools: “the municipality’s main problem is administrative, and the mayor’s office lacks the internal systems and procedures and adequately trained personnel to manage the city’s affairs. This deficiency is corroborated by the city’s inability to spend all of the revenues it receives despite many pressing needs.”³¹³ With an estimated 800 000 people, the city remained the centre of gravity of the coalition effort and more attention was required to address the city’s ills.

The idea that Kandahar City should have development assemblies and councils like the rural districts was not new but it was complicated by the Afghan bureaucratic process. The National Solidarity Programme worked with the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, which being the rural reconstruction department, did not deal with cities. When an experiment with UN HABITAT was attempted, Mayor Hamidi told the PRT that he “asked UN HABITAT to leave and not be involved with city officials...he thinks the staff UN HABITAT placed in his office were corrupt (taking bribes for awarding contracts to certain persons.) He did not like that the UN heavily publicized its involvement with the city and took credit for everything.” Similarly, the mayor’s engineering advisor noted that they were “constantly frustrated by UN HABITAT’s lack of interest in coordinating their projects with the municipality or helping them plan for the city.”³¹⁴

By summer, Kandahar City was increasingly seen by TF Kandahar as an area of operations unto itself, with more and more Canadian counter-IED capability and signals capacity extant at the PRT. This increased interest attracted the attention of the insurgents. By the end of August, a two-man team on a motorcycle assassinated the second in command of the High Court, Hazarat Abdullah Mujahadi. This left Kandahar “with only seven judges for the entire province.” Five IED attacks over three days after this murder was a portent that the city was once again becoming a “front” in the war.³¹⁵

Operations in Zharey District, June–July 2008

In the wake of Sarposa and with the focus on Arghandab, Zharey appeared to become an operations backwater. The reality was that there was constant daily patrolling by Canadian and Afghan forces. Larger coalition operations continued but there were fewer of them.

The engineers tried to solve the Route Langley paving project problem but CMT-2 had problems recruiting due to enemy intimidation. The decision was taken to put in a combat road instead.

The enemy, pinned down in Garmsir in Helmand, tried to move resources into Zharey to keep this front alive. The number of Helmand-based insurgents and their leaders increased in the district.³¹⁶ Constant patrolling by the ANSF and their Canadian mentors helped define areas of increased insurgent influence. These resulted in numerous “shoot and scoot” contacts with few casualties to either side. The Afghan police and their Canadian mentors were able to determine that the enemy used former PSSs Kolk and Sangsar and that there was a significant forward presence in Burmohammad north of Pashmul.

Police information also indicated that the insurgents had pre-developed but left unmanned defensive positions set up in a ring to protect the areas they influenced. Most importantly, information collected by the Afghans noted that the population was sick and tired of “outsider” Taliban activities in their domains: they were shutting down markets, for example, and negatively affecting trade.³¹⁷ Then there was Operation KHAMOSH TEARANDAZ [Silent Archer] on 26 June.

There was far too much activity on the Spin Pir “firing range” so the Afghans decided to clear the compounds south of the strong point. The patrols encountered small teams of insurgents during four contacts; the enemy employed rapid “shoot and scoot” tactics to break contact. Consequently, only one enemy team could be engaged by artillery and even then, it was unclear how many were wounded or killed.³¹⁸

B Battery was finally able to unleash its new capability. On 4 July, the P-OMLT stationed at Spin Pir on Highway 1 came under attack by an insurgent force that took up a firebase in a grape hut and manoeuvred on the police sub-station. The P-OMLT and Afghan police returned fire and called for support. They had no joint terminal air controller and no trained forward observation officer. They were asked for a 12-figure grid reference. In minutes, an M-982 Excalibur round wrecked the grape hut and the rest of the enemy fled.³¹⁹

As for governance and development in Zharey, there was precious little of it in summer 2008 though there were big plans for Stability Box JUNO. People who wanted to work for CMT-2 were shot or otherwise intimidated. Elsewhere, one shura member told CIMIC “if the PRT was unwilling to do projects in Pashmul, then what was the point of attending the shura?”³²⁰ Zharey District police were still “on the take”: many people distrust the Afghan National Police and supported the insurgents instead.³²¹ This was confirmed by CMT-2: they collected evidence that the police were exacting a toll on the gravel trucks supporting the paving project and developed information that police dressed as insurgents killed workers who did not pay them off.³²²

Canadian OMLT and P-OMLT troops and the ANSF operating from Zharey tactical infrastructure into the interior of the district encountered daily contacts with enemy forces throughout July. The list is as voluminous as it is repetitive. Framework patrols, either P-OMLT and police or OMLT and Afghan army, got into contact, air or artillery fire support was brought down, there were a handful of enemy casualties and the patrol continued. Spin Pir was attacked with RPGs and mortars on numerous occasions, while FOBs Ma'Sum Ghar and Wilson were mortared or rocketed regularly. It is unclear, in retrospect, who was being disrupted: the coalition forces or the insurgents. The coalition was unable to clear the district, it could not Hold because there were not enough police, and the Build was completely stalled out because of the lack of governance and development capacity. The insurgents could not replicate the conditions of 2006 in the interior of the district thus far, and they were annoying the local population in certain areas. Their attempts to "keep the game alive" in Zharey were successful but they were unable to make the gains that they wanted to either.³²³

For the most part, Canadian activities were directed away from Zharey's interior and more and more toward Highway 1 as the enemy shifted operations there. One crucial node was the community of Senjaray. BGen Thompson directed efforts toward establishing a combat outpost there, mostly because it looked like the Taliban was increasingly intimidating the population and because the Alizais were politically isolated in Kandahar.³²⁴ Canadian interest increased after the killing of a man who seemed to be a constant in the Kandahari power structure.

The Assassination of Habibullah Jan

Member of Parliament Habibullah Jan, *de facto* leader of the Alizais, was shot and killed on the night of 4 July while secretly visiting his new wife's family in Zharey District. The killer was later identified as a criminal released during the Sarposha prison break and was an Alizai related to his victim.³²⁵ There were escaped Taliban operating in Senjaray after the prison break that were known to police but the provincial coordination centre reported that there were Afghan "communications problems" with warning Jan that he was targeted.³²⁶ The Canadian OCC-P personnel, furthermore, were convinced that the assassination was "an inside job" that somehow involved the Kandahar provincial police.³²⁷ In the days after, neither Governor Asadullah Khalid nor provincial council leader Ahmad Wali Karzai made any public comment on the killing, were camera-shy, and left the job up to the district leader and chief of police.³²⁸

TF Kandahar's assessment was that "The death of Habibullah Jan leaves a significant power vacuum in Eastern Zharey as the Alizai tribal elder wielded considerable power and influence. His assassination is one of a string of influential tribal elders killed in recent

months, which has changed the power dynamics in central Kandahar.”³²⁹ Furthermore, the consensus in TF Kandahar headquarters was that Jan’s killing was not done by the Taliban.³³⁰ LCol Woodworth at the PRT believed that Habibullah Jan was killed because he was starting to support Canadian efforts in the district.³³¹

The Habibullah Jan killing was almost as destabilizing as the death of Mullah Naqib. Indeed, the death of both men, who were allies in opposing the Popalzai representatives’ domination of Kandahari politics, wiped out the third “leg” of the Kandahar provincial power structure. It remains a telling point that not a single Barakzai or Popalzai power broker was assassinated during the 2006–2008 period. Like Sarposa and Arghandab, there was a suspicious convergence of interests between the insurgents and elements in the provincial power structure, but there was no hard evidence of a direct connection.³³²

The day after Jan was killed, the Governor moved 50 of his “police” into Sanjeray.³³³ The Governor in effect occupied Sanjeray with his own forces and jettisoned the remaining implements of Alizai power. Ahmad Wali Karzai’s primary rival was now no more. A CIMIC team noted that they “[do] not believe that many of the crimes currently attributed to the insurgents can be confirmed as actual insurgent activity and the possibility exists that complex local crime organizations are behind them.”³³⁴ The lack of confidence in the provincial government by the Alizais was confirmed when they sent a 40-man delegation to Kabul to press the President’s Office on their concerns rather than parlay with Asadullah Khalid.³³⁵

Operation LUMBAR: The Fight for Highway 1 Starts, July–August 2008

The insurgents, regrouping from the Arghandab operation, looked everywhere to apply pressure on the coalition forces. Though operations in the interior of Zharey were stalemated, Highway 1 along Zharey District was an obvious and vulnerable target, so the IED specialists sprung from Sarposa were put to work alongside the existing networks operating in Zharey.³³⁶ From 4 to 21 July, there were 18 ambushes, small-arms fire attacks and IED events from Asheque to Maywand, including six attacks against resupply efforts in a five-day period (see Figure 3-14). Highway 1 started to resemble Route Fosters. This state of affairs “negatively affected commercial and [coalition forces] freedom of movement, specifically the resupply of [coalition] elements.” In this case, this meant anything west of Sanjeray that required ground resupply, including Helmand Province.³³⁷ Moreover, with the pending deployment of 2-2 Infantry to Maywand District, IED attacks had to be reduced along this route.

Operation LUMBAR was designed to address the Highway 1 problem. From 21 to 24 July, TF Kandahar reassessed the situation and, working through the OMLT, tried to develop an Afghan–Canadian solution. Regular sweeps of Highway 1, coupled with irregular vital point searches and culverts for IEDs, were manpower intensive and it was not clear

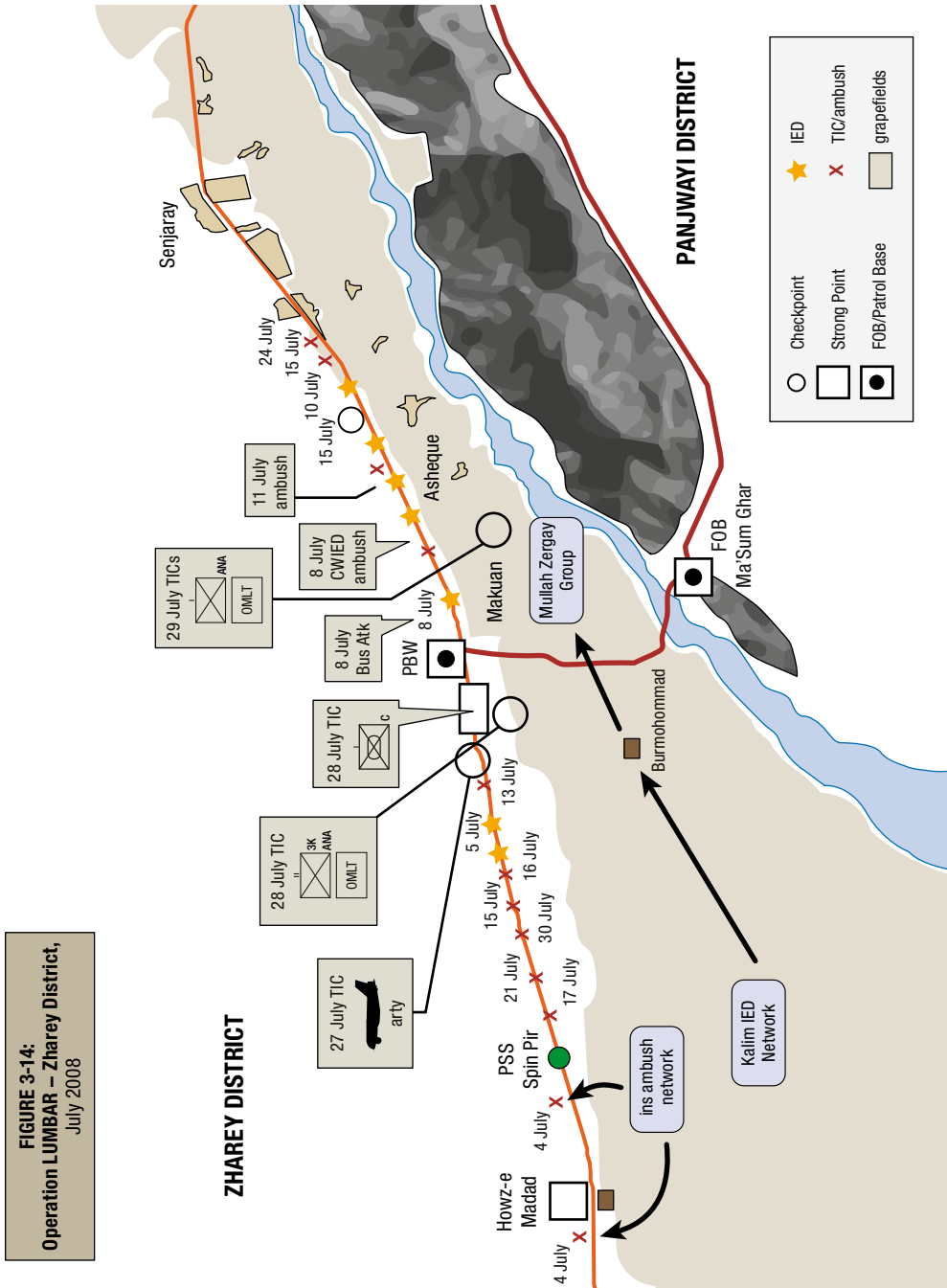


Figure 3-14: Operation LUMBAR – Zharey District, July 2008

if there were enough police in Zharey District to handle the task. They lacked armoured vehicles, as did the Afghan army. Some means of establishing a police–army patrol matrix had to be found through the Joint District Coordination Centre, if possible.

Operation LUMBAR eventually consisted of several elements. The ANCOP and Afghan Uniformed Police handled vital point checks. Canadian combat engineers also conducted route patrols. OH-58D helicopters from the Banshees provided top cover to both as well as to convoys passing through the area. At the same time, ANCOP positions on Highway 1 in Asheque were improved by Canadian engineers. Finally, C Company developed a patrol plan for the area south of Patrol Base Wilson, while special operations forces elements came in at night for covert surveillance. (See Figure 3-15.)

From 27 July to 24 August, there were only four IED attacks and no ambushes against Highway 1 vehicle traffic in the Operation LUMBAR operating area. None of these were against resupply convoys.³³⁸ There were, however, several actions. The first was on 27 July when a Sperwer TUAV spotted an ambush team, which was then engaged with M-777 artillery fire. The next day, Afghan troops and the OMLT engaged the enemy south of Highway 1, while C Company did the same. LAV III 25mm cannon fire, artillery and close air support killed around eight insurgents. Two Afghan companies and their OMLT mentors launched a hasty cordon and search operation into Asheque after two policemen were kidnapped and taken to Makuan. There, an enemy force with mortars and skirmishing engaged them in a firefight that lasted nearly two hours. The forward air controllers were unable to bring close air support and artillery to bear, so the Canadians and Afghans withdrew. Makuan remained hot, and there was concern that the locals had some grievance with the police and took them to the Taliban for adjudication.³³⁹

Operation LUMBAR measures continued to produce contact so the operation was extended to mid-August. C Company patrolling south of Patrol Base Wilson resulted in two major contacts, both of which drew in artillery and close air support, while the Afghan police and the Army had two large contacts east of Patrol Base Wilson on the highway. In all cases, there were enemy casualties with no coalition casualties. The Taliban, who had deliberate intent to shoot down a coalition helicopter with a dedicated team, ambushed the Banshees in their OH-58Ds. These attacks occurred on two occasions, so the Banshees baited a trap and then unloaded a B-1B bomber onto the Taliban ambush force south of Howz-e Madad on 13 August, taking out all of the heavy machine gun teams. Six days later, an IED dig team was observed at night by C Company and special operations forces. The dig team engaged with a variety of bombs and missiles until they were all dead.³⁴⁰

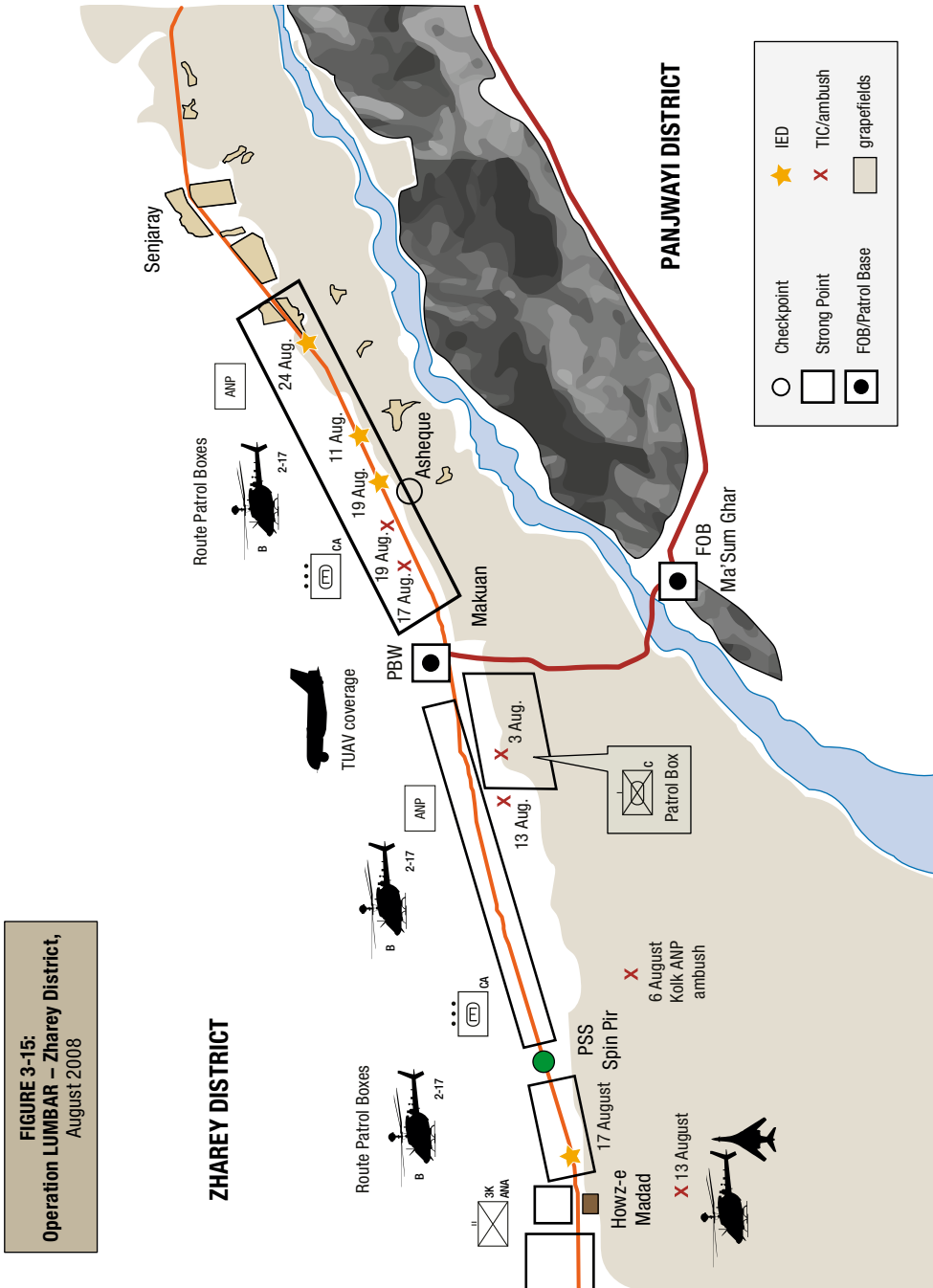


Figure 3-15: Operation LUMBAR – Zharey District, August 2008

Operation LUMBAR was successful in that it helped TF Kandahar and Regional Command (South) regain the initiative and freedom of movement on Highway 1. This was only a temporary state of affairs, however, and subsequent operations were required to build on it.

Operations in Panjwayi District, July–August 2008

Haji Baran's cry for help with eastern Panjwayi in late June was answered in early July. Analysis determined that the community of Salavat was a node that, if agitated, might stimulate enemy activity and help define the threat. Regional Command (South) brought in a British Para company from the Regional Battle Group (South) for Operation SOTAK [Sledgehammer]. A straightforward operation, an operations box around Salavat was established with part of C Company blocking along Fosters East, TUAV coverage along Lake Effect, and an Afghan army company and police plus Recce Platoon from the battle group to the west. On the morning of 1 July, Royal Navy Sea King helicopters (the same vintage as Canadian Sea Kings) air-assaulted the 3 Para company accompanied by Afghan police, Canadian P-OMLT and National Directorate of Security personnel into landing zones southeast of the community. Back at the battle group Tactical Operations Centre, the staff directed a MQ-1 Predator to follow a group of four insurgents trying to get away. They were engaged with a Hellfire and an OH-58D helicopter that came on station engaged the survivors. There was sporadic firing at an intelligence team but no further contact. Exploitation of the compounds in Salavat produced an IED factory and a first aid post but no insurgents.³⁴¹

BGen Thompson determined in early July that the time was right to initiate Operation HUNDA [Wolf], the establishment of Stability Box Sperwan. Preliminary patrols conducted by B Company, the Afghan army and the mentors in the first week in July helped gain better definition of the area. Operation LEWE interrupted this process. By late July, several Sperwan locals who were declared Taliban fighters presented themselves to the district leader and asked to reintegrate into Afghan society. This was a positive sign.³⁴² On the other hand, CIMIC teams concluded that "It is disturbing that the villagers see themselves as not involved in the conflict, merely bystanders. Their overriding interest appears to be staying neutral, and not attracting either Taliban or ISAF/ANSF fire."³⁴³ TF Kandahar and the battle group then gave attention to establishing a police station in Sperwan. The problem with this proposition was the chronic lack of police. With the shift of focus to Kandahar City after Sarposha, 30 trained police were pulled out of Panjwayi and sent into the city. This severely curtailed patrols in Panjwayi East. Though the P-OMLT and CIVPOL did everything they could, the numbers just did not lie. When the insurgents mounted an attack from Salavat against the Salehan checkpoint, the remaining police in the district

refused to leave their stations. Kandahar superiors then told the chief of police that he had permission to recruit 75 local people, but they would have no training. Despite all attempts at Focused District Development, Panjwayi was now back to square one for policing.³⁴⁴

As for CMT-1, the Route Fosters paving project stalled out. The material for making the road using manual labour had not arrived and a significant level of intimidation was directed against the workers. Haji Baran was “adamant that the rest of the paving project should be undertaken by heavy equipment and completed as quickly as possible to prevent any more injuries or deaths due to IEDs....Many locals are openly stating that since so much money has been spent on the project with not much to show, the local leaders and shura representatives must be stealing the money and that for the same reasons, Canadians are corrupt....”³⁴⁵

At the same time, the combat outposts had their disconnected local operations styled into Operation KORBA in three iterations in July–August. The Tactical Deep Fight was also superimposed on top of KORBA.³⁴⁶ B Company had no manoeuvre capability. There were partially-manned platoons in the combat outposts: their numbers were reduced because of the leave plan. Maj Mike Lane could call on Maj Chris Adams and B Squadron for QRFs if required, but because of the IED threat, these had to be large deliberate operations.³⁴⁷

The infantry patrols sortied out into the summer heat from the combat outposts in Talukan, Zangabad and Haji. There were daily contacts made by these platoons for an entire month in and around the combat outposts along Route Fosters, so numerous that they cannot all be detailed here.³⁴⁸ In one case, an ISAF Contract Air Transport Support Mi-17 helicopter took fire and dropped its resupply load south of COP Zangabad. One Canadian section established itself in overwatch, while another manoeuvred on the sling load. The enemy collapsed their ambush and went after the overwatch section. As they were doing so, they crossed in front of the manoeuvring section and a firefight broke out. The entire village appeared to open up on the Canadian platoon and more fighters poured out to flank and cut off the Canadians. With artillery support denied, taking fire from six different directions, and the route to the outpost about to be cut off, the platoon conducted a fighting withdrawal over nearly 2 kilometres. As they were pursued, the enemy reinforced the fight with even more fighters and moved to cut off the platoon from the outpost, which forced Lt McMichael’s platoon to dig in at the intersection. A pair of OH-58D Warrior helicopters arrived on station and started to empty their .50-calibre machine guns and rocket pods onto the enemy, who dispersed. The platoon arrived at COP Zangabad and refilled their ammunition pouches. LCol Corbould called Lt McMichael and ordered him not to go back in.³⁴⁹ This was an example of just one of several firefights in the horn of Panjwayi during this period.

The local populations remained intimidated and there were few incentives available to influence them otherwise. The enemy started laying anti-personnel mines and IEDs to limit the patrol's zones of influence and, on occasion, the insurgents conducted ambushes. During the course of these operations in July, Pte Colin Wilmott, a medic from 1 Field Ambulance, and Cpl James Arnal, from B Company, were killed in separate incidents involving mines.

In another contact, Cpl Tyler Myroniuk and WO Robin Crane were on patrol with Afghan troops operating southeast of COP Haji on 4 August, when they were ambushed. With four wounded soldiers, the Afghans and Canadians adopted an all around defence and called for close air support. Despite marking the target with an M-72, the aircraft could not gain positive identification and would not engage. The enemy, now estimated to include 30 insurgents, pressed their attack. Myroniuk and Crane, running out of ammunition and down to lobbing grenades, were finally able to call in M-777 fire, break contact, and withdraw with the wounded to Patrol Base Sperwan Ghar. Both men were decorated with the Medal of Military Valour for their actions.

On 12 August, the enemy mounted a coordinated attack against COP Haji. A volley of RPGs took out the observation tower and heavy fire was directed against the position.

With a dust storm rolling in, a Sperwer TUAV was launched to get "eyes on" for the battle group Tactical Operations Centre team. M-777 artillery was also called in. A B-1B was orbiting the area, waiting for "trade" from Maj Hamel. Two pairs of guided bomb units were dropped on separate insurgent groups firing at COP Haji. After the second pair detonated, enemy firing ceased. Battle damage assessment came in at ten enemy dead. Unfortunately, MCpl Erin Doyle was killed in the initial assault on the position.³⁵⁰

On the whole, it was extremely difficult for the Canadians in Panjwayi to gain any traction be it policing, governance, or on the development and reconstruction front. The whole process was mired in the competition between the Dastagiri Group and Haji Baran and his supporters over control of contracting and the distribution of humanitarian aid in the district. Baran claimed the District Development Assembly/Community Development Council system was totally controlled by the Dastagiri Group, while others claimed that Baran was financially benefiting from the Fosters paving project by getting tribute from the workers. Some claimed that both entities were selling UN-provided humanitarian aid in the bazaars. Baran claimed that the Dastagiri Group was simply waiting the current rotation out before allowing the shura members it controlled back into district meetings. The Dastagiri Group claimed they were boycotting the meetings because of Baran's corruption. When CIMIC talked to regular people, they were told "that the Shura members were all corrupt and there is no point taking their problems to them." This, in effect, ceded the ground to the Taliban and its emergent court in the Zangabad area, who promised swift dispute resolution.³⁵¹

Simply put, government legitimacy in Panjwayi was so completely compromised that development was not possible. Without real development, there could be no Build, and in any event, the district was not “cleared.” Canadian and Afghan troops and police were essentially holding the line in isolated spots throughout the district, waiting for those responsible for the governance portfolio to grip the situation and sort it out. Unfortunately, for those fighting in Panjwayi, those people were focused on projects like the Dahla Dam and the new priority, Kandahar City.

The Battle for Strongpoint Mushan, June–August 2008

The decision to withdraw from COP Talukan left Strong Point Mushan, more or less, surrounded. The only means to resupply Mushan was by ground convoy, led by B Squadron's Leopard tanks, or by CDS drop from one of the C-130 Hercules transports. Contracted helicopter support refused to go anywhere near the positions on Route Fosters. At the same time, there were intelligence reports that the presence of Strong Point Mushan was having a deleterious effect on enemy freedom of movement not just in and around the bazaar itself, but in the whole horn of Panjwayi and in Zharey.³⁵² (See Figure 3-16.)

Operation TOORAH AZADI II brought more coalition forces into Mushan. Patrols pushed out and ran into complex ambushes, including a three-sided ambush on 31 May that the OMLT and the Afghan infantry shot their way out of with help from B Battery's M-777s at Sperwan Ghar. In early June, almost every patrol departing Strong Point Mushan was involved in a contact. Mortars were also against the position on occasion. On a positive side, these patrols made contact with the Mushan community and built up substantial good will, so much so that ISTAR systems picked up enemy complaints that the population was in danger of shifting toward supporting the government.

On 10 June, the insurgents mounted a significant action against the Afghan 1st Company and the Canadian mentors as they sortied out to protect the bazaar. Three enemy groups converged on Mushan bazaar and the strong point, engaging two platoon-sized patrols with small-arms fire and the strong point with 82mm fire. The Afghan troops and Canadian mentors fought back and were able to call in a pair of F-15s and contact B Battery. A Sperwer TUAV joined in, tracking enemy movements. WO John McNabb, who had no training as a forward air controller, was able to contact the F-15s: they subsequently bombed the insurgent positions. As the enemy retreated, they were engaged with 155mm artillery fire in the open. Afghan patrols later found the body parts of 15 insurgents hidden in culverts.

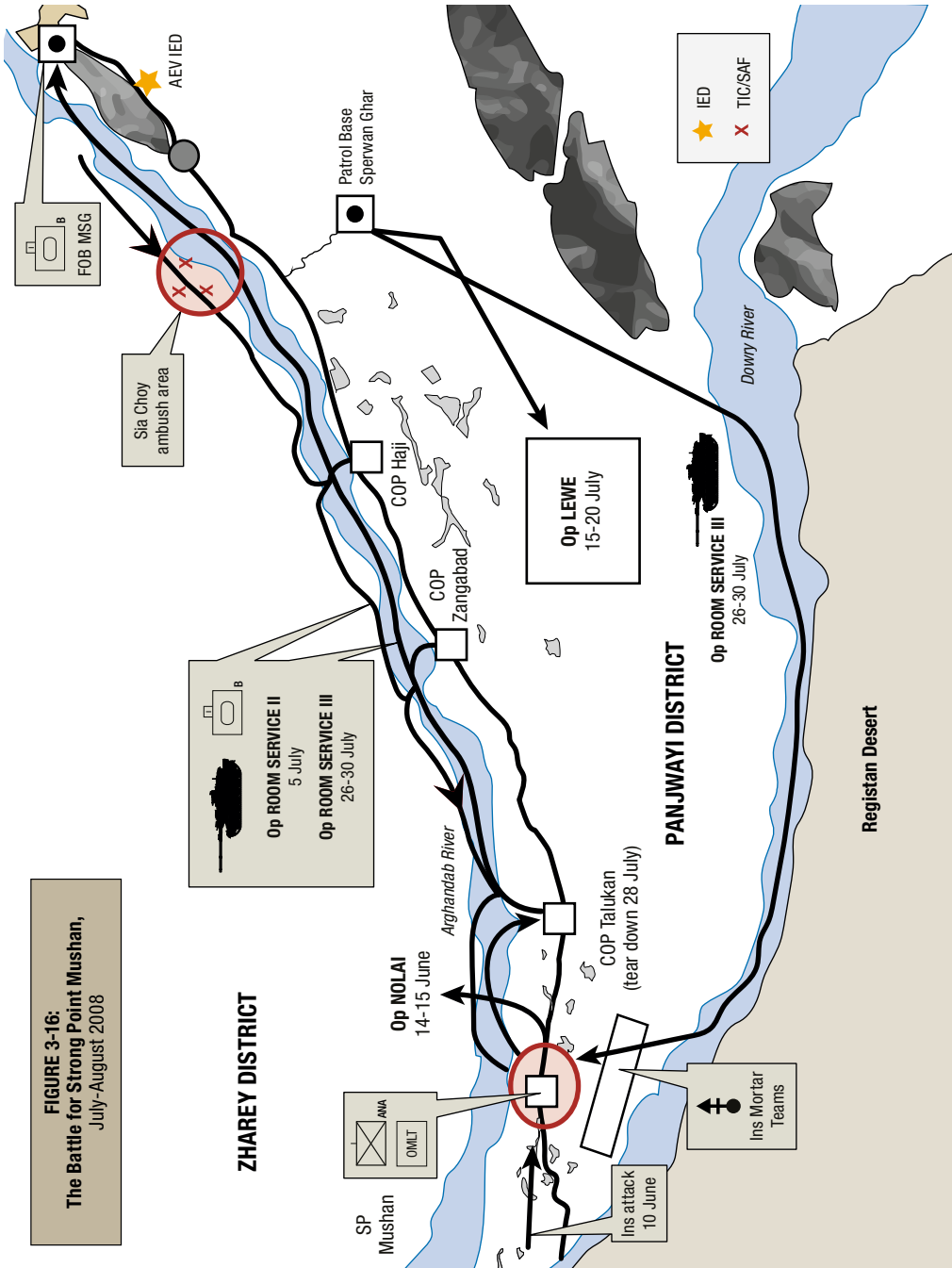


FIGURE 3-16:
The Battle for Strong Point Mushan,
July-August 2008

Figure 3-16: The Battle for Strong Point Mushan, July-August 2008



Photo Credit: DND AR2009-2051-06

Afghan troops and a Canadian supply convoy come under contact during Operation ROOM SERVICE, a “river run” down the Arghandab riverbed to Strong Points Talukan and Mushan, which were held by Afghan troops and Canadian OMLT personnel.

Strong Point Mushan played a role in Operation NOLAI (see above) on 14 and 15 June, pushing platoons north of the Arghandab River and engaging in several firefights. The Taliban’s response came on 27 June. For the next three days, Strong Point Mushan and its defenders were subjected to a high volume of small-arms fire and mortar bombardment. The Afghan troops moved their machine-gun equipped Ford Rangers to the run-up positions and fired until their barrels nearly overheated. The Canadian mentors pulled out their 84mm Carl Gustav and fired rocket-assisted projectiles at the enemy. A Taliban mortar finally nailed the Afghan 60mm mortar, seriously wounding its operator.

B Squadron arrived on 5 July during Operation ROOM SERVICE II. The combat team departed Ma’Sum Ghar on 5 July and was immediately engaged from the north bank of the Arghandab near Sia Choy. 25mm fire from B Company’s LAV IIIs suppressed the enemy, killing three. A Leopard then threw a track, forcing a long halt for repairs. An enemy force attacked the column and retreated using “shoot and scoot” tactics: they were tracked by a Sperwer TUAV and engaged with M-777 fire. At 0914, the combat team breached into Zangabad while under contact by enemy teams firing RPG and small arms from a fortified compound. With OH-58D helicopters observing for “squirters”

a Badger AEV and a Leopard 2A6M breached the complex wall and a platoon from B Company cleared the compound.³⁵³ There was no contact at COP Talukan and, after resupply, the combat team moved on to Mushan, where an orbiting OH-58D engaged and killed four insurgents as the column went into a leaguer. As 2nd Company and B Squadron breached in from the river, they were greeted with 82mm mortar fire. The relief in place and resupply was conducted under fire. The Afghan company and Canadian mentors sortied out on a series of patrols into the bazaar and bagged a number of insurgents. As it turned out, one was a mortar specialist. The two Badger AEVs had to be repaired before the column left Mushan on 7 July and headed back toward COP Zangabad. B Squadron and 1st Company returned to Ma'Sum Ghar but were engaged all the way back by insurgents in Zharey. The Leopard 2A6M's 120mm guns made short work of the RPG teams while the Afghans dismounted and fought back along the riverbed. Eventually, the fire slacked off and the combat team reached FOB Ma'Sum Ghar.³⁵⁴

Strong Point Mushan's new occupants pushed patrols into the bazaar but encountered insurgents every time they emerged. For the month of July, there were 14 separate contacts involving small-arms fire, RPGs and mortars, mostly in combination directed at the strong point and its defenders. In one of these engagements, Capt Slade Lerch directed .50-calibre machine gun fire and gave corrections to MWO Rod Dearing and his 60mm mortar crew, while MCpl John Prior fired the 25mm in his LAV III directed from a tower by MCpl Todd Woods. During this action, another Taliban mortar specialist was killed. Multiple Afghan soldiers were wounded in these actions: they were evacuated by UH-60s covered by the Banshees' OH-58Ds.

Strong Point Mushan continued to hold. B Squadron and B Company mounted Operation LEWE [Big Dog] on 15–20 July into the Zangabad communities south of the combat out post. There were multiple objectives. The idea was to activate the enemy's early warning system and get it to fixate on Operation LEWE movements so that ISTAR assets could collect to prepare for subsequent operations involving the removal of COP Talukan and the resupply of Mushan. At the same time, enemy pressure on Strong Point Mushan need to be drawn off. The forces moved out with the intention of being visible; the tanks went over land past Sperwan Ghar and conducted a range, while B Company surged patrols into the Zangabad communities. B Company platoons were sporadically engaged with "shoot and scoot" tactics but there were no casualties. MQ-1 Predators were unable to engage because of the close terrain and proximity of friendly forces on the ground.³⁵⁵

At the end of July, B Squadron combat team returned on Operation ROOM SERVICE III,³⁵⁶ bringing in 1st Company to replace 2nd Company. A Badger AEV hit an IED less than 500 metres from FOB Ma'Sum Ghar. When the column headed south

of Sperwan Ghar to the Dori River, the AHSVS and the RG-31 vehicles bogged down in the sandy banks, forcing the Leopards to pull them out. One tank, strained by the effort, suffered an engine fire and was disabled. It took nearly the entire day to reach Mushan.³⁵⁷

The force leaguered and resupplied the strong point while the combat engineers made defensive improvements and added a helicopter pad. As the Leopards leaguered, they were hit with mortars. UAVs spotted the mortar positions: One crew was able to take out an enemy team with 120mm tank fire while U.S. Marine Corps F-18s engaged and destroyed the ones that could not be hit with direct fire. B Squadron pulled out on 28 July and headed for Talukan. On arrival, the breach was attacked with a flurry of small arms and RPG fire, with the Leopards engaging enemy positions with 120mm fire. The Badgers made short work of COP Talukan by 1300 and the force proceeded to COPs Zangabad and Haji, where they were mortared again. After resupply was completed, B Squadron was ambushed at Sia Choy with every weapon in the insurgent inventory. Focusing on the Afghan Ford Rangers and the EROC suite, insurgent 82mm recoilless rifle fire disabled a Husky EOD vehicle. 120mm and 105mm fire drove the ambush back and the force made “landfall” at FOB Ma’Sum Ghar later that day.³⁵⁸

Patrolling continued from Strong Point Mushan as the Afghan troops and the Canadian mentors protected the bazaar and its population. It is clear that the insurgents were increasingly perturbed with the existence of Strong Point Mushan. They threw scarce resources like their mortar teams at it, and lost significant numbers of fighters in the process. B Squadron was no longer losing vehicles to IEDs because it avoided Route Fosters in order to resupply Mushan. The population was starting to favour the government. As a result, the enemy sent a delegation of “elders” to Bazaar-e Panjwayi to convince Haji Baran to have the strong point removed. This ploy was unsuccessful, and the mortars started up again.

ROOM SERVICE III, however, deposited a Light Counter Mortar Radar System at the strong point. It was now put to good use. Data from the system were fed back to B Battery at FOB Sperwan Ghar and the enemy started to lose mortar systems to artillery fire. The situation was so dire that the insurgents resorted to using young non-combatants to drop the mortar bombs into the tube after the insurgent mortar specialist laid in the weapons and departed the area. In time, the Taliban stopped sending mortar teams south of the Arghandab River.

By the end of summer, Strong Point Mushan remained solidly in Afghan and Canadian hands and these forces continued to develop their relationship with the Mushan community. The enemy’s attempts to force the coalition forces to abandon this position completely failed and they expended significant resources to challenge it. Those resources were not able to be directed against Stability Box JUNO and SPERWAN. The question for TF Kandahar now was what to do with Mushan. It was a successful disrupt operation but it needed CIMIC

attention, possibly development resources. Could those resources be provided without a sustainable resupply route? And, with the PRT focused on Kandahar City and Dahla Dam, was there a real possibility of reinforcing success in Mushan? These questions could only be answered in fall 2008 when TF Kandahar paused to reassess the overall situation.

Ramrod Reinforcements: 2-2 Infantry, August 2008

American deliberations in the wake of the NATO summits and the Manley Report resulted in the decision to deploy an infantry battalion under command of JTF Afghanistan. The unit selected for this was 2nd Battalion, 2nd Infantry Regiment (2-2 Infantry), led by LTC Dan Hurlbut. The Ramrods, a light infantry battalion, were flown into Kandahar Airfield late in July with a minimum of equipment. The battalion's parent brigade was operating in Regional Command (East) but, in the words of one 2-2 Infantry officer, his battalion "was orphaned by its own system." There was no intelligence or operations briefing from its parent headquarters. 2-2 Infantry had no training to drive or fire the RG-31 or RG-33 or MRAP vehicles it was given. The battalion had no enablers: no engineers, counter-IED, UAVs or integral logistics. In effect, 1 000 Americans arrived at KAF, walked up to TF Kandahar, and announced they were here to join the fight in Kandahar Province.³⁵⁹

LTC Hurlbut and his staff worked closely with TF Kandahar to define an area of operations and to prepare their troops. The decision was made to deploy 2-2 Infantry to Maywand District as soon as possible. Crash courses in driving and firing were conducted for the first two weeks of August with Canadian help, while the battalion acclimatized to the heat and dust. 2-2 Infantry lacked defensive stores, so these were provided from Canadian stocks. American and Canadian combat engineers prepared the ground west of Huta for the main 2-2 Infantry camp. On 16 August, three infantry companies and the Headquarters Company deployed to a bare patch of ground that would over time be called FOB Ramrod. The Americans were greeted with a shower of rockets from the insurgents that night.³⁶⁰

2-2 Infantry's deployment to Maywand solved a number of problems for both TF Kandahar and Regional Command (South). The endless "mowing the lawn" in that area could stop and, with a better sustained presence, the Band-e Timor ratline would be easier to disrupt with "knock on" effects in Zharey and Panjwayi Districts. Anything that produced friction into the enemy system in those districts was a useful proposition. At the same time, Maywand was heating up with IED attacks along Highway 1, the vital main service route to Helmand and trade route to Herat. Was this because of increased presence by 2-2 Infantry or was it because the enemy were resurgent in the district? Only time would tell. And 2-2 Infantry was not fully operational yet in Maywand.



Photo Credit: Author

After the release of the Manley Report, which recommended deployment of another battalion-sized unit to Kandahar Province, the United States agreed to deploy 2-2 Infantry under Canadian command. Here the members of 2-2 Infantry familiarize themselves with their RG-33 vehicles prior to moving out to Maywand District.

Operation TARGAK: Arghandab Deteriorates, July–August 2008

The Taliban commanders for Arghandab and Khakrez, Mullah Mahmood and Mullah Shakur respectively, had a problem. Mahmood was recovering from the tender mercies of Operation DAOR BUKHOU when he decided to infiltrate Arghandab as a precursor for another incursion. He wanted Shakur to back him, but Shakur was wary. At this point, Maj Boivin's Recce Squadron troops were operating out of FOB Frontenac and had a command post at the district centre. There were several unmentored Afghan National Army platoons in three positions throughout the district, and the Arghandab police were back on patrol. Word came in through CIMIC and police sources that Shakur made a deal with the Khakrez District authorities whereby the district leadership would turn a blind eye toward his activities. Subsequently, the population in lower Shah Wali Kot was subjected to an information operations campaign and the insurgent message was, "We're coming." The first anti-tank mine/homemade explosive IED combination was discovered by a police patrol and then FOB Frontenac was mortared twice. The ASIC was not sure whether this was misdirection or not but concluded that Arghandab was going to be infiltrated while the enemy tried to focus coalition attention on lower Shah Wali Kot.³⁶¹

Mullah Mahmood was positively identified by Canadian ISTAR systems and the ASIC while moving between Shah Wali Kot and Khakrez. With an MQ-9 Reaper on station and, with no civilians present in the area, BGen Thompson authorized a precision strike with Hellfire missiles and MGen Lessard at Regional Command (South) supported this decision. The deputy commander of ISAF, however, countermanded the strike and authorized direct fire only. After an agonizing wait, a pair of A-10s came online and flew to the target area, making gun runs on the compound housing Mahmood and his staff. Four insurgents were killed, one of which was Mahmood.³⁶²

Mahmood elimination stalled what would likely have been a replay of operations INTIZAAR ZMAREY and DAOR BUKHOU. The Taliban were forced to bring in new leaders from Pakistan, who formulated a new approach. In early August, the insurgents concocted an intimidation plan designed to target government supporters in Arghandab. The first kidnappings took place, and seven abductees were taken to a secret prison in Khakrez and tortured.³⁶³ The prisoners were released and sent back into Arghandab to frighten the population. Night letters appeared on every mosque door in the district. An Arghandabi told Canadians that “the security problem in Arghandab could not get better now because so many key leaders [from the district] have been killed.”³⁶⁴

The Taliban focused on the communities occupying the hilly tri-district area north of Jelawur. Jelawur itself, loaded with members of the Ghilzai confederation, was a deepening swamp of insurgent support. The intimidation campaign facilitated insurgent infiltration into these areas.

The ANSF situation in Arghandab was alarming. None of the Afghan army sub-units were mentored and there appeared to be little coordination with the Arghandab police. The police themselves were somewhat effective: they intercepted an insurgent column, shot it up and captured the survivors on one occasion. Attempts to establish permanent Afghan army strong points were not seriously pursued. The lackadaisical Afghan response to the situation was a combination of the progressive gutting of Alikozai power, the removal of General Saqib and disruption of the police at the provincial level, and the imminent removal of Governor Asadullah Khalid.

TF Kandahar hastily assembled Operation TARGAK [Storm]. It lasted four days and its purpose was “to influence the ANSF to play a more active role in providing a secure environment in the Arghandab District.” Three organizations were thrown at the task, with no intelligence as to what was happening in the district. The Canadian OMLT sent Maj Chris Comeau in a Bison to Tabin to work with the Afghan infantry company located there. Recce Squadron increased its patrolling in upper Arghandab and escorted TF 77, the Lithuanian special operations forces platoon, into the Tabin area. From there, TF 77 and the Afghan army company mounted an aggressive night patrol schedule to throw off the insurgents. Enemy activity completely dropped off when the TARGAK force moved in.³⁶⁵

After the coalition forces left, however, the insurgents burned a school in Babur. This was followed by a flood of night letters. More local leaders were abducted, tortured, and released back into their communities. On 23 August, police checkpoints came under direct attack, leaving six insurgents dead and one policeman killed. By the end of the month, the first IEDs were found on Route Oregon. Operation TARGAK was not enough. The population in Arghandab now feared for their lives at night and they were virtually leaderless.³⁶⁶ A more systematic approach to Arghandab was required but where were the forces going to come from?

Operation ASP-E JANUBI: August 2008

The deteriorating mechanical situation at the ageing Kajaki Dam in Helmand Province and its relationship to the sporadic power outages in Kandahar City evolved into a high-profile problem throughout 2008. The inability of the Afghan government to deliver a basic service had obvious negative psychological effects but repairing a huge system like Kajaki Dam in the middle of a war was a daunting task. For the most part, the Kajaki problem was not a Canadian one. That said, KAF was the main logistical hub for Regional Command (South), and the lines of communications from KAF to Kajaki passed through the TF Kandahar operating area. In addition, Regional Command (South) was commanded by a Canadian general.

It fell to MGen Lessard and his staff to handle the security aspects of what became known as Operation ASP-E JANUBI. Unofficially dubbed Operation “Ass Pain Janubi,”³⁶⁷ the Regional Command (South) plan involved the movement of the huge components of a power turbine from KAF through contested territory in two different provinces controlled by two different task forces, safely to Kajaki.

The magnitude of the operation was matched by the size of the components. When the turbine machinery arrived at KAF from China by contracted AN-124 transport, it was too large to be moved by heavy-lift helicopter to Helmand. A multi-wheeled low-bed tractor trailer was used for the largest and heaviest of the pieces. Knowledge of the importance of the turbine and its arrival in KAF by the enemy was assumed. The question was how to get the convoy to Kajaki safely. Part of the operation even prohibited photographs of the components themselves.

As we will recall from Volume I, Highway 611 up to Sangin from Highway 1 was an IED death trap and had been for years as the British sought to resupply the forward operating base there. The dam itself was under fire regularly. But then, there was Zharey District, where Highway 1 was a potential shooting gallery as the convoy passed through it. The Regional Command (South) planners ultimately coordinated a series of task force

level operations designed to draw off enemy activity along the routes before the turbine convoy passed by. One of these involving TF Kandahar was Operation TIMUS PREEM (for the details see below).

There were other activities synchronized with ASP-E JANUBI. The idea that the anticipated movement of the convoy by the enemy would activate their own coordination methodology was not lost on the planners. It was possible that special operations forces could go after the leadership of enemy cells and groups and take them out when this information revealed itself. Other insurgent forces that were in a position to engage the convoy could also be attacked using a variety of methods as well.³⁶⁸

That is essentially what happened. The turbine convoy moved out from the airfield and passed down Highway 1 through Zharey without incident. Route remediation by the engineers occurred right afterwards. The handover line was in Maywand District. Instead of proceeding down to Highway 611 to the west in Helmand however, the convoy and its escorts veered north, passed through the Garmabak Pass into Ghorak District, northwest into Helmand Province and then on to the dam area. (See Figure 3-17.)

There were so many aerial engagements against insurgent forces along the route that Regional Command (South) Joint Operation Centre was overwhelmed. TF 71, working in the Ghorak area, was involved in a substantial number of strikes as the surprised insurgents tried to react to the convoy. And, on the return, the escort convoy took heavy fire at the handover line, which generated even more targets for a variety of forces and systems. The number of enemy personnel destroyed during Operation ASP-E JANUBI was estimated to be several hundred and the amount of information on the insurgent networks in both provinces was deemed invaluable.³⁶⁹ The formal Regional Command (South) analysis in November 2008 was understated: “The period since August 2008 has seen the levelling off of violence which had previously been an upward trend. The turbine 2 (Operation ASP-E JANUBI) move has had an effect on the enemy both in writing down their overall strength and in their visible inability against superior ISAF forces.”³⁷⁰

Operation TIMUS PREEM and Operations in Zharey District, August 2008

While the turbine was inbound, operational focus shifted to Zharey District once again. Operation JANGISIOUX brought Maj Stacey Grubb and C Company to bear in a series of disrupt and manoeuvre-to-collect incursions. These incursions were conducted from 5 to 8 August, with the first one going in near Abdullahkhan, where a patrol base was established on 6 August. Patrols went out and conducted key leadership engagements to define what was going on in the area. At night, Canadian platoons moved out to trigger the enemy early warning system so ISTAR resources could collect on them. A single source indicated that an enemy IED expert was in the area and preparing to lay IEDs.

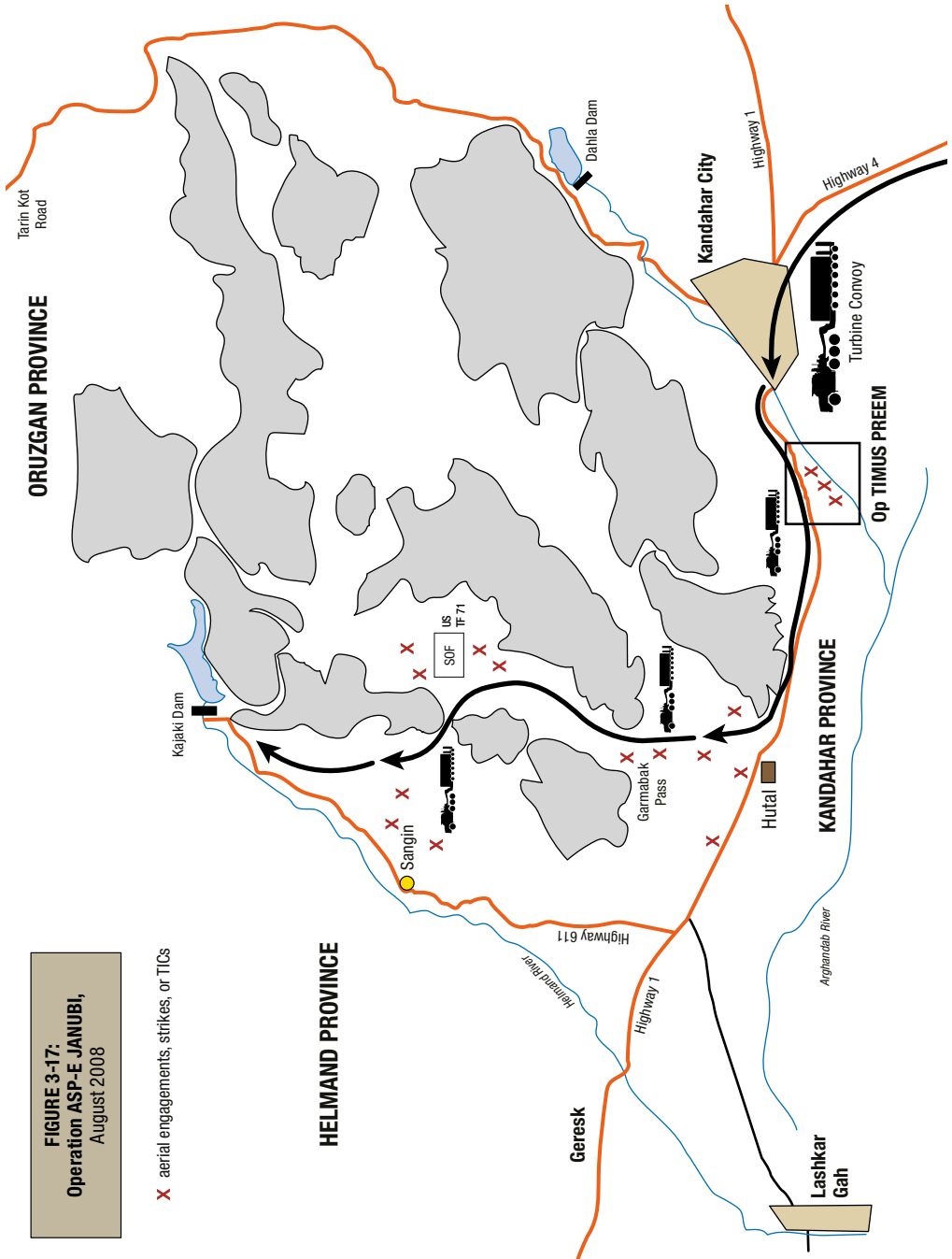


FIGURE 3-17:
Operation ASP-E JANUBI,
August 2008

X aerial engagements, strikes, or TICs

Figure 3-17: Operation ASP-E JANUBI, August 2008

A dismounted sweep went down the road to Lakokhel strong point but as the LAV IIIs manoeuvred, Maj Grubb's vehicle hit an IED, disabling it, and wounding him for the third time on this tour (after this, Maj Grubb became known as "Three Time Charlie"). The IED strike triggered an ambush, prompting the QRF to deploy, whereas a Leopard C2 detonated another device with its rollers. Firefights erupted and it took 44 155mm rounds from B Battery and close air support from U.S. Marine Corps AV-8B Harriers to break contact. Six Canadians were wounded in this action but C Company was able to extract itself and re-establish another patrol base. This strong defence of the area west of Nahlgam was a significant indicator to the ASIC that a better and more capable enemy was back in Zharey.³⁷¹

C Company recoiled on 8 August and moved just south of Spin Pir to the first wadi line. The OMLT and an Afghan patrol moved to their west. The battle group Tactical Operations Centre team, at this time, was tracking an enemy 82mm recoilless rifle team south of C Company with an UAV when C Company was engaged from the east and the south by enemy forces. The OMLT and Afghans also came under fire. At the same time, a resupply convoy escorted by a private security company was headed west on Highway 1. It thought it was being engaged by the insurgents, so they fired to the south. During this confused collection of engagements, Cpl Josh Roberts was shot and killed.³⁷² JANGISIOUX continued on 10 August and resulted in another contact, which was suppressed and eliminated with 12 rounds of 155mm fire.³⁷³

Operation JANGISIOUX achieved two things. First, it produced significant enemy disruption south of Highway 1 and contributed to the objectives of Operation LUMBAR. C Company's manoeuvring also generated intelligence that fed into Operation TIMUS PREEM, which, in turn, supported Operation ASP-E JANUBI.

Operation TIMUS PREEM started off as a contingency operation on 8 August but this changed as ASP-E JANUBI drew closer. The battle group was keeping an eye on a compound complex in Zharey, designated Objective WEASEL. It appeared to be a combination of command and control node, waystation, and IED facility. From WEASEL, the insurgents operated against Pashmul, Highway 1 to the north, as well as Senjaray and against Highway 1 from there (see Figure 3-18). An operation directed against the area, essentially the same area where Operation NOLAI was conducted back in June, would theoretically attenuate the insurgents' ability to interfere with the turbine move, disrupt their operations in Sanjaray, and, incidentally, buy time for Stability Box JUNO to grow.³⁷⁴

ISTAR reportage that Taliban commander and IED man Jabar Agha and two other commanders were located in Objective WEASEL was a key factor in unleashing Operation TIMUS PREEM on 20 August. By this time, the forces for the operation were allocated: a company from 3rd Kandak and its mentors; two companies from 1st Kandak with mentors;

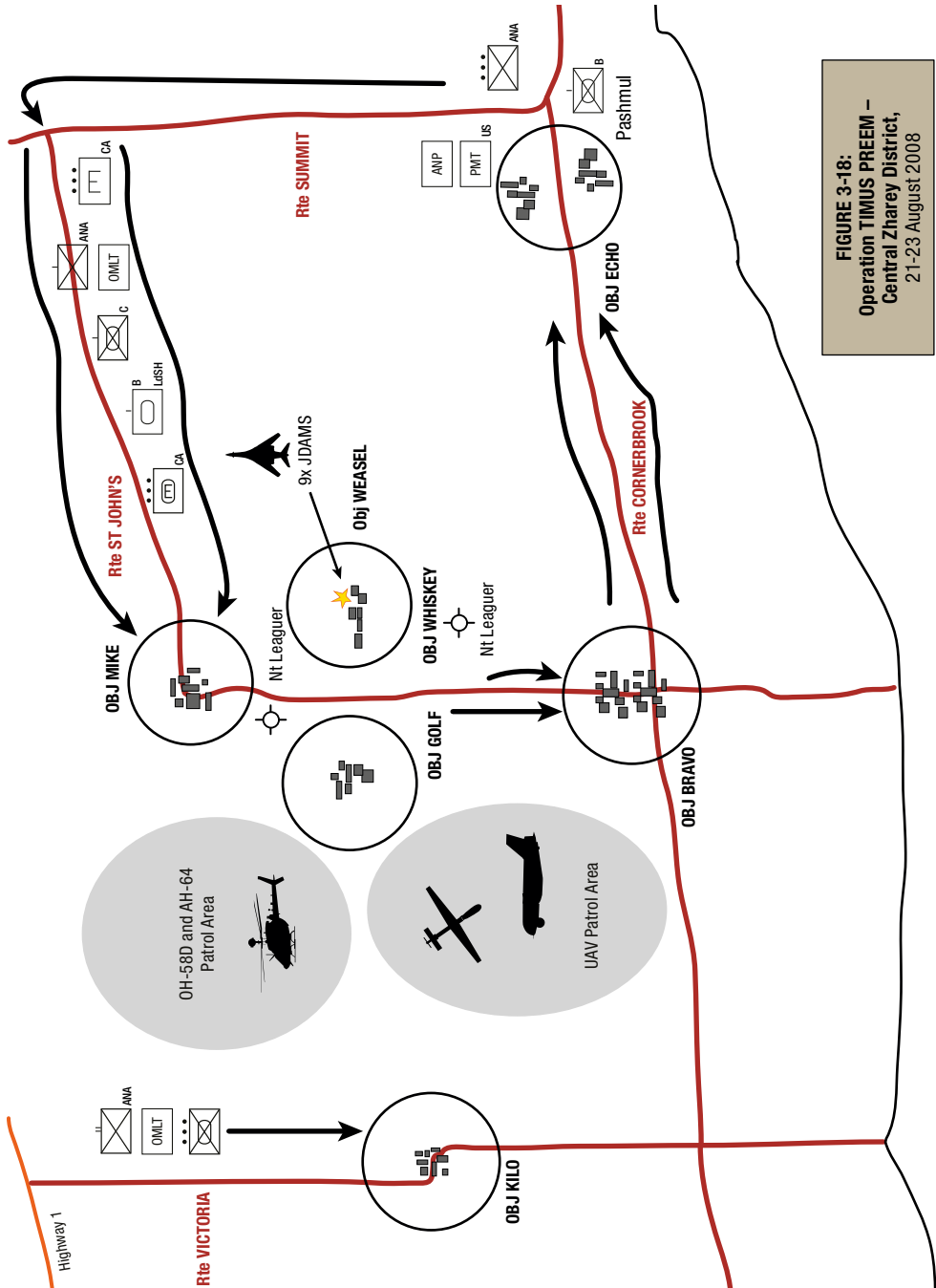


FIGURE 3-18:
Operation TIMUS PREEM –
Central Zharey District,
21-23 August 2008

Figure 3-18: Operation TIMUS PREEM – Central Zharey District, 21-23 August 2008

Afghan police and their mentors; B Company; C Company; and B Squadron. For comparative purposes, Operation TIMUS PREEM was larger than Operation MEDUSA and operated in roughly the same area, but had no political interest directed at it and virtually no media coverage. The enemy in 2008 also operated differently from the insurgents encountered in 2006.

TIMUS PREEM was to be initiated by an airstrike on Objective WEASEL. 3rd Kandak and mentors would strike south from Highway 1, while 1st Kandak and mentors would strike west from Route Summit into Pashmul. This would overwhelm the enemy's command and control system and their early warning system. B Squadron and C Company, plus an Afghan company and mentors, were formed into two Breach Teams, led by Badger AEVs. They would move out north along Summit, swing west, south of the wadi line, and encircle and search clusters of compound complexes over the course of three days.

The day before Operation TIMUS PREEM was to kick off, however, the combat engineer squadron suffered a catastrophic loss. An engineer recce team moving along Highway 1 as part of Operation LUMBAR struck a huge IED. The detonation flipped the vehicle upside down and threw the turret off. Sgt Shawn Eades, Cpl Dustin Wasden and Sapper Stephan Stock were all killed; another soldier was seriously wounded. Recce Platoon deployed to the site to secure it, while Maj Steve Davies from the OMLT led an unarmoured firefighting team to the site. Recovery efforts ensued, but then it was discovered that an enemy leader was attracted to the site. He was tracked by an MQ-1 Predator, but the operations centre was unable to gain positive identification. Artillery could not be used because of a Rules of Engagement issue. The enemy commander escaped death for the time being.

At 0445 hours the next morning, Breach Teams 1 and 2 departed FOB Ma'Sum Ghar. Each team consisted of a Badger AEV; a six-vehicle tank troop (combinations of six Leopard C2 and 2A6Ms per troop); an infantry platoon in LAV III; a Taurus armoured recovery vehicle; and an armoured heavy support vehicle fascine carrier for crossing ditches. An Afghan infantry company in Ford Rangers and their mentors in RG-31s fell in behind. A pair of AH-64 attack helicopters and a pair of OH-58D recce helicopters from TF Eagle Assault flew overhead. The plan was to avoid the existing road network because they were likely riddled with IEDs. Each Breach Team would plow its own road through the grape fields and mud walls to the objective area.

At 0605, the Breach Teams were in position and then they went in, Badger blades down. Leopard C2 tanks equipped with plows made "herring bone" run-ups behind the breaching Badgers; the following Leopard A26Ms and the LAV IIIs moved into these as the breach progressed. At 0634 the enemy reacted and LCol Corbould decided to release the orbiting B-1B so it could attack Objective WEASEL. Nine JDAMs were delivered, obliterating the target compounds. B Squadron got the first contact at 0637 hours and in 20 minutes every sub-unit in the Operation TIMUS PREEM force was involved in an

engagement. The tanks picked off the enemy spotters and early warning system signallers with HEAT rounds. 155mm fire missions engaged any enemy movement detected by the Sperwer TUAVs or MQ-1 Predator that was orbiting. Breach Team 1 headed for Objective MIKE. The Badger plowed a path 360 degrees around the community: the Leopards and LAV IIIs moved onto it to create a “Ring of Steel,” cutting off any possible egress or reinforcements. Canadian engineers worked with the Afghan infantry and Canadian mentors to search each compound, while PSYOPS conducted key leader engagements. The enemy reacted to the incursion near ECHO and a firefight broke out. It was short: the AH-64 attack helicopters came in and took out the opposition. Over in MIKE, the joint terminal air controller was able to vector an AV-8B Harrier onto some enemy who were trying to reinforce, killing all of them. When the engineers backtracked east along the roads, they found pre-positioned chambers for IEDs, and prepared but empty fighting positions deployed in depth on each route. TIMUS PREEM pre-empted the enemy’s ability to get to and fight from these well-concealed and sighted positions.

There was a lot of shooting over in Objective KILO. The Afghan infantry and Canadian mentors intercepted insurgents who were trying to laterally reinforce MIKE. At least two small counterattacks against MIKE were repelled, one of them by LCol Corbould’s 9th TAC.³⁷⁵ AH-64 and OH-58D helicopters spotted and engaged others. Breach Team 2 passed Objective MIKE once Breach Team 1 was set and moved on to clear a night leaguer position south of MIKE for both Breach Teams.

As Capt Tom Neil and his PSYOPS team played Blue Oyster Cult’s “Don’t Fear the Reaper” over their loudspeakers, the enemy attacked the night leaguer twice but were obliterated with 120mm canister fire from the tanks. ScanEagle UAVs kept the night watch overhead. LCol Corbould had to make a decision: did the force go after Objective GOLF or Objective WHISKEY, where the rubble of the WEASEL compounds were located?

He decided to do both. By 0840 in the morning on 22 August, Breach Teams 1 and 2 plowed south, isolated the objectives with the tanks, and started cordon and search operations. The stench from the WEASEL compounds was overwhelming and there were too many body parts crushed by large amounts of rubble to do an effective battle damage assessment. It is possible that between 30 to 50 insurgents were killed in this airstrike. Several bomb production facilities were discovered, including one repurposing Canadian 155mm illumination casings into IEDs. Over in Objective KILO the Canadians and Afghans took mortar fire. The Afghans detected enemy spotters and engaged them, while the Canadian joint terminal air controller brought an AV-8B Harrier fighter-bomber to bear and destroyed the mortar team. Further exploitation of GOLF and WHISKEY uncovered large mortar, RPG and IED caches. Some of the ammunition was brand new and came from the People’s Republic of China. Several radios and cell phones were also found and exploited.

The Badgers scraped the ground south of WEASEL for a night leaguer and the vehicles from the two Breach Teams filed in for the night. At last light, enemy spotters were detected and engaged. The enemy then mounted a mortar and RPG attack on the leaguer after dark. This was a suicidal move. With thermal imagery optics and 120mm canister rounds from the Leopard 2A6Ms, there was not much left except small glowing pieces seen in the Thermal Imaging sights. The melody of “Don’t Fear the Reaper” continued through the night. There were two more contacts which produced the same results.

On Day 3, 23 August, LCol Corbould decided to go after Objective BRAVO. Overhead TUAV and SUAV coverage spotted women and children leaving the compounds there heading north. Among them was an insurgent commander with a radio, surrounded by children. A Leopard 2A6M crew refrained from opening fire and he escaped. Breach Teams 1 and 2 then stepped off, heading southwest. They encountered a stream, so a Badger lifted a fascine from the back of the AHSVS so that the columns could pass over it. Then the fascine was removed so that there was minimal ecological damage to the watershed. Objective BRAVO was encircled and the process started again.

By noon, there was nothing found in the BRAVO compounds. Indeed, the population was anti-Taliban for the most part. Operation TIMUS PREEM wound down. LCol Corbould ordered the teams to head east toward Route Summit. These moves were under enemy observation and the insurgents made the mistake of attacking Breach Team 2 on the way out. Tanks and Predators engaged and destroyed both ambushes. The Afghans and Canadians withdrew from KILO and ECHO and the forces returned to their previous configurations. Operation TIMUS PREEM was complete. There were no Canadian or Afghan casualties in three days of operations, but the enemy suffered at a minimum over 100 personnel killed and had their command systems and part of their IED production system attenuated. The Kajaki turbine convoys made their way west along Highway 1.

Supporting TF Kandahar Operations

LCol Casey Horlock took command of the NSE in spring 2008. This NSE rotation replaced LCol Eldaoud’s personnel on a one-to-one basis, which was based on the previous NSE requirements and concept of operations. During his tenure, however, the amount of tactical infrastructure that Horlock’s NSE had to support grew significantly. There were the P-OMLTs in the police sub-stations in Zharey. There were Canadian mentor teams in the Afghan strong points. The battle group initially was in FOB Frontenac, Patrol Base Wilson, FOB Ma’Sum Ghar, Patrol Base Sperwan Ghar and Spin Boldak. Then the battle group took over the police sub-stations in Panjwayi West and renamed them combat outposts. Recce Squadron was everywhere. Arghandab was a front, as was Maywand.³⁷⁶

CHAPTER THREE



Photo Credit: Author



Photo Credit: Author

CHAPTER THREE



Photo Credit: Author



Photo Credit: Author



Photo Credit: Author

Operation TIMUS PREEM was a significant Canadian-Afghan operation launched into western Zharey District in August 2008. TIMUS PREEM had the tank squadron and armoured engineers breach in and surround the fortress-like communities so that Canadian and Afghan forces could sweep them for insurgents and their equipment.

In essence, the NSE had to adapt to the new operational style using structure based on a different operational style. That became clear to LCol Horlock and his staff once they got on the ground and started operating with the Laroche headquarters. Who “owned” the forward operating bases? The battle group? OMLT? NSE? Who was responsible for their security? Was there enough personnel and if there was not, where would they come from?³⁷⁷ Ultimately, the concept of support stabilized into two distinct areas. There were the KAF-based combat service support operations: large items, contracting, national projects. The gate guard task remained, sucking away Canadian manpower despite the presence of numerous Bulgarian and Hungarian troops.³⁷⁸ Second, there were combat service support operations from KAF: these were the combat logistics patrols, aerial replenishment operations and forward logistic group functions. The third grouping included combat service support operations forward, which was in effect an echelon, and combat service support from forward locations, which were tailored groupings of support at the forward operating base-level, also known as “CSS Dets.”: these were located at Ma’Sum Ghar, Wilson, Sperwan Ghar, Frontenac and Spin Boldak. In the past, there would have been two separate units to handle the forward operating base and KAF-based functions, respectively. That was not going to happen given manpower restrictions, so the NSE did both.³⁷⁹



Photo Credit: Author



Photo Credit: Author

The constricted terrain in Zharey and Panjwayi Districts reduced the mobility of the eight-wheeled LAV III, especially in grape trench fields and small watercourses. The Badger armoured engineering vehicle, based on the Leopard 1 chassis, proved itself time and again in increasing the battle group's mobility while the engineers resurrected a Second World War capability: the fascine, seen here on the back of an AEV and an AHSVS.

The NSE continued to rely on “jingle truck” contractors for certain non-military items. This usually involved contracting up to 20 to 50 trucks a week. However, with the increased American presence at KAF, there was increased competition for trucking capacity and this had spin-off effects.³⁸⁰ First, the costs for the NSE went up. Second, more money was supposedly pumped into the economy but the expansion of work was followed by the expansion of interest on the part of the Kandahari power structure in profiting from this area. Ahmad Wali Karzai and people associated with him, for example, held interests in several trucking companies. Political dimensions like these were not taught at the logistics school in CFB Borden.

The NSE by now shifted from the HLVW truck to the Mercedes Armoured Heavy Support Vehicle System (AHSVS). Combat logistic patrol crew confidence in the Mercedes armoured truck was high. It was fully armoured and air-conditioned. The cab was a separate protected pod. With eight wheels, the truck was survivable and highly manoeuvrable. There were wrecker, cargo, and palletized load system variants, as well as a Doll low-bed for recovery. The NSE eventually acquired 80 of these vehicles. Crew fatigue dropped significantly, which increased endurance and sortie rate. Two AHSVS were IED'd during this rotation, with no casualties. Only one was a write-off.³⁸¹

The Electrical and Mechanical Engineers acquired LAV III-based fitter vehicles with cranes; the Buffalo ARV 3, which was based on the Leopard 2 chassis; and the AHSVS-based “BATTY” [Big Ass Tan Truck, Yo] wrecker.³⁸² All three vehicles significantly increased the electrical and mechanical engineer's capabilities in the field and thus extended the endurance of the battle group. “Tango Maintenance” at Ma'Sum Ghar and the NSE tank yard at KAF was also busy with a whole host of vehicle upgrades. The first was the addition of remote weapons systems to some TLAVs. The second was the implementation of the “slat armour” programme for all Canadian armoured vehicles. Slat armour, developed in the 1960s for use in Vietnam by American riverine forces, was a form of stand-off armour that deflected or detonated 82mm recoilless rifle and RPG rounds before they came into contact with the vehicles' integral armour.³⁸³

There were also several modifications for the Leopards. All were now equipped with electronic countermeasures. The crews now had NASCAR-like “chill suits.” Another development was the addition of “Barracuda” kits: these mesh-like additions reduced the heat signature of the tanks but also reduced the amount of heat in the vehicles. A Canadian soldier came up with the idea of a turret umbrella made of the same material. These devices brought the internal temperature of the tanks down 10 to 15 degrees, which was significant in 50-degree summer heat in Afghanistan.³⁸⁴ Finally, all of the Leopard 2s were repainted from green to tan. As they had in the past, the EME soldiers made all of these and more modifications to ensure the habitability and survivability of Canadian vehicles operating in Kandahar.



Photo Credit: Author



Photo Credit: Author

The need for a protected logistic vehicle in the improvised explosive device-heavy environment of Kandahar led to the acquisition and deployment of the Mercedes Armoured Heavy Support Vehicle System in 2007. It came in several versions, including a cargo and palletized loading system.



Photo Credit: Author

The decision to sell off Canadian CH-47 Chinooks in the early 1990s meant that contracted Mi-17s like this one flown by maverick ex-Soviet pilots handled resupply operations to forward Canadian bases in permissive environments.

The lack of helicopter logistics support noted in the Manley Report was only partially addressed during this rotation.³⁸⁵ The initial foray into contracted civilian support was taken with the creation of the ICATS or ISAF Contract Air Transport Support office. The unwillingness of European NATO members to provide helicopter support dated back to 2003 (see Volume I). One solution was to employ contracted support. In 2008, ISAF worked through a company called SkyLink to line up six Mi-8/Mi-17 Hip transport helicopters and their crews to augment NATO transport operations in southern Afghanistan.³⁸⁶ Like the “jingle trucks,” the ICATS helicopters were contracted to carry non-military equipment and supplies into permissive areas. Flown by a colourful variety of expatriate ex-Soviet subjects, including some who flew in Afghanistan in the 1980s, the ICATS were inevitably dubbed “jingle air.” ICATS started supporting the Canadian combat outposts in Panjwayi West by May 2008. On 1 June, an ICATS Mi-17 delivering a sling load to COP Zangabad was engaged with RPG and machine gun fire, wounding the pilot.³⁸⁷ This led to a suspension of ICATS resupply until the complex legal issues of using military helicopters to escort civilian contract helicopters could be resolved.³⁸⁸

An Ignominious End for Strategic Advisory Team Afghanistan and the Replacement of Asadullah Khalid

Col Don Dixon handed SAT-A to Col Serge Labbé in August 2007. By this point, SAT-A consisted of 20 personnel spread across eight ministries of the Afghan government. Labbé, who had been a staff officer for Hillier, was *au courant* with the original need for SAT-A as expressed back in 2004 and had followed the Capstick and Dixon-led teams in their endeavours. Building on the existing relationships, the incoming SAT-A focused on reinforcing “the non-security ministries” in order to build human capacity and deliver services to the Afghan people, with an eye on long-term transition to a functional government.

The critical ministries, from Col Labbé’s perspective, included the Ministry of the Interior, Energy and Water, Education, Rural Rehabilitation and Development, Ministry of Justice, and the Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation. SAT-A deployed advisors to those organizations to assist with planning and process development. There was another advisor involved with inter-ministerial financing, who trained Afghans on conducting audits. This was particularly important as the international organizations and non-governmental aid organizations demanded accountability for the monies deployed to Afghanistan through the Afghan government. If these people were not satisfied, then the possibility of aid monies drying up became real and thus was a threat to the counter-insurgency effort further down in the provinces and districts.

SAT-A also remained involved with the Afghan National Development Strategy. There were a series of crucial international meetings scheduled in Paris for June in 2008 to review ANDS progress with an eye to the future. LCol Nick Martin led the effort to advise the Afghan government how to formulate responses in this extremely important dialogue. Again, without the right answers, support could dry up.

Previous SAT-A rotations had advised the Afghan government on “strategic communications.” This function was formalized as the Government Media and Information Centre, a process supported by LCdr John Williston, who worked with President Karzai’s spokesman, Humayun Hamidzada. The cost of running the Government Media and Information Centre was shared by Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom, a deal brokered by SAT-A. SAT-A also retained the services of a CIDA representative, and Dr. Elizabeth Speed, a defence scientist and analyst.

Labbé realized that “It was not the lack of human capacity at the central level: it was the lack of human capacity at every level.” Traveling around Afghanistan, Labbé and his team confirmed that “there were some very capable young people here in Kabul. But when you go down to the provincial level, it gets watered down considerably. Especially if you go into the provinces like Oruzgan, Zabul, Helmand, Kandahar. Then when you get down to the district level, it’s almost non-existent.”³⁸⁹ The point of main effort

became the Ministry of Rehabilitation and Rural Development, because that ministry was mandated to drill down through all three levels in ways that the other ministries were not. This, once again, involved the National Solidarity Programme and the National Area Based Programme's Provincial Development Committees, District Development Assemblies and Community Development Councils. None of the other ministries had this type of vertical integration, not even the police.³⁹⁰

Ideally, there should have been some OMLT-like organization for the Afghan civil service so that delivery and capacity could be improved. Initial Canadian forays into advising the Civil Service Commission so that the selection of civil servants could be improved ultimately collapsed and the advisors were pulled out. The commission itself consisted of 2 different organizations and it proved impossible to coordinate their agendas in any meaningful way. Attempts by the Canadian advisors to foster basic meetings for deconfliction failed. One of the reasons for the lack of headway was the presence of outside contractors. There was "a lot of professional jealousy between the various donors...all the consultants and contractors looked at [SAT-A] with incredible jealousy and hatred because we were working for free. We were offering the Afghan government a free ticket because the Canadian government was paying us, whereas these guys came in, they exact a huge fee, and very often do not deliver a hell of a lot of return." Kabul, it turned out, was flooded with technical advisors, but these people were not strategic thinkers. Many of these technocrats were unable to conceptualize high-level planning and strategic functions.³⁹¹

The key to moving things forward remained the SAT-A approach: "We never forced anything down anybody's throat." The advisors assisted with basic issues like how to run a meeting, the establishment of procedures. The Canadian military culture was better suited to this than, say, DFAIT or CIDA. Col Labbé noted that "DFAIT can't plan a party even if their life depended on it. So how can they help a ministry plan? How can they develop a plan for the next five years? Strategic intent for the next five years for the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development or the Ministry of Energy and Water? Of course they can't, because they've never been taught to plan." (The Canadian Army has a planning culture and this is inculcated in each officer from the start of his or her career).

Indeed, one observer *au fait* with Afghan culture working in Kabul noted "that there was inherent respect given to warriors, most of the key players in Afghan government considered themselves to be warriors and proved much more amenable to advice from a soldier than a bureaucrat. This was a fact that rubbed many in the diplomatic and non-governmental organization community the wrong way."³⁹²

According to Labbé the main antagonists facing SAT-A were not the Taliban, Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin or Al Qaeda: they were ambassador Arif Lalani and David Mulroney. Back in Ottawa, David Mulroney believed that "SAT-A had outlived its usefulness and needed

to be better coordinated with the larger effort.” SAT-A did not, in Mulroney’s view, fit in with the priorities that were being generated by the Secretariat and the Cabinet Committee on Afghanistan. He also believed, furthermore, that SAT-A was “a Canadian Forces embassy to Afghanistan because they didn’t have any faith in the [existing Canadian] embassy.” Why was this the case? The Sproule ambassadorship period had long-term negative effects on Canadian-ISAF relations and “DFAIT was sitting on its hands.” Mulroney understood the situation, if he did not sympathize with it, but in terms of providing advice to the Government of Afghanistan “you couldn’t have two versions.” In essence, Mulroney made it clear that Lalani was to be tough when it came to SAT-A: “I take full responsibility for that.”³⁹³

In their first meeting, Lalani told Labbé “in polite language, that he was going to do everything he could to neutralize, to the maximum extent possible, the effects of the SAT in Afghanistan. At a time when we needed more capacities than ever.”³⁹⁴ Col Labbé believed that Lalani’s animosity toward the team was almost personal:

He couldn’t deal with the fact that you had a bunch of officers [doing these tasks] because he hated the military. He thinks we’re all dumb....At the end of the day, we were influencing at the strategic level. He was unable to do so, personally, and none of his people were able to do so because they simply did not have the background, experience, and intuition, the things that come with years and years and years of soldiering and being an officer in the Canadian Forces. Lack of experience hinders you from understanding certain basic issues which come from time and experience and just being out there and doing that.³⁹⁵

Labbé’s relationship with Lalani deteriorated: “He’d start yelling; I’d walk out of his office. Two seconds later, he was on the phone to Mulroney. Then Mulroney would phone DND, the Deputy Minister Robert Fonberg,³⁹⁶ and he would talk to Hillier, and Hillier would say ‘Yeah, yeah, yeah.’ Hillier suffered terribly. Foreign Affairs was leaking stuff to the media, trying to denigrate him and wear him down.”³⁹⁷ There is a hint in some circles that since SAT- A was considered to be Hillier’s creation, it had to be removed to “rebalance” Hillier’s relative power vis-à-vis DFAIT in Ottawa bureaucratic circles.³⁹⁸

And that is ultimately what happened. The Chief of Defence Staff, who decided that there were higher priority items to fight for in the Ottawa environment, disestablished SAT-A. Ultimately, Mulroney and Lalani won out and the Canadian Government Support Office was created. However, when DFAIT and CIDA could not get enough experienced people to man the new organization, they approached the Department of National Defence for personnel. This effort failed and the Canadian Government Support Office eventually consisted of technical advisors, not strategic advisors, including contractors and CIDA

“cooperants.”³⁹⁹ CGSO never achieved anywhere near the level of influence or prestige that SAT-A attained during its time, nor does it appear to have had the long-term impact that SAT-A did.

In 2009, Commander ISAF, General Stanley McChrystal, helped reconstitute some of the SAT-A functions as part of the NATO Senior Civilian Representative’s Office, and Col Serge Labbé, now retired, was asked to lead it. The organization survived the transition from McChrystal to Petraeus in 2010, who formalized ISAF’s relationships with the four key Afghanistan development ministries. Called the Strategic Partnering team, it continues in its vital work building Afghan government capacity from the ground up.⁴⁰⁰

Finally, Canada’s relatively long relationship with Governor Asadullah Khalid came to an end in summer 2008. Unable to overcome the serious allegations in the Canadian media in April relating to what were euphemistically called “human rights abuses” and revelations of documents that suggested that Khalid might have been involved in the murder of a number of UN workers, his position was no longer tenable.⁴⁰¹ To save face, the Afghan government likely delayed his replacement until August. It was now time for new leadership and, with it, some hope for the Afghan government to regain legitimacy.

Conclusions

The first half of 2008 had numerous concurrent changes to the Canadian approach to the war in Kandahar. The Manley Report and its aftermath, Canada’s assumption of command of Regional Command (South), and the relief in place of the Laroche TF Kandahar headquarters by the Thompson headquarters all occurred at a time that key elements in the Kandahar power structure realized that they did not face the existential threat that they had in 2006.

The Laroche plan had many positive aspects to it. Specifically, district-level coordination of security entities through the Joint District Coordination Centres and early attempts to align development or at least PRT CIMIC coordination with them should be chalked up as successes. In early 2008, however, the deficiencies in the plan emerged.

First, there was a lot of tactical infrastructure, but not all of it was man-able. There were not enough police, and even fewer after the Focused District Development process. There were major issues getting police to remain in key districts. Personalities played a role as much as the multinational Tower of Babel: the senior American police mentor essentially worked at cross-purposes to the Canadians when they tried to populate the infrastructure network. What was the appropriate balance between static and mobile operations? Who was responsible for establishing the singular plan for the province?

Second, there was the unanticipated enemy backlash against the plan, especially in western Panjwayi along Route Fosters. The idea that tactical infrastructure connected by a ring road would isolate the enemy “heartland” in Nahlgam was laudable. It did not take into account the enemy presence south of this structure and the fact that the enemy were building their legitimacy on grievances that the Panjwayi District leadership refused to address and, indeed, aggravated. The cutting out of influential elements of the Panjwayi power structure on development projects aggravated further this situation, which, in turn, led to more grievances and increased insurgent violence. Finally, the difficulties in getting the ANSF to cooperate with the tactical infrastructure lay down forced the issue of “TF Zharey” and made it look like the Afghan forces were merely Canadian levies in support of dubious leaders. The TF Kandahar plan came under attack from several directions and planes, almost none of them anticipated by the planners, which made these issues even more difficult to address. Third, and most crucially, there was the incomplete consolidation of Arghandab District in the wake of the first Taliban incursion. This was in part the fall out from the systematic elimination of Alikozai influence in the Kandahar power structure by their tribal rivals, who used the confusion and uncertainty to gain the upper hand anticipating correctly that Canadian forces would bail them out if the Taliban moved in again. Again, those Canadians involved in governance failed to seriously address this “tribal cleansing.” This had long-term ramifications for the rest of the Canadian Army’s stay in Kandahar.

While all of this was going on, there were substantial changes in the Government of Canada’s approach. For domestic political purposes, there was a new emphasis to try and refocus Canadian efforts on development. These efforts were unrealistic because they were out of phase with the realities of the security situation in Kandahar Province.

When BGen Thompson’s headquarters took over in May 2008, their first inclination was to extricate themselves from the Laroche plan. They were unable to do so and had to live with the tactical infrastructure legacy throughout summer and fall 2008. All of the manning, coordinating and policing issues landed on the heads of this headquarters and they struggled to extract themselves from this maw as much as from the tactical infrastructure itself.

Similarly, Thompson and his rotation had to live with the incomplete consolidation of Arghandab District. The enemy exploited the power vacuum in Arghandab, which forced a response and distracted TF Kandahar from the Clear-Hold-Build process in Zharey and Panjwayi that it wanted to focus on. The Taliban were defeated once again in Arghandab, but then the enemy came back with new operational methods that required a dedicated occupation of Arghandab if the coalition was going to address the new threat adequately. Those forces simply did not exist in 2008 and Arghandab opened up as a new full-time enemy front in the province.

Despite all of this, this headquarters took steps to get development underway. This resulted in the creation of Stability Box JUNO and Stability Box Sperwan. The refocusing of development efforts on Kandahar City was another means to demonstrate that there was progress for the population.

Collectively Zharey and Panjwayi remained a festering wound. Both districts were crippled by the lack of police and army to man the tactical infrastructure and then generate security from those nodes. When the ANSF did not want to operate, something had to be done, so the Canadian Army did so. This resulted in Mushan River runs and supporting operations to the tactical infrastructure along Route Fosters in Panjwayi East. Holding the tactical infrastructure and supporting it distracted Canadian attention and the enemy increased operations from bases in Panjwayi East and especially along the vital Highway 1.

Attempts at any form of development in Zharey and Panjwayi were crippled by the inability of the National Solidarity Programme/District Development Assembly/Community Development Council system to work while under contact with the insurgency. In any event, local power brokers who generated grievances through favouritism, which the enemy exploited, undermined the process. At the same time, the Governor of Kandahar, Asadullah Khalid, was not seriously engaged at the provincial level and the refocus of PRT operations on other projects like the Dahla Dam contributed to the lack of development to support efforts in Zharey and Panjwayi.

There were some major successes. Operation LUMBAR, the response to attacks on Highway 1, was one of these and contributed to the operational-level success of deploying the Kajaki turbine through Kandahar Province. Operation TIMUS PREEM drove back the enemy to prevent interference with the turbine move but, more importantly, it drove back the enemy from Stability Box JUNO to buy time for it to take hold. Similarly, the efforts of the Canadian OMLT and the Afghans in Strong Point Mushan, and B Company in its fragmented positions in Panjwayi West, acted as a covering force for Stability Box SPERWAN to take hold. However, with PRT attention focused elsewhere, the ability to develop them was in question into fall 2008.

On the positive side: Spin Boldak reconstruction and development efforts did take hold, and the Canadian-created Joint District Coordination Centre was a crucial aspect of harmonizing the security forces (or at the very least providing a fig leaf for the efforts of Col. Raziq to maintain stability). Dand started to come under threat, but its governance and development efforts were well-developed by mid-2008. Arghandab's development processes worked up to a point after the second incursion but with the new enemy methods, it started to erode by fall 2008. Regional Command (South)'s interest and involvement with Maywand coupled with the American influx there looked promising.

Crucially, the Afghan National Army improved significantly by mid-2008 when closely mentored and there were a lot more Afghan forces operating in the province than ever before. The lack of a unified Canadian–Afghan operating concept for the province between TF Kandahar and 1-205 Brigade became a barrier at this time, and caused some command and control issues.

The Canadian-led Regional Command (South) also brought greater fidelity and coordination to operations across southern Afghanistan, with significant positive effects on Kandahar. These included a coordinated Afghan–Canadian response to Sarposa and Arghandab II, the facilitation of the Garmsir operations, operations in Maywand, special operations forces coordination, and enemy leadership targeting.

The Kajaki turbine operation was ultimately a failure in the long term. A Chinese contractor firm slated to pour the concrete foundations refused to work because of “security concerns” and pulled its personnel out one month after the turbine’s delivery. The cement itself, 500 tonnes’ worth, did not arrive because the routes remained interdicted. As of the writing of this history, the equipment remains decaying next to the dam.⁴⁰² In the short term, Operation ASP-E JANUBI produced around 400 enemy dead.⁴⁰³

The insurgency in Kandahar Province was, by mid-2008, crippled but still flailing away. The core districts they threatened were Panjwayi, Zharey and Highway 1 (Senjaray and Asheque), and they were making low-level inroads into Arghandab by late summer. The insurgents were challenged for control of non-core rural districts (Khakrez, upper Shah Wali Kot, Ghorak, Maruf and Arghistan) by special operations forces disruption operations.

By mid-2008, TF Kandahar essentially confirmed the possibility that the Kandahar power structure was almost as much a part of the problem as the insurgency, but there was paralysis on what to do about it in the Canadian camp. Attempts to remove a key element in this, Asadullah Khalid, were only partially successful. The unwillingness of the Karzai government to recognize and deal with the problem or even their complicity in creating or sustaining the problem remained an insurmountable barrier for the Canadian Army. That was the bailiwick of OGDs, so the responsibility for this problem lay elsewhere.

Events in the first half of 2008, and especially in the summer, demonstrated that there was a serious divergence between what the Canadian government wanted to accomplish on the development front in Kandahar and what was necessary to keep ISAF viable across southern Afghanistan. With only so many resources available, how should TF Kandahar and Regional Command (South) HQ deploy them? If Dahla Dam was a priority, then security in lower Shah Wali Kot and Arghandab was required. Protecting Kandahar City meant that enemy operations in Panjwayi had to be challenged and suppressed.

Ensuring that Highway 1 along Zharey remained open to supply the British and American forces fighting in Helmand meant that Zharey District security operations were also a priority. This problem would confront Canadian commanders in the last half of 2008.

For the most part, a small number of Canadians sustained the whole effort in Kandahar in 2008. Police operational mentors, army operational mentors, CIMIC and PSYOPS teams, usually worked alongside the ANSF in the isolated, hot and unforgiving police sub-stations, strong points and combat outposts of Zharey, Panjwayi, and Maywand Districts. Meanwhile, the battle group performed a valuable disruptive function with operations like NOLAI and TIMUS PREEM, buying time so that Canada and Afghanistan could reorganize their respective development and governance efforts.

ENDNOTES

1. "CBC News in Review March 2008: The Manley Report on Afghanistan."
2. Telephone interviews with David Mulrone (9 and 13 October 2014).
3. "Manley report demands effort from Government and NATO to maintain Afghan mission" www.canada.com (22 January 2008).
4. "Manley report puts equal pressure on Liberals, Conservatives," www.canada.com (22 January 2008).
5. John Manley, "Afghanistan: Meeting the Development Challenge," *Policy Options* (October 2007), pp. 6–12. There was significant commentary on this so-called "self-plagiarism" (whatever that may be) in the blogosphere but it stoked a level of suspicion that the Manley Report was predetermined before it was tabled and published. See the discussion on "On John Manley, Self-Plagiarism, and Credibility," <http://phantomobserver.com> (23 January 2008).
6. "Independent Panel on Canada's Future Role in Afghanistan," [hereafter "The Manley Report"], pp. 3–4.
7. The Manley Report, p. 33.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 36.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Peter Kent, "Ottawa Misses Manley's Best Points," *Policy Options* (March 2008), pp. 50–53.
12. Jim Cox, "Afghanistan: Canada and the Intra-NATO Dialogue," PRB 08-02E House of Commons Political and Social Affairs Division (22 April 2008).
13. As depicted in Bob Woodward, *Obama's Wars* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 2010).
14. The author played a discrete part in the process by which the Americans chose to deploy "The Manley Battalion" (2-2 Infantry, U.S. Army) to Kandahar.
15. Telephone interview with LGen Andrew Leslie (26 October 2014).
16. Interview with BGen Denis Thompson (Ottawa, 14 February 2012).
17. Operation SHAMSHIR briefing.
18. Regional Command (South) briefing to the author (August 2008).

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19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Though General Rick Hillier led Multinational Division (Southwest) as part of the NATO Stabilization Force in Bosnia, this organization was engaged in a defined stabilization operation as opposed to a counter-insurgency war.
23. Interview with Col Spike Hazleton (Kingston, 19 April 2012).
24. Ibid.
25. Interview with Col Rene Melançon (Kingston, 3 May 2012).
26. Ibid.
27. CANSOF at this point lacked its own dedicated helicopters and was dependent on either ground delivery or someone else's helicopters. This in turn reduced its ability to react in certain circumstances in certain areas.
28. Hazleton interview; Melançon interview.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
31. Confidential interviews. *Team America* was a marionette comedy film that had a secret American unit destroying the Eiffel Tower in a fit of exuberance while chasing terrorists. See also Nick Davies, "Afghanistan War Logs: Task Force 373-special forces hunting top Taliban," *The Guardian* (25 July 2010); Robert Winnett, "WikiLeaks Afghanistan: black operations unit carries out "kill or capture" mission," *The Telegraph* (27 July 2010). More hysterically critical websites describe TF 373 as a "death squad" with "no judicial oversight." When the SAS went after Erwin Rommel in North Africa during the Second World War, they did not require "judicial oversight" to kill him nor did the LRDG when they shot up and disrupted the Afrika Korps supply columns. TF 373 was operating from the JPEL and there was legal oversight exercised over the JPEL process.
32. Hazleton interview.
33. Melançon interview.
34. Hazleton interview.
35. Ibid.
36. Authors observations while accompanying 1st Battalion, Royal Gurkha Rifles and discussions with Lt.-Col. Johnny Bourne and his staff (February–March 2008).
37. Melançon interview.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid.
40. "Commander TFK Initial Direction to R5 Commanding Officers" (3 March 2008).
41. FRAGO to Op GARRANDAY ZMARAY. See slides "Pashmul Development Bubble" (12 January 2008).
42. JTF-A HQ WSR (22–28 February 2008).
43. JTF-A HQ, "Op RAHAWANA ZMARAY" (12 December 2007).
44. Interview with Major Geoff McCarthy (KAF, 6 August 2008).
45. Ibid. See also interview with LCol Al Mulawyshyn (KAF, 12 August 2008).

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46. The CH-136 Kiowas, of which 74 equipped ten regular and reserve squadrons, were mothballed at CFS Mountainview by 1995 and sold off to the Dominican Republic and civilian users. The CH-136 mounted a Mini-TAT GAU-2A/B 7.62mm Gatling gun. See <http://www.helis.com/database/model/713/>.
47. Interview with Capt. Joe Corsentino, U.S. Army, and key Banshee personnel (KAF, 9 August 2008).
48. JTF-A HQ DSR (13 March 2008); J2 DSR (31 March 2009); JTF-A HQ DSR (10 April 2008); J2 DSR (2 June 2008); JTF-A HQ DSR (2 July 2008); JTF-A HQ DSR (15 August 2008); Interview with Col Jamie Cade (Kandahar, 2 February 2009).
49. JPCC DSR (16 March 2008); JPCC DSR (5 May 2008); JTF-A HQ DSR (9 May 2008); JTF-A HQ DSR (13 May 2008).
50. J2 DSR (23 May 2008).
51. Battle group DSR (4 July 2008); JTF-A HQ DSR (16 July 2008); J2 DSR (25 March 2008).
52. J2 DSR (29 March 2008).
53. J2 DSR (2 March 2008); J2 DSR (4 March 2008); J2 DSR (5 March 2008); J2 DSR (10 March 2008); JTF-A HQ DSR (20 March 2008); Afghan News, "Taliban cellular antenna vandals killed, arrested," www.afgha.com (18 March 2008).
54. Ayesha Siddiqa, *Military Inc.: Inside Pakistan's Military Economy* (London: Pluto Press, 2007); Adam Pappas, "Trade Promotion in Afghanistan: Roles for Infrastructure and Institutes," *Police Options for State-Building in Afghanistan*, School for Advances International Studies (24 April 2009).
55. "Red Ball Express Rides Again?" (World Press: 29 July 2008).
56. Briefing to the author, OCC-P (Kandahar, 3 August 2008).
57. JTF-A HQ DSR (6 June 2008); JTF-A HQ DSR (27 July 2008).
58. Interview with Major David Warnke (KAF, 8 February 2009).
59. C-IED briefings to the author.
60. Ibid.
61. See Army Counterintelligence Center Counterintelligence Analysis Report, "Wikileaks.org-An Online Reference to Foreign Intelligence Services, Insurgents, or Terror Groups?" (18 March 2008) and Tiffany Strother, "Cell Phone Use by Insurgents in Iraq" Urban Warfare Analysis Center, Wave Technologies, 14 May 2007." The historical equivalent would be, "What if the CBC announced on Radio Canada International that our Lancaster bombers were jamming Nazi air defence radar during the Second World War?"
62. The author was present when ISTAR resources revealed the enemy's frustrations in trying to target a TF Orion column with RC-IEDs in July 2006.
63. Briefings to the author (January 2008). The author was present on Operation JALEY when an exploitation team found cached Iranian-built spider devices and other IED-making materials. See also "WikiLeaks.org- An Online Reference to Foreign Intelligence Services, Insurgents, or Terror Groups?"
64. Jerome Starkey, "Prowlers Detonate Roadside Bombs," *The Scotsman* (26 March 2009).
65. Interview with Sgt David Tofts (Camp Nathan Smith, 28 January 2008).
66. C-IED briefings to the author.
67. Interview with LCol Chris Comeau (Kingston, 15 May 2012).
68. Interview with LCol Bob Ritchie (Ottawa, 24 October 2012).
69. Comeau interview.

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70. JTF-A WSR (22–28 February 2008); OMLT DSR (4 March 2008).
71. Interview with Major Gilbert McCauley (KAF, 11 August 2008).
72. In previous rotations, the J6 dealt with these issues in part because of a manpower cap. With all of these changes it was no longer possible for the J6 to have the span of control over everything. Interview with Capt James Lindsay (KAF, 15 August 2008).
73. Interview with Major Jamie Vieveen (KAF, 15 August 2008).
74. TF 1-08 DSR (4 March 2008).
75. TF 1-08 DSR (17 March 2008).
76. OMLT DSR (1 March 2008).
77. The author observed the operation from the JTF-A HQ POC and then the battle group TOC.
78. OMLT DSR (1–20 March 2008); TF 1-08 DSR (20 March 2008).
79. JTF-A HQ DSR (18 March 2008).
80. JTF-A HQ DSR (19 March 2008).
81. Telephone interview with LCol Stephane Boivin (1 March 2013). See also JTF-A HQ DSRs (March–May 2008).
82. Boivin interview.
83. Ibid.
84. JTF-A DSR (16–17 April 2008).
85. J2 DSR (12 March 2008); JTF-A DSR (14 April 2008).
86. JTF-A DSRs (17–25 April 2008).
87. TF 1-08 DSR (1 May 2008).
88. Boivin interview.
89. Interview with LCol Stacey Grubb (Ottawa, 4 July 2012).
90. Grubb interview.
91. Ibid.
92. TF 1-08 DSRs (7–9 March 2008).
93. Grubb interview.
94. TF 1-08 DSRs (24, 27, 29 March and 3 May 2008); Grubb interview.
95. PRT DSR (18 March 2008).
96. PRT DSR (3 March 2008).
97. PRT DSR (6 March 2008).
98. PRT CIMIC report from c/s 51 (11 March 2008).
99. OMLT DSR (24 March 2008).
100. OMLT DSR (23 March 2008).
101. J2 DSR (5 March 2008).

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102. J2 DSR (10 March 2008).
103. J2 DSR (25 March 2008).
104. OMLT DSR (13 March 2008).
105. JTF-A HQ SIGACT (13 March 2008).
106. JTF-A HQ DSR (16 March 2008).
107. OMLT DSRs (16–19 March 2008).
108. JTF-A HQ SIGACTS (14, 16 and 23 March 2008).
109. OMLT DSR (24 March 2008).
110. TF 1-08 DSR (31 March 2008).
111. JTF-A HQ SIGACT (30 March 2008).
112. Interview with MWO Alison Clark (Kingston, 4 May 2012).
113. Interview with Major Mike Lane (Ottawa, 8 March 2012).
114. Ibid. See also Interview with Capt Reg McMichael (Edmonton, 12 July 2012).
115. TF 1-08 DSRs (8–9, 14–15 March 2008).
116. TF 1-08 DSR (24 March 2008); McMichael interview.
117. OMLT DSRs (3, 6–7 March 2008).
118. TF 1-08 DSRs (26–29 March 2008); J2 DSR (29 March 2008).
119. TF 1-08 DSRs (30 March–2 April 2008).
120. TF 1-08 DSRs (2–5 April 2008); TF 1-08 DSR (15 April 2008).
121. PRT DSR, CIMIC callsign 51 report (3 March 2008).
122. PRT DSR (17 March 2008).
123. PRT DSR (5 March 2008).
124. PRT DSR (17 March 2008).
125. Discussions with Capt Larocque (Panjwayi District, 1 February 2008).
126. PRT DSR, CIMIC call sign 52 report Panjwayi (18 March 2008).
127. Ibid.
128. PRT DSR, CIMIC callsign 52 report Panjwayi (8 March 2008).
129. PRT DSR (2 April 2008).
130. Ibid.
131. PRT KLE report (4 April 2008).
132. PRT DSR, CIMIC Detailed Follow Up call sign 52 Panjwayi (14 April 2008).
133. PRT DSR (15 April 2008).
134. PRT DSR, callsign 52 report Panjwayi (22 April 2008).
135. PRT DSR, callsign 52 report Panjwayi (23 April 2008).

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136. PRT DSR callsign 52 report Panjwayi (24 April 2008).
137. OMLT DSR (12 March 2008).
138. Interview with LCol Dana Woodworth (Camp Nathan Smith, 27 August 2008).
139. PRT DSR (16 March 2008).
140. Woodworth interview. Interview with Major Eric Perey (Camp Nathan Smith, 28 August 2008).
141. PRT DSR (3 March 2008).
142. PRT DSR (10 March 2008).
143. PRT DSR (9 April 2008).
144. PRT DSR (16 April 2008).
145. PRT DSR (18 March 2008).
146. PRT DSR (4 March 2008).
147. JTF-A HQ WSRs (28 March–3 April 2008).
148. KLE with Ahmad Wali Karzai (11 September 2007).
149. JTF-A HQ WSRs (22–28 February 2008).
150. Ibid.
151. “Post Operation Report Headquarters Regional Command South-Rotation 4” (24 October 2008).
152. This was the phrase BGen David Fraser used when the author asked him in July 2006 as to why Governor Asadullah Khalid could not be removed. It was repeated to the author on several occasions by subsequent senior Canadian personnel during successive rotations.
153. CTV News “Karzai Should Replace Kandahar Governor” (14 April 2008).
154. Except those who sought to blame the Canadian Forces for not recommending the removal of Khalid in the past and thus deflect attention away for their own inability to handle the governance portfolio they sought with so much vigour. See Murray Brewster, “Canada defended torturer,” *Toronto Star* (14 December 2009).
155. PRT DSR, CIMIC det report to PRT (18 April 2008).
156. As discussed in Nicholas Grammer’s “The Afghanistan Task Force and Prime Ministerial Leadership.”
157. To wit, Golberg “joined the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade in 1996 and has worked on a range of global peace and security issues over the past decade. Among other duties, she has managed Canadian responses to significant natural disasters, political violence and armed conflict. In 2005, she became director of the Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Response Division, then senior director and deputy head of the Stabilization and Reconstruction Task Force. In 2007, Ms. Golberg became executive director of the Independent Panel on Canada’s Future Role in Afghanistan with the Privy Council Office.”
158. As for the RoCK’s effectiveness, the author was approached by members of the Kandahari power structure to ask if Canada was deliberately insulting them or if this was some form of joke that they did not understand. Provincial Council members, in discussion with the author through his interpreter, referred to the RoCK in Pashtun as “The Little Girl” with all of the implications that carries with it. Note that under Pashtun tribal hospitality codes, it is inappropriate to insult guests, so these conversations were obviously extraordinary, given the circumstances. During discussions with senior JTF-A HQ personnel, they explained to the author that the Afghan provincial-level leadership would frequently defer to BGen Denis Thompson and not to Elissa Golberg during shuras. The choice

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of a young female foreign affairs officer to represent Canada in the incredibly conservative Islamic, not to mention homosocial, Pashtun heartland of southern Afghanistan was a highly questionable decision given the gravity of the situation. The author was, unfortunately, unable to gain the permission of the Canadian government to interview Ambassador Golberg for her perspective on the matter.

159. Which had other, more malign aspects to it as Ruth Hubbard and Gilles Paquet note in their book, *Probing the Bureaucratic Mind: About Canadian Federal Executives* (Ottawa: Commoners Publishing, 2014). "In our view the state of mind of senior executives has come to be tainted by a multitude of bad habits: creeping cognitive dissonance and political correctness, erosion of critical thinking. These bad habits of the mind have unwittingly led to reprehensible behaviour; rewarding failure; punishing success; failure to confront, disloyalty."
160. Telephone interviews with David Mulrone (9 and 13 October 2014).
161. Ibid.
162. Ibid.
163. Canada Privy Council Office, "Canada's Engagement in Afghanistan June 2008: Setting a Course to 2011," Report to Parliament (Ottawa: Government of Canada, 2008), p. 6.
164. Ibid.
165. Discussion with LCol Tim Young (KAF, 15 August 2008); Discussions with Major Jeff Davis and LCol Fraser Auld (KAF, 8 August 2008).
166. Memorandum JTF-A COMD to D.L. "Of Interest to the Commander" (16 May 2008).
167. Discussion with LCol Tim Young (KAF, 15 August 2008); Discussions with LCdr Elizabeth Woodcliffe and Major Mario Beauchesne (KAF, 15 August 2008).
168. BGen Denis Thompson daily diary (16 and 19 May 2008).
169. Thompson papers, "Current Situation/Major Deduction Notes" (May 2008). See also interview with BGen Denis Thompson (Ottawa, 14 February 2012).
170. Ibid.
171. Memorandum JTF-A COMD to D.L. "Of Interest to the Commander" (16 May 2008).
172. Thompson papers, "Operational Philosophy V.1."
173. Thompson interview.
174. BGen Denis Thompson daily diary (16, 19, 21, 23 and 31 May and 29 June 2008).
175. OMLT DSR (3 March 2008).
176. JTF-A HQ SIGACTS (7 and 12 April 2008). See interview with Capt Tyler Wentzell (Kingston, 26 March 2011).
177. Discussions with the PSYOPS team (KAF, 15 August 2008).
178. Wentzell interview.
179. Ibid.
180. Ibid, Wentzell patrol report.
181. Lolita C. Baldor, "24th MEU Singled Out for Afghan Duty" (The Associated Press, 14 January 2008); 24 MEU PAO, "Operation AZADA WOSA: Recounting the 24th MEU's Progress in Garmisr."
182. Correspondence with the author.

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183. 24 MEU briefing to the author (KAF, 15 August 2008).
184. Hazleton interview.
185. Or was it the other way around? One could never be sure.
186. Briefing to the author on contractor issues, JTF-A HQ (KAF, 15 August 2008).
187. See "Private Security Contracting and the Counter-insurgency Mission in Afghanistan: United States House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Government Reform Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, Testimony by Carl Forsberg, Institute for the Study of War, 22 June 2010." See also Carl Forsberg and Kimberly Kagan, "Consolidating Private Security Companies in Southern Afghanistan" study.
188. Email Boivin to Maloney (11 March 2013).
189. Boivin interview.
190. Ibid.
191. Thompson Papers, "Chief J2 Occasional Paper 3-The importance of Kandahar City" (May 2008),
192. Ibid.
193. Ibid.
194. Thompson marginalia on the "Importance of Kandahar City" occasional paper.
195. Interview with Major Chris Adams (FOB Ma'Sum Ghar, 17 and 18 August 2008).
196. Ibid.
197. PRT DSR (31 May 2008).
198. PRT DSR (10 June 2008).
199. PRT DSR (3 June 2008).
200. That is, The Rocket Man.
201. TF 1-08 DSR (1–3 May 2008); TF 1-08 FRAGO Operation TOORAH AZADI II.
202. OMLT DSRs (1–24 May 2008).
203. TF 1-08 DSR (24 May 2008); TF 1-08 Post Op Report, TOORAH AZADI REDUX.
204. OMLT DSR (12 May 2008).
205. OMLT DSRs (1–13 June 2008).
206. OMLT DSR (16 June 2008).
207. PRT DSR (30 June 2008).
208. TF 1-08 DSR (9 June 2008).
209. Lane interview.
210. McMichael interview.
211. Ibid.
212. Lane interview.
213. TF 1-08 DSR. OMLT DSR (3 June 2008).
214. OMLT DSR (1 May 2008).

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215. OMLT DSR (7 May 2008).
216. OMLT DSR (9 May 2008).
217. OMLT DSRs (10 and 14 May 2008).
218. Ritchie interview.
219. OMLT DSR (17 May 2008).
220. OMLT DSRs (20 and 22 May 2008). Mulawyshyn interview.
221. Mulawyshyn interview.
222. OMLT DSR (28 May 2008).
223. JTF-A HQ DSR (13 May 2008).
224. TFK Weekly ASSESSREP (30 May 2008).
225. JTF-A HQ SIGACT (25 May 2008).
226. 226. TF 1-08 DSR (28–30 May 2008); JTF-A HQ SIGACT (28 May 2008).
227. Ibid.
228. ASIC assessment of Op RAWA TANDER (31 May 2008).
229. J2 DSR (1 June 2008).
230. TFK/2 PPCLI BG Operation LEWE [Wolf] CONOP LEVEL 2 Briefing (14–22 July 2008).
231. JTF-A DSR (5 June 2008).
232. "2 PPCLI BG Use of UAV in the Hunter-Killer Role" (July 2008).
233. Interview with Major Jay Adair (Ottawa, 9 March 2012).
234. The term "Deep Battle" was misleading because it had operational-level connotations from NATO Cold War concepts and terminology like FOFA and the Reconnaissance-Strike Complex.
235. Adair interview.
236. The author spent many sleepless nights in the battle group TOC with Major Louis Hamel watching the "kill TV" process in August 2008.
237. Adair interview. A cursory count and examination of the JTF-A HQ SIGACTS approximates these numbers and there is video footage of almost all of the strikes, some of it captured by TUAV, the rest by MQ-1 or MQ-9.
238. The author was a member of the KAFCC and was present in 2008 and 2009 for some of these meetings.
239. Thompson Papers, Daily Diary (22 and 26 May, and 4 June 2008).
240. Email LCol Fraser Auld to Maloney (5 November 2009).
241. TF 1-08 DSR (13–14 June 2008); OMLT DSR (15 June 2008); authors notes on Op NOLAI (KAF, 6 August 2008).
242. Interview with Capt Alex Duncan (Kingston, 26 March 2011).
243. Duncan interview.
244. Sean M. Maloney, "Panjwayi Alamo: The Defence of Strongpoint Mushan," *Canadian Military History*, Vol. 18 No. 3, pp. 47–63.
245. Operation NOLAI Chronology.

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246. Duncan interview.
247. Maloney, "Panjwayi Alamo."
248. Operation NOLAI Chronology.
249. Ibid.
250. Ibid.
251. Ibid.
252. JTF-A HQ DSR (8 June 2008).
253. JPCC DSRs (7 and 8 March 2008).
254. Author's discussions with senior Afghan Ministry of the Interior officer (August 2008).
255. Woodworth interview.
256. JPCC DSR (14 June 2008).
257. JTF-A HQ SIGACT (13 June 2008); JPCC reporting to JTF-A HQ (15 June 2008).
258. TFK ASSESSREP (20 June 2008).
259. JTF-A HQ Monthly Assessment Report (June 2008).
260. Discussions with Canadian and Afghan intelligence personnel (Kandahar, August 2008) Some also believe that Lashkar-e Taiba provided the team.
261. Ibid.
262. JPCC DSR (29 June 2008).
263. Discussions with Correctional Services Canada personnel (Kingston, September 2008). The author visited Sarposa Prison in 2007 and 2008 and spoke with Afghan and Canadian personnel at the site.
264. Ibid.
265. PRT DSR (18 June 2008).
266. JPCC DSR (7–8 June 2008); JTF-A DSR (9–11 June 2008).
267. JTF-A HQ SIGACT (13 June 2008).
268. J2 DSR (14 June 2008). JPCC DSR (15 June 2008).
269. "Operation DAOR BUKHOU Post Operation Report" (1 July 2008). Hazleton interview; Melançon interview.
270. Frago 01 Operation DAOR BUKHOU; Melançon and Hazleton interviews.
271. Interview with LCol Dan Drew (KAF, 15 August 2008).
272. Interview with Major Steve Joudrey (KAF, 10 August 2008).
273. PRT DSR (18 June 2008).
274. Frago 01 Operation DAOR BUKHOU; JPCC DSR (17 June 2008).
275. Interview with MGen Al Howard (Kingston, 20 July 2012).
276. Joudrey and Drew interviews.
277. PRT DSR (19 June 2008).

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278. Operation DAOR BUKHOU Chronology.
279. Ibid; Joudrey and Drew interviews.
280. JTF-A HQ DSR (19 June 2008).
281. JTF-A HQ DSR (20 June 2008).
282. Operation DAOR BUKHOU Chronology; Joudrey and Drew interviews.
283. Drew interview.
284. JTF-A Commander's Morning Update (3 July 2008).
285. PRT DSR (20 June 2008).
286. JTF-A HQ DSR (28 June 2008).
287. JTF-A HQ DSR (30 June 2008).
288. Interview with MGen AI Howard (Kingston, 20 July 2012).
289. Howard interview.
290. Discussion with Col Jay Milne (KAF, 30 January 2009).
291. Howard interview.
292. Ibid.
293. Letter to Comd Regional Command (South) from JTF-A HQ "Concerns-Comd Joint Task Force Kandahar-Cycle 2 of the Focused District Development" (n/d).
294. JPCC DSR (1 May 2008).
295. JPCC DSR (21 May 2008).
296. OCC-P DSR (19 July and 1 August 2008).
297. Author's discussions with senior JTF-A HQ and ARSIC personnel, August 2008.
298. Interview with LCol Dwayne Hobbs (Kandahar, 3 August 2008); interview with LCol Doug Poitras (KAF, 7 August 2008). Discussions with LCol Dana Woodworth (Camp Nathan Smith, 27 August 2008); discussions with Col Jamie Cade (KAF, 4 August 2008); discussions with LCol Marc Gendron (3 August 2008).
299. McMichael interview.
300. Ibid.
301. Grahame Smith, "Fired Kandahar police chief says Canadian let him down," *Globe and Mail* (3 July 2008). See <http://afghanistan-the-true-story.blogspot.ca/2008/07/fired-kandahar-police-chief-says.html>.
302. Thompson interview.
303. PRT DSR (5 May 2008).
304. Discussions with Tactical PSYOPS Team (KAF, 15 August 2008).
305. Interview with Major Jim Allen (Camp Nathan Smith, 28 August 2008). Interview with Major Eric Perey (Camp Nathan Smith, 28 August 2008).
306. Ibid.

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307. "Warlord, Inc: Extortion and Corruption Along the U.S. Supply Chain in Afghanistan," Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, U.S. House of Representatives (June 2010), p. 38.
308. PRT DSR (8 May 2008).
309. PRT DSR (17 June 2008).
310. PRT DSR (4 August 2008).
311. PRT DSR (6 August 2008).
312. PRT DSR (16 August 2008).
313. PRT DSR (30 June 2008).
314. PRT DSR (1 August 2008). The author of this section in the DSR commented that the mayor was merely jealous of the large number of UN projects and downplayed his concerns. That view reflects the pro-UN bias of some Canadian personnel. Who was supposed to run Kandahar City, the UN or the mayor?
315. JTFA HQ DSR (24 and 28 August 2008).
316. JTF-A DSR (6 June 2008); JPCC DSR (6 June 2008).
317. JTF-A HQ DSR (8–14 June 2008).
318. JTF-A DSR (26 July 2008).
319. Vieveen interview.
320. PRT DSR (3 June 2008).
321. PRT DSR (22 July 2008).
322. Clark interview.
323. JTF-A DSRs (3–29 July 2008).
324. Thompson interview.
325. Author's Afghan sources.
326. JTF-A HQ DSRs (6–7 July 2008).
327. Hobbs interview.
328. Ibid.
329. JTF-A HQ DSR (6 July 2008).
330. Cade interview.
331. Author's discussions with LCol Dana Woodworth (Camp Nathan Smith, 27 August 2008).
332. The best approximation of events at this time barring the availability of new information was that Habibullah Jan and Ahmad Wali Karzai made a deal over a quiet dinner to delineate their extracurricular activities in order to set Habibullah Jan at ease. But then a power broker aligned with Ahmad Wali Karzai concurrently arranged the assassination while Habibullah Jan's guard was down. Another "player" ensured that there would be no police protection or response. Asadullah Khalid's and Ahmad Wali Karzai's animosity towards Habibullah Jan was well known to Canadian analysts as were their attempts to shape the Canadian view of Habibullah Jan. There remains no hard connection between the Habibullah Jan killer and elements in the Kandahari political structure.

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333. OCC-P DSR (4 July 2008).
334. PRT DSR (30 June 2008).
335. Ibid.
336. JTF-A DSR (28 July 2008).
337. JTF-A HQ, "Operation LUMBAR" (22 July 2008).
338. Operation LUMBAR Chronology.
339. Ibid.
340. Ibid. Briefing to the author (KAF, 8 August 2008).
341. JTF-A HQ Briefing, "Operation SOTAK" (2 July 2008); JTF-A HQ DSR (2 July 2008); JTF-A HQ DSR (8 July 2008).
342. TF 1-08 DSR (23 July 2008).
343. PRT DSR (5 July 2008).
344. TF 1-08 DSRs (26 July and 2, 4 and 11 August 2008).
345. PRT DSR (27 July 2008).
346. 346. TF 1-08 DSRs (26–30 July 2008).
347. Lane interview.
348. JTF-A HQ DSRs (4–29 July 2008).
349. McMichael interview.
350. The author was being briefed by the TUAV unit at its site when COP Haji came under attack and he observed the response in real time.
351. This section is derived from CIMIC reports to the PRT for the entire month of August 2008 in addition to the author's research in Panjwayi District that summer.
352. This section is based on "Panjwayi Alamo: The Defence of Strongpoint Mushan," *Canadian Military History* (Summer 2009), pp. 47-63. This article was based on interviews with the OMLT personnel stationed at SP Mushan during this period and were conducted in the field the summer of 2008.
353. B Squadron Post Operation Report, Operation ROOM SERVICE (2, 5–7 July 2008).
354. Ibid.
355. B Squadron Operations Order, "Operation LEWE" (15 July 2008); TF 1-08 DSR (18 July 2008).
356. Also known as Operation MUTAFIQ TANDAR 3.
357. B Squadron Post Operation Report, Operation MUTAFIQ TANDAR 3 (26–30 July 2008).
358. Ibid.
359. 2-2 Infantry briefings to the author, FOB RAMROD, Maywand District, 13 March 2009. Note that the author was asked by TF Kandahar to assist 2-2 Infantry with familiarization of Maywand District and past operations in the area as their own intelligence picture was minimal on arrival.
360. Ibid.
361. JTF-A HQ DSR (11–22 July 2008).

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362. ASIC briefing to the author (15 August 2008).
363. Note that Canadian opposition parties, the media and human rights groups did not demand investigations, inquires, or Red Crescent intervention into the Taliban secret prisons and torture chambers.
364. J2 DSR (2 August 2008).
365. JTF-A DSR (15–20 August 2008); Interview with Major Chris Comeau (Kingston, 16 May 2012).
366. JTF-A DSR (20–31 August 2008).
367. The operation code name was generated by an Australian planner who used an Australian term for a non-existent animal specifically so that it would be difficult for JOC commander LCol René Melançon to pronounce. This related to an incident where LCol Melançon was publicly berated in a humiliating fashion by Maj.-Gen. Jacko Page and Melançon retaliated by using the most difficult French Canadian phrase he could muster as an operations code name so that Page would trip over it. See Melançon interview. See also the email from Col Spike Hazleton to the author (12 March 13).
368. Hazleton and Melançon interviews.
369. Ibid.
370. "Post Operation Report Headquarters Regional Command South-Rotation 4" (24 October 2008).
371. The author was observing in the TOC while C Company was under contact. TF 1-08 DSRs (6–7 August 2008).
372. The author was observing in the TOC while C Company was under contact.
373. TF 1-08 DSR (11 August 2008).
374. This section is based on Sean M. Maloney, "The Mechs: Operation TIMUS PREEM," *Canadian Military History* (Summer 2010), pp. 57-72.
375. *Note.* The author accompanied LCol David Corbould and his TAC HQ on this operation.
376. Interview with LCol Casey Horlock (KAF, 10 August 2008).
377. Ibid.
378. Author's observation.
379. Horlock interview.
380. Ibid.
381. Horlock interview.
382. BATTY stands for "Big Ass Tan Truck, Yo!" CSS Briefing to the author (Ma'Sum Ghar, 19 August 2008).
383. CSS Briefing to the author (Ma'Sum Ghar, 19 August 2008); Briefing to the author by MCpl Stan Goodyear and Trooper James Jacobs (Ma'Sum Ghar, 4 March 2008).
384. Briefing to the author by MCpl Stan Goodyear and Trooper James Jacobs (Ma'Sum Ghar, 4 March 2008).
385. Though the Air Force was steadily working on getting CH-47 Chinooks to replace the ones sold to the Dutch at the end of the Cold War now that they had the green light after the Manley Report.
386. "SkyLink USA Corporate Presentation and Capabilities Briefing" (n/d).
387. JTF-A HQ SIGACT (1 June 2008).
388. Discussions with LCol Ed Haskins (KAF, 2 February 2009).

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389. Telephone interview with Col Serge Labbé (10 October 2012).
390. Labbé interview.
391. Ibid.
392. Correspondence between Major Sean Wyatt and the author.
393. Telephone interviews with David Mulrone (9 and 13 October 2014).
394. Labbé interview. The author attempted to contact Ambassador Lalani for comment but requests for an interview were not returned.
395. Labbé interview. Lalani's professional background consisted of "various assignments at Headquarters and abroad, including a brief assignment in Copenhagen and work with the Senior Coordinator for the Middle East peace process, European Union issues, and Commonwealth and United Nations affairs. In 1994, he was assigned to the Embassy of Canada to Turkey. Mr. Lalani also served abroad at the Permanent Mission of Canada to the United Nations in New York during Canada's term on the Security Council and as counsellor in Washington, D.C. In 2006, he was appointed ambassador of Canada to Jordan, with accreditation to Iraq." In other words, he had no substantial ground-level experience with conflict zones and apparently no substantial interdepartmental experience with the CF or DND. See also Global Affairs Canada website, News: Diplomatic Appointment (28 August 2012).
396. Fonberg was moved into DND from DFAIT in 2007 where he had been deputy minister for international trade. Like his former DFAIT confreres, Fonberg, also lacked any experience with international conflict zones let alone military operations.
397. Labbé interview.
398. Nicholas Grammer, "The Afghanistan Task Force and Prime Ministerial Leadership." See www.cpsa-acsp.ca.
399. See "The Canadian Government Support Office," Canada's Engagement in Afghanistan website.
400. Labbé interview.
401. CBC news, "Afghan Governor's Rights Abuses known in 2007," (12 April 2010). See also Graeme Smith, "House of Pain: Canada's Connection with Kandahar's Ruthless Palace Guard," *Globe and Mail* (10 April 2010) and updated edition of 23 August 2010, which retracted allegations of knowledge of these events by LGen Gauthier and BGen Fraser.
402. Mark Urban, "What went wrong with Afghanistan Kajaki power project?" BBC (27 June 2011); Glenn Zorpette, "Re-engineering Afghanistan," *IEEE SPECTRUM* (October 2011).
403. Hazleton interview.

EQUILIBRIUM:

SEPTEMBER 2008–FEBRUARY 2009

Introduction

The turbulence generated by the rapidly changing Canadian strategic landscape, coupled with the psychological body blows of Sarposa, Arghandab II, and an accelerating assassination campaign directed at “soft” Afghanistan targets in Kandahar City, ushered TF Kandahar and its units into the second half of 2008. The replacement of Governor Asadullah Khalid brought with it further provincial-level uncertainty. But the damage to the enemy forces in southern Afghanistan temporarily brought calmer waters through a combination of leadership targeting, the tracking down and elimination of escaped Sarposa insurgents, the drawing in and killing of several hundred insurgents who attacked the Kajaki turbine replacement as it inched toward the dam, and the tightening chokehold on the enemy’s ability to resupply and reinforce their forces in Zharey and Panjwayi Districts as coalition activities in Maywand and Helmand increased.

As the campaign entered the fall of 2008, an equilibrium of sorts developed between the insurgency and the coalition forces in Kandahar Province. This state of affairs brought with it the possibilities of increased development, reconstruction and capacity-building on the ANSF front in areas that the insurgents exhibited less control. As a result, there was increased Canadian emphasis in efforts in Kandahar City. There was pressure from Ottawa to get moving on the Dahla Dam project. Some non-governmental aid organizations pressed to increase their activities in the province. The problem was that the enemy once again altered course and proved to be agile in the face of an overwhelming force when that force was directed in one area.

At the same time, the provincial power structure accrued more and more access to coalition resources but was unable to generate the synergy necessary to have a significant effect on the ground in the adjacent and outlying districts. Legitimacy increasingly became a public issue as the Afghan government moved toward national elections in 2009. There was now increased scope for enemy operations to interfere with that process and perhaps reverse their crucial errors of 2004 and 2005. The Canadian Army’s campaign in southern Afghanistan was not fought in a political vacuum and, throughout the last months of 2008, it had to respond to both Canadian and Afghan political imperatives.

The Canadian Strategic Dimension

The minority government in Canada decided, by the end of August 2008, to hold an election, and Parliament was dissolved on 7 September. Once again, the enemy were watching carefully and attempted to gain strategic leverage. Taliban media operations leader Qari Mohammad Yousef used the CBC news network to disseminate their message:

Our message to the Canadian leaders, the Canadian people, the Canadian government, and all Canadians is that they should not send their sons to Afghanistan, where they will die for the benefit of the Americans. Afghanistan will be a graveyard for them.¹

Yousef, when interviewed by the Canadian Press, remarked: “Yes, I know that the election is being held in Canada. That is why our attacks on Canadians are increased.... My suggestion for the next prime minister is to withdraw Canadians from Afghanistan.”² Permitting the enemy’s leadership access to the Canadian population through Canadian media without a robust response from the Canadian government was a questionable path to take, ceded psychological ground to the enemy, and would have been unheard of during the Second World War. This was the functional equivalent of interviewing Joseph Goebbels.

As it turned out, more pressing domestic matters in Canada overrode Afghanistan during the course of this election campaign and this time around, none of the opposition parties chose to substantially focus on the war as an election issue. Moreover, to its credit, the government did not instruct deployed forces to curtail operations during the run-up to the election as its predecessors had in 2004.

The attempts to establish a semblance of a government strategy remained in the hands of David Mulroney. In the post-Manley Report period, which involved the creation of the Cabinet Committee on Afghanistan and the commitment to report on Canadian progress, Mulroney and his team formulated “an extensive set of benchmarks by which Canadians and Parliament can assess what progress is or is not being made in the mission between now and 2011.”³ And, “While Canada remains an influential player and has a growing embassy in Kabul, we are now concentrating both our civilian and military contributions to Afghanistan in Kandahar.” The new strategic objective, as distinct from the ones established in November 2001, was “to make measurable progress by 2011 toward building a safer and better governed Kandahar supported by a national government more able to advance Afghanistan’s own security and development.”⁴

These objectives became known as the “Six Priorities” and they were to

1. enable the ANSF in Kandahar to sustain a more secure environment and promote law and order;

2. strengthen Afghan institutional capacity to deliver core services and promote economic growth, enhancing the confidence of Kandaharis in the government;
3. provide humanitarian assistance for extremely vulnerable people, including refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons;
4. enhance border security with facilitation of bilateral dialogue between Afghan and Pakistani authorities;
5. help advance Afghanistan's capacity for democratic governance by contributing to effective, accountable public institutions and electoral processes; and
6. facilitate Afghan-led efforts toward political reconciliation.

At some point in the process, a decision was made to graft what were called “signature projects” to this strategy. The purpose of the signature projects was initially unclear, but they consisted of the Dahla Dam project the construction of 50 schools, and a polio eradication initiative in the province.

As seen in Volume I, the first of these was an Afghan-proposed, Afghan-stimulated project, while the polio eradication initiative was already underway through a myriad of agencies long before the Canadian decision to adopt it as “Canadian.” The signature projects were embedded into the “benchmarks” that were supposed to be reported on by the Canadian government every quarter.

The decision to adopt this as Canadian strategy was breathtakingly narrow, given the extant circumstances in southern Afghanistan over the past several years. It was almost as if the insurgency did not exist to the strategy's formulators. There was some language about a “fierce insurgency” but the Canadian goals and signature projects suggested that “providing core services” would increase government legitimacy and would therefore prevail when shielded by more effective Afghan security forces. This approach completely ignored how legitimacy operated in Kandahari political culture. There was no understanding of the role of religion in Kandahari social and political life, let alone was there any understanding as to the relationship between religion, schools and education.

Furthermore, there was no recognition that Al Qaeda played any role in Canada's involvement in Afghanistan in the first place, nor was there any recognition that Al Qaeda was displaced back in 2001–2002 and essentially rendered comparatively impotent in part because Afghanistan was now under new management. The reality was that Kandahar was a series of operational-level problems that were aggravated by a resurgent Al Qaeda ally

or affiliates supported by entities in Pakistan. The problems with the Kandahari power structure, on the other hand, were connected to both Kabul and to criminal entities that crossed international boundaries. Those manufacturing the new strategy, now, artificially disconnected these strategic-level issues from what Canada wanted to achieve in Kandahar. Furthermore, the means of measuring Canadian effectiveness in Kandahar played to a domestic Canadian audience and were connected to some, and not all, of the operational-level problems in the province.

Operation TOLO: Regional Command (South)'s New Operational Framework

The Regional Command (South) headquarters led by Lessard completely reassessed the situation in September in light of the summer's events. The new framework plan, Operation TOLO, was less convoluted than previous plans when it came to identifying the threat. Yes, the Al Qaeda, Taliban, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and HiG enemies all remained the same. However, Iran was now identified as a weapons supplier. Pakistan was identified as a Taliban sanctuary, and the Quetta Shura was explicitly identified as providing strategic direction to the insurgency in Afghanistan. Even more forcibly, TOLO recognized that rogue elements of the Pakistani ISI, coupled with a recruiting effort in Pakistani Pashtun areas, Afghan refugee camps and madrassas provided large numbers of fighters that were pouring into Kandahar and Helmand. Indeed, Regional Command (South) confirmed that Helmand and Kandahar Provinces were the enemy's main efforts in Afghanistan.⁵

Operation TOLO clearly descended from the ADZ strategy of 2007 (see Figure 4-1). Regional Command (South) identified several priority focus areas in the region and these focus areas were to be subjected to the Shape-Clear-Hold-Build process. The difference this time was that all four lines of operation (security, governance, security force capacity-building, and reconstruction and development) were to be better coordinated and synchronized, and that ISAF forces were to partner with the Afghan police and army, not just mentor them. The objective of Operation TOLO was to reduce enemy influence for the next six months until the American influx could come in, whatever that might look like.

The focus areas that affected the Canadians in Kandahar were Zharey, Panjwayi, Arghandab, and Maywand. These districts were to be cleared. The existing Hold was to be "deepened" in Spin Boldak and Kandahar City. Maywand District particularly was to be a pilot project for Shape-Clear-Hold-Build. Keeping Highway 1 open remained a priority. Regional Command (South) planners clearly stated that ISAF lacked resources to do anything else outside this schema, and that higher headquarters (and for that matter critics of the effort in Afghanistan) should manage their expectations.

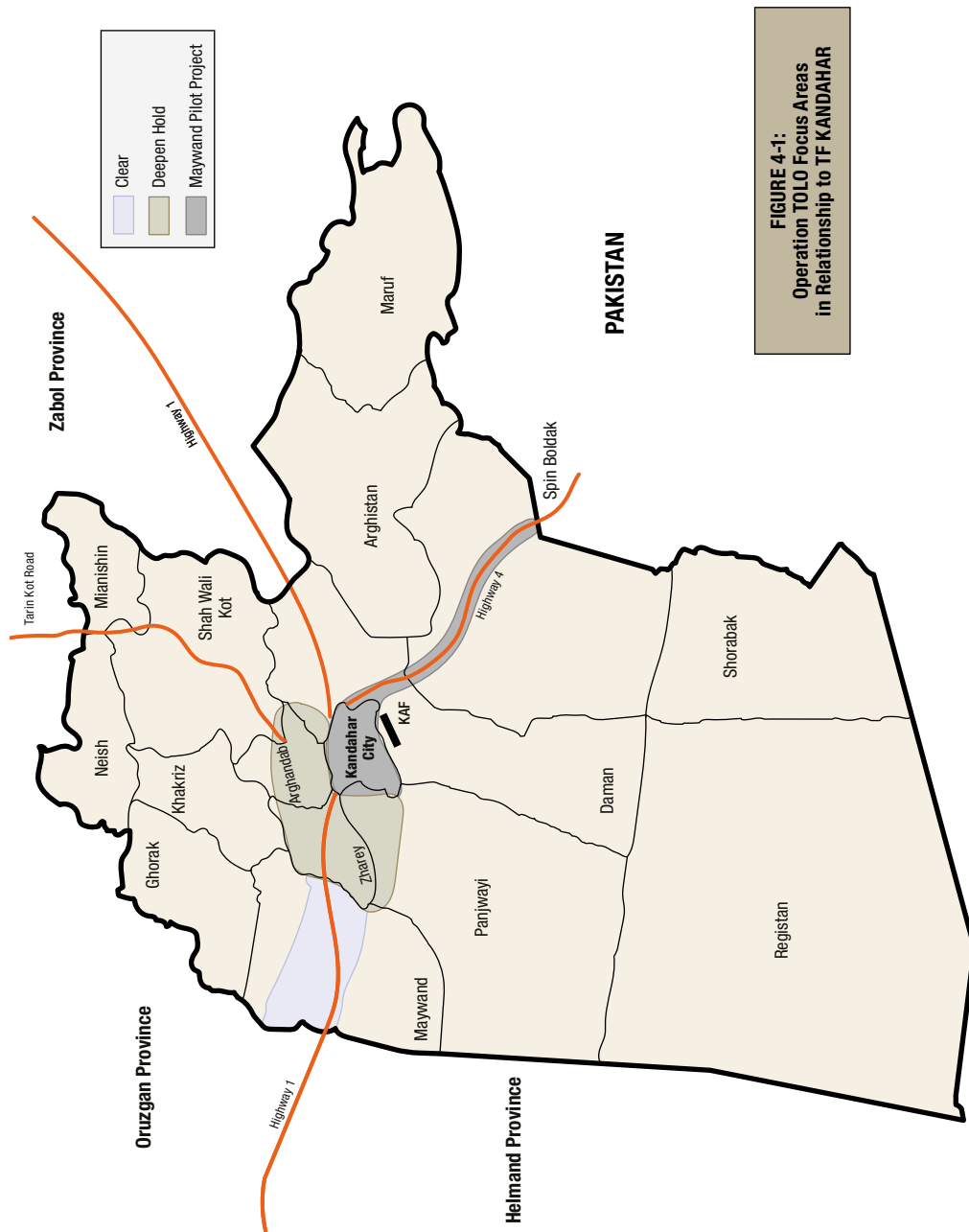


FIGURE 4-1:
Operation TOLO Focus Areas
in Relationship to TF KANDAHAR

Figure 4-1: Operation TOLO Focus Areas in Relationship to TF Kandahar

Unlike previous plans, Operation TOLO recognized that there were severe governance problems in the southern region, especially at the provincial level. Canadians in Regional Command (South) noted that Ahmad Wali Karzai in Kandahar, Sher Mohammad Akhundzada in Helmand, and Jan Mohammad Khan in Oruzgan were all endorsed by President Karzai and functioned as the Popalzai power structure in the south. It was increasingly difficult for Regional Command (South) to differentiate between inter-tribal, familial, criminal and insurgent activities. Operation TOLO was a sober, realistic assessment and confirmed that the game was evolving yet again. It also recognized that the forces in place were holding the line, awaiting reinforcement and there were limits as to what could be accomplished until that took place.

Task Force Afghanistan: The Thompson View

TF Afghanistan now had to reconcile the Canadian strategic dimension and Operation TOLO with its Interim Provincial Action Plan, now called the Kandahar Action Plan. Frustrated with the process, BGen Denis Thompson later said that “David Mulroney and ‘his’ six priority programmes” were “irrelevant” to the effort in Kandahar. “I watched them at work and I did not care. Why did we not establish ‘winning the war’ as a priority?” Thompson told Mulroney that there were 30 things that needed to be done in Kandahar. Canada was going to do six, but those six were not relevant to Afghans. Who was going to handle the other 24? Canada did not prioritize electricity, for example, so when PRT commander LCol Dana Woodworth had meetings and asked who was going to handle this, the Canadian civilian representatives had their hands tied by the “Six Priorities.” The Americans leapt on board with the electricity issue: “They understand influence, we do not.”⁶

Thompson chose to focus TF Kandahar’s efforts on the objects of his operational philosophy instead and not get too caught up with what he viewed as another “distraction.” Thompson, by this time, was moving toward the view (encouraged by the Canadians in Regional Command (South)) that Kandahar City was not necessarily under control. That needed to be addressed. The issue here for the Thompson headquarters, and for BGen Jon Vance, who was working up plans with his staff to replace Thompson in early 2009, was that fighting inside Kandahar City with conventional coalition troops was simply not an option. The American experience with Fallujah in Iraq back in 2004 loomed in the background.⁷ Fallujah, a city of 250 000 inhabitants and about less than half the geographic size of Kandahar City, became a resistance no-go zone and then a terrorist sanctuary. The first entry into Fallujah by four American battalions was repulsed in April 2004. In December 2004, it took two brigades to clear and then hold the city. There was massive

damage and substantial loss of civilian life.⁸ ISAF, let alone Canada, lacked the forces and the will to conduct any similar operations. There had to be other alternatives but those tended to be subsumed under the weight of the plethora of other issues at hand.

Second, Thompson spent more time looking at the dimensions of the insurgency and what TF Kandahar could do about that. He believed that the insurgency had four pressure points:

1. sanctuary: recruits, training and money;
2. infiltration routes: safe passage to and from operating areas;
3. resupply nodes: leadership, arms, ammo, medical; and
4. support of the population: intelligence and food.

The Operational Philosophy described as the Define-Shape-Clear-Hold-Build-Enable schema, remained viable to address some of these.⁹ However, there had to be more focus at the sub-district level, not merely at the district level, in order to establish an enduring presence.

For Thompson and his staff, the means of “deepening the hold” and “protecting the hold” were crucial. This involved¹⁰

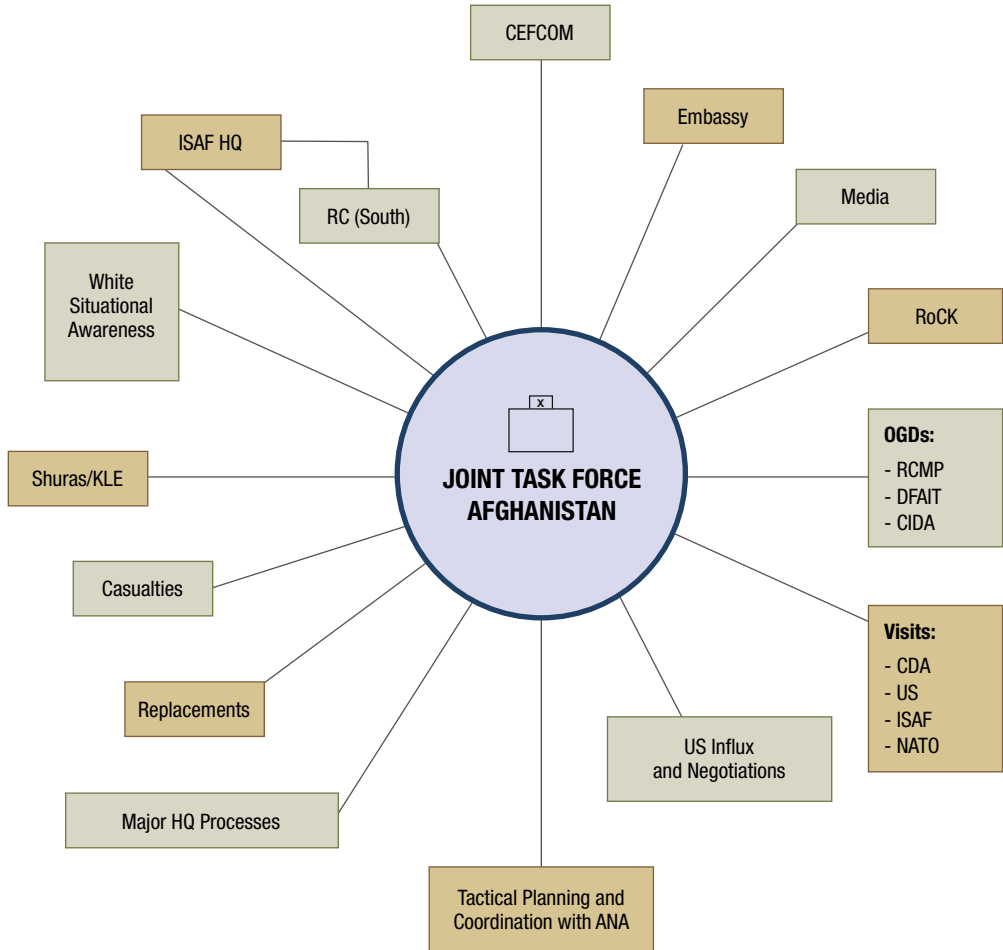
1. joint day and night patrols;
2. quick reaction to both incidents and intelligence threat warnings and indications;
3. support to initial BUILD/ENABLE efforts;
4. securing lines of communication;
5. intelligence-cued direct actions against insurgent nodes;
6. active targeting of insurgent leadership;
7. sustained disrupt operations to DEFINE and SHAPE; and
8. monitoring population attitudes.

A key “benchmark,” in Thompson’s vision, was having “platoon-sized police stations at the sub-district level with professionalized police, that aggressively patrol their patch, being both visible and respected by the population.” Dahla Dam, polio eradication, and schools had little or nothing to do with this. In effect, the long-standing tension between “security” and “development” remained in play. Police professionalization was now “number one priority.” Second was the acquisition of another Afghan National Army kandak to free up the police. The incoming battle group, TF 3-08, based on 3rd Battalion, The Royal Canadian Regiment, was to deepen the hold in Pashmul, Asheque, Panjwayi, Sperwan and Arghandab, and protect the hold across Zharey, Panjwayi, Arghandab and lower Shah Wali Kot and, as directed, support the Dahla Dam project. 2-2 Infantry out in Maywand was to deepen and protect the hold in Hupal, clear Band-e Timor, define and shape Garmabak Pass, and secure Ghorak District Centre. The PRT was to now coordinate Build-Enable efforts through the Joint District Coordination Centres, an important change. CIVPOL would continue with police training and the Kandahar City Security Plan. The OMLT would relinquish its role at TF Zharey and focus on police professionalization and rifle kandak capacity development.¹¹

TF Kandahar should have been solely focused on these activities. The reality was, however, that there was a finite amount of potential human effort in the JTF-A headquarters, and operational activities were only part of what the headquarters was doing. In essence, TF Kandahar was overwhelmed by too many inputs and it had to respond to all of them (see Figure 4-2). Of these, visits were one of the most problematic as the balance between maintaining support from interested parties in Canada, and the absorptive capacity of a headquarters and its units to show them the war swung back and forth. Another was the large amount of reporting that TF Kandahar had to do: Regional Command (South), ISAF HQ, CEFCOM, the OGDs, the Cabinet Committee on Afghanistan, and so on. Casualty reporting (both men and machines) and investigations of significant incidents assumed higher priority than in any other past war because of their possible information operations impact.¹² Tactical planning with the Afghan National Army’s 1-205 Brigade was a painstaking process due in equal parts to language and the differences between Canadian and a quasi-Soviet staff systems.¹³

There was only one Development Advisor from CIDA (Jean McCardle). The Representative of Canada in Kandahar (Elissa Golberg) essentially subsumed the Political Advisor position. They had few staff members and in some ways, both attempted to use the PRT as a headquarters surrogate because they could not get more people from Ottawa. This conflicted with PRT operations, which, in turn, caught LCol Woodworth in the middle. There was inevitable interdepartmental friction, which reduced the efficiency of the mechanism. At the same time, ISAF believed that the PRT and OMLT should

FIGURE 4-2:
Pressures, Inputs, and Reporting –
Joint Task Force Afghanistan Headquarters,
2008



*Based on a discussion between the author and Col Jamie Cade, DComd JTF-A HQ, July 2008

Figure 4-2: Pressures, Inputs and Reporting – Joint Task Force Afghanistan, 2008

report to NATO and not a national chain of command and were confounded when Canada effectively ignored ISAF HQ's efforts to suggest that it needed to report progress directly to it.¹⁴ All of these factors challenged Thompson's desire to "deepen the hold." He believed in retrospect, that the senior civilian position for Kandahar should have been a NATO position and not a Canadian one.¹⁵

The Fall 2008 Relief in Place

By 2008, army planners moved away from summertime relief in place operation and shifted it to late September. Though it was still brutally warm, climatic conditions were nowhere near as extreme as they were in July–August. The relief in place methodology was also improved and, with the new C-17 Globemaster III transports with their defensive systems and huge carrying capacity coming online, relief in place operations became much more efficient. All of this ensured that Canadian soldiers arrived and acclimatized better than before with obviously increased effects on the ground.

The relief in place was conducted throughout September and completed on the 26th of that month. Transfer of authority from LCol Dave Corbould and the 2 PPCLI-led battle group to LCol Roger Barrett and the 3 RCR-led battle group, took place on 21 September. The battle group consisted of M and N Companies, led by Maj Cayle Oberwarth and Maj Rob McBride, respectively; A Squadron, LdSH, led by Maj Ian McDonnell; a Recce Squadron from RCD, led by Maj Dean Tremblay; F Battery, led by Maj Stu Taylor; and the 24 Field Squadron, led by Maj Matt Sandy. The OMLT also changed hands with personnel from 1 RCR, led by Col Joe Shipley, taking over from 3 PPCLI. Personnel from 1 RCR replaced the 3 PPCLI-led OMLT. The NSE rotated as well, with LCol Steve Blair and his team taking over from LCol Casey Horlock and his staff.

Consequently, operations in the districts were conducted by a combination of both rotations for a time in September. The U.S. Army's 2-2 Infantry under LTC Hurlbut had a different rotation schedule and remained in place for nearly a year. As before, the bulk of battle group and OMLT operations were focused on four districts: Panjwayi, Zharey, Arghandab and Maywand.

The Character of the Insurgency in Late 2008

The insurgency in Kandahar Province ran into serious supply and command problems by the summer of 2008. In an interesting parallel, Taliban commanders in Panjwayi complained to the Quetta Shura that too many resources were being allocated to their counterparts in Helmand, and that Kandahar City should be the focus of their operations. The Quetta Shura informed some of the Kandahar commanders that they were reinforcing success: the aggressive counternarcotics programme in Helmand fed the insurgency because of the

grievances it generated, and the Helmand commanders were more willing to get into the fight than their brethren in Kandahar, so the resources went to them. This led to insurgent infighting throughout the summer.¹⁶

As a result of this and the fact that the Ramadan holiday was approaching, numerous Taliban commanders returned to their safe haven in Pakistan earlier than usual. However, the Quetta Shura leadership ordered them back in and gave them dispensation to wage war during Ramadan. By September, the enemy leaders were back in place in Zharey and Panjwayi. In Zharey, the insurgents, led by Sadiq Agha, re-infiltrated Senjaray. Over in Panjwayi, there was a slow build-up of Nakhonay as a logistics and command node under Mullah Qasim. The supply “ratlines” from Helmand to Maywand to the Horn of Panjwayi were revitalized and enhanced with new ones coming in from the Reg Desert. The consolidation of their bases in Zangabad and Nahlgam occurred concurrently.¹⁷ (See Figure 4-3.)

The Nakhonay build-up led to increased insurgent intimidation in Dand but it also restored linkages to Kandahar City’s District 6. That, in turn, paved the way for a massive assassination and intimidation campaign launched in late October and continued well into the new year. At the same time, the northern Kandahar Taliban groups altered their approach to Arghandab in part because they were under new leadership. Instead of driving in, establishing a “liberated zone” and then getting kicked out by coalition action, these groups now conducted their own “shaping” campaign, which employed intimidation as the lead element, followed by selective assassination. In both Arghandab and Kandahar City, the Taliban started with random acts: security targets of opportunity, like a cop on beat patrol. By November, the campaign escalated into high-profile killings of prominent government and security personalities.¹⁸

The new insurgent emphasis on eastern Panjwayi led to more rocket attacks against KAF launched from the northwest rocket box. The Pakistan–Maruf–Arghistan–Daman supply route remained in play, with rockets supplied to “non-insurgent insurgents” in Daman.¹⁹

By mid-fall, Canadian analysts saw increased linkages between different insurgent groups within the province and between them and the groups in Helmand. For example, one group in Helmand called on other insurgent groups to support it and mounted the June 2008 Arghandab incursion similar to its November 2007 predecessor. Other insurgent groups were not convinced of the efficacy or probability of success, so they hoarded equipment, supplies and fighters, and did not support the Helmand operations. With new missives from Mullah Omar and the Quetta Shura, coupled with new leadership, these links seemed to be stronger by late 2008. The Helmand/Maywand/Zharey/ Panjwayi complex was stronger than the Ghorak/Khakrez/Shah Wali Kot groups, but that was changing and the new insurgent emphasis on Senjaray, which geographically linked Zharey with Khakrez and

FIGURE 4-3:
Enemy Dispositions and Activity,
Late 2008

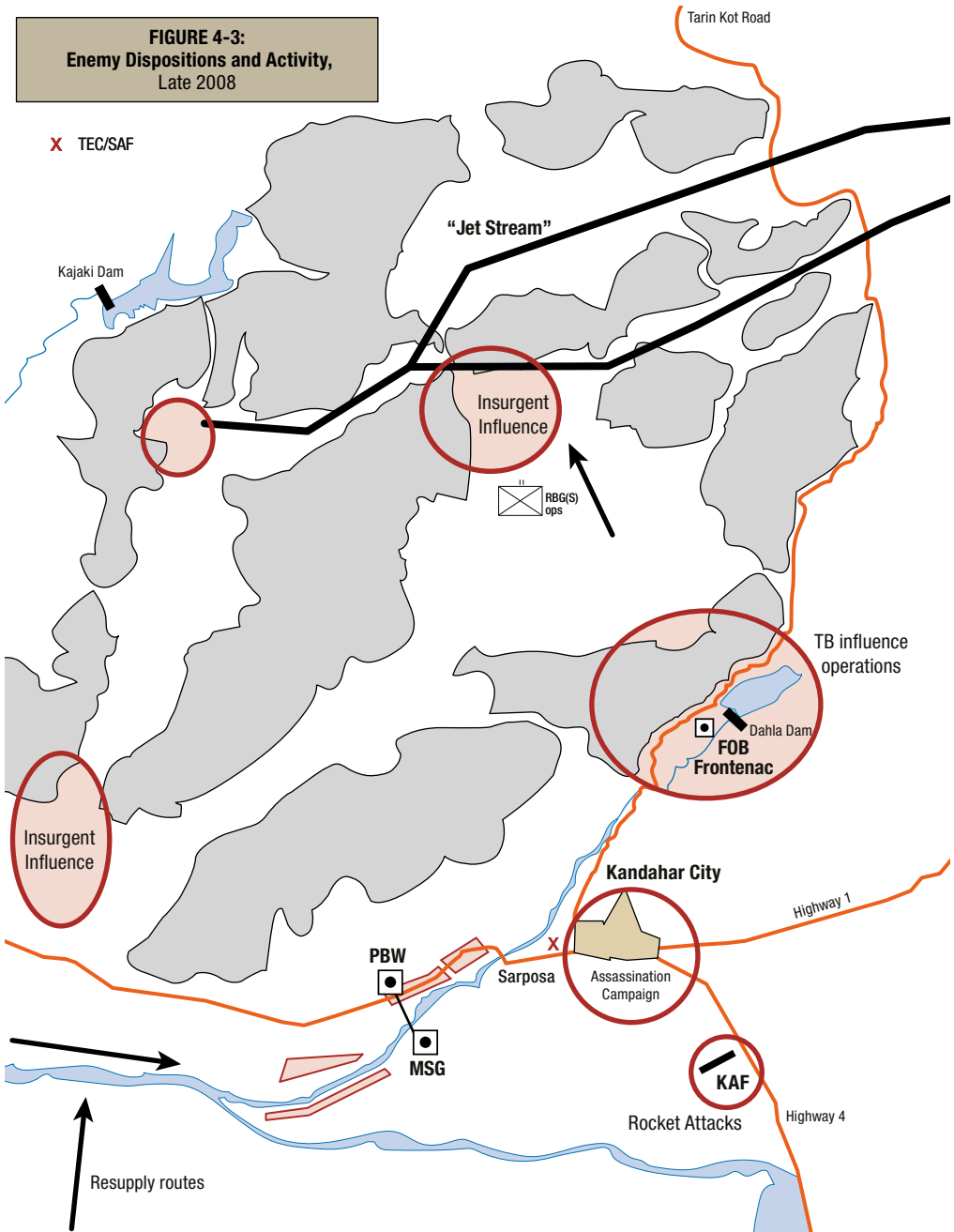


Figure 4-3: Enemy Dispositions and Activity, Late 2008

Arghandab, was one indicator.²⁰ The Quetta Shura became increasingly concerned, as its city-based assassination campaign gained momentum, that “dissident elements” were taking matters into their own hands and killing people for purposes not related to the movement’s aims. Their solution was to craft a form night letter to ensure the veracity of the threat and confirm that the assassination was legitimate.²¹ The insurgency also appeared to strengthen its shadow governance in fall 2008. Canadian analysts picked up on the appointment of more and more shadow “district governors.” For example, Arghandab now had a Taliban parallel governor as well as a parallel judge.²²

Panjwayi District Operations, September 2008

By September 2008, the pro-government forces lay down consisted of:

1. Strong Point Mushan, manned by Afghan National Army troops from 2nd Kandak and Canadian mentors;
2. Patrol Base Sperwan Ghar, which held the infantry company headquarters, a Canadian artillery troop and engineers;
3. COP Zangabad and Haji, manned by Canadian infantry;
4. FOB Ma’Sum Ghar, with the tanks squadron, OMLT HQ, and CMT-1;
5. a plethora of police and army checkpoints in and around Bazaar-e Panjwayi, including Three Tank Hill slightly south of the town; and
6. the New District Centre east of the town.

A police checkpoint on Route Fosters East was also in place at Salehan. A combination of Canadian P-OMLT, American police mentors, and a DynCorp logistics expert mentored the Panjwayi police forces as much as possible. (See Figure 4-4.)

Despite the removal of COP Talukan during Operation MUTAFIQ TANDAR, Canadian forces remained “trapped in the TI” and surrounded with large numbers of homemade IEDs and anti-tank mines. The enemy now employed more and more PMN anti-personnel mines. This situation forced the Canadians to continue the heavily armed resupply operations for Mushan, Zangabad and Haji. The battle group had to strike a balance between four activities:

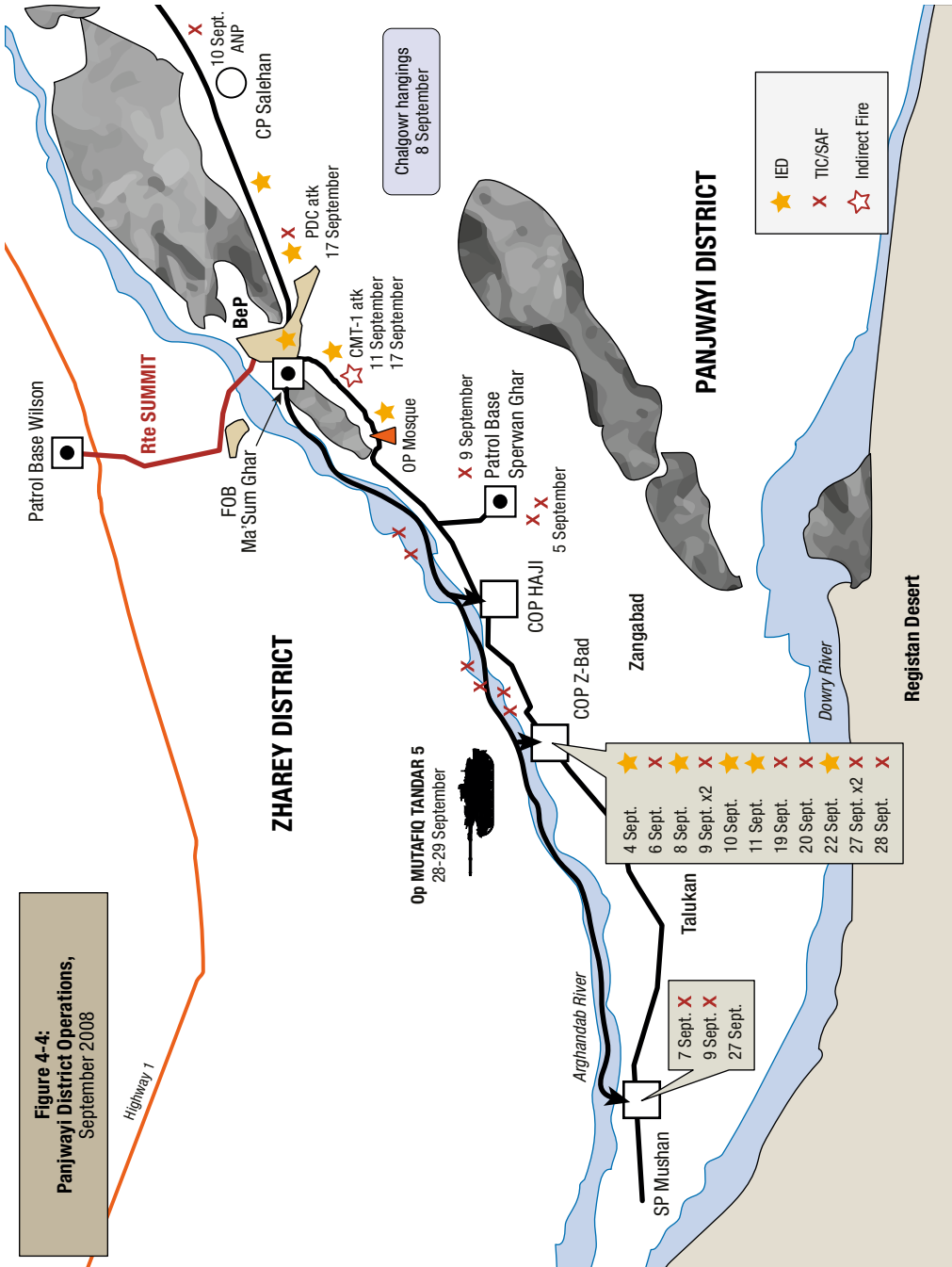


Figure 4-4: Panjwayi District Operations, September 2008

1. the MUTAFIQ TANDAR “river runs”;
2. morning “route sweeps” along the roads looking for nocturnally placed IEDs;
3. an irregular patrol schedule which launched forces into the Zangabad communities;
4. the provision of protection or QRF assistance for the CMT-1 working the Fosters West paving project; and
5. the patrol of Stability Box SPERWAN in support of police and CIMIC efforts there.

Essentially, this applied to the 2nd Kandak companies deployed in Panjwayi as well. If the battle group commander wanted to conduct a larger operation elsewhere, this meant reducing one or even more of these activities, which, in turn, had spillover effects on the stability of the district.

The enemy probably understood this dilemma. As a result, approximately a quarter of enemy activity that month was directed against COP Zangabad. The removal of COP Talukan, ironically, permitted the insurgents to direct more resources against Zangabad and Mushan and it opened a gap that permitted the insurgent network in the southern part of the horn of Panjwayi better communications with the Nahlgam network in Zharey. From 4 September to 28 September, COP Zangabad was subjected to 14 attacks. Five of these amounted to mortar harassment: a single round or two flung at the position. Others involved coordinated small-arms fire from multiple directions aimed at the small fort and its tower. On 4 September, for example, 3 Platoon responded to fire from south and west of the combat outpost by deploying a LAV III outside the position, supported by a pair of OH-58D recce helicopters to engage the shooters.²³ Three days later, the insurgents mounted an identical operation: the combat outpost occupants called in 155mm fire instead.²⁴ The annoying mortar was eventually identified and engaged using counter-battery detection systems and artillery but another was soon in action. Interestingly, an informant in the village where the mortar was kept reported its presence to the Panjwayi police and National Directorate of Security and volunteered to mark it and call the Joint District Coordination Centre the next time it deployed.²⁵ Again, on 9 September, two section-sized enemy elements poured fire at the combat outpost, which provoked a response with LAV III 25mm fire and 155mm artillery fire. Enemy operations dropped off for nearly a week.²⁶

Strong Point Mushan, on the other hand, was only involved in three incidents during the entire month of September. The Afghan National Army and the Canadian mentors were able to patrol the bazaar and keep the security bubble propped up.²⁷ As for Stability Box SPERWAN, the insurgents ran into a Recce Platoon disruption patrol, probed the gate area trying to determine where the sniper detachment was, and then backed off and resorted to night letter intimidation in the box.²⁸ The Fosters West paving project had its civilian workers ambushed on 4 September; they were shot at in a drive-by incident on 11 September, and then mortared on 27 September, but work continued. Two nasty IED attacks occurred on Fosters West: the Afghan police were the targets.²⁹



Photo Credit: Author

Synchronizing development with counter-insurgency operations produced ad hoc forces like the Construction Management Organization and its Construction Management Teams. With the Canadian International Development Agency unable to provide capabilities in Zharey and Panjwayi, Construction Management Team 1, pictured here on Route Fosters, worked to employ local people in infrastructure improvement projects.

The situation in Panjwayi East focused on the area east of Bazaar-e Panjwayi. A routine road move by Canadian troops along Fosters East was targeted with an IED that flipped a LAV III onto its side, killing Sgt Scott Shipway and wounding seven other Canadian soldiers. An Afghan police patrol working the road east of checkpoint Salehan was ambushed. Chillingly, the insurgents resorted to extreme intimidation in Chalghowr

on 8 September, where they hanged four Afghan civilians accused of working for the government. A number of Fosters paving project workers were also kidnapped and taken to Salavat, beaten and released. The insurgents escalated their intimidation campaign on 17 September, when they deployed a suicide bomber into Bazaar-e Panjwayi. An Afghan police patrol with Canadian P-OMLT mentors encountered this man, who raised his arms and chanted, revealing the bomb. The Canadians shot and killed him before he could detonate the device. That day, insurgents attacked the New District Centre and deployed another IED against it.³⁰

Sorting out who was responsible for what piece of the security puzzle remained the prerogative of the district leader, the security shura and the Joint District Coordination Centre. The main concern was the significantly increased enemy activity in and around Bazaar-e Panjwayi and points east. The biggest problem was the policing situation. Incredibly, the P-OMLT determined that only one-third of the police in Panjwayi had gone through Focused District Development training. Qualified personnel had been redeployed to Kandahar City and elsewhere by the provincial chief of police, leaving Panjwayi, once again, in the hands of unqualified police who antagonized the civilian population, especially around Three Tank Hill.³¹



Photo Credit: Author

An increase in violence in Bazaar-e Panjwayi led to an Afghan National Army and police patrolling surge in the town. Here, Capt Chuck Pitkin and his Afghan counterparts arrest members of an illegally armed group on the main road.

Finally, Brig.-Gen. Matiullah fired the district chief of police, Essa Khan. And Bismillah Khan, who had previously been fired by Matiullah's predecessor, was brought back in. This did not bode well: Khan was a friend of Haji Baran and had connections to the Dastagiri group. The P-OMLT predicted this would lead to trouble in the future.³² The combined pressure of the P-OMLT, the American Police Mentoring Team, and DynCorp was applied to Khan at a Joint District Coordination Centre meeting, where he was told that they would not put up with any shenanigans. Bismillah Khan surprised everybody by conducting an aggressive sweep of insurgent ambush positions on Fosters West. On the downside, the 2nd Kandak commander had problems with Khan in the past and refused to cooperate on joint patrols. The Canadians on the OMLT, the P-OMLT and the Joint District Coordination Centre worked to improve the relationships in order to gain the synergy they wanted, but it was glacier-like progress.³³

The police mentors were pleasantly surprised, however, with the arrival of Mohammad Nabi from Kandahar City. Brig.-Gen. Matiullah was no fool and wanted his man propping up Bismillah Jan. Nabi was a professional and experienced officer and set out to build a proper support structure to facilitate Khan's operations. However, on 16 September, the New District Centre was attacked with small-arms fire. While Canadian artillery provided illumination, the police QRF, led by Nabi, was ambushed on the way to the firefight by a separate insurgent element. Nabi was badly wounded and later died. This was yet another blow to district security.³⁴ The police later apprehended nine insurgents who admitted to assassinating Nabi. In a convoluted sequence of events, the triggermen escaped from National Directorate of Security custody in Panjwayi after having been repatriated there inexplicably from the holding facility in Kandahar City! Haji Baran used this incident to place doubts in the Canadians' minds about the reliability of the police.³⁵

More problematic were revelations from the Joint District Coordination Centre about Haji Baran:

The [district leader] mentioned for the first time that he had what he called "legitimate connections" with insurgents. He told us that the NDS chief in Kandahar City introduced him to several individuals that were working for the government and was told to support them wherever possible. One of the insurgents talked to him on the phone from Band-e Timor in front of us. The DL expects to receive valuable information from this man in the future and he was adamant that this issue not be discussed.³⁶

Ironically, however, Baran was formally accredited as the district leader, which now meant that DFAIT representatives from the PRT would now deal with him. Lara Romaniuk subsequently came out for talks with Baran in mid-September.³⁷

The main event for the incoming battle group, however, was Operation MUTAFIQ TANDAR 5. Mushan, Zangabad and Haji needed resupply and it was now A Squadron's turn. Led by Maj McDonnell, the combat team worked its way down the Arghandab River on 28 September. The first contact consisted of five suspected insurgents emplacing a mortar: embarrassingly, the mortar turned out to be a water pump. There were no civilian casualties. Moving on toward Zangabad, the column was engaged three times with combinations of small-arms, RPG and 82mm recoilless rifle fire supported with mortars. The tanks fired back with 120mm canister and HEAT rounds, while the 25mm cannons from the LAV IIIs picked off the enemy as they sought to reposition the ambushes. The joint terminal attack controller was able to vector a U.S. Marine Corps F-18 onto a mortar position, destroying it with GBU-38 bombs. As the armoured column breached into the combat outpost, they were engaged with five rounds of mortar fire. M-777 artillery took out that position.

The combat engineers used their Badger AEVs to make improvements to the Zangabad positions while the armoured leaguer resupplied the forces. LCol Barrett believed that "The large amount of combat power that pushed down the Arghandab River will undoubtedly draw the insurgents' attention throughout the [Zharey and Panjwayi area] and I expect the insurgents to engage the combat team on its return to FOB Ma'Sum Ghar."³⁸ There were two small attempts by the enemy to interfere with the movement back along the river but the battle group reported that the enemy broke contact on both occasions. The reality was this: MUTAFIQ TANDAR did not draw enemy resources or attention away from eastern Panjwayi, nor did it seem to materially affect enemy operations in western Panjwayi. The enemy were fighting a different war in the eastern part of the district while in the west it was not clear who was pinning whom down.

Zharey District Operations, September 2008

The security forces lay down in Zharey District by September had combinations of Canadian mentors and their police and army counterparts in seven locations. There were strong points at Ghundy Ghar, Lakokhel and Pulchakan situated 2 kilometres south of Highway 1, with four more, Howz-e Madad, Spin Pir, FOB Wilson and Asheque on Highway 1. Stability Box JUNO had a sub-district police station, and the former FOB Zettelmeyer, now used by the Blue Hackle private security force. The PSSs Sangsar and Kolk were now closed and efforts to build another along Route Langley ended with the collapse of the CMT-2 road project. BGen Laroche's plan to encircle the insurgents in

central Zharey with a lattice of police sub-stations connected by paved roads was recognized at this point as completely untenable. And, as events in September demonstrated once again, it was the Canadians and Afghans who were being contained by being forced to defend tactical infrastructure which, in turn, limited their ability to patrol and project an enduring presence in the district. (See Figure 4-5a and b.)

On the plus side, the enemy was unable to mount large ambushes along Highway 1 due to the combined effects of Operation LUMBAR and due the casualties incurred by Operations TIMUS PREEM and ASP-E JANUBI. The only ambushes west of FOB Wilson were on the highway, and this was limited to two events in September. These occurred east of Spin Pir in the area north of where the former PSSs Sangsar and Kolk would have interfered with enemy north-south movement.

Canadian operations focused initially on Operation JANGISIOUX patrolling around Patrol Base Wilson and into the communities west of Route Summit in Stability Box JUNO. These were usually platoon-sized presence and disruption patrols. Early on, most of the patrolling matrix related to Highway 1 security: the OMLT and the Afghans from 3rd Kandak, plus whatever police could be mustered, did morning route sweeps and tried to do night patrols around the strong points when they could. Another patrol area was Pashmul North, pointing west, where the new police station was under construction. For September, there was minimal contact in the JANGISIOUX patrol area and along Highway 1. The Pashmul North area was hotter. CMT-2 was pulled away from the cancelled Route Langley job and was working up a project with local people to clear the irrigation system around Route Summit when they were ambushed on 2 September. The engineers returned fire and the enemy broke contact. The following day, a mounted patrol from C Company was engaged with 82mm recoilless rifle fire. The HEAT round penetrated the vehicle's armour, detonating the ammunition, and killing Cpl Andrew Grenon, Cpl Michael Seggie and Pte Chad Horn. Five more Canadians were wounded in the strike.³⁹ MCpl Michael Bursey and Cpl Mark Ejdrygiewicz, while under enemy fire, repeatedly went into the LAV III, whose ammunition was starting to cook off, and extricated the casualties. Pte Jordan Kochan worked to keep them alive while under high volumes of enemy fire until the QRF could arrive. All three men were awarded the Medal of Military Valour for their actions.

C Company got one up on the insurgents during a patrol on 15 September: a premature IED firing alerted the Canadian platoon that they were about to get ambushed and then found themselves engaged from three separate positions with small arms and RPGs. The Canadians laid down suppressive fire and called in the M-777s. Sixty-two 155mm high explosive rounds shredded the enemy in their positions.⁴⁰ Inexplicably, there was no more enemy activity in the JUNO area until 30 September, when an Afghan police patrol got into a TIC and conducted a fighting withdrawal back to PSS Pashmul North.

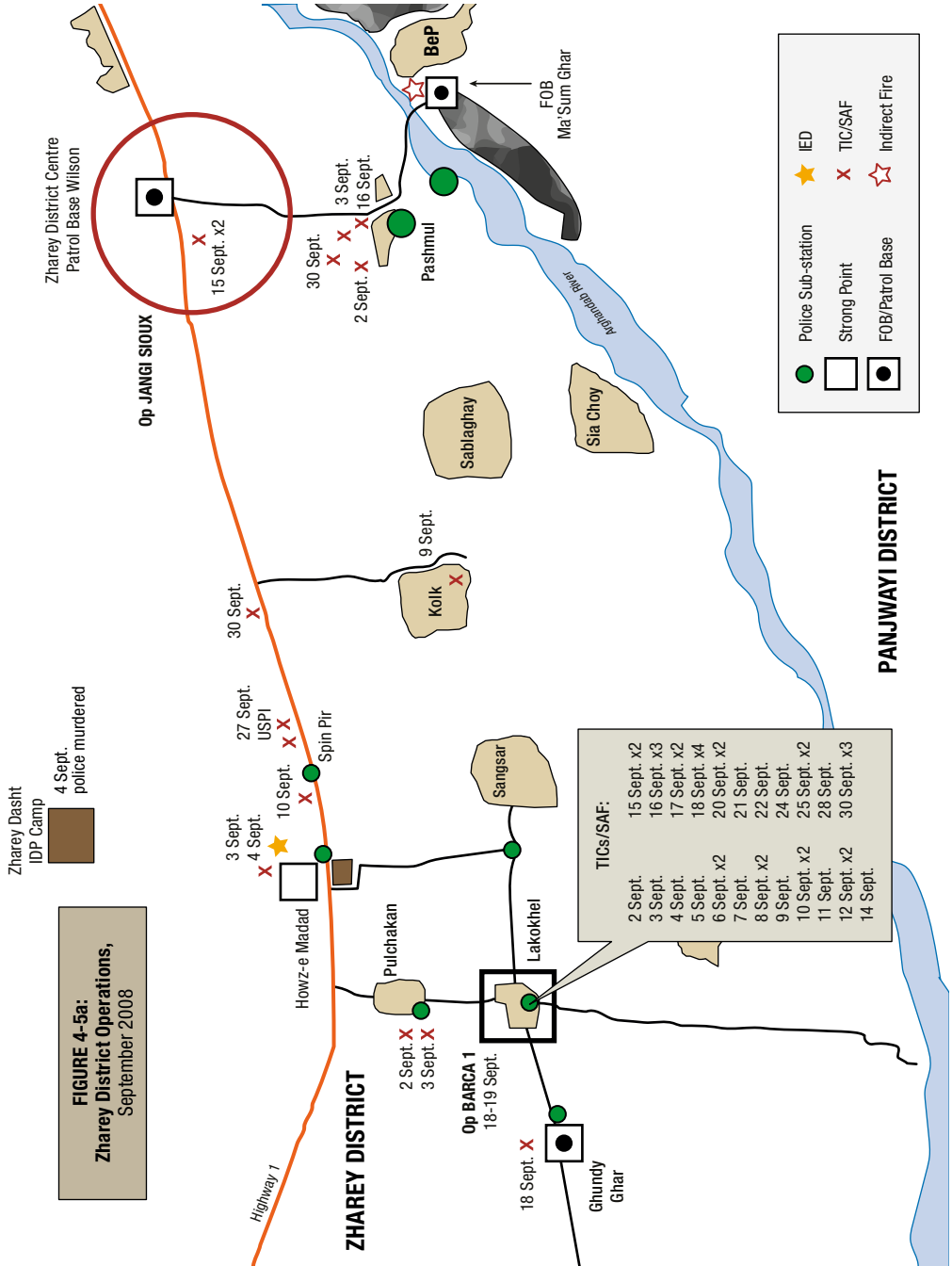


Figure 4-5a: Zharey District Operations, September 2008

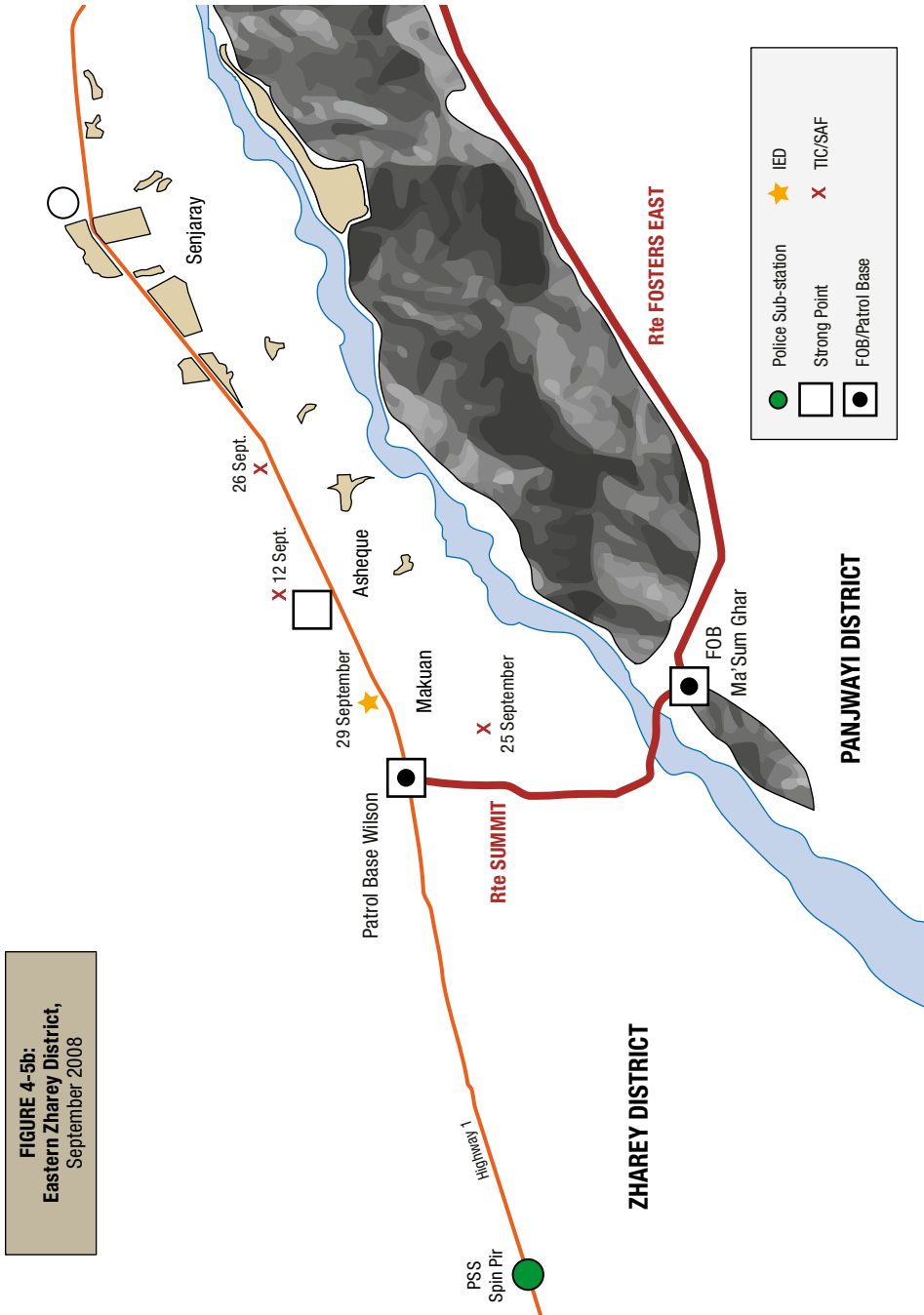


FIGURE 4-5b:
Eastern Zharey District,
September 2008

Figure 4-5b: Eastern Zharey District, September 2008

In September, the bulk of the action centred on Strong Point Lakokhel. For an incredible 23 days, the occupants of Lakokhel, 2nd Company from 3rd Kandak and their Canadian mentors from team 73B, were subjected to every type of weapon that the insurgency had in its arsenal at the time. For the most part, the insurgents used “shoot and scoot” attacks: these involved a small number of rounds fired at the strong point by a small force that immediately dispersed and disappeared into the lush fields and dilapidated compound complexes nearby. After the first five days, the battle group planned Operation BARCA to clear the nearby compounds and demolish them using contractors. The contractors refused to show up, so BARCA was delayed. The Canadian mentors were prepared when they sortied on patrol on 6 September. The enemy engaged the first patrol but the mentors were able to call in an Excalibur strike, which ended the contact. A second patrol was engaged later that day: a 2,000-pound GBU-31 bomb and 12 rounds of 155mm fire silenced the enemy fire. That evening, an enemy sniper fired a round at the Afghan command post.⁴¹



Photo Credit: Courtesy of Captain Sheldon Maerz

On 3 September 2008, the enemy attacked a LAV III with an 82mm recoilless rifle, killing three and wounding five Canadians. Three Canadians were awarded the Medal of Military Valour for their actions in the rescue. This photo, taken from Three Tank Hill, shows the smoke pall from the burning LAV III and the subsequent artillery strike by the M-777s against the ambushers.

After four more days of “shoot and scoot,” an Afghan army resupply convoy was ambushed on its way to Lakokhel, with no casualties, but on 10 September an IED wounded members of a patrol. Three more “shoot and scoot” contacts, followed by RPG attacks against another resupply convoy, resulted in another round of 155mm fire directed at the elusive opponents. The TF Kandahar intelligence staff concluded that the enemy wanted to pressurize the Afghans to remove Lakokhel as it was interfering with their freedom of movement in western Zharey. The mentors asked for more UAV coverage to help define the enemy but after a number of ambushes against patrol covered by UAVs, the combination of terrain and dispersion limited an effective and timely response.⁴²

On 18 September, Operation BARCA was finally launched. BARCA brought in 3rd Company and its Canadian mentors, plus a Canadian LAV III platoon and combat engineers with Badger AEVs. The Afghans and mentors provided the cordon while the engineers swept and then bulldozed compounds to clear fields of fire. Unfortunately, after 50% of the task was completed, both Badgers broke down from coolant leaks and blown seals. The enemy engaged the cordon but again they could not be defined or engaged. The next day, three “shoot and scoot” contacts occurred and then the enemy attacked a LAV III with an RPG. Eleven rounds of 155mm high explosive were brought down, and an OH-58D helicopter took out “squirters.”⁴³ MCpl Michael Trauner’s vehicle was hit with the RPG, which disabled its 25mm cannon. The flurry of enemy small-arms fire pinned down the dismounted troops. MCpl Trauner manned the pintle-mounted machine gun and laid down covering fire, and effectively suppressed the enemy attack, which allowed the troops to reorganize and defeat the enemy so that the team could continue with its mission. MCpl Trauner was awarded the Medal of Military Valour for his actions.

Five more days of “shoot and scoot,” followed by artillery fire directed at an enemy position, plus the inability to gain positive identification with an orbiting MQ-9 Reaper was enough. The Afghans brought in mortars and responded to the attacks, while plans were made to deploy Canadian snipers. The nearly month-long affair ended with a call for jihad against the Canadians broadcasted via mosque loudspeakers in the Lakokhel area.⁴⁴

Another problem that emerged for TF Kandahar by late September was the community of Senjaray. The destabilization of this important sub-district brought on by the assassination of Habibullah Jan and the removal of Asadullah Khalid’s militia after he departed produced dividends for the insurgents. The Zharey security shura was informed that the civilian population in Senjaray was in the process of conducting truce talks with the Taliban. Zharey District leader Sahardi told the Canadians that he “was strongly against this but has little influence as the [people] require a safe environment for the winter.” There were further reports that the population was now paying Zakat (a religious tithe) to the Taliban,⁴⁵ which meant the religious leadership in Senjaray was also compromised. LCol Barrett was

CHAPTER FOUR



Photo Credit: DND AR2008-J011-032



Photo Credit: DND AR2008-J011-043



Photo Credit: DND AR2008-1011-116

Raiding operations by 3rd Battalion, The Royal Canadian Regiment were conducted in Zharey District throughout fall 2008 as continual attempts were made to prop up the police sub-stations. This was one such operation in the Kolk area.

exceptionally concerned: he thought that if something was not done and soon, “operations during the winter would be compromised.”⁴⁶ Additionally, Senjaray’s special status with the Afghans going back to the Habibullah Jan days meant that the chief of police for Zharey District “does not have the power to influence Senjaray, nor does he control the [Afghan police] there.”⁴⁷ This was not surprising. There were few police in Zharey who were trained, and the district had still not undergone Focused District Development. There was a feud between the police and the National Directorate of Security: the Zharey police physically blocked the National Directorate of Security from giving information to the P-OMLT and the PRT detachment.⁴⁸ The police at the Zharey refugee camp were infiltrated and four murdered as they slept.⁴⁹ Contractors reported to the PRT that they feared being shot by the police if they complained to the CIMIC teams.⁵⁰ The Sisyphean efforts of the P-OMLT continued.

Arghandab District Operations, September 2008

Arghandab security forces consisted of Recce Squadron operating from FOB Frontenac, an Afghan infantry company with Canadian mentors based temporarily out of a school in Hasan Tabin, and a network of Afghan police checkpoints on main routes throughout the district. For the most part, a Canadian intelligence summary captured the state of affairs in September:

HUMINT reporting indicates insurgents have ceased their information operations activity in Arghandab. Intimidation, kidnapping, and assassination peaked in early August but decreased over the past two weeks. [The insurgents] feel their aim is achieved. This reporting also suggests insurgents have gained freedom of movement throughout the district, coerced support from the population, and that the ANP are not patrolling outside of their checkpoints...while insurgents may not be an immediate threat to the district, these reports are likely that local nations think otherwise. This perceived threat may have the effect the insurgents are after, and could possibly sever local national support to [the government and ISAF] if they feel they are not receiving the protection they think they need.⁵¹

This cogent piece of analysis was not effectively acted upon during the rest of 2008. The police, TF Kandahar confirmed, patrolled outside their checkpoints. Recce Squadron conducted numerous presence patrols and kept a watchful eye as much as it could on the district. The Afghan army company did effectively patrol from its location. CIMIC monitored the District Development Assembly as it went about its work. But none of this affected the population's perceptions. For example, elders told the Canadian recce soldiers that "whoever controls Jelawur controls Arghandab."⁵² But what did "control" mean? Physical occupation? Psychological dominance of anti-government tribal elements?

The district leader, Karimullah, was of limited assistance; he had been on extended leave in Dubai when the intimidation campaign was underway.⁵³ Canadian armoured soldiers in their Coyotes and Afghan police in their Rangers could not fill the leadership vacuum. But the insurgents, what senior Afghans now called "The Commission," could. This body apparently included all of the senior insurgent leadership for the northern districts.

As if to spite the ASIC, "The Commission" ramped up intimidation in September with a fresh series of kidnappings, 14 village leaders in four weeks, and a spate of night letters. The kidnapped people's families were forced to purchase weapons on the black market and turn them over to the insurgents in order to release their loved ones. Others were taken away, beaten and released. Recce Squadron took three IED strikes on 4, 12 and 21 September. None of these attacks were lethal but they mobility-killed three Coyotes which reduced Recce Squadron's patrolling sortie rate. Water resupply trucks headed for FOB Frontenac were also hit. By the end of the month, Recce Squadron was reporting an abnormal pattern of life involving increased numbers of fighting age males in northern Arghandab.⁵⁴

Maywand District Operations, September 2008

In Maywand District, the Canadian effort was in support of 2-2 Infantry as it expanded its operations throughout September. FOB Ramrod, the 2-2 Infantry base, was almost completed west of Hupal. There was FOB Hupal, which encompassed a facility near the

Maywand District Centre and included an American infantry company, Recon Company from 4th Kandak with Canadian mentors, a P-OMLT team and a Canadian CIMIC detachment from the PRT. Eventually, a pair of M-777 guns and their crew from [?] Battery deployed to FOB Ramrod to improve fire support coverage. There was a lot of cross-pollination between the Canadian, American and Afghan forces. American snipers went out with Canadian mentors and Afghan reconnaissance troops, while Canadian CIMIC worked with all comers. This included a USAID representative.

2-2 Infantry's familiarization included Operation MAWREGA, a sweep into Band-e Timor. 2-2 Infantry's intelligence staff determined that the bulk of overt enemy activity was up in the Garmabak area and that the insurgents tried to maintain a low profile in the southern part of the district because it was so crucial to keeping their Zharey efforts resupplied.⁵⁵ Unfortunately, 2-2 Infantry lost Pte Vincent C. Winston Jr. in a catastrophic IED attack that wounded four others during the operation.

There was a lot of positive activity happening in Maywand. The police were undergoing Focused District Development in September, and 125 newly trained police were due back from the Regional Training Center. A new district centre was under construction. Afghan National Civil Order Police provided effective security as CIMIC assessed that the National Solidarity Programme had, in fact, produced a significant number of wells. Canadian CIMIC facilitated USAID assessments in areas that were relatively permissive.⁵⁶ The district leader was a distinct improvement from the notorious Haji Saifullah. He was a proactive leader who wanted a standardized coalition approach whereby ISAF formed a "ring of steel" around villages, his police went in, and he called out the village leadership for an impromptu shura. His main issue in September was that his staff of five would not deploy out to Huta from Kandahar City, so his administrative capacity was limited. CIMIC reportage sent back positive impressions during this time for the communities surrounding Huta, and the Specialist Engineer Team sent a contractor out to look at improving the bazaar: he was kidnapped by some entity but this did not intimidate him and he returned to complete the survey.⁵⁷

Elsewhere, however, there was substantial Taliban intimidation, which involved scaring the population away from government-run medical clinics using fear-mongering about the bad things that might be done to them. The insurgents' early warning system was judged to be extremely effective and responsive in the district. Intimidation was directed against some of the projects undertaken by locals through the District Development Assembly–Community Development Council chain: a locally managed road paving project was laced with IEDs which were uncovered during an Afghan–Canadian patrol. And, as might be expected, the insurgents were not averse to shooting up FOB Huta and scooting away. Rockets were also used against the district centre, to no effect.⁵⁸

At this point, however, there was a lack of coalition synergy in Maywand. In some ways, Maywand was in the same position that Panjwayi District was in 2007. There was no Joint District Coordination Centre, for example. Reconstruction and development was a patched-up lash-up with little interest from the PRT. Many of the moving parts were present but it was necessary to get those gears to mesh in order to stabilize Maywand District.

Kandahar City Operations, September–October 2008

The post-Sarposa shift of focus to the trials and travails of Kandahar City was reinforced on 8 September, when two suicide bombers dressed as police officers detonated inside provincial police headquarters wounding 38 people killing two. The Afghan police subsequently found three emplaced IEDs on first-responder routes to the headquarters building.⁵⁹ An already planned security operation, MARKAZ AMALIAT, was in place to provide a post-Ramadan security presence in the city. This operation was accelerated. In the interim, there were five more IED attacks and a direct fire attack, all directed against Afghan police.⁶⁰ 1-205 Brigade ordered 5th Kandak, the combat service support kandak, to deploy 80 maintenance and logistics personnel into the city. Commanded by the Signals company commander, the OMLT was seriously concerned that support capacity to the brigade's deployed kandaks in Zharey and Panjwayi would be affected.⁶¹

Operation MARKAZ AMALIAT was altered to include L Company from 42 Royal Marines Commando, the new Regional Battle Group (South). L Company was handed off to LCol Woodworth at the PRT. This gave Kandahar City, in effect, three companies for presence patrolling. The operation was delayed 24 hours because the UN insisted that TF Kandahar recognize the UN International Day of Peace and not conduct operations.⁶²

L Company, supported by a Canadian CIMIC team, established a patrol base in the "seam" between Dand and the southwestern districts of the city. There, they found a population who was terrified that the Taliban would target them if they provided any form of assistance to the ISAF forces.⁶³ This was not surprising; previous Canadian PRTs going back to 2005 identified District 6 as problematic. L Company established a random series of vehicle checkpoints on Route Lake Effect, which likely had a temporary disruptive effect on the insurgent ratline into the city.⁶⁴ PRT Force Protection mounted patrols in various city districts to provide a visible presence.

Unfortunately, the enemy shifted tactics. On 28 September, a pair of assassins gunned down Lt.-Col. Malalai Kakar of the Kandahar City police. This killing made international news in part because Western media had already turned her into a poster girl for gender equality in southern Afghanistan, which in turn raised her public profile and made her a desirable information operations target. What went unreported was the assassination of two members of the Zabul Provincial Shura in Kandahar City, along with their bodyguards,

while they were socializing with friends. These were the opening shots in what amounted to a city-wide assassination campaign that extended from September 2008 to January 2009.⁶⁵

The deteriorating security situation in the city affected plans to go forward with 25 more Community Development Councils and district manager facilities in addition to wells and an improved water system. UN HABITAT was CIDA's facilitating partner on these projects to the tune of \$22 million and \$7 million, respectively. However, UN HABITAT staff "lacked confidence" in security and moved the UN HABITAT director to an "undisclosed location" for security.⁶⁶ This was an appropriate move. The next day, the Director of Work and Social Affairs was assassinated while driving in to work. Three days later, a senior Barakzai elder, Ali Ahmad Khan, and his son, who was a bodyguard to President Karzai, were killed in a drive-by shooting at a mosque. A second senior Barakzai leader, Haji Ali Mohammad, was also shot and killed.⁶⁷ Canadian ISTAR reportage confirmed that a 30-man unit, led by Mullah Abdul Bari, had arrived in the city and was dispersed into assassination teams with orders to target government officials and tribal elders.⁶⁸ The teams also employed kidnapping as a tool. They snatched the eight-year-old son of a UNAMA worker on 23 October in order to get him to stop working on reconstruction projects.⁶⁹

To his credit, the Mayor of Kandahar City, Ghulam Haider Hamidi, refused to be intimidated, and continued to work with the PRT and UN HABITAT during this dangerous time to improve the city and its services for the benefit of its citizens.

Reorganization of the Operational Mentor Liaison Team and Relations with the Afghan National Security Forces

The opportunity to reorganize OMLT operations arrived in September with the incoming rotation, led by Col Joe Shipley, and based primarily on officers and men from 1 RCR. OMLT reorganization became a major political problem, however. The existing TF Zharey structure, established under BGen Laroche and utilized in the first half of 2008, was considered deficient in many quarters. The efforts of Maj Bob Ritchie to make TF Zharey work were recognized by all. However, TF Kandahar was forced to accept that the OMLT was running Zharey District like a battle group and not actually mentoring the Afghans as much as they should have been. The OMLT was not structured, in terms of equipment, to do the job it was doing. It had RG-31 vehicles, but no maintenance or supply system similar to the battle group, nor was it manned to handle a tactical operations centre in the same way the battle group was.⁷⁰ Simply put, the Afghan army was not a manoeuvre element of TF Kandahar in the same way 3 RCR and 2-2 Infantry were. TF Kandahar decided to disband TF Zharey and turn battle space management of the district over to Maj Rob McBride, the officer commanding N Company, on 13 September. Elements in Ottawa viewed this move as a retrograde activity that flew in the face of the progress that the

Cabinet Committee on Afghanistan wanted to see and report through their “benchmark” system in order to satisfy media and opposition critics of the mission. There was substantial pushback. BGen Thompson and his staff, to their credit, resisted it.⁷¹

That was not all. The idea of a “strike” kandak emerged in summer 2008. The demand for more Afghan forces in the field led to a reorganization of the green-yellow-red cycle that had been in lay for the three 1-205 Brigade kandaks since 2007. Col François Riffou suggested that one kandak that was partially trained should occupy the Highway 1 strong points doing static tasks and route clearance patrols, while another should man the Zharey and Panjwayi strong points. The third infantry kandak should become a mobile force to be used as required.⁷² There were two views on how this “strike” kandak might be used: the limited view was that it would operate in the areas between the other two kandaks in Zharey and Panjwayi, while a more expansive view was that the “strike” kandak might operate like the Regional Battle Group (South), possibly for 205 Corps.⁷³

Unfortunately for TF Kandahar, the Canadian-mentored 2nd Kandak from 1-205 Brigade was the designated Strike Kandak as of September 2008. The implications of this change were significant. The existing lay down of 1-205 Brigade had a kandak in Zharey, another in Panjwayi, and parts of a third in Arghandab and Maywand. All were tied to tactical infrastructure conducting local security patrols and trying to work with the Afghan police. Removal of the Strike Kandak for deployment elsewhere would have a detrimental effect on this structure if there were no backfill. And that is exactly what happened later in October, December and January.

The issue remained; more Afghan forces were needed for Kandahar Province and Canada could not get them. In all probability, the collapse of Canadian strategic influence in Kabul played a role in attenuating any Canadian attempts to exert relative power in Afghan Ministry of Defence or Presidential circles (as discussed later). An alternative view suggests that the locus of power in kandak deployment lay in CSTC-A and ISAF HQ and it was British leverage in those forums that was decisive. Canada’s inability to get more Afghan army troops for the province was likely the result of some combination of both views.

No matter what view one takes, the situation allowed the British to poach an Afghan kandak that was assisting Canadian forces in securing Kandahar City and sent it repeatedly to Helmand Province to prop up their situation. One could argue that the British reciprocated with the use of the Regional Battle Group (South) companies in Kandahar. However, the crushing need to have Afghan soldiers assist the Afghan police and protect Afghan people was arguably more important than ripping an Afghan kandak out while it was developing relations with the population. In the balance of things, having a couple of British companies arrive for a couple of operations and then depart for another province was not a bargain.

There was other bad news. There was friction between the Afghan army leadership in Kandahar and the new Governor. Governor Raufi continued to behave as he had when he was a major general, a posture the current commander of 205 Corps, Maj.-Gen. Sher Mohammad Zazai, resented. One consequence was the withdrawal of Afghan army representatives from the Operation Coordination Center–Province at the Palace, a move that attenuated security coordination.⁷⁴ Overall, fall 2008 was a period of significant transition for all levels of the Afghan security apparatus in the province.

Development: The Provincial Reconstruction Team and TF Kandahar from September–October 2008

The alterations brought in by the new Canadian strategy had consequences for the PRT, which was itself subject to some fluctuation by fall 2008. Simply put, there was a struggle over who would control the PRT: the OGDs or the Army. The arguments for OGD control included the idea that to implement the new imperatives coming from the Cabinet Committee on Afghanistan, more civilians from Ottawa were needed in Afghanistan, and they required a clearer reporting chain back to the Cabinet Committee. The arguments against OGD control lay in that there was no way the military personnel were going to permit military operations (specifically force protection and CIMIC) to be controlled by inexperienced civilians who had no command responsibility. This impasse continued throughout fall 2008 until a new structure could be agreed upon in January 2009. Even then, it was a tenuous relationship. During this time, the PRT relinquished its military legal advisor, who was pulled back by the Judge Advocate General in Ottawa and was not replaced. This ended military involvement in the Afghan rule of law initiatives.⁷⁵

The most significant changes to PRT operations occurred during fall 2008. LCol Woodworth, looking at the Interim Provincial Action Plan and the Kandahar Action Plan, was concerned that there was a lack of coordination in the Zharey and Panjwayi Districts. It was clear that there was going to be increased focus on Kandahar City by the OGDs, especially after Sarposha, and that if institutionalized measures were not taken, reconstruction and development resources would dry up in the districts. This, in turn, would affect the battle groups' ability to Hold. The battle groups could Clear, but needed CIMIC to assist with the Hold after the battle groups moved on. The idea of a "stabilization company" combining a platoon of infantry from force protection company and several CIMIC detachments emerged as a possibility. Its implementation in fall 2008 was hampered by force generation problems, but at least the idea existed.⁷⁶

The other component was the role of the Joint District Coordination Centre. The idea that the Joint District Coordination Centre could be more than a security coordination office also emerged earlier in 2008. LCol Woodworth wanted the OGDs to expand their involvement in the districts through the Joint District Coordination Centres, which would become a sort of “PRT forward.” CIDA and DFAIT personnel were, however, limited by Ottawa in deploying “forward,” as much as some of them wanted to go out, so CIMIC would have to retain a significant role in project and programme delivery and verification. The idea that a stabilization company and a joint district coordination centre would exist in each contested district to handle all three lines of operations (security, development, governance), and then be able to identify and address sub-district problems, gained traction throughout fall 2008,⁷⁷ but it was in the face of substantial opposition from a variety of parties. Some elements did not see how stabilization company/Joint District Coordination Centre operations related to the new Canadian government strategy, and were hung up on a dogmatic interpretation of the benchmarks and priorities. Other elements wanted to “fight the red icons” and steer clear of anything smacking of development. Still others wanted scarce personnel resources allocated to their projects. Woodworth and his staff were unable to implement everything they thought they needed to by winter 2008. In a broad sense, two solitudes emerged by late October: the army focus on the districts, and the OGDs’ focus on Kandahar City.⁷⁸

That said, there was significant movement during this time in the ANDS reconstruction and development system, that is, the Provincial Development Committee, District Development Assembly and Community Development Council mechanisms. An increase in civilian staff at the PRT, particularly CIDA staff, coupled with increased focus, assisted with this. At the embassy level, CIDA dropped nearly everything else in the country to deal with Kandahar, with an increase from 17% to 50% of CIDA funding heading south. The most significant change was a reinvigorated Provincial Development Committee. The replacement of Asadullah Khalid with General Raufi, coupled with the efforts of Rhonda Gossen from CIDA (with Andrew Scyner who served in previous PRT rotations providing continuity support), was crucial in this. Sector working groups were also set up, which helped the provincial government link to the national government line ministries like the Ministry of Rural Reconstruction and Development. The whole system started from scratch: many of Asadullah Khalid’s people went with him when he departed and there was no handover at all. In August 2008, the provincial government was starting over again, six years after the defeat of the Taliban in 2002, and three years after the deployment of the first Canadian PRT.⁷⁹

Though the system was less than perfect, Afghans and Canadians were reaping the benefits of three years of hard work. Money was able to flow much more freely from Canada to Kabul to Kandahar (see Figure 4-6). The “sluice gate” at the provincial level now opened under Raufi, and it was clearer to all that the real impediment had been Asadullah Khalid all along. The issue now was the insurgency at the district levels. And, in theory, that is where the planned PRT stabilization companies and the Joint District Coordination Centres came into play working alongside the Canadian and Afghan security forces.

Unfortunately, personality conflicts hampered the development effort at the TF Kandahar level and this was exacerbated by cultural differences between CIDA, DFAIT and the Canadian Army. Culturally, CIDA was used to dealing with “enabling partners” that were usually neutral aid delivery systems. Some CIDA personnel found it difficult to see the Canadian Army units as “enabling partners,” others found it impossible due to personal ideological beliefs, and still others even openly expressed contempt for military personnel in what were supposed to be cordial interagency meetings. Some Canadian officers believed that CIDA was behaving like any other non-governmental organization would as opposed to an agency of the Canadian government. They believed that some CIDA personnel were opposed to TF Kandahar district-level operations.⁸⁰

Some CIDA personnel were culturally not attuned to information operations and the measurement of effects. As a result, they came across to military personnel as naive and idealistic. One CIDA representative haughtily asserted that the Afghan National Army should not be involved in delivering humanitarian aid. This was bad. Afghans should not get credit for Canadian aid. BGen Thompson reminded this person that Afghanistan was their country and they could do what they wanted to, and Canada was in support of the Afghans. It was next to impossible for the effects planners to get information from some CIDA representatives, while other younger CIDA personnel learned how the “Army tribe” did business and tried to find ways to build personal and conceptual bridges. Some CIDA development planning using non-Canadian Army implementing partners failed to pan out, which meant that the CIDA representatives had to finally ask TF Kandahar for help, which they viewed as humiliating. TF Kandahar was only too happy to assist.⁸¹

New Initiatives from Kabul

The ongoing issues relating to the Afghan police forces, the judicial system, and their relationship to rule of law at the lowest level of government prompted Commander ISAF General David McKiernan to take the lead in order to overhaul and systematize a coherent approach. McKiernan understood that the top-down approach favoured by the Bonn Agreement nations and their pillars back in 2002 was not working. Throughout 2008,

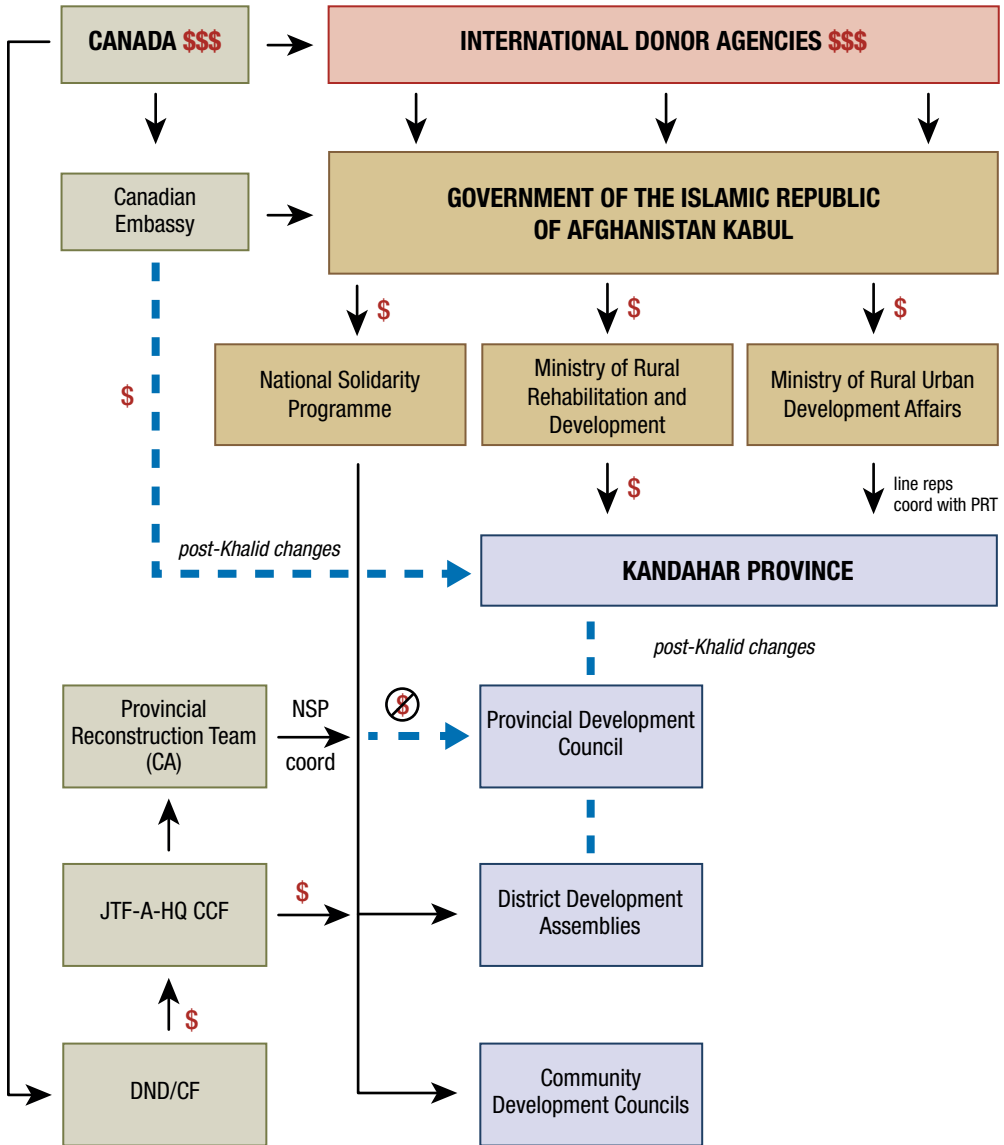


Figure 4-6: Development Monies Flow, Kandahar Province, 2007-2009. *Based on a PRT briefing to the author, Kandahar, February 2009

Commander ISAF worked with the Afghan government, Ministry of the Interior, CSTC-A, UNAMA, and a variety of donor nations, including Canada. Out of these discussions came a series of programmes that had an impact on Canadian operations in Kandahar.

Building on the existing ANCOP and the Focused District Development programmes designed to professionalize the police at the district level, there was recognition that policing needed the backing of good governance and that they really needed to proceed together. The Karzai government created the Independent Directorate for Local Governance: its purpose was to keep an eye on provincial governors and the relationship between them, and the district leaders they appointed. In 2008, the Independent Directorate for Local Governance implemented the Afghan Social Outreach Programme, which was supposed to work with local communities within the context of the district-level governance to handle dispute resolution by combining local practices with those of the Afghan government. As we have seen, the development assemblies and development councils that were already in place handled development issues but did not address justice or dispute resolution. The Afghan Social Outreach Programme was to operate as a counterpart to the District Development Assemblies and Community Development Councils.⁸²

In an ideal situation, then, the ANCOP would come into a district, the district police would be whisked away for training as part of Focused District Development. Then, the Independent Directorate for Local Governance's implementing partners would come in, establish the community and district councils, and work with the Governor and the district leader to make sure those linkages were working. The Afghan Social Outreach Programme funding would also be channeled to provide expanded police training programmes; to "re-align [police] salaries and benefits with [army] levels as a means to fight corruption and desertion; strengthen [police] integration into local institutions...."⁸³

Another initiative was the Afghan Public Protection Programme or AP3. This programme sought to establish community militias trained by U.S. Special Forces but administered by district police after they were *FDD'd* (Focused District Development became a verb and an adverb.) The Afghan Public Protection Programme was extremely controversial and its implementation problematic. As we have seen, the disarmament programmes established back in 2003, and their successor, the Disbandment of Illegally Armed Groups programme, were designed to take AK-47s off the streets and to reduce the coercive power of tribal and ethnic militias. Some saw the Afghan Public Protection Programme as a reversal of years of work based on a Vietnam model applied to Iraq that did not necessarily apply to Afghanistan and opposed its implementation. Others argued that the programme was historically based in the *arbaki* (the tribal police) and that having a community protection force allowed local people to stand up for themselves against the

insurgents. Variants of the programme were used to placate the critics and Afghan Public Protection Programme was finally rolled out and tested in Wardak. It would later come to Kandahar but not for some time.⁸⁴

McKiernan deserved credit for working to deal with the crippling security problems confronted by the government and its allies at the grassroots level. It remained to be seen if Afghan police units and local communities in Kandahar would benefit from these programmes.

Governance and Legitimacy

There was a growing threat to the Canadian effort and his name was Ahmad Wali Karzai. It was well known by both TF Kandahar and the population in general that he was the key Popalzai power broker and worked alongside former governor Asadullah Khalid to maintain Popalzai dominance behind the scenes. Issues involving the elected leader of the provincial council were, as we have seen, not new. These problems were about to be exacerbated, which, in turn, had a long-term effect on Canadian and ISAF operations.

In mid-2008, the Bush administration, for a variety of reasons, shifted policy focus away from Iraq and back toward Afghanistan. With this shift, the possibility of an Iraq-style “surge” gained momentum. Preparatory measures for a possible influx of American troops included the allocation of \$1 billion by the U.S. government to southern Afghanistan to build infrastructure for the potentially incoming forces. Ahmad Wali Karzai wanted to co-opt the construction companies in Kandahar and lead a consortium to absorb as much of this money as possible.⁸⁵ The Canadian concept of conflict of interest clearly did not apply under such circumstances, and it was likely that the bulk of this consortium would be companies owned by cronies connected to Ahmad Wali Karzai.

The idea of an Ahmad Wali Karzai and thus Popalzai-led monopoly on a billion dollars’ worth of business was too terrible to contemplate for some in TF Kandahar. First, it would enhance the growing belief system that only the Popalzais were benefiting from these projects, which, in turn, would augment existing tribal grievances that could be exploited by the Taliban and other entities. Second, such a monopoly would gobble up the limited existing construction and security capacity in Kandahar Province, which, in turn, would reduce the ability of the PRT to accomplish its development aims. Third, it could overwhelm and distort the mechanisms that the PRT was working on, like the Provincial Development Committee.

LCol Woodworth was particularly concerned about Ahmad Wali Karzai’s increased emergence as an overtly malevolent power broker. This occurred after the removal of Asadullah Khalid in August 2008, and the PRT took note of AWK’s linkages to the new regional police leadership as well as his relationship to other extracurricular activities.

Col Jamie Cade at TF Kandahar likened the situation to *The Sopranos*, a popular television programme of the day dealing with organized crime in New Jersey. There was no consensus on what to do about it and no well thought-out strategic guidance from the embassy or Ottawa.⁸⁶

Asadullah Khalid's replacement was, at first glance, formidable. General Rahmatullah Raufi commanded 205 Corps back in 2006 and had close working relationships with previous Canadian commanders. He was also a religious man who understood the crucial role of the Kandahar Ulema Shura, an organization completely marginalized by Asadullah Khalid.⁸⁷ One of his first moves, as we have seen, was to sort out the Provincial Development Committee. PRT personnel looked forward to a mutually beneficial relationship with Raufi. It was unclear at the time, however, if this man of some principle would be able to stand up to Ahmad Wali Karzai or be able to deal with the Kandahari power structure and reverse the erosion of government legitimacy with a billion U.S. dollars on the line. LCol Woodworth noted at the time that "the social contract in Kandahar Province was in ruins and it had to be rebuilt."⁸⁸

The PRT continued to send out CIMIC patrols to the various districts as before, with the priority on Zharey, Panjwayi, Dand and Arghandab. CIMIC had an outstation with 2-2 Infantry at FOB Hotal in Maywand, though this detachment lacked transport. A CIMIC presence was retained in Spin Boldak after Recce Squadron departed in September. For the most part, that team kept its ears to the ground on what the Joint District Coordination Centre was up to and reported the details of the continuing attempts to kill Col Abdul Raziq with suicide bombers. They were also in a position to summon medical evacuation assistance when a UNAMA vehicle from the World Health Organization was suicide-bombed, killing one and wounding 15 people.⁸⁹

The PRT also increased its observation of Daman district in fall 2008. This occurred for two reasons. First, Daman was "connective tissue" between Kandahar City and KAF. The increased emphasis on Kandahar City led to scrutiny of Daman. Second, there was an increase in enemy activity on Highway 4 and there were more rocket attacks on KAF than usual. There was even a kidnap attempt against Demining Agency for Afghanistan workers.⁹⁰ Attempts had been made in 2007 to link up CIMIC with the RAF Regiment squadron, who were protecting the airfield, but the lack of PRT resources at the time limited LCol Bob Chamberlain's ability to have an effect in Daman.⁹¹

When CIMIC got into Daman and made contact with the district leader and police, they found that the district was quiet and stable. The National Directorate of Security kept a close eye on known Taliban-sympathetic communities where the main insurgent weapon was the night letter and other forms of low-level intimidation. The National Directorate of Security knew who the shadow Taliban district leader was and where he lived in Quetta.

The police conducted raids and killed Taliban in small numbers. They were less concerned with rule of law initiatives emanating from Kandahar City and killed any insurgent they found to be a repeat offender. There was also a functioning District Development Assembly.⁹²

The one destabilizing factor, CIMIC learned, was not the Taliban. It was Ahmad Wali Karzai. Elders from three villages “claimed Ahmad Wali Karzai had threatened the people of Nakline and warned them to vacate the village because the land allegedly belongs to the government. They had been living on that land for ten years and do not want to leave. [One elder] claimed that Karzai wanted to vacate the land so he could sell it for personal gain.”⁹³ Daman, as it turned out, was mostly Popalzai, with Alikozai in the minority. Daman Shura members told CIMIC that Ahmad Wali Karzai was moving Popalzai people onto Alikozai land. The Alikozais then boycotted the Daman shura in protest. They made protestations to Haji Agha Lalai Dastagiri and Karimullah, the two remaining Alikozai power brokers, but to no effect: “members of the Popalzais are better represented in the government and have connections to ISAF and the Taliban...[Haji Agha Lalai Dastagiri] is a subordinate to Ahmad Wali Karzai and fears losing his position.”⁹⁴

The Taliban used situations like the one in Daman as leverage to exploit the decreasing legitimacy of the government. Word traveled fast in Kandahar Province, too fast for Canadian information operations to respond. In this case, it was impossible. ISAF, and thus Canada, was seen increasingly to be part of the problem because of the relationship to Ahmad Wali Karzai—whether he was elected or not. Though the new Canadian strategy made broad statements about rule of law, improving core governance capacity delivery and so on, specific obstacles like Ahmad Wali Karzai seemingly did not exist in that theoretical framework. If Canada was supporting the Afghan government, and Ahmad Wali Karzai was part of that government, was Canada supporting his illicit activities? That was the logic that was bandied about in the tea houses and bazaars around the provincial districts and the city.⁹⁵ Canadian information operations did not counter this message in any significant or systematic way.

Ending Operations in Ghorak District

Ghorak District operations, considered an irritant by successive TF Kandahar headquarters, were finally shut down during this rotation. The catalytic event was an insurgent mortar attack on the district centre on 3–4 October. At this time, the Afghan police manned the facility. Requests through the OCC-P to Regional Command (South) for recce platform assistance and an aerial show of force were denied. TF Eagle Assault refused to fly a medical evacuation mission because of the Ghorak forces’ inability to convince Eagle Assault that there were competent ground forces available to control a landing zone. An Afghan military Mi-17 helicopter conducted the medical evacuation

but, when the “wounded” were brought to the Role 3 hospital, they turned out to be the relatives of the district chief of police. After two more days of reported mortaring, TF Kandahar directed 2-2 Infantry to deploy an infantry company to the district centre (Operation SUK JANUBI). TF Eagle Assault’s CH-47s airlifted the company there in two lifts. They found five wounded police but the situation was by no means as dire as had been reported. LTC Hurlbut and his staff were somewhat annoyed: “Once on the ground the situation proved not to be as tenuous as the Ghorak District leader made it sound. In fact according to the Afghan National Police on the ground the last contact they had with the insurgents was six days ago.” Further key leadership engagements confirmed this.⁹⁶

The assessment of TF Kandahar was that the situation in Ghorak was all about narcotics. The police were there to protect a drug route that competed with somebody else’s drug route. Those competitors were connected to the Taliban, so there was a convergence of interests in removing “police” control in the area. TF Kandahar finally told the Afghans that they would no longer support resupply of the Ghorak District Centre and, since they demonstrated that they could mount a medical evacuation with their own helicopters, they could handle the situation themselves. The Ministry of Defence wanted nothing to do with Ghorak, either; Bismillah Khan, the defence minister, did not want his machines used for this purpose. There was substantial pressure brought to bear on Regional Command (South), 205 Corps and TF Kandahar by Hamid Karzai personally, but everybody stood firm. The compromise solution was that 205 Corps would transport police rotations in by Mi-17, but everybody else would stay out of it. This took place at the end of November and was a successful demonstration of Afghan initiative and planning.⁹⁷

The effort was, in the end, unsustainable. In mid-January 2009, reports came into the provincial coordination centre that the district centre was abandoned and the police had deserted. The district leader and district police chief were spotted in Kandahar spending the policemen’s pay. The Governor, when confronted with this, said he did not blame the police for deserting, because they had not been paid. The provincial coordination centre staff concluded that the Governor “does not appear to be confident enough to make representations to Kabul and address the squabbling.”⁹⁸

On 13 January, the insurgents moved in and took over. They “congratulated each other over the fall of the district centre and confirmed that vehicles, weapons, and ammunition had been left behind.” When remonstrations were made to Brig.-Gen. Matiullah, he refused to send any more police unless there was a permanent Afghan National Army presence in Ghorak. It was finally game over for Canadian involvement in that district.

The OMLT and Helmand Operations, October 2008

The Canadian OMLT mentors and their counterparts became part of two large-scale operations in Helmand Province conducted in late 2008 by virtue of the fact that 2nd Kandak, 1-205 Brigade was now a “strike” kandak and thus deployable. From August to October, the insurgents in Helmand slowly built up and then seized three communities west of the capital, Lashkar Gah. Between 8 and 10 October, they launched a combination of indirect fire and suicide bomb attacks in the city. On 11 October, British AH-64 Apache attack helicopters disrupted a ground assault on the outskirts of the city, while insurgent mortars rained down on the provincial palace. This attack occurred during the British relief in place and was directed against unacclimatized troops. TF Helmand believed that the bulk of the police forces were infiltrated and compromised, and it appeared to them that the provincial capital might be lost.⁹⁹

The Lashkar Gah situation escalated into a national crisis and prompted the mobilization and redeployment of 2nd (Strike) Kandak on 14 October. At 1800 hours, lead Canadian mentor, Maj Steve Nolan, was instructed by Col Joe Shipley to be in Helmand by 0600 hours the next morning. The 36-man OMLT team was forced to deploy with six RG-31 vehicles, unreliable communications and no logistics support plan. The Afghans mounted up in their “technical” Ford Rangers, Hummers and 10-tonne International Trucks, and moved west along Highway 1. (See Figures 4-7 to 4-9.)

Units were converging on Lashkar Gah with no coordination, including three kandaks from Kabul. 2nd (Strike) Kandak was ordered into the city with no intelligence on what was going on. The RG-31s cruised around trying to determine where the enemy were as civilians rushed about trying to escape. The team moved from British organization to British organization trying to find out where they fit in and were passed on until they found General Mohajum from 3-205 Corps. His staff was working up a plan to push the enemy back, sweep the green belt west of the city and then south to Garmsir and Nawa, the site of TF Orion’s battles in 2006.

Operation BIA ITNAMAAN (also called ATAL-28) had 2nd (Strike) Kandak as the centre battalion in a three-battalion abreast sweep south. The terrain was complex: it consisted of an incredible number of water-filled ditches, irrigation canals of varying sizes, and bridges and culverts throughout. Compound complexes clustered together to act as impromptu mini-forts. The “Tower of Babel” of coalition communications systems complicated the whole situation: American military mentors, British military mentors, American police mentors, Afghan police of various types, and so on, all had different radios. This did not bode well to the Canadian mentors.

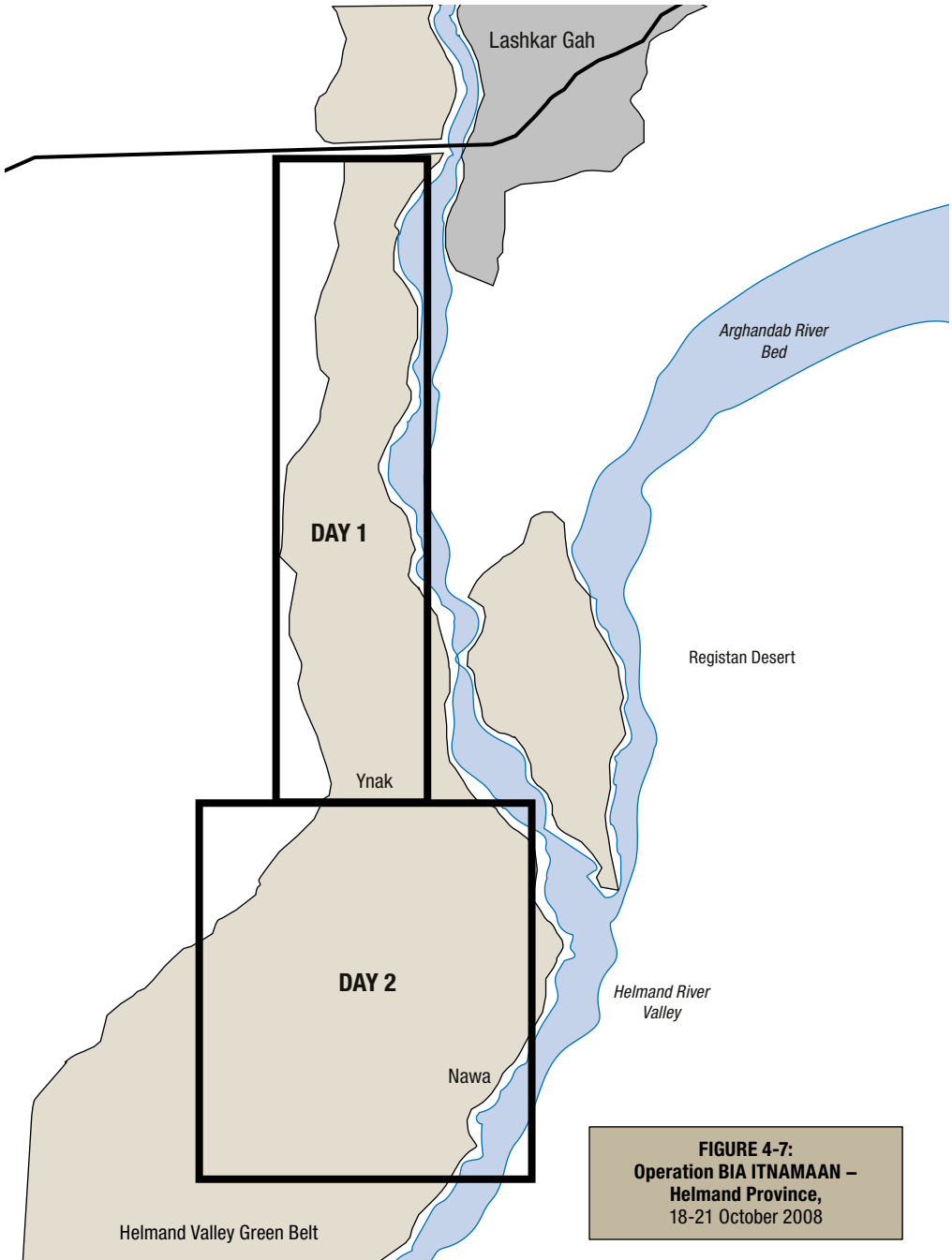


Figure 4-7: Operation BIA ITNAMAAN – Helmand Province, 18-21 October 2008

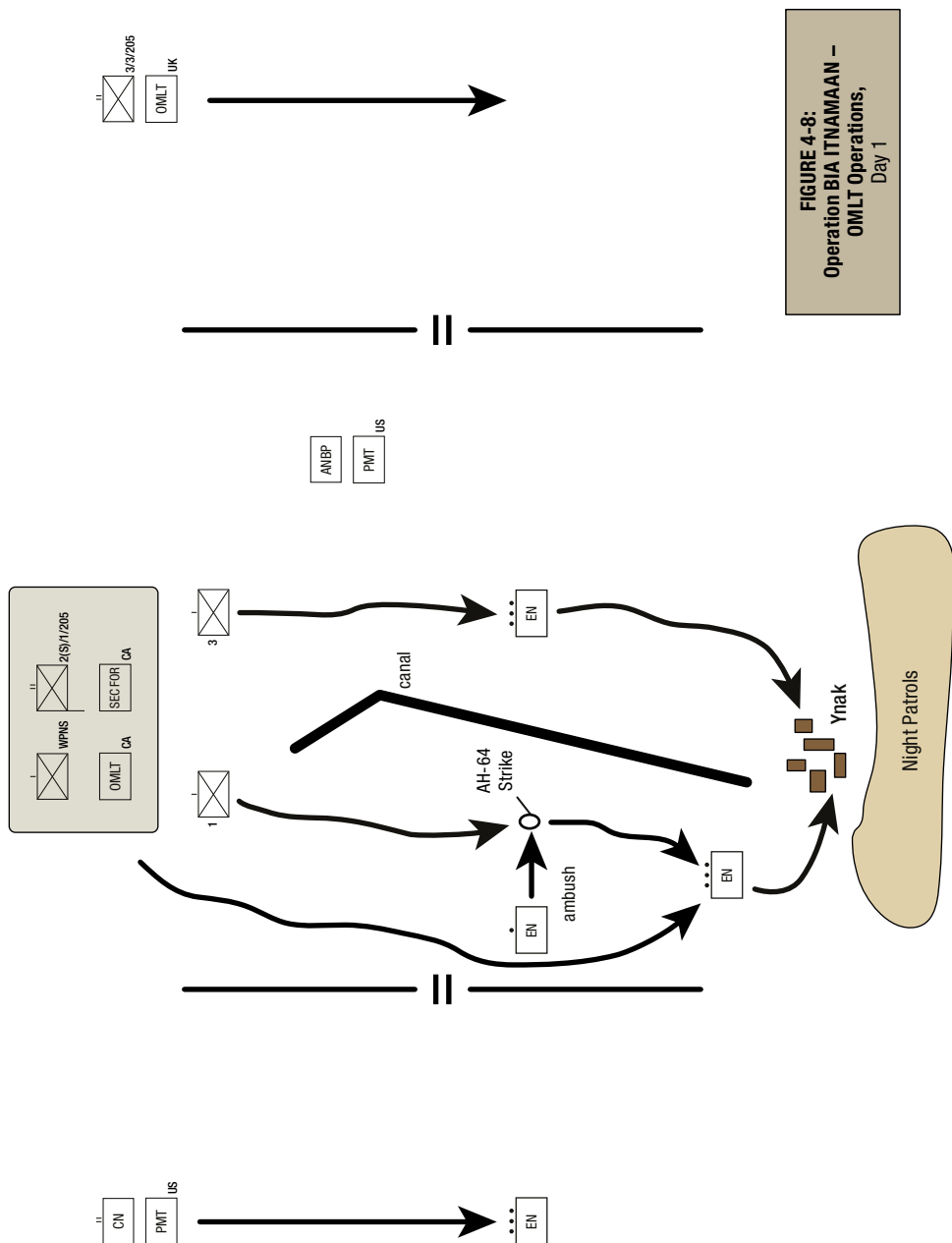


Figure 4-8: Operation BIA ITNAMAAN – OMLT Operations, Day 1

FIGURE 4-9:
Operation BIA ITNAMAAN –
OMLT Operations,
 Day 2

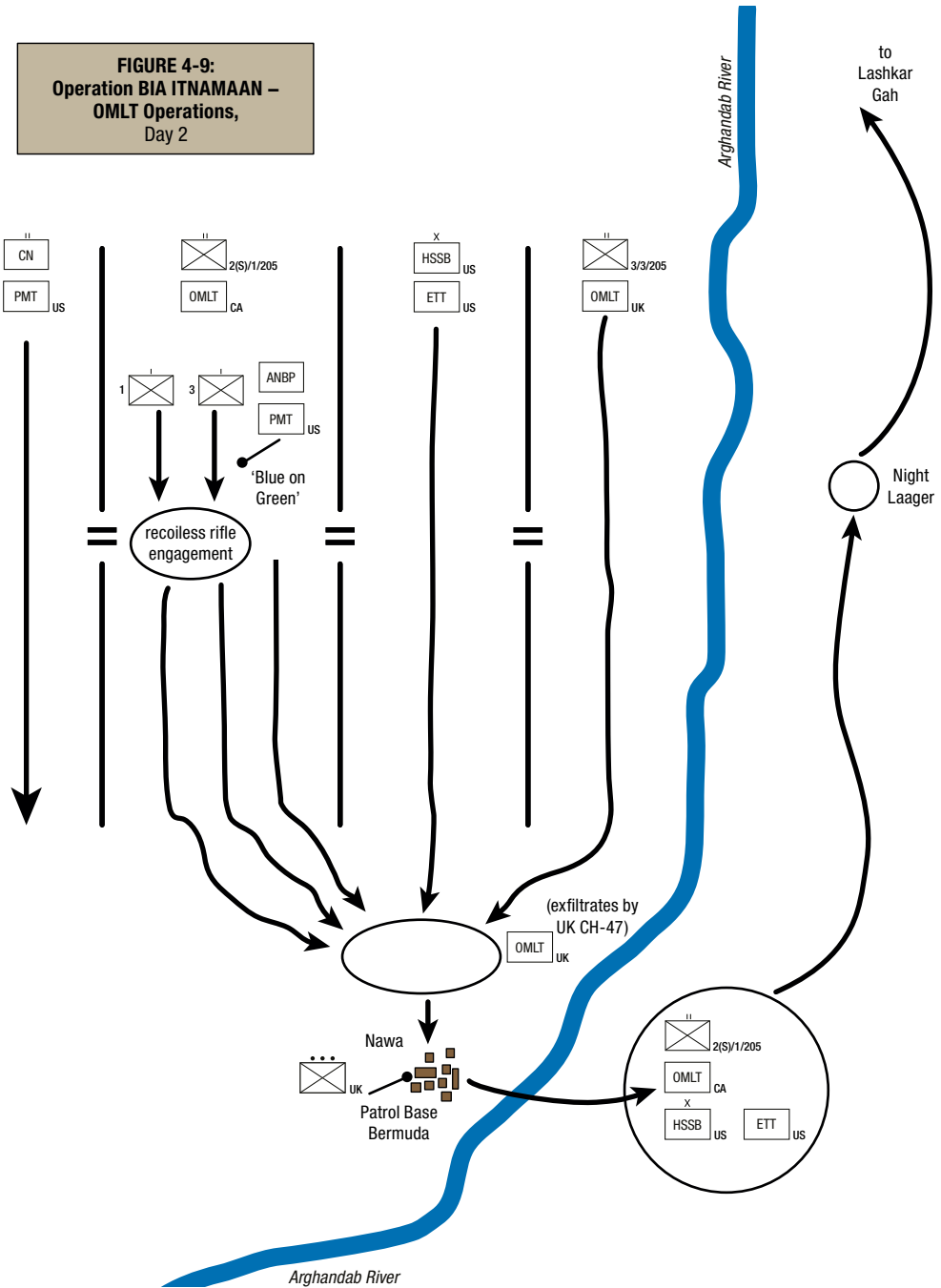


Figure 4-9: Operation BIA ITNAMAAN – OMLT Operations, Day 2

On 19 October, the Canadians and Afghans crossed the start line around 0500. The flanking battalions, a counternarcotics kandak and an Afghan border police kandak, started taking casualties and halted. A pair of A-10 Warthogs and a pair of AH-64 Apaches arrived on scene, but British communications broke down. The Canadian OMLT was able to communicate with the aircraft and the aerial firepower was brought to bear. 1st Company and its Canadians were then ambushed from an orchard and this turned into a massive firefight, killing at least 20 enemy. The insurgents had a covering force that initiated a delay, and took casualties while IE emplacements and small ambush teams dispersed into the small communities. 2nd (Strike) Kandak advanced, encountered, and defeated a slew of these ambush teams throughout the first day. While moving forward later on, they encountered an enemy strong point, dug in with overhead cover and about to be occupied with SPG-9 recoilless rifles. After another firefight, which took out the systems, the kandak continued on to the town of Ynak, where they leaguered and sent out night patrols. Adjacent Afghan units opened up on anything that moved with spec fire, so 2nd (Kandak) and their mentors had to be careful. When Maj Nolan was briefed back in Lashkar Gah, he learned that 2nd (Strike) Kandak and the mentors inflicted an estimated 60+ dead and over 100 wounded on the enemy force.

The plan changed for the next day. The nature of the terrain accommodated the inclusion of a fourth axis of advance from Ynak to Nawa, but now BIA ITNAMAAN commanders thought they could make a 25-kilometre thrust to their objectives. This after a hard day's fight over 5 kilometres. Now, however, there were the equivalent of six battalions in the line, which made Operation BIA ITNAMAAN the largest Afghan, let alone, coalition operation conducted thus far in southern Afghanistan.

The morning of 20 October was characterized by a series of discrete encounters with small numbers of insurgents who fired off whatever weapons they had and tried to melt away. By 1300 hours, however, the kandak encountered a defensive line that employed airburst RPG rounds and PKM machine-gun fire in an attempt to break up the Afghan-Canadian attack. This inflicted some casualties on 2nd (Strike) Kandak. When that failed to deter the advance, the insurgents dispersed under fire, taking casualties throughout. The heat and lack of water soon forced the Afghans and Canadians to halt around 1500 hours and replenish using water purification systems from wells and canals. Intelligence estimates came down that 2nd (Strike) Kandak took on a 150-man enemy force, but it was unclear what the battle damage assessment was.

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Photo Credit: Author



Photo Credit: Author

OMLT operations took Canadian troops to Helmand Province alongside 2nd (Strike) Kandak on two occasions to prop up government and British forces there.

The coalition forces reached Nawa. The problem was that the enemy emerged behind the columns and laid IEDs on the roads, probably all the way back to Lashkar Gah. As the Canadian team froze in a destroyed building at the poorly named Patrol Base Bermuda in Nawa, plans were drawn up to cross over into the Reg Desert and head up the east bank of the Arghandab River up to Lashkar Gah. The forces launched the next day but became bogged down in the desert, forcing a night leaguer. Maj Nolan, his men and 2nd (Strike) Kandak made it to the provincial capital, where they were feted before a rendezvous with a Canadian convoy sent out to resupply them and then return to Kandahar.

Operation BIA ITNAMAAN was instrumental in saving the provincial capital in Helmand, and led the way in demonstrating that the Afghan National Army had significantly progressed since the days of 2006 when Afghan army platoons were attached to Canadian infantry companies. The role of the OMLT in this progression was profound and BIA ITNAMAAN was an example of what could be done when it had to be done.

Zharey District Operations, October 2008

The pattern of activity in Zharey resembled that of the previous month. Strong Point Lakokhel was in contact for 14 days in October, with multiple contacts on some days. For the most part, it was constant “shoot and scoot,” with Canadian artillery fire as a response. During one encounter, a Canadian–Afghan patrol from Lakokhel came under fire and withdrew back to the strong point. A Canadian LAV III crew started to provide cover fire when the 25mm cannon jammed. The crew commander, MCpl David Tedford, used the pintle-mounted machine gun while the gunner tried to clear the jam. When he was unable to do so, Tedford exited the turret to fix the cannon while under fire. Clearing the jam, the LAV III was able to provide suppressive fire while artillery was called in. The joint patrol made it back in. MCpl Tedford received the Medal of Military Valour for his actions.

Enemy pressure was increasingly applied to Strong Point Howz-e Madad as the month went on (eight contacts), while Spin Pir was hit twice. The Highway 1 length between Spin Pir and Patrol Base Wilson attracted three IEDs and a number of ambushes, likely led by insurgent commanders Mullahim Sahib and Mullah Zergay, who had significant local experience in the area. The JANGISIOUX patrols into Pashmul encountered the enemy at least four times. Rockets continued to be fired at Ma’Sum Ghar, and the tanks continued to fire back at the points of origin identified by the HALO and other systems. Pashmul South was probed twice that month and there was a single ambush on Route Summit. (See Figures 4-10a and 4-10b.)

The biggest change noted by the TF Kandahar J2 was the significantly increased enemy presence in Asheque, which they believed was “in part facilitated by the assassination of Habibullah Jan.” Importantly, “the insurgent commander currently assessed to be responsible

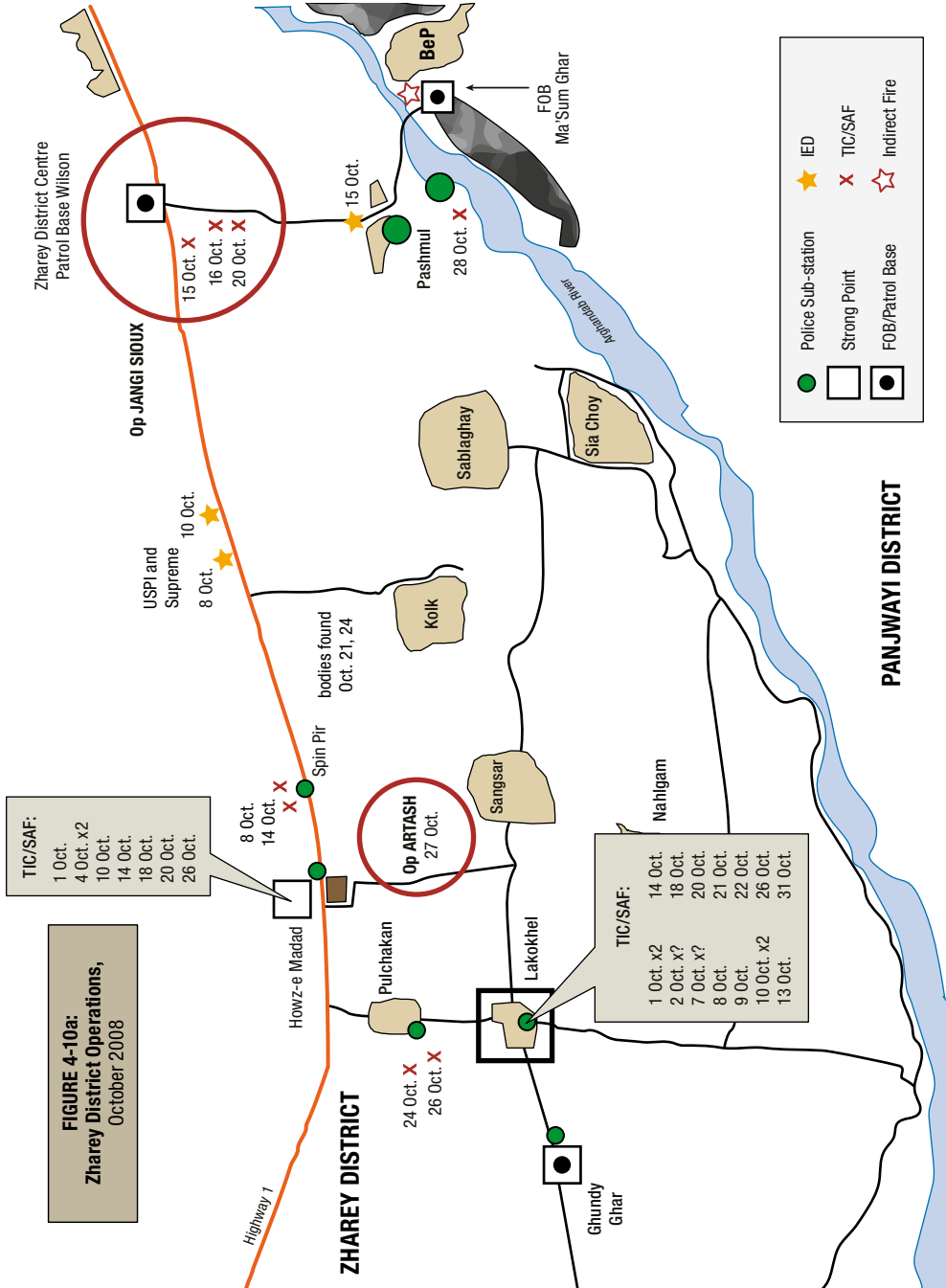


Figure 4-10a: Zharey District Operations, October 2008

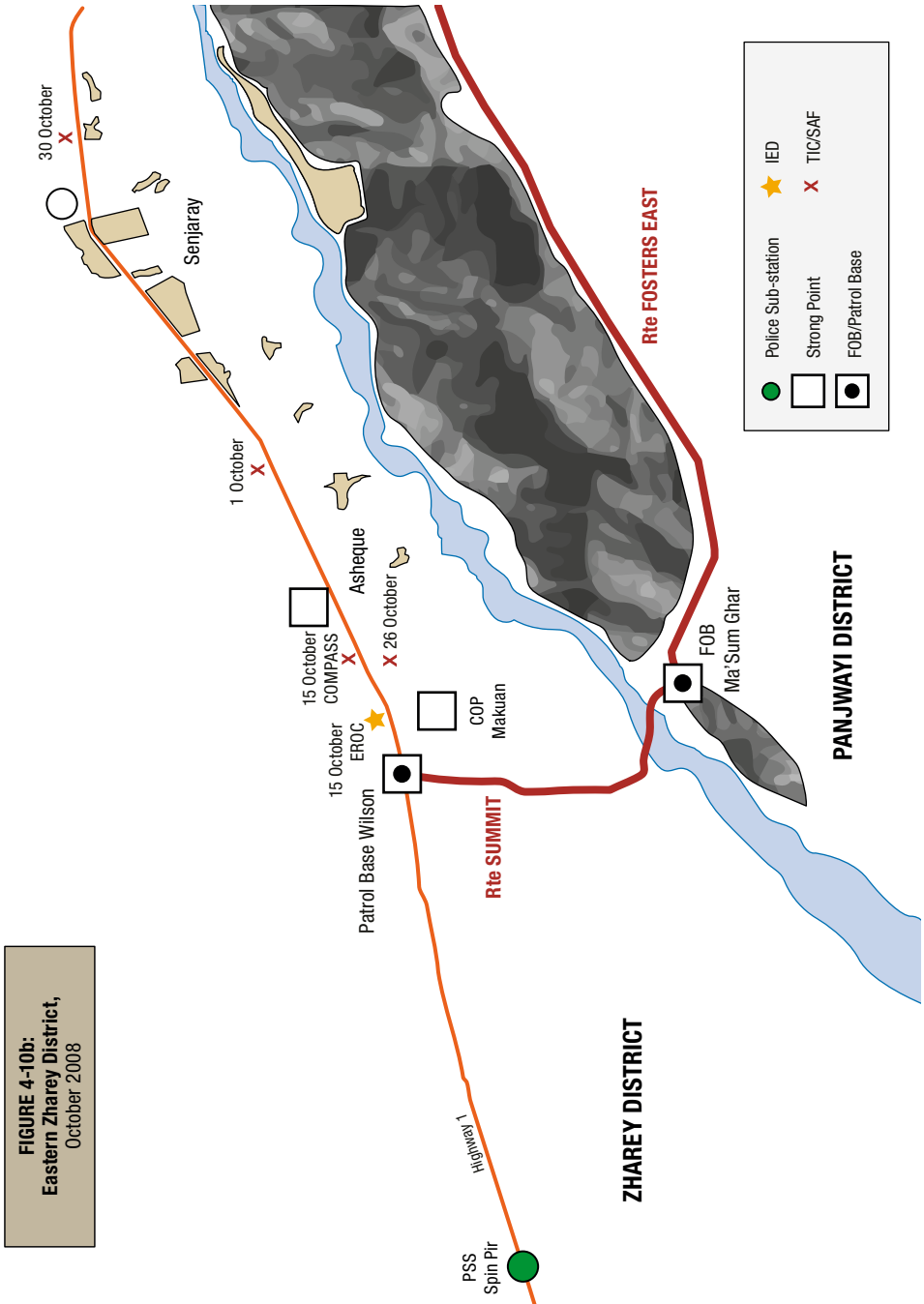


Figure 4-10b: Eastern Zharey District, October 2008

for Senjaray is Haji Abdullah, the older brother of Habibullah Jan.”¹⁰⁰ Not all of the locals were going along with the programme, and they killed insurgent Commander Nasrullah as he hectored the population one night. The enemy deployed a team to deal with the local elders in mid-October in preparation for “the eventual occupation” of Senjaray.¹⁰¹ The school was closed and then vandalized, and intimidation against the people spiked. The Zharey police generally were hesitant to go south of Highway 1 into the communities.¹⁰²

There was not a lot happening on the development front in Zharey District. When CIMIC teams engaged the local population, they were told that “ISAF comes out to talk but do nothing.”¹⁰³ CIMIC reported that Pasab, a bastion of pro-government support in the past, was shifting to support the Taliban because of petty theft by the Afghan police.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, locals in various communities referred to the police as “the addicted” and shunned contact with them more and more.¹⁰⁵ The Zharey police force was desperately in need of Focused District Development. This commenced, thankfully, on 8 October when 40 Zharey police boarded buses for Regional Training Center Herat.¹⁰⁶

In time, CIMIC, DFAIT and CIDA representatives met with Mr. Sahardi, the district leader, to work out the terms for wheat seed distribution.¹⁰⁷ There was progress by CMT-2 on the Haji Baran canal, with 40 metres completed out of a planned 1,350 metres. However, CIMIC learned that virtually none of the workers were local people and many came from other provinces.¹⁰⁸

LCol Barrett decided to launch an operation southeast of Howz-e Madad and south of the Spin Pir area, with the intent of seizing and exploiting an IED facilitator’s compound to reduce IED use on Highway 1. The Operation ARTASH [Juggernaut] plan involved N Company with an Afghan army company and mentors; the National Directorate of Security; plus a LAV III platoon from M Company, Recce Platoon, and a Leopard platoon from A Squadron. M Company would move south from Spin Pir, seize a series of compounds and open up the road, while N Company and the Afghans would deploy from Howz-e Madad, sweep in from the west, and search a second set of compounds.¹⁰⁹

Operation ARTASH went in on the morning of 27 October. There was some “shoot and scoot” against N Company consisting of a volley of RPG rounds and some small-arms fire. A bunker with a cache was uncovered and a pair of orbiting OH-58D Warriors engaged a fleeting ground target. Operation ARTASH accomplished little beyond that and the forces returned to their base locations by the late afternoon. The use of the battle group against a singular target with almost no results was a questionable use of resources.¹¹⁰ The situation in Zharey, for the most part, remained stalemated in October. Some TF Kandahar planners referred to the district as “The Coliseum.”

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Photo Credit: Author



Photo Credit: Author

Strong Point Lakokhel, with its Canadian and Afghan occupants, was under fire for 23 days in a row throughout September 2008, followed by another 14 days in October.

Panjwayi District Operations, October 2008

Much the same could be said for Panjwayi District. The pattern of activity in October included an enemy probe against Strong Point Mushan, six days of mortaring directed at Strong Point Zangabad preceded by a prolonged TIC on 3 October, and another brief “shoot and scoot” at COP Haji. These incidents were interspersed with a number of IED attacks on Fosters East. The events of 3 October in the vicinity of COP Haji started off with a dismounted platoon-sized patrol that was engaged with small arms. An orbiting B-1B dropped a GBU-32 bomb, which temporarily disrupted the ambush. Then an enemy mortar started up. That was destroyed with an MQ-1 Predator dropping a Hellfire, killing five enemy. Watching with an unblinking eye, the Predator observed insurgents recovering the bodies and weapons, and tracked them to a cemetery, where they met what appeared to be a commander in a white sport utility vehicle. As they had no visible weapons present, they could not be engaged. TF Kandahar concluded that “This attack demonstrates tactical coordination and would have required low-level leadership in the area. This event furthers the assessment that there is essentially a forward line of enemy troops, at least in Panjwayi, in the vicinity of the 28–29 easting.”¹¹¹

Strong Point Mushan, however, was still a going concern. The population was more and more receptive to the Afghan army presence and provided more and more information to the Afghans and Canadians operating in the area. The body of a murdered 25-year-old interpreter was discovered by a patrol: the local population explained that there was an insurgent prison somewhere near Mushan, where an Afghan army soldier had been incarcerated and then hanged sometime in September.¹¹²

This incident, coupled with reports of an insurgent court operating in the Zangabad area, was cause for concern in that the insurgency was establishing a parallel governance system in an area that they believed they controlled. Reports of these and other competitive governance efforts sporadically made their way into TF Kandahar reportage but TF Kandahar did not recognize their significance at the time. It was one thing for the enemy to challenge the government using violence: it was quite another when they moved to the next step of a revolutionary programme.

Maj Cayle Oberwarth’s M Company initiated a patrolling schedule in Stability Box Sperwan to maintain security but were engaged on 4 October by an enemy ambush party. Mortars from Patrol Base Sperwan Ghar, an MQ-9 Reaper and a B-1B bomber loaded with GBU-38 bombs killed five enemy in response.¹¹³

To give Stability Box Sperwan more space, M Company deployed west of Sperwan Ghar in company strength with an Afghan army platoon on 19–20 October. Operation SIKHAL was a sweep into the Zangabad area but it turned up nothing and there was no contact other than a single mortar round flung at the force: “It was determined in conversation with local nationals that the villagers were aware of the ISAF operation 48 hours before our arrival.”¹¹⁴

On the development front, CMT-1 continued to work on the road and liaised with Blue Hackle, the new private security contractor based out of FOB Zettelmeyer supporting the coalition effort. Blue Hackle brought in its security people and CMT-1 prepared to ramp up paving along Fosters West. Beyond CMT-1 operations, little development was reported in Panjwayi.

Over in Panjwayi East, Canadian police mentors near Salehan kept encountering a militia that, apparently, consisted of a number of ex-policemen from Ghorak. When queried, police chief Bismillah Jan told the Canadians that this was “a group of villagers that rise up against the insurgents when needed.”¹¹⁵ The police mentors reported that more and more people were calling the Joint District Coordination Centre and reporting IED placement: this was an important and positive indicator.¹¹⁶

Operation ARAY, 5-10 October 2008

The main coalition event in Panjwayi during the course of October was Operation ARAY [Sickle] (see Figure 4-11). An earlier deployment of L Company 42 Commando Royal Marines into the southwestern districts of Kandahar City led to confirmatory information that a resupply corridor came into the city from Route Lake Effect in Panjwayi District.¹¹⁷ This, of course, was not new: the Canadian PRT learned about this ratline from CTF Bayonet back in 2005. The focus on operations in Zharey and Panjwayi West over the past year, however, permitted the enemy some respite in Panjwayi East, despite the exhortations of Haji Baran to security forces regarding the security situation. Operation ARAY, which involved both the battle group and the Regional Battle Group (South), was designed to disrupt this enemy activity and to remind the insurgents that Nakhonay was not a safe haven for them.

The operating area was broken down into Objectives DARTMOOR (Salavat); PAARDEBERG (Nakhonay); WOODBURY (Zalakhan) and TARZAN (Belanday). The Canadian sub-units consisted of Recce Squadron with two recce troops, a recce platoon and two engineer troops, and a combat team with two tank troops, two infantry platoons and an Afghan infantry company with Canadian mentors. Canadian CIMIC, PSYOPS and intelligence support was attached to the three British marine companies, who also had an Afghan platoon and several National Directorate of Security agents to conduct sensitive site exploitation. The scheme of manoeuvre had the Canadian recce squadron screen west of Salavat, with the N Company combat team coming into the Nakhonay area from the southwest. Two British platoons would go into Salavat, while a marine company disrupted to the east. The third British company would initially screen to the east, move into the Belanday area, link up, and then both companies would go into Salavat from the east.¹¹⁸

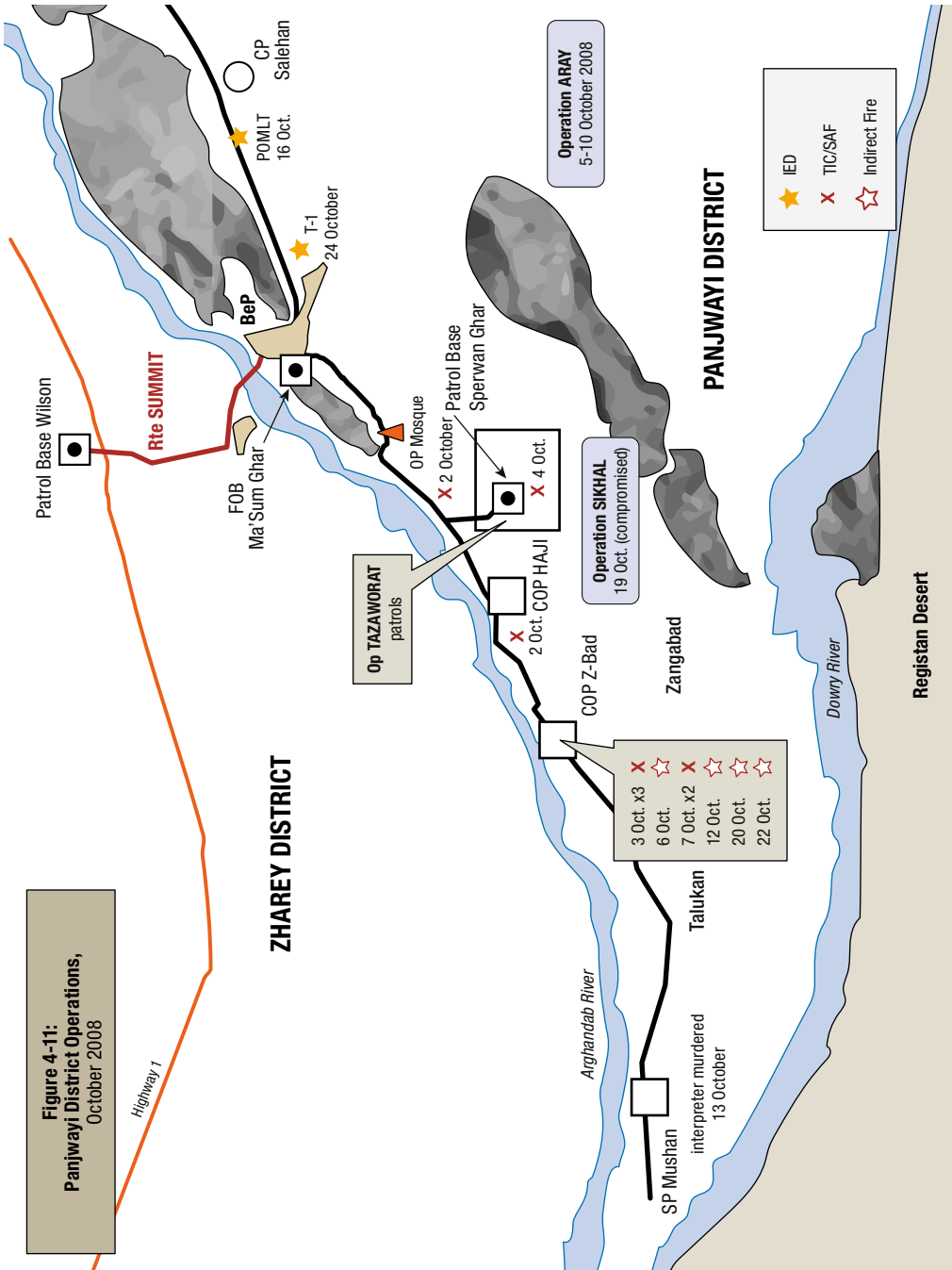


Figure 4-11: Panjwayi District Operations, October 2008



Photo Credit: DND AP2008-K124-117



Photo Credit: DND AR2008-K128-019

Operation ARAY, conducted in eastern Panjwayi District, netted substantial arms caches in Salavat and Nakhonay. These included factory-made plastic anti-personnel mines and rocket-propelled grenade rounds, which combat engineers (previous page) prepare for demolition.

On the first day, 5 October, K Company took some small-arms fire in a “shoot and scoot” but L Company ran into an IED-initiated ambush, which they shot their way out of with the help of an AH-64 Apache attack helicopter. There were four wounded that required medical evacuation. N Company was plagued with vehicle breakdowns as it manoeuvred to get to the start line.¹¹⁹ The enemy’s early warning system activated within one minute of the Canadian forces departing FOB Ma’Sum Ghar and Patrol Base Wilson: flares and white flags were seen, and these were correlated with Canadian movements. The insurgent network in Khenjakak, southwest of Nakhonay, requested reinforcements, a disturbing development since N Company was unable to get to that community in its initial moves.¹²⁰

On Day 2, N Company moved in and conducted searches. The Afghan troops and Canadian mentors uncovered four mortars, huge amounts of medical supplies, and bloodied clothing (notably, all of the medical supplies came from the International Committee of the Red Cross).¹²¹ Key leadership engagements were conducted and it appeared as though the enemy went to ground. British and Afghan search teams found an IED facility in Salavat but little else.¹²² The Canadian assessment was that “the absence of IED attacks in the area of operations suggests that the insurgents may have been surprised....”¹²³ The dismantled patrols continued in all objective areas.

A source called the Panjwayi Joint District Coordination Centre and told the staff that the insurgent commanders in the area met secretly in Nakhonay and agreed to cache their weapons and either exfiltrate or blend into the population. One commander refused and planned to move his force into Malajat to hide. Searches continued on 9 October. N Company uncovered a significant weapons and IED cache: “the find was so sizeable that a second patrol may be cancelled in order to move all the present material back to N Company’s leaguer. The only contact was a “shoot and scoot” by a pair of insurgents on a motorcycle.¹²⁴

The enemy reacted and placed IEDs. A Royal Marine patrol engaged a triggerman in one event and numerous IEDs were uncovered. By 11 October, Operation ARAY petered out. The decision was taken to airlift 42 Commando out of the area. As N Company combat team conducted its withdrawal on 10 October, the lead Husky EROC vehicle triggered an IED, which resulted in a mobility kill. A Leopard C2 from A Squadron manoeuvred and also triggered an IED: the crew spotted the triggerman and engaged him with the 105mm gun, killing him.¹²⁵

Ultimately, what were the effects of Operation ARAY? CIMIC reported that Haji Baran thought the operation was a success because he heard that “the people of Nakhonay were very happy with the outcome of Operation ARAY and especially delighted that there were no civilian casualties. It was also reported that during the searches people were coming out of their compounds and asking the [coalition forces] if they needed help.”¹²⁶ Sensitive site exploitation produced numerous documents, including: the means to make homemade explosives, how to build radio-commanded IEDs, and how to operate mortars, rockets and recoilless rifles. In the end, this “further indicates the significance of the facilitation role that Nakhonay plays in the central Kandahar insurgency.”¹²⁷

Arghandab and Lower Shah Wali Kot Operations, October 2008

Maj Dean Tremblay and Recce Squadron took over in early October. Once on the ground, Tremblay and his troops discovered that the two districts were quite distinct. Agriculturally prosperous Arghandab was the more economically sophisticated of the two, while the armoured soldiers dubbed the hilly and rocky Shah Wali Kot “the badlands.” Ostensibly, Recce Squadron was to implement the usual lines of operations in the area but there were significant troops-to-task issues. Organized into two eight-vehicle Coyote troops, with Recce Platoon from 3 RCR and an engineer section added, the force was thin on the ground. Based in FOB Frontenac near the Dahla Dam, Recce Squadron was expected to handle both the lower Shah Wali Kot and Arghandab Districts. The only allied forces consisted of 30 ineffective police located in the Shah Wali Kot District Centre.

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Photo Credit: Author

Increased concern over insurgent activity in eastern Panjwayi District led to the irregular surge of—Canadian Battle Group, Afghan and OMLT, as well as Regional Battle Group (South)—forces to the Salavat area throughout fall. The smaller hill in the middle is Salavat Ghar, with the community of Salavat at its base and to the right. Chalghowr is in the foreground.

There was a security force for the dam project hired by CIDA but they proved to be problematic. Another private security force protecting a road construction project was in the area but its efforts were not coordinated with Recce Squadron at all.¹²⁸ (See Figure 4-12.)

Down in Arghandab, there was an Afghan infantry company with Canadian mentors, the district police, and a 20-man American Police Mentor Team. An American special forces ODA was also active, with its accompanying Afghan platoon. Again, these three organizations had no command relationship to each other, or with Recce Squadron. Informal relationships were established as much as possible between the players to move information between them and react in case of emergencies.¹²⁹

Recce Squadron patrolled both districts to further define the situation. With a small two-man CIMIC detachment from the PRT, their ability to influence the development situation was limited. Even though there was a multi-million dollar signature project in the middle of the area, there were next to no spin-off economic benefits to the local population in any way. Indeed, when Maj Tremblay challenged a senior CIDA official on this, he was told, “I don’t give a fuck about Shah Wali Kot District.”¹³⁰

Whenever the Coyotes rolled, they generated a significant amount of enemy communications traffic. Consequently, Recce Squadron was able to define the enemy west of the Tarinkot Road and learned they were supported by enemy lodgments in Khakrez: this was not new but there was little the coalition forces could do about it. The Afghan leaders in Shah Wali Kot “stated that the current location of FOB Frontenac is ineffective because few local nationals live in the vicinity and the FOB does not block any insurgent routes from Khakrez down to Shah Wali Kot.” Local commanders suggested to the Canadians that an Afghan army position in Tabin village “would be more useful in deterring insurgent movement if it were relocated to Khakrez.”¹³¹

Over a few weeks, Recce Squadron patrols manoeuvred-to-collect and did what they could to keep Route Oregon open. Lacking a dedicated collection capability, the squadron signals staff improvised. On one occasion, an allied collection organization broke down and, while repairing its vehicles at FOB Frontenac, assisted with defining enemy activity. Essentially, the “seam” identified earlier by Maj Boivin and his squadron between Khakrez and Kandahar City was in heavy play, with a substantial amount of transient enemy traffic moving southeast. There was a dedicated enemy cell operating in Mansurabad, a defended location that could only be taken out with a deliberate operation. Another cluster of enemy activity was defined in the Jelawur area in Arghandab.

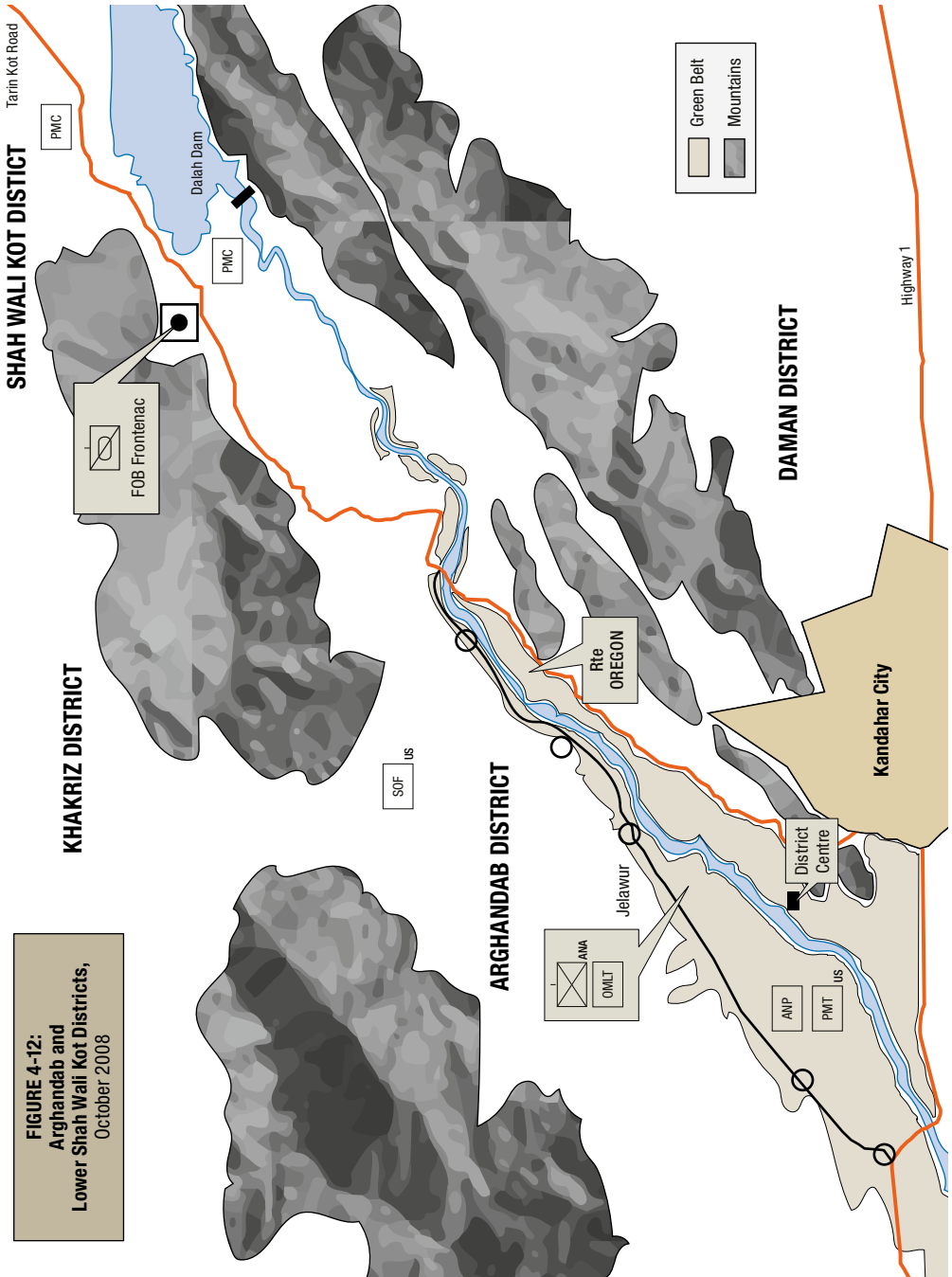


FIGURE 4-12:
Arghandab and
Lower Shah Wali Kot Districts,
October 2008

Figure 4-12: Arghandab and Lower Shah Wali Kot Districts, October 2008

Operation ARAY, however, reduced the ability of the reconnaissance troops to patrol Route Oregon with the frequency they wanted, and Tremblay was concerned that this state of affairs would allow the enemy to flow back in and lay IED's on the route. Another concern was the QRF task for the Dahla Dam, which kept part of the small force on standby in FOB Frontenac: This reduced the patrolling sortie rate.¹³²

The plan, however, was to move the Afghan strong point to Jelawur, which was a hotbed of insurgent activity. Canadian engineers were prepared to move in and build the position, but there were inexplicable delays. Meanwhile, there was word of a weapons cache near the Arghandab District Centre. Recce Squadron and Afghan police conducted Operation SPARAL on 22 October but found nothing. Four days later, a Coyote patrol hit an IED, wounding two and producing yet another immobilized Coyote.¹³³ Local reports came in that the enemy leadership was meeting in the northern districts to prepare further operations in Arghandab but there was no means to collaborate these reports. Not much was going on in Arghandab but there were local complaints that the district leader was not releasing wheat seed, as promised, in return for not planting poppies.¹³⁴

Maywand Operations, October 2008

The situation in Maywand District remained stable. FOB Ramrod was still under construction, while FOB Hotal served as a crucial presence and a stepping-off point for patrols in the town. For the most part, Afghan police and Afghan army personnel, mentored by American police mentors and Canadian OMLT personnel, focused on keeping Highway 1 swept in their area of operation. The small Canadian CIMIC and PSYOPS detachment assisted in these efforts. There were occasional but non-lethal IED strikes against Canadian and American vehicles, but nothing systematic when compared to Zharey or Panjwayi. this time, there were few ambushes on Highway 1. 2-2 Infantry, however, had mobility issues.¹³⁵ The lack of protracted maintenance for their RG-31, RG-33 and MRAP vehicles plus multiple mobility kills from IED strikes had a cumulative effect (recall that 2-2 Infantry's first contact with these vehicles was on landing at KAF in July–August).

The CIMIC detachment was dependent on the OMLT for transport and protection, so when the Afghan infantry company was ripped away from FOB Hotal, CIMIC was grounded, which, in turn, limited where it could go and thus what it could do. The Afghan police lacked transport and were essentially confined to Hotal. Despite these limitations the Canadians in Maywand tracked enemy activity designed to exploit the reduced patrolling presence: “the Taliban are discussing the possibility of arresting people for theft, public disorder, and murder. The Maywand [police] do not have vehicles or radios—this creates a void that the Taliban are all too ready to fill.”¹³⁶

CIMIC also learned that the insurgents established illegal vehicle checkpoints in parts of the district.¹³⁷ The combination of the two posed a direct threat to the legitimacy of the provincial and the Afghan government in that there was now an established parallel power operating in the district. It was no longer just a waypoint for the resupply of enemy forces in Zharey and Panjwayi.

To make a point that they were in the ascendency in Maywand, the insurgents conducted a horrific atrocity. Sometime on 15 October, insurgents on Highway 1 hijacked a bus. Claiming that the passengers were soldiers dressed in civilian clothes, the men were taken away in groups of six or seven, had their hands bound, and were executed with single shots to the head or in the case of one group, beheaded. Maywand police and mentors supported by OH-58D recce helicopters discovered the killing sites, and the Afghan police in Kandahar took control of the investigation. Eventually, between 27 and 30 bodies were discovered.¹³⁸

2-2 Infantry's main effort in October was Operation HAWALEA, conducted at the end of the month. HAWALEAH's purpose was to define the enemy in the Garmabak Pass area between Ghorak and Maywand. LTC Hurlbut launched his forces into the area on 29 October but there was virtually no resistance short of an RPG round and a rocket lofted at the manoeuvring companies. Surprisingly, 2-2 Infantry discovered that there were pockets of pro-government communities and that the Ghorak police actually raided suspect communities regularly. The closer to Hotal one got, it seemed, the more anti-government the population was. Unfortunately, Lt.-Col. Hurlbut was forced to call off the operation because of an excessively large number of vehicle breakdowns.¹³⁹

Kandahar City Operations, November–December 2008

The insurgent assassination campaign in the city gathered momentum throughout November as the PRT focused its efforts on reconstruction and development. The first killing in October involved an Afghan police lieutenant colonel who was gunned down with an AK-47 in a market, followed by the killing of Capt. Ahmad Shad from 5th Kandak, who was murdered under similar circumstances. A National Directorate of Security colonel was also assassinated, which attenuated city-wide intelligence operations temporarily.¹⁴⁰ Information led to a combined Afghan-ISAF raid on a Loy Wala compound on 8 November. Mir Ahmad, who was linked to senior Taliban leader Hafiz Majid, was apprehended, along with Imam Qari Saf. Saf's specialty was "to indoctrinate young men to the insurgent cause"¹⁴¹ presumably in the district madrassas and mosques.

The Afghan security forces displayed a level of previously unseen initiative and operational security during this time. On 10 November, Canadian mentors from 2nd (Strike) Kandak accompanied their counterparts as they unexpectedly deployed to a site in the city to await orders for an unannounced, unnamed, five-day operation (later dubbed Operation ATAL 32).

The 1-205 Brigade headquarters arrived, and elements of all five kandaks converged on the city. The Afghan forces then launched a series of cordon and search operations in the city, one district at a time, working closely with the National Directorate of Security and the police. In the first 24 hours, the National Directorate of Security detained 28 possible insurgents, criminals, or both, including one Taliban leader; weapons and opium were also confiscated. After 72 hours of operations, there was “an unexpected protest in [Kandahar City] sponsored by the Afghan National Reconciliation Council (ANRC)” who, apparently, decided to protest ISAF air strikes in Shah Wali Kot. The Afghan army suspended ATAL 32 for 24 hours. During this time, insurgents detonated a huge vehicle-borne suicide IED next to the National Directorate of Security headquarters and the Provincial Shura building, killing eight and wounding 50 civilians. The situation could have been worse: a brave Afghan policeman became suspicious and halted the truck before it could get closer to the building. Sadly, he was killed in the blast.¹⁴² The Role 3 hospital at KAF was alerted. The message from the insurgents was clear: stop ATAL 32 or else.¹⁴³ The OCC-P helped coordinate the response, while the PRT received information that Camp Nathan Smith was next on a suicide IED hit list and made the appropriate security preparations that night. What impressed the Canadians was that the Afghan police could be seen on television “dealing with the incident without any coalition assistance.”¹⁴⁴

While this drama was under resolution, another unfolded. Twelve female teachers and students departing a girl’s school in District 8 were subjected to an acid attack conducted by two men on a motorcycle. All had to be treated at Mirwais hospital. The international media outcry was as instantaneous as it was gargantuan. Governor Raufi, and for that matter, TF Kandahar’s information operations personnel, now had a rare platform to globally denounce the Taliban and its allies.¹⁴⁵

The Afghans decided to pause for 48 hours, and not strictly because of the intimidation. The attack on the National Directorate of Security meant that “that agency is no longer able to participate in or provide intelligence for the operation, temporarily halting further searches targeting insurgents.”¹⁴⁶ The 1-205 Brigade commander wanted to mount a series of regular pulse operations into the city to maintain momentum but the next foray uncovered nothing. The police, on the other hand, had three people in custody who were part of the acid attack. Governor Raufi directed the resumption of Operation ATAL 32.

There were more successful cordon and searches but the Afghan police commander in District 3 where they were conducted was assassinated in retaliation on 19 November. The PRT Force Protection Company continued with its patrols and found armed Afghans protecting their homes and businesses. Most appeared friendly and receptive to the Canadian presence. Reports continued to flow in that the Taliban shadow governor for Kandahar, Ayub Akhundzada, was adamant that Camp Nathan Smith be targeted as soon as possible

to maintain the insurgent campaign's momentum. Apparently, he wanted a military target destroyed as soon as possible because he was taking heat from his superiors and his supporters regarding the large number of Afghan civilian casualties.¹⁴⁷

Operation ATAL 32 was suspended again on 27 November, for reasons unknown to the OMLT. The assassinations and bombs started again. This time, police near Mirwais Hospital were targeted with a bomb (killing six and wounding six) and an Afghan contractor was shot as a message to others not to bid on ISAF contracts. A bicycle-borne IED was found rigged to kill school children at a girl's school: it was dismantled and exploited by the PRT's IED experts. Another find involved a propane bomb set to kill the provincial Minister of Education. Again, PRT engineers handled its dismantling. Several more near-misses were recorded against Kandahar City police sub-station commanders: three officers were nearly killed in various attacks in late December. Another senior National Directorate of Security commander was not so lucky and was killed.¹⁴⁸

Almost as an afterthought, TF Kandahar reported the assassinations of three Kandahar City religious figures. The most prominent was Abdul Qayum, the Mullah of the Red Mosque. Qayum was murdered while he was in the process of reciting the Koran. Two other members of the Kandahar Ulema Shura were shot and killed in December.¹⁴⁹

This litany of death and destruction had a purpose. The variety and selectivity of the targets precluded any suggestion that these were random acts. The insurgents were specifically targeting community leaders and community security as much as they were targeting the larger security organizations like the National Directorate of Security. From September to December 2008, there were 20 assassinations, two kidnappings, and 15 IED attacks, as well as several aborted attempts. January would see five more IED attacks, four more assassinations, and another kidnapping.

What effect did all of this have on the overall Canadian effort? First, according to PRT reports, there was not a lot of visible Canadian-supported development going on during this time. More behind-the-scenes aspects of capacity-building at the provincial level continued, however. Contact was made with the municipal level authorities. CIMIC patrols continued with their efforts in their assigned districts. Police mentors continued to mentor. The main effect was on the "implementing partner" relationships, especially the UN ones. Once the security situation deteriorated, they ran for cover, which in turn attenuated critical programmes like the Community Development Councils. The cultural divide between CIDA and CIMIC, as well as a capability divide, precluded the use of CIMIC to do UN HABITAT programming, for example. All of this made progress in Kandahar City extremely difficult to measure and thus the ability to report back to Ottawa and feed the mechanisms of the new Canadian strategy became problematic.

The positive aspect of the situation was that Canadians saw Afghans, army, police and standby police work together on Operation ATAL 32 with virtually no mentoring. They could conduct effective operations when they deemed it critical to do so. The Canadian Army assisted with first response EOD and presence patrols with Force Protection Company, but the bulk of the action was Afghan. This was measurable progress.

Panjwayi District Operations, November–December 2008

Canadian operations in the district kicked off with MUTAFIQ TANDAR 6. Unlike previous “river runs,” this one carried with it some controversy. BGen Thompson and LCol Barrett concurred that Strong Points Mushan and Haji should be evacuated and destroyed in a deliberate operation while Mushan was resupplied. The battle group justified this option noting that “this realignment will enable the battle group to force project to a higher troop density throughout Panjwayi and demonstrate to the population our will to enhance security.”¹⁵⁰ This objective was slightly changed later to “consolidate forces in Stability Box Sperwan.”¹⁵¹ The other view, held by CEFCOM commander LGen Mike Gauthier, was that Canadian media and the Taliban would interpret this as a retreat. The battle group countered that it thought it could mitigate any “bad IO” with the population through district leader Haji Baran. LCol Barrett told LGen Gauthier while he was visiting that even the Afghans did not want to man Zangabad or Haji. LCol Jocelyn Paul, Commanding Officer of the follow-on battle group who was over on his recce, did not want to man them either and told Barrett that his men “would bleed” if they went in there. Gauthier finally caved in and accepted the withdrawal.¹⁵² (See Figures 4-13 and 4-14.)

Operation MUTAFIQ TANDAR 6 broke down into two phases. The first went in on 6 November, with A Squadron leading the way down the Arghandab riverbed to Strong Point Haji. The enemy attempted to engage with anti-tank weapons on four occasions: all were disrupted with Hellfires dropped from MQ-1 Predators and MQ-9 Reapers, and gunfire from F Battery’s M-777 guns and OH-58D Warrior helicopters. Eight enemy were killed in these engagements.¹⁵³ M Company implemented an aggressive series of patrols in order to deceive the enemy as to what was happening.

Strong Point Haji was dismantled. While this was in progress, the enemy mortared the site with a high volume of fire. An A Squadron Leopard 2A6M, after some time, finally observed the mortar spotter and engaged him with 120mm fire. The forces in Strong Point Zangabad observed the mortar locations and engaged with their own mortars. Another insurgent mortar opened up but could not be located or engaged.¹⁵⁴

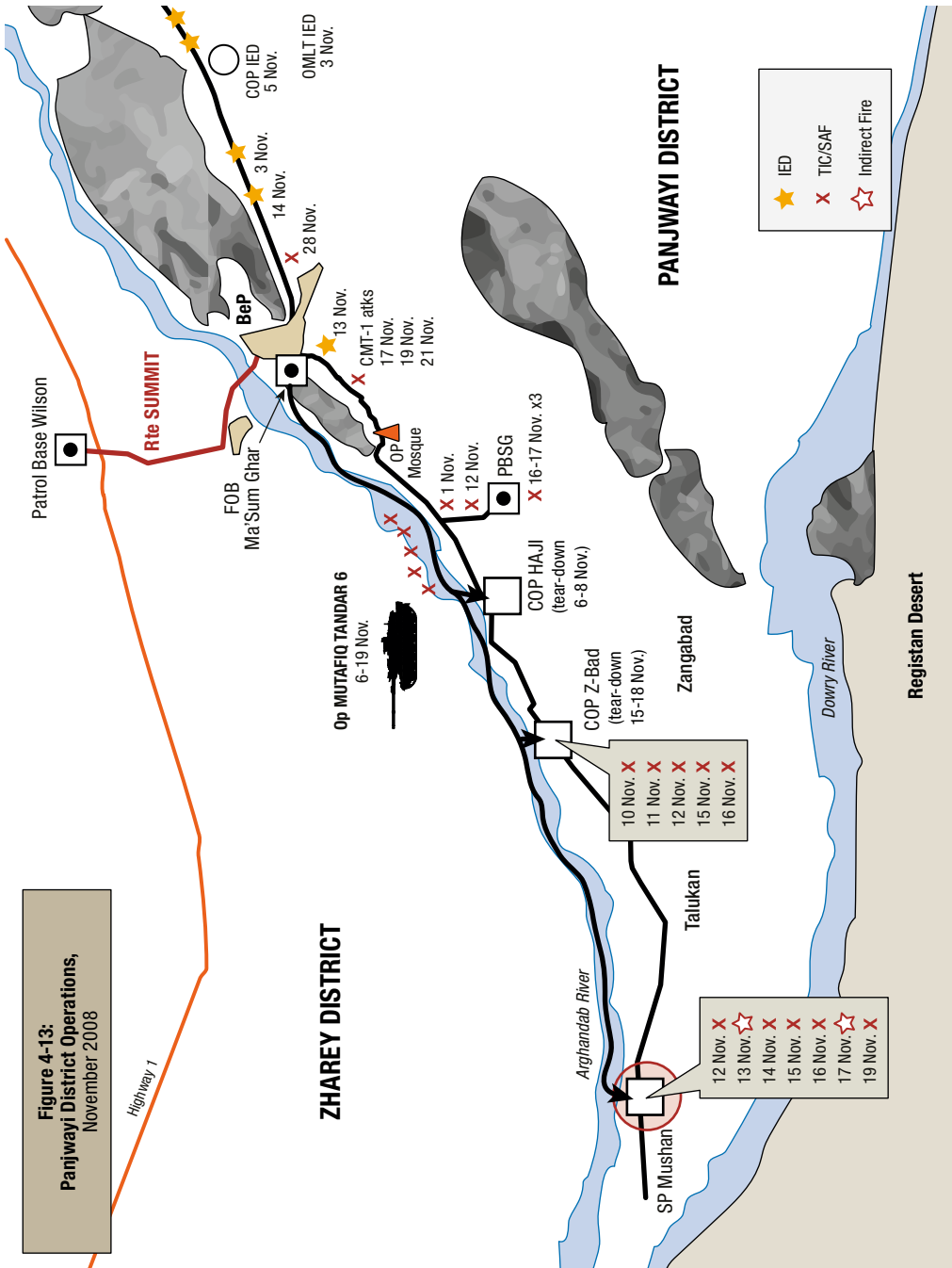


Figure 4-13: Panjwayi District Operations, November 2008

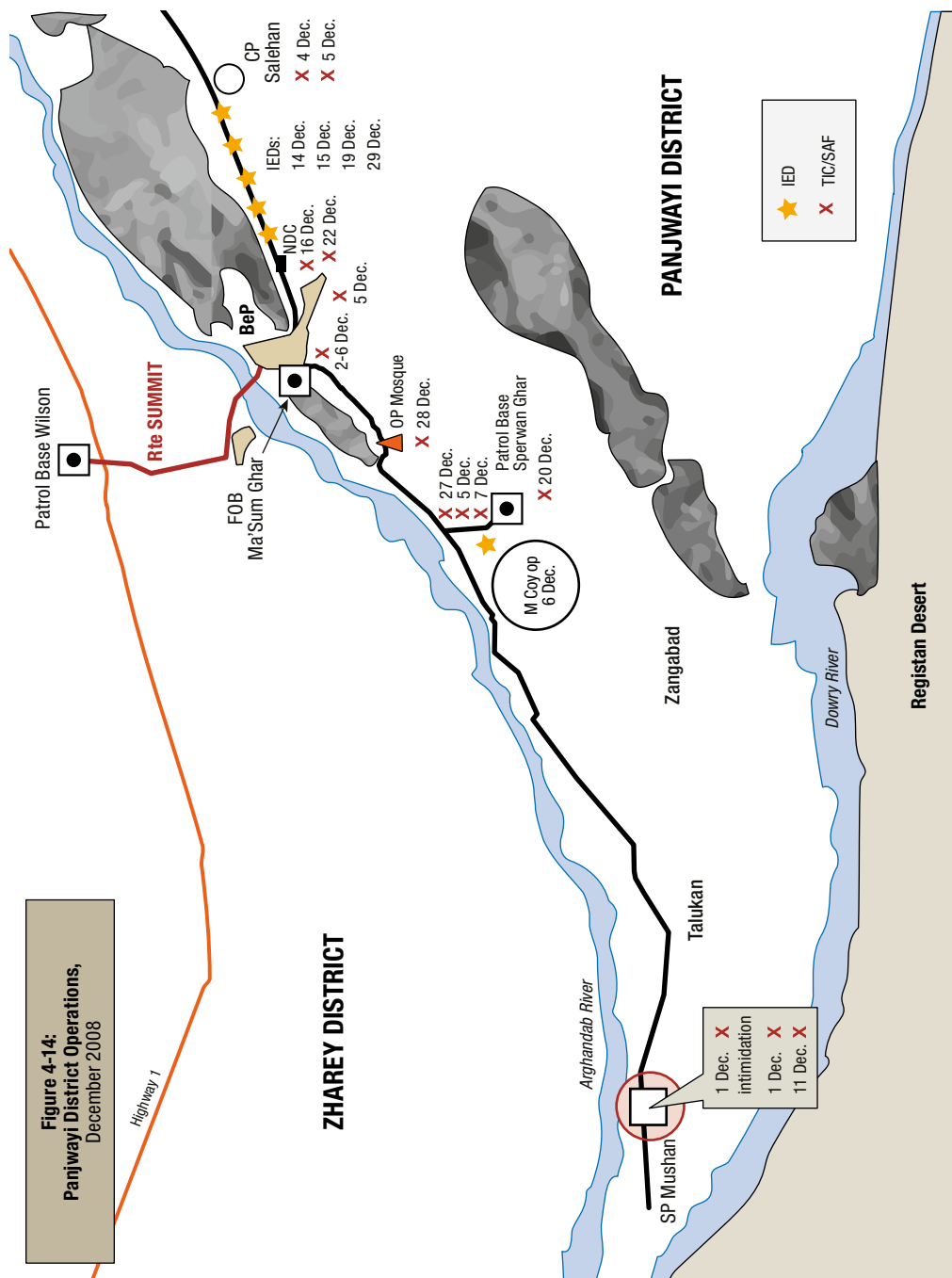


Figure 4-14: Panjwayi District Operations, December 2008

As the Canadian force leaguered and prepared for the next move west, the Afghan commander in Mushan held a shura with elders there. They told him that they were about to send an emissary to the Taliban and give them an ultimatum: “The town does not support them, and the Taliban are not allowed to purchase items from the bazaar anymore.” This was a significant victory. After months and months of taking fire, conducting aggressive patrols, and connecting with the population, Strong Point Mushan was now reaping the benefits of their actions and the population was coming off the fence. In no other location in the district had the population made such remonstrations to the Taliban. When the Taliban threatened the shopkeepers the following day, they responded by keeping their shops open all night. An Afghan–Canadian patrol received information on a weapons cache and uncovered 32 Chinese anti-personnel mines, 15 bricks of Russian plastic explosive, and medical supplies.¹⁵⁵

This defiance of the Taliban led to seven days of violence directed at the strong point and its patrols. For the most part, this was “shoot and scoot” small-arms fire with some mortaring thrown in.¹⁵⁶ Strong Point Zangabad also received mortar fire for four days, to which the Canadians responded with 155mm artillery. A Squadron combat team was launched again on 17 November as the EROC suite cleared Routes Fosters West to Brown and then north to a breach into the Arghandab riverbed. From here, the column proceeded west to Strong Point Zangabad and initiated the teardown. M Company, once again, aggressively patrolled and provoked limited enemy responses that were dealt with by a variety of weapons systems. The EROC Husky and Buffalo vehicles hit IEDs, which slowed things down but the enemy continued to harass the column with mortar fire. The mortars were eventually dispatched with direct fire, when possible, or 155mm fire from the M-777s when necessary. On 16 November, A Squadron moved on to Mushan for the resupply operation and the Afghan infantry companies relieved each other: 3rd Company from 2nd Kandak took over from 2nd Company and the Canadian mentors rotated. Canadian engineers built a new helicopter pad using a structure called “Rhino Snot” and made several other improvements to the strong point. A volley of enemy mortars was suppressed with 44 rounds of high explosive fired by F Battery. When mortar fire continued the next day, killing one Afghan soldier and wounding five more, a Leopard tank troop and an infantry platoon launched a hasty attack from the strong point, killed the crew, and seized the mortar itself. On 19 November, A Squadron departed Mushan and headed south to the Dori River, west and then north through the open Maywand Dasht and then back to Ma’Sum Ghar. Operation MUTAFIQ TANDAR 6 was complete.¹⁵⁷



Photo Credit: Author

Improvised explosive device attacks continued to immobilize Canadian vehicles on Route Fosters and in the Arghandab riverbed. Here, a Taurus armoured recovery vehicle tows a Leopard 2A6M to “Tango Maintenance” at Ma’Sum Ghar for repairs.

M Company continued with Operation TAZAWORAT in an effort to ensure concurrent security in Stability Box Sperwan. Canadian engineers and local nationals working together to improve the roads in the area were engaged with harassing fire. An engineer LAV engaged the insurgents with 25mm fire, killing both of them, and attacks ceased.¹⁵⁸

Concurrent with the Operation MUTAFIQ TANDAR 6 endgame in late November, the enemy mounted a series of attacks in the area between Sperwan Ghar and Ma’Sum Ghar. OP Mosque was engaged for the first time in months, and two IED attacks occurred on Route Fosters West. CMT-1 was hit three times with small arms and a mortar between 17 and 21 November. These events were overshadowed by MUTAFIQ TANDAR 6. When combined with the five IED strikes that took place on Fosters East during the month, including a strike against a Canadian NSE combat logistics patrol, it was unclear that there was a relationship between enemy activity in the two parts of the district.

That perception changed in December. After the closure of Strong Points Zangabad and Haji, the number of incidents from Sperwan Ghar east along Fosters West to Fosters East skyrocketed. The Afghan troops at Patrol Base Sperwan Ghar came under direct attack. There were three sustained TICs along Route Brown, and a cluster of IEDs were uncovered between the Fosters West and Brown intersection and OP Mosque. Small-arms fire was now directed against FOB Ma'Sum Ghar from the south. Three Tank Hill even came under contact on 5 December.¹⁵⁹ The new Afghan infantry company in Mushan did not have the confidence of the population and the people swung back onto the fence. This did not bode well, though there was only a single contact in December.¹⁶⁰

The worst was yet to come. The New District Centre came under attack three times in December, a direct insurgent challenge to the seat of governance. The insurgents overran a police checkpoint in Bazaar-e Panjwayi right next to FOB Ma'Sum Ghar, killing three police and abducting two more. They left behind what appeared to be a booby trap but the Canadian QRF deployed and determined that the device was fake. As they were mounting up in their engineer LAV to depart, they triggered another device, killing WO Gaétan Roberge from 2 R22eR and Sgt Gregory Kruse from 2 Combat Engineer Regiment. Two Afghan police were also killed, and four other Canadians and an interpreter were wounded.¹⁶¹

Further east, there were four IED attacks against Afghans and Canadians along Fosters East. The checkpoint at Salehan came under contact twice, and on one occasion Canadian police mentors and a handful of Afghan police fought off insurgents. The combination of these events indicated there was a significant shift in emphasis for the insurgency in Panjwayi District, one that was not attributable merely to the change in season.

To what extent was the increased violence in Panjwayi East connected to the insurgents' north-south consolidation between the Nakhonay networks and those in Panjwayi West, overflow from coalition operations in Asheque-Senjaray in Zharey District, or an increasingly robust insurgent presence in Salavat-Nakhonay? The pattern of behaviour favoured the idea that enemy consolidation in Panjwayi West-Nakhonay fuelled attacks against the Sperwan Ghar-Ma'Sum Ghar area and supported the Salavat-Nakhonay efforts along Fosters East. The mountains between Asheque-Senjaray in Zharey and Fosters East are barren and anything moving over them is easily observed, assuming there was a platform available to conduct the observation. The possibility of the Asheque-Senjaray cells conducting operations into Bazaar-e Panjwayi by moving along the river east of Route Summit could not be ruled out, however, but with the increased scrutiny directed at Senjaray, it was less likely.

What was Canada able to accomplish on the governance and development fronts in Panjwayi District during this time? Canadian CIMIC teams sketched out several broad issues. There was development going on in the district and it was facilitated through the development shura. There was little CIMIC reportage passed up to TF Kandahar that used

National Solidarity Programme/District Development Assembly/Community Development Council terminology: the reports discussed food distribution, large construction projects, specifically, the roads and water issues in Bazaar-e Panjwayi. Along with these large projects, however, came various shades of corruption associated with each one, coupled with struggles between factions over who controlled or otherwise benefited financially from them. As we have seen, there was competition between Haji Baran and Haji Agha Lalai Dastagiri. CIMIC uncovered connections between Baran and Haji Agha Lalai from Sperwan (called “Haji Dollars” to distinguish him from Dastagiri) and between Baran and the former Maywand District leader, Haji Saifullah. Someone also ran an extortion racket using “police” against the civilian contract trucks supporting CMT-1, while another entity allegedly connected to Dastagiri withheld a portion of the World Food Programme allocation for the district and spirited it off to a warehouse in Kandahar City for re-sale on the open market.¹⁶²

What appeared to be going well were the CMT-1 and the Fosters paving project. Yes, progress was slow and, yes, the enemy, and possibly other entities, attacked it with some regularity. However, the visible economic spin-offs in the district, particularly in Bazaar-e Panjwayi, were tangible. The quality of life for the 400 or so workers and their families noticeably improved during the course of the project—and was measurable. What CMT-1 called a “micro-economy” grew around the project to cater to the workers, something that collaterally improved the livelihoods of people along Fosters West as the project inched forward. Blue Hackle security did not extort from the local population as the police had in the past. Naturally, district leader Baran threatened to apply pressure to cut off funds to the workers because they were, in his view, moving too slowly. Others believed Baran was peeved about not getting a big enough slice of the financial action.¹⁶³

The district National Directorate of Security commander, Col. Faiz, was no fool and had more than an inkling as to what was going on. However, Haji Baran was no fool either. He insisted that Faiz be excluded from the district security shura, then behaved histrionically over “corruption” on the Fosters paving project and threatened to go to the media because of Canadian “inaction.” The CIMIC team marveled when Baran threatened to resign because people were saying “bad things” about him to the Governor.¹⁶⁴

Col. Faiz aside, policing was still problematic. The P-OMLT informally met with their American and CIVPOL counterparts to divide the labour: the American police mentors would work with Bismillah Khan, the chief, while P-OMLT would handle field operations and CIVPOL training. Then, all of a sudden, the chief disappeared, claiming he had to attend shuras in the city. The police virtually deserted for the Eid holiday, leaving the P-OMLT to prop everything up. Brig.-Gen. Matiullah finally replaced Khan with Mohammad Naeem, who set out to re-professionalize what he had left to work with.¹⁶⁵

Every possible entity came out of the woodwork sniffing for money on the PSS Sperwan project, so much so that the only player who recalled that the objective was actually to build a police station were the Canadians. The Byzantine negotiations over who would build, who would protect the builders and who would handle the convoys are beyond this study, but it was evident that all factions in Panjwayi wanted a piece of the action—or else bad things would happen. For example, a worker was kidnapped, taken to Nakhonay, beaten, threatened and then released. Was this Taliban action or not? An informant working for M Company in Sperwan who provided information on a variety of topics was found beaten to death. Was this a Taliban action or not?¹⁶⁶ Once again, commercial violence followed projects where there was a lot of Canadian or allied money involved and then overlapped with insurgent violence, who saw the projects as both sources for funding for their operations, and as things to attack to demonstrate their effect. The new Canadian strategy could in no way relate these behaviours effectively in a manner measurable to a large audience back in Canada. Indeed, TF Kandahar's ability to track and respond to this on a short-term basis was, in fact, quite limited. Panjwayi was a coliseum of a different sort from Zharey, but a coliseum nonetheless.

Zharey District Operations, November–December 2008

Those who thought that so-called fighting season was over were dismayed by the level of enemy activity in Zharey District in November. The enemy's operational tempo against Strong Points Lakokhel, Pulchakan and Spin Pir was as vigorous as it was in October, with 14 attacks on Lakokhel alone (see Figures 4-15a and 4-15b.) The difference was an increased level of enemy coordination between attacks on both Lakokhel and Pulchakan, and in one case a coordinated attack against both positions. What was more alarming was the significant increase in enemy activity directed against Stability Box JUNO: the number of incidents doubled compared to incidents in October and coincided with a significant number of rocket attacks against FOB Ma'Sum Ghar.¹⁶⁷ The situation was aggravated further by what appeared to be a completely separate but associated enemy front operating in Senjaray.

Operation JANGISIOUX patrols continued throughout the month with very little reported contact. On 6 November, an Afghan/Canadian patrol from Strong Point Lakokhel was engaged with small-arms and RPG fire. The interpreter was wounded and paralyzed. Cpl Mark McLaren crawled to his location and extracted him under fire. Smoke and high explosive fire was called in and the patrol broke contact and made its way back to the strong point. Cpl McLaren was awarded the Medal of Military Valour for his actions but was subsequently killed in an IED blast later in the tour.

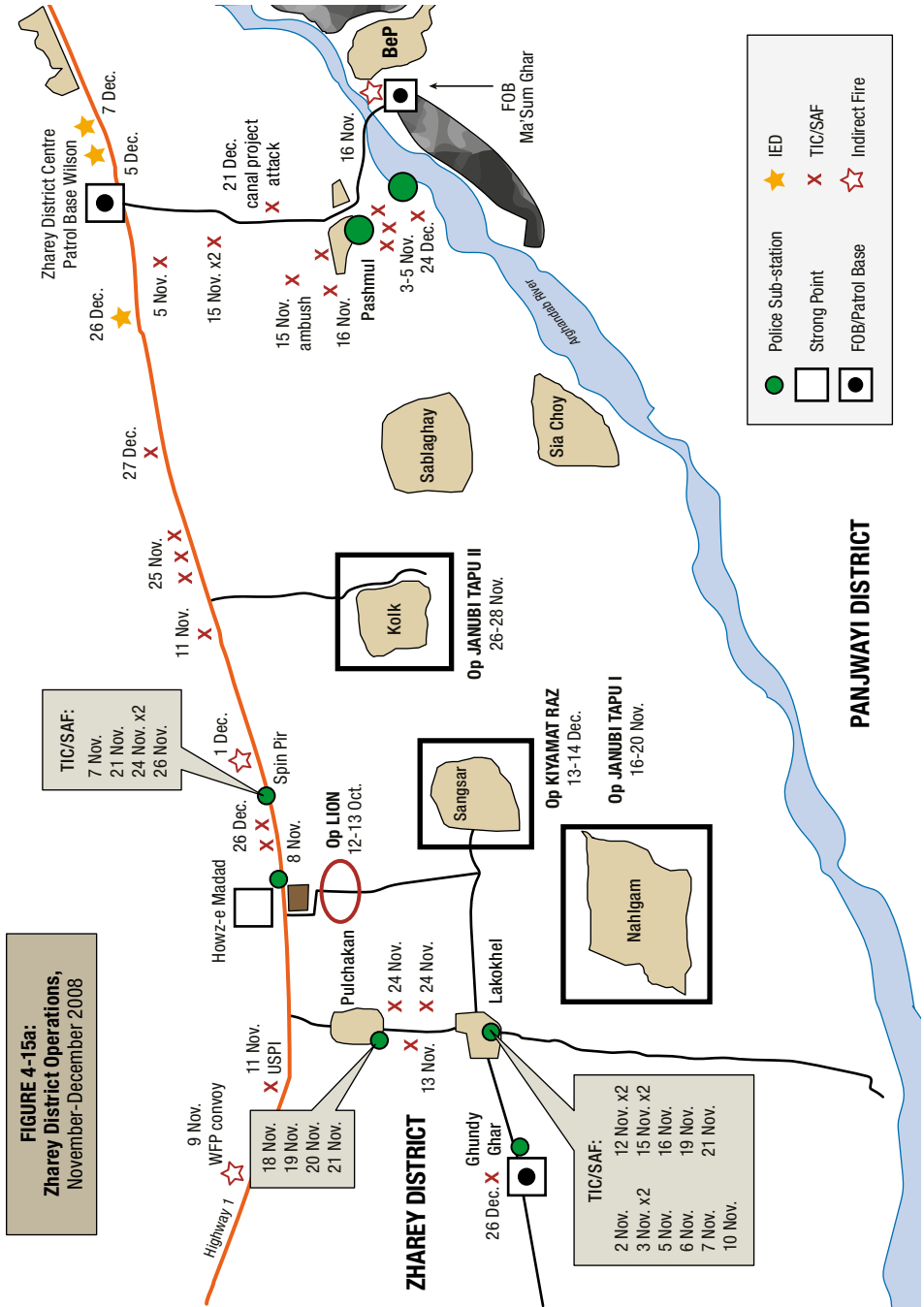


Figure 4-15a: Zharey District Operations, November-December 2008

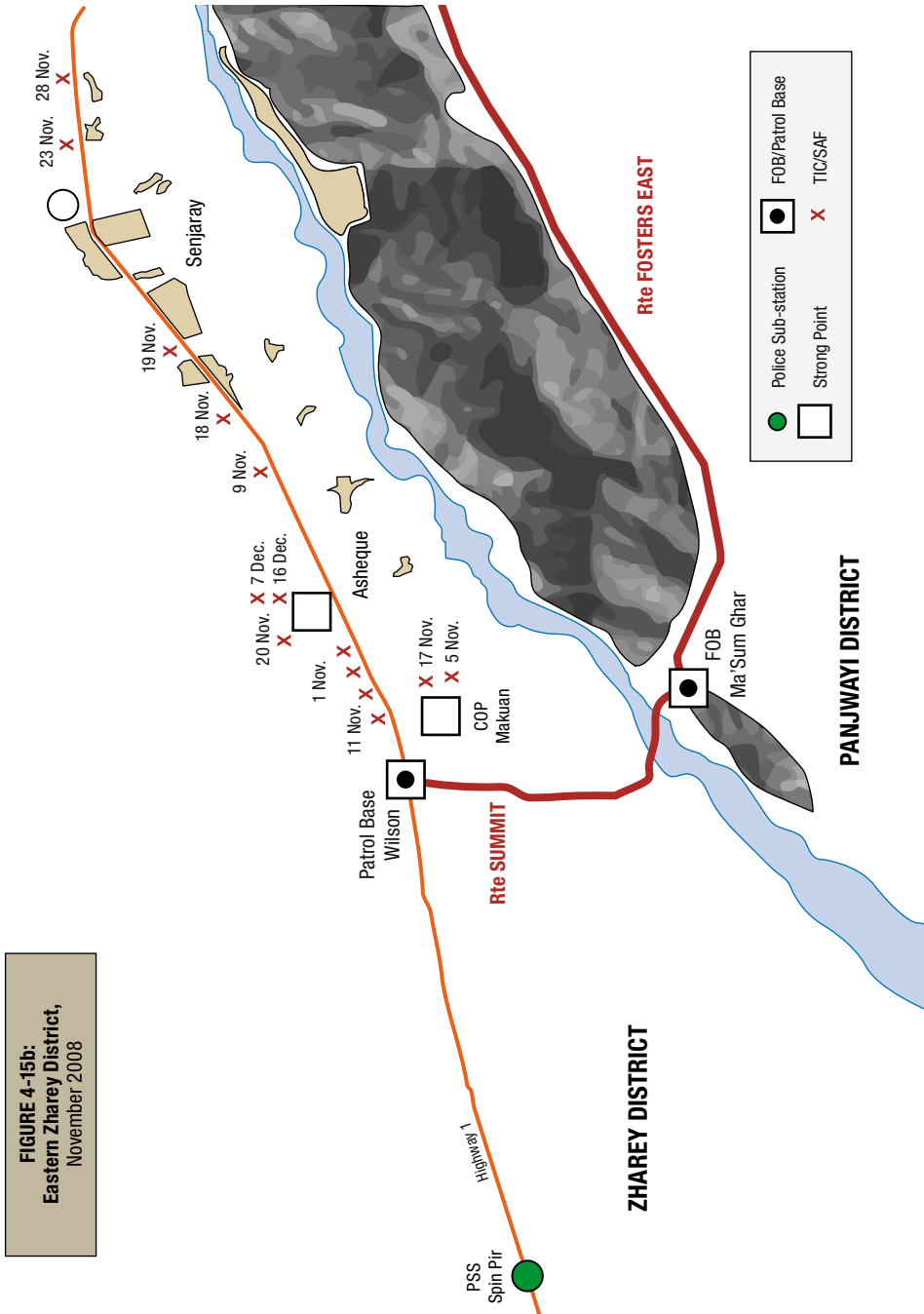


Figure 4-15b: Eastern Zharey District, November 2008

The larger operations mounted in the district involved 3rd Kandak and mentors who launched a cordon and search into Makuan on 5–6 November, and the JANUBI TAPU series in the last half of the month. Operation JANUBI TAPU brought the Regional Battle Group (South), in this case, 42 Commando (Royal Marines), back into the Canadian area of operation for a limited time. The objectives of JANUBI TAPU I and II were to raid enemy sanctuaries in Nahlgam and Kolk, in part to draw off enemy resources from the upcoming voter registration process.

JANUBI TAPU I started on 14 November with the quiet deployment of the 42 Commando mortars to Ghundy Ghar, and the simultaneous launch of N Company into the Pashmul area on two large patrols as a diversion, while 42 Commando prepared and mounted an air assault on Nahlgam. N Company and Afghan police with American mentors came under contact on 15 November from multiple locations with a high volume of fire once they moved into the extremely close terrain around Pashmul. N Company returned suppressive fire and called in 16 rounds of 155mm high explosive from the guns. Part of one Canadian platoon was pinned down and could not extricate. The joint terminal attack controller was able to vector in close air support, with a GBU-12 bomb dropped on one compound from where fire was emanating and the platoon was able to pull back. Another fire mission of six rounds suppressed the enemy team engaging the police.¹⁶⁸ The next day, another deliberate patrol into Pashmul encountered insurgent mortar fire and direct fire. Canadian small-arms fire and artillery suppressed the enemy while an MQ-9 Reaper spotted another four-man team and engaged with Hellfire missiles.¹⁶⁹ Fifteen minutes later, the Royal Marines touched down and exited their Sea King helicopters at a landing zone in Nahlgam. There were three substantial contacts throughout the morning as they swept through the fortified town where they uncovered a large IED factory and called in an exploitation team.¹⁷⁰

During the course of operations, a two-man sniper team situated on a rooftop, covering an Afghan–Canadian patrol was spotted and came under fire. One member of the team was critically wounded, and his partner MCpl Jeremy Pinchin covered him while administering first aid. Numerous enemy rounds impacted on Pinchin's body armour as he did so. They were able to successfully extricate from the situation and link up with friendly forces. MCpl Pinchin was awarded the Star of Military Valour for his actions. The searches continued the next day resulting in three more contacts with little to report. The Royal Marines narrowly avoided a motorcycle-borne suicide IED attack. With diminishing returns, the decision was made to lift K and L companies out on 20 November. One important effect was that Operation JANUBI TAPU shook loose a prominent Taliban commander who was being tracked by the ASIC. An MQ-9 Reaper was brought online to gain positive identification but the targeting team could not meet the rule of engagement criteria. Substantial intelligence, however, was collected for future use.¹⁷¹

In an important development, the 2nd Kandak leadership decided to unilaterally mount a sweep of rocket launch areas in Zharey, and take along Afghan police for a joint operation. This was in response to a rocket attack that killed two Afghan soldiers and wounded four. At the last minute, unmentored police replaced the P-OMLT at the behest of the deputy chief of police. The two infantry companies produced nothing in the cordon and search operations, which raised suspicions between the two organizations.¹⁷²

Operation JANUBI TAPU II involved the battle group with a company from 42 Commando attached. The goal was to degrade enemy activity affecting both Highway 1 and Stability Box JUNO radiating from the Kolk area. Two combat teams breached in on the ground while the Royal Marines conducted a company-sized air assault near Kolk. Results were mixed. There were 30 detainees taken by Afghan forces, but it was unclear at the time of operation how important they were. A small weapons cache was uncovered and there was virtually no contact reported. As with the previous operation, enemy leadership was forced to move to another location, which resulted in a productive SOF strike later on.¹⁷³

With the exception of Highway 1 east of Patrol Base Wilson, there were only a handful of contacts recorded for December 2008 in Zharey District, none of which occurred in the first half of the month. It is likely that the JANUBI TAPU series forced what was left of the insurgency in the district to go to ground, as their out-of-area fighters finally departed for the season. 2nd Kandak rotated out and 1st Kandak came in. Canadian and Afghan patrols continued into Pashmul and there were casualties from IEDs. N Company kept uncovering IED manuals and partially constructed devices during the course of the patrol programme. On 14 December 2008, N Company launched Operation KIYAMAT RAZ: a night infiltration of the Sangsar area, which resulted in the seizure of a handful of weapons: “The insurgents did not present to defend” and the enemy were assessed to have vacated the area.¹⁷⁴ Spin Pir was shot up a couple of times and the CMT-2 was engaged on Route Summit, to no effect.

What about development in Zharey District? Though a canal project in the village of Zehdanan was held up to be a success, CIMIC reported that

Currently there is no real leadership in the village...No clear response on who the current village leader was given. [ELDER] was the former village elder until his abduction by the insurgents in January 2008 who released him days later. After [ELDER]'s abduction he resolved not to maintain a relationship with ISAF with regards to construction efforts. This is perhaps indicative of a lack of organization, which seems to confirm that the insurgents do have an influential role in the village, contrary to what was said by the local nationals.¹⁷⁵

Indeed, poor police behaviour continued to play into this:

The village supports the government but they grow weary of the ANP due to the fact that the verbal commands given by the ANP when conducting a search are not appropriate but are demeaning toward the Pashto culture.¹⁷⁶

District-level development initiatives were hampered by the lack of full-time Canadian coordination. CIMIC, CIDA and CMT representatives once again attempted to meet to coordinate projects but it appeared that the district-level organizations like the District Development Assembly were inoperative. It was evident that the insurgents were interfering with the Community Development Councils. Ideas like the construction of a farmer's market next to FOB Wilson were mooted. The fact that CIMIC, CIDA and CMTs were working together was itself a positive development but it was not enough to capitalize on the lull in enemy activity in western Zharey in December.¹⁷⁷ Indeed, the district leader told the Canadians in mid-December that "the priority for the district at this time was security and until such a time that security issues were addressed, it would be unlikely that other advancements could be made."¹⁷⁸ CMT-2, however, reported success in its activities dealing with water issues along Route Summit. They "established a credible workforce" and that "the capacity of their workers is such that they are able to take on some of the responsibilities of project management, focusing on team leadership."¹⁷⁹ Unfortunately, these gains were not directly connected to positive governance. Yes, they improved the lot of the population, but that improvement did not benefit the government camp significantly at the district or provincial levels. The enemy benefited in that they could tell the population they were, in fact, allowing the Canadians and the government to do these projects on their sufferance.

As for security, Sahardi was not unaware of what was going on. In his view, "there are essentially three different [police] zones of control in Zharey District and that it was contributing to greater insurgent freedom of movement." These were: the Senjaray—controlled "by Presidential decree"—police under Haji Lala; Zharey Dasht refugee camp, under Tooryalai; and the rest of Zharey under Bismillah Khan. Haji Lala was "providing security for himself and his men and not for the community at large." Makuan and Senjaray were a problem because the people there "mostly of the Alizai tribe were providing the insurgents with food and shelter."¹⁸⁰ This made it difficult for the Canadians to develop and then implement a district plan. Canadian CIMIC, DFAIT, OMLT and P-OMLT all agreed that "the primary issue seems to be a lack of trained manpower to adequately secure the district."¹⁸¹

Death in December: Operation KASSAT in Senjaray

The Senjaray area along Highway 1 east of FOB Wilson had been a shooting gallery for most of November. Habibullah Jan's death and the imposition of Karzai-controlled police who did not coordinate with the district or any other police severely weakened the government's position in that area.¹⁸² The Afghan National Army launched a one-day operation into Makuan area (Operation COBRA), but for the most part, convoys along the road continued to receive small-arms fire in increasing volumes toward the end of the month. The Afghan National Army conducted morning sweeps along the road, while N Company prepared night ambushes along the river. There were intelligence reports that IEDs were coming into the area courtesy of Commander Zergay, but they were not specific enough to act on.¹⁸³ On 13 November, Afghan police discovered a dummy IED in a culvert. As they were assessing it, a secondary device consisting of a PMN anti-personnel mine and a jug of homemade explosive was triggered with a command wire, killing or wounding four police officers.¹⁸⁴ The ASIC warned on 24 November that the enemy were increasingly interested in targeting the morning road sweeps.¹⁸⁵ In the following days, Afghan police and army patrols discovered several command wire IEDs before they could be detonated.¹⁸⁶

Around 0800 on 5 December 2008, N Company was in the process of conducting a dismounted presence patrol in Pashmul when a soldier triggered a mine or IED. The resulting blast seriously wounded two Canadians, who were subsequently evacuated by helicopter.¹⁸⁷ One hour later, working with a platoon from 1st Kandak mentoring team 71D were conducting their morning Highway 1 sweep for IEDs in Senjaray when the enemy detonated an IED and ambushed them. This IED had no effect. However, as 71D's two RG-31s fired back and extricated from the ambush, a huge IED detonated under one vehicle, flinging it 25 metres off the road into a grape field. The crater was so large it destroyed Highway 1. WO Robert Wilson, Cpl Mark McLaren and Pte Demetrios Diplaros, all from 1 RCR, were killed in the attack.¹⁸⁸

A coordinated attack against Strong Point Asheque took place on the night of 7 December, further reinforcing the fact that the insurgents were ramping up operations in Senjaray. On the night of 12 December, a Sperwer TUAV mission observed four people working on a Highway 1 culvert west of Senjaray near the location of the 5 December attack. They were seen to "move tactically" and laying what was believed to be a command wire. The team later moved to a mosque in the area. TF Kandahar instructed the PRT to deploy its QRF at first light to investigate. On arrival, the enemy detonated a large IED beneath one of the LAV IIIs, catastrophically destroying it and killing Cpl Thomas Hamilton, Pte Justin Jones and Pte John Curwin. A fourth Canadian was seriously wounded.¹⁸⁹ Normally, the enemy laid the command wire perpendicularly to the road to a firing point.

CHAPTER FOUR



Photo Credit: Author

Seen from the air looking north, this is the community of Senjaray in Zharey District, the arena for Operation KASSAT. KASSAT was conducted in response to multiple deaths of Canadian and allied personnel along the stretch of Highway 1, which can be seen here running east to west along the northern edge of the green belt and the town.

In this case, they laid the command wire in close and parallel to the road for some distance and the route search missed it. That indicated the insurgents were closely observing Canadian and Afghan procedures and adapting to them.¹⁹⁰ Another IED attack on 26 December killed Pte Michael Freeman from 3 RCR.

The deaths of seven Canadians in such a short period produced a variety of pressures on TF Kandahar. The initial response was frustration and an inclination to blame the Afghan National Army. When that wore off, the staff started to look back to see if they missed anything. Then there was LGen Gauthier who, according to one planner, “went ballistic” and demanded that TF Kandahar produce a detailed operations order and plan to go after the IED cell responsible. Second was BGen Thompson “who was pissed” and wanted the identified Taliban commanders involved killed. A “Tiger Team,” led by LCol Al Mulawyshyn, was established: it included the battle group and OMLT operations officers and the chief of operations. They were instructed to establish near-term, mid-term and enduring plans to handle Senjaray. This collection of plans was dubbed Operation KASSAT [Revenge].¹⁹¹ (See Figure 4-16.)

One of the first acts was to cut out Haji Lala from the coalition process. He was scared of the Taliban and severely limited his police patrols. Indeed, the National Directorate of Security reported to the Canadians that there was a *de facto* truce in the area between the local population and the Taliban and, apparently, the local leadership had previously sought approval for that truce from Governor Raufi.¹⁹² PRT commander LCol Woodworth was tasked to keep an eye on him through key leadership engagements. The second was to increase battle group and OMLT/Afghan National Army patrols in the area and regain “White SA.” Third was to increase ISTAR coverage over the area, including the new ScanEagle UAVs. Increased use of EROC vehicles in the area was another response. All of these moves constituted phase one.

At the same time, Mulawyshyn and the Tiger Team looked at targeting the IED cell or network that conducted the attacks. This involved detailed focused investigation of enemy methodology by the counter-IED engineers, coupled with dedicated intelligence analysis. The Canadian counter-IED organization had extensive experience with that already and that experience was harnessed. BGen Thompson had the ability to rapidly respond to the intelligence so he authorized streamlining the Joint Prioritized Effects List bureaucracy and improving the link between the ASIC and the Special Operations Intelligence Centre so that Canadian SOF could go after the perpetrators unfettered. Similarly, armed UAVs assigned to operations boxes in the Senjaray area had their targeting processes streamlined.¹⁹³

As to the long-term aspects, Mulawyshyn’s Tiger Team recommended placing several of what they called “cameras on a stick” to maintain surveillance over the whole area. They also researched the possibility of using balloon-mounted cameras for “persistent surveillance.”

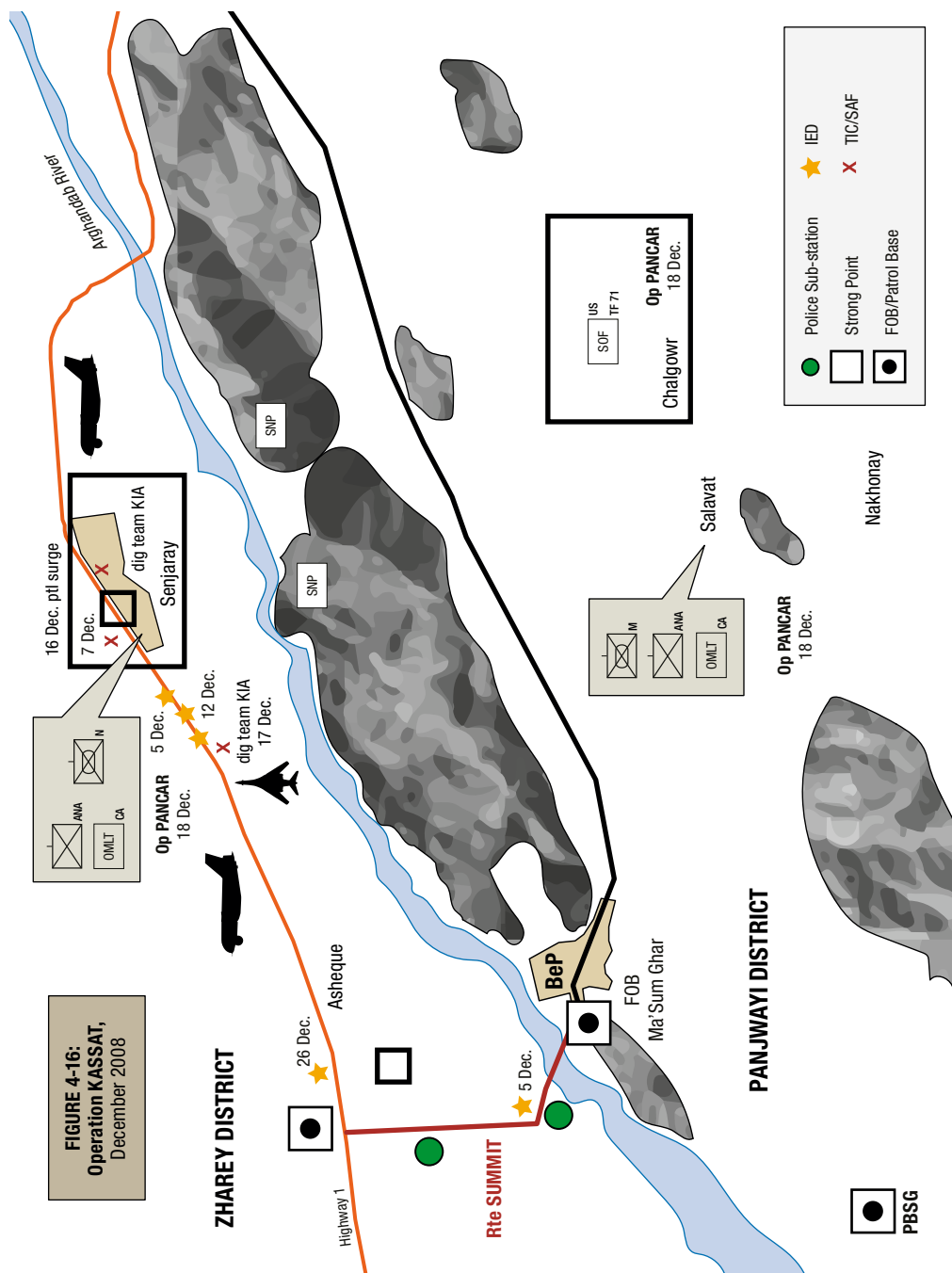


Figure 4-16: Operation KASSAT, December 2008

And, being an engineer, Mulawyshyn looked at Highway 1 itself. There were far too many culverts on that stretch of the road. Anti-IED grates were used on Fosters, so their use was recommended in Senjaray. However, the ultimate aim was to re-jig the irrigation system along the road and remove as many culverts as possible. This was scheduled into 2009 planning and heavily involved the PRT and CIMIC.¹⁹⁴

To demonstrate that the Canadians retained freedom of movement in Senjaray and to retain the psychological high ground, BGen Thompson instructed the battle group to mount a ground operation into the area immediately. Patrols inserted on 16 December generated enemy early warning system hits, and enemy movements were observed by aerial systems but not engaged so that they could be mapped and assessed. One patrol ambushed an enemy dig team, killing them all.¹⁹⁵ The following night, a B-1B bomber using its surveillance systems spotted another dig team on Highway 1 and, coordinating with the battle group command post via the Rover system, engaged and killed them.¹⁹⁶ The battle group's QRF exploited the site, and while picking up the pieces of the dig team and its equipment, noticed that the anti-IED grate had been removed and re-cemented in.¹⁹⁷

Working around the clock, the intelligence community determined by 16 December that Commander Shair Sahib and his IED network were responsible for both the 5 and 13 December attacks.¹⁹⁸ In some cases, local nationals came forward and reported on the network because they understood how angry the Canadians were and feared Canadian retaliation that would produce damage to the infrastructure, including their fields.¹⁹⁹

Operation PANCAR [Claw] was swiftly war-gamed and launched. N Company, plus an Afghan infantry company with Canadian mentors, focused on three objective areas in Senjaray, while M Company with an Afghan company and Canadian mentors went into the Salavat area. Special Operations TF 71 and its accompanying Afghan National Army Commandos went into an operations box encompassing Chalghowr and Zalakhan (Sperwer TUAVs provided coverage for the duration of PANCAR: poor weather limited ScanEagle SUAV use but the more robust Sperwer TUAV was still able to handle the deteriorating conditions).²⁰⁰

The four companies deployed without incident on the morning of 18 December. N Company cleared a number of "compounds of interest," where they found a man who claimed to be a National Directorate of Security agent from Dand chained up and imprisoned. They also found ten sets of blood-stained Afghan police uniforms. Several piles of unexploded munitions that were in the process of being reused as IEDs were found. M Company uncovered a small number of weapons but the real haul was 10 million Taliban-era Afghanis (currency), plus medical supplies. They also found night letters, phone sim cards and confessions of "complicity" with the government forces written by local people. X-rays of wounded Taliban fighters were also found with the medical stash

(of course, the only X-ray machines in the region were at the Role 3 on KAF and the Red Cross-controlled Mirwais Hospital in the city). TF 71 uncovered 2.5 tonnes of hashish piled up in the Chalghowr schoolhouse classrooms.²⁰¹

ISTAR coverage of Operation PANCAR noted that the enemy knew ahead of time that M Company was on its way to the Salavat area. The enemy also tried to emplace IEDs in front of N Company as it manoeuvred, but were frustrated in their attempts because of the company's unpredictable movement. The ASIC noted that the enemy "exhibited discipline," and blended with and then disappeared into the civilian population. ISTAR tracked what the ASIC believed to be "a well-defined chain of command," which was also revealed by the operation, and a link analysis showed Commander Shair Sahib figured prominently in all of these interactions, as did senior Zharey commander, Sadiq Agha. The hunt intensified as more resources were moved to track them. Sahib was trying to preserve as much of his IED capability as possible. This involved moving components out of the way of searches and activating newly trained IED personnel. He was also short of materials and tried to get them from a source in Maywand. Every time he contacted these organizations and personnel, he added to the ASIC's body of knowledge.²⁰²

The first real contact of Operation PANCAR took place on 20 December, nearly two days into the operation. M Company came under small-arms fire so they called in a smoke mission to screen and withdrew. Then the snipers, who had been in positions on top of Nowruz Ghar, came under contact while exfiltrating. A QRF arrived and extracted them.²⁰³

TF Kandahar believed that they succeeded in temporarily disrupting Sahib's IED operations with Operation PANCAR. ISTAR reportage suggested that the enemy leadership left Senjaray, leaving Commander Toor Jan behind to run things. The nagging belief that they had prior warning of Operation PANCAR persisted at TF Kandahar. Then information came in that Sahib was told by Quetta-based Taliban leaders to report back to Waziristan. Canadian analysts were mystified and noted that this development "adds one more level of complexity to this commander."²⁰⁴ Commander Agha was also ordered out and told to report to Quetta. A lower-level commander in Senjaray was also given a list of 12 people who informed on Taliban forces during Operation PANCAR and was told to deal with them.²⁰⁵

The insurgents believed—and told each other—that the latest operation was just a sweep, like they had seen before. They did not anticipate Operation JAKAR, which followed on the heels of PANCAR. JAKAR would establish permanent Afghan army presence in Senjaray with a platoon-sized strong point. Construction engineers moved in to survey the area around Haji Lala's ineffective police compound, protected by N Company. The insurgent response was to call up IED facilitator Commander Khan Aka in Nahlgam and have him infiltrate IED components into Senjaray.²⁰⁶

On Christmas Eve, Canadian ISTAR resources picked up Sahib while he was on the move in Maywand. An airstrike was ordered up but at the last minute the weapons controller aborted the mission and missed the targeted vehicle. The occupants, including Sahib, “bombshelled” from the strike site. A British SOF team that was in the area was able to round up seven insurgents, but Sahib was not among them. His trail was picked up on Christmas Day. He was located in a compound in Hasanabad village in Maywand. Canadian SOF was prosecuting another target at the time and handed off to SOF TF 373, who promptly raided this compound and killed Sahib and nine other insurgents. Those other insurgents were assessed to be up and coming enemy leaders in Maywand, so the effect of this strike had significant impact across the enemy command structure in the TF Kandahar area of operation. The ASIC established the existence and locations of other enemy leaders associated with Sahib and the hunting continued.²⁰⁷

Arghandab and Lower Shah Wali Kot Operations, November–December 2008

The possibility that more American forces would be assigned to Kandahar Province after the November 2008 American election led to a reassessment of Arghandab District at TF Kandahar. The American Police Mentoring Teams were ordered through their chain of command to enter and independently assess Arghandab District, sometimes even without coordination with Canadian forces. As a result, the decision was made to maintain Maj Tremblay’s Recce Squadron in its economy of force role in Arghandab and Shah Wali Kot, and not commit further Canadian resources to the district other than ongoing CIMIC and PRT development activities.²⁰⁸

Recce Squadron’s war in Arghandab District dramatically heated up in November. A 50-man insurgent force entered the district in the first week of the month and initiated a multifaceted campaign that was clearly designed to disrupt coalition reconstruction activities and reduce security but not occupy terrain. There were three abductions of civilians and a pair of IED strikes against the Arghandab police force, plus a flurry of night letters. Rockets and a truck-mounted recoilless rifle were used on two occasions to keep FOB Frontenac alerted and pinned down, and on one occasion the insurgents ambushed a Canadian combat logistics patrol. OH-58D helicopters that were escorting the patrol took out the enemy force and no Canadian casualties were generated.²⁰⁹ (See Figure 4-17.)

Recce Squadron responded with a series of aggressive patrols designed to reassert security for the wavering population in the affected part of the district. A deliberate operation, Operation CANCA, resulted in the uncovering of two substantial weapons caches, including one with IED components, and this temporarily disrupted enemy operations. At the same time, 4th Kandak was trying to establish Patrol Base Arghandab

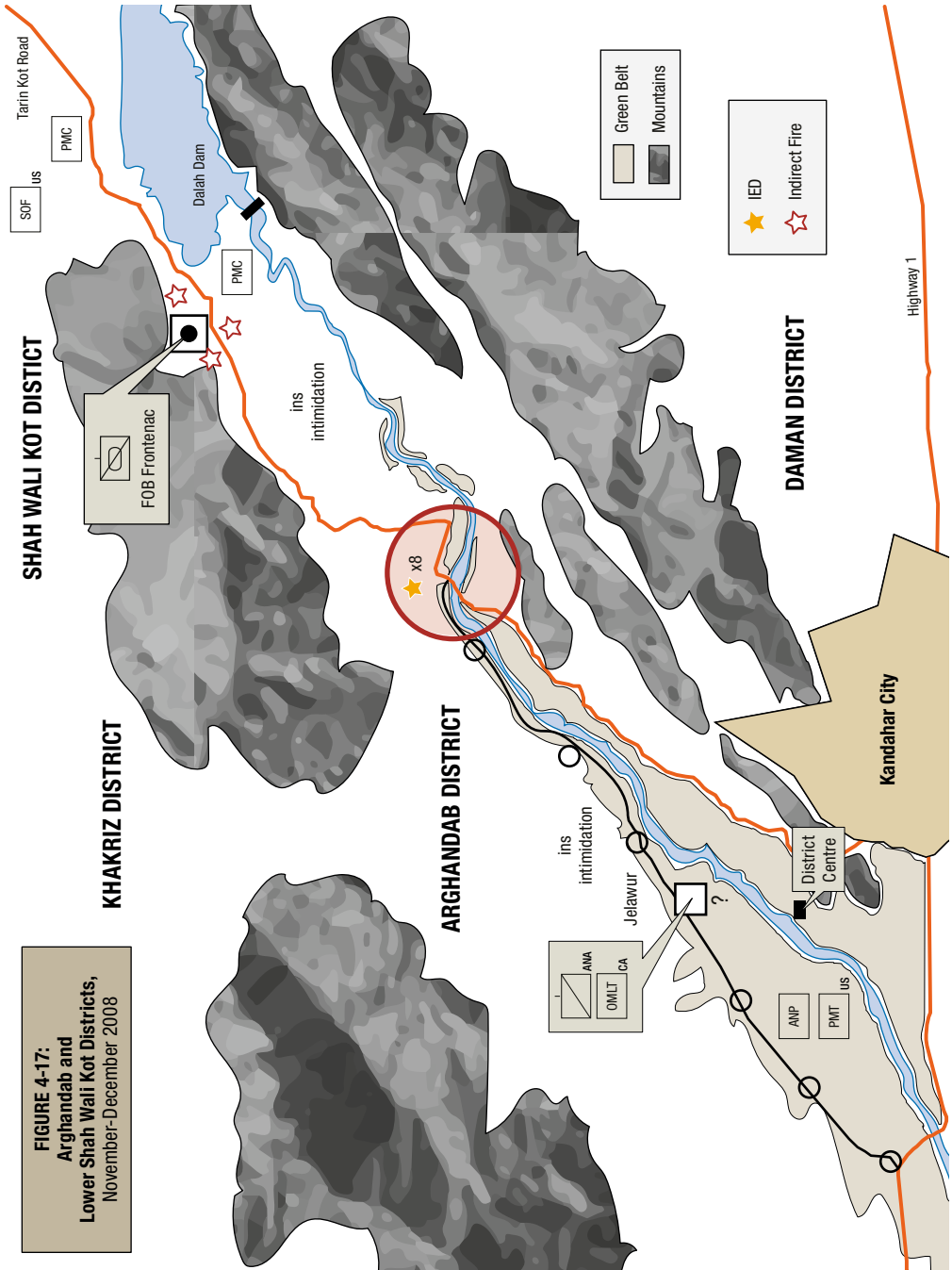


FIGURE 4-17:
Arghandab and
Lower Shah Wali Kot Districts,
November-December 2008

Figure 4-17: Arghandab and Lower Shah Wali Kot Districts, November-December 2008

near Jelawur, to house a 122mm gun battery and their Recon Company. Encouraged by Canadian mentors, 1-205 Brigade deployed their own engineering resources and contracted civilian construction to build the strong point. The day after shovels went into the ground, work was halted due to a land claims issue. This was not resolved in November and the equipment sat idle. 4th Kandak had to operate from a temporary base south of Jelawur which limited their ability to keep an eye on the Taliban-sympathetic town's population.²¹⁰

Recce Squadron's successes resulted in serious pushback by the insurgent force as November progressed. By the end of the month, Recce Squadron endured seven IED strikes against their vehicles, producing 22 Canadian wounded and several wrecked vehicles. Many of these vehicle losses were catastrophic kills. Requests to deploy an EROC team were turned down: Recce Squadron was economy of effort and the main effort lay elsewhere.²¹¹

Isolated on all fronts, Maj Tremblay and Recce Squadron, assisted by a small combat engineer section led by Sgt Darrell Spence, conducted their own post-blast analysis of the attacks. When examined further, the conclusion was that the blasts were so large because the insurgent IED makers had nearly unlimited access to a particular type of fertilizer. This material, as it turned out, was paid for using CIDA money and distributed by their arm's-length contractors as part of the alternative livelihoods wheat-growing programme. Knowing what to look for, Recce Squadron uncovered and confiscated these stockpiles when they found them.²¹²

By December, enemy activity dropped off to include a handful of night letters, a rocket "stonk" against FOB Frontenac and the kidnapping of a Dahla Dam construction worker. Recce Squadron shifted operations to conduct a series of disruption patrols north of the dam project.²¹³

The future of Arghandab was still up in the air. It was by no means secure. The district leader, Ghulam Faruq, told the PRT that he was tired because he "had to move around the district to avoid a group of 50-60 insurgents" while going about his business. He expressed concerns to the CIMIC and CIDA representatives that the province-wide wheat seed distribution project was flawed in that "a great deal of seed was being given to districts where the [Afghan government] had very little or no control." Faruq explained to the Canadians that the non-governmental organizations undermined government authority in this way. Furthermore, why were the Canadians not looking at what went on in the mosques? According to Faruq, "The Taliban then takes the donations in the mosque for themselves."²¹⁴ As for the police, only 15 arrived to replace Zmaray Khan's police as they went off to be "Focused District Developed" at the Regional Training Center.²¹⁵ At best, Recce Squadron and the sub-units from 4th Kandak could disrupt enemy activities on a limited basis, as they stumbled across them. Shah Wali Kot was effectively already lost and Arghandab remained a district on the brink as Canadian activity increasingly focused on Zharey District hunting down Commander Sahib and his associates. Recce Squadron continued its lonely and dangerous economy of effort operations.

Dand District Operations, September–December 2008

If any district looked like it was self-securing at this time, it was Dand District, led by Ahmadullah Nazak. The Barakzai-dominated district was productive and by this time required minimal visitation by the PRT CIMIC team.²¹⁶ Enemy activity was limited to the southwest part of the district abutting Panjwayi and in the Belanday “seam” between Kandahar City, Panjwayi and Dand. Dand was protected by its own police augmented with 02 Battalion, which was in effect a Governor-controlled militia whose future was uncertain after the departure of Asadullah Khalid. From September to December 2008, violence was limited to five events, three of which were assassination attempts against Nazak, the other an IED, which killed four police in October, and the kidnapping of a shura member.²¹⁷ Indeed, the third attempt to kill the district leader resulted in a Dand District police operation that tracked down the entire suicide IED network involved and led to the apprehension of nine more teenaged suicide bombers, with minimal coalition involvement. Canadian analysis concluded that “The prompt and professional response of ANSF to this incident... demonstrates the positive progress being made...”²¹⁸

Maywand District Operations, November–December 2008

2-2 Infantry and the Canadian CIMIC team significantly expanded operations in Maywand throughout November and December. The framework for operations in the district consisted of Strong Point Pegasus on Highway 1 containing an Afghan army company; FOB Ramrod, the main base for 2-2 Infantry headquarters and two infantry companies; and FOB Hotal, which had two infantry companies, the Police Mentoring Team and CIMIC. 2-2 Infantry also received two new organizations: there was now a Joint District Coordination Centre, which was set up along the same lines as the ones in Zharey, Panjwayi and Spin Boldak, and the Human Terrain Team. Consisting of five civilian personnel, the Human Terrain Team’s task was to collect social data to support the battalion and was the field equivalent of the Canadian “White SA” team at TF Kandahar.²¹⁹

LTC Hurlbut mounted an aggressive patrolling schedule with his companies. Almost all of these were dismounted patrols in the communities all along Highway 1 and were accompanied by Canadian CIMIC when possible. From time to time, 2-2 Infantry surged into Band-e Timor (Operation JOSH KARAY) as part of a disruptive “manoeuvre-to-collect” effort. Hand-launched MQ-11 Raven UAVs were used to watch for enemy dig teams on the highway and, in a number of cases, follow-up patrols made IED finds the next morning. For the most part, Maywand was relatively quiet throughout November with very few incidents reported to TF Kandahar. The enemy’s early warning system noticeably improved part way through the month, and the accuracy and scope of their reportage expanded significantly, which was cause for concern.²²⁰

Tragically, Human Terrain Team anthropologist Paula Lloyd was set afire by an Afghan during an assessment patrol in the Band-e Timor area. Her bodyguard gunned down the perpetrator but Lloyd later succumbed to her wounds.²²¹

The Canadian CIMIC team focused on working with the district leader Haji Mullah Mohammad Massoud on the wheat seed issue. CIDA, USAID and the Afghan Department of Agriculture were in the process of mounting a province-wide programme to distribute the seed so that it could act as an alternate crop in poppy-laden districts. There were substantial delays in the programme, which reduced government credibility with the population who had been promised the seed publicly. Time was growing short and the pressure was on. CIMIC identified the remnants of the National Solidarity Programme structure in Maywand and found that there was a Community Development Council coordinator. The district leader suggested that village elders handle the distribution: he wanted nothing to do with it. And there were good reasons for him not to. Afghan counternarcotics police arrived in the district and informed the Canadians that the district leader was taking money from drug distributors in Huta bazaar so the police would not harass them. Being overtly identified with any counternarcotics effort, including agricultural livelihoods, could be detrimental to his health. Indeed,

It is felt that the arrival of this unit is a very positive step towards getting the area stabilized and moving in a positive direction. However, as the drug trade is highly integrated into the economy of this area, it is predicted that the level of hostile kinetic activity will increase significantly. Additionally, given the pervasive and multifaceted nature of the district leader's apparent corrupt nature, it is fairly difficult to promote the idea that ISAF is working for the "legitimate" Government of Afghanistan in this area.²²²

In a nutshell, that was the problem in Kandahar Province. The district leader's son disappeared after wheat seed distribution was authorized.²²³

The November status quo continued into December. After some deliberation between 2-2 Infantry and TF Kandahar, the decision was made to establish a company-sized combat outpost on the Zharey–Maywand border south of Highway 1. The thinking was that COP Terminator, combined with the effects of strong points Ghundy Ghar and Mushan, would have a detrimental effect on the enemy's ability to resupply Zharey and Panjwayi via Band-e Timor and Helmand. Operation KIYAMAT RAZ went in on 14 December to disrupt Band-e Timor, while construction started on COP Terminator. There was some resistance but, more importantly, 2-2 Infantry flushed out a Taliban commander and his staff. An MQ-1 Predator strike with Hellfire killed or wounded this command team, and the Taliban leader later died of his wounds.²²⁴

Despite his involvement in illicit activities, Haji Massoud was supportive of the coalition effort in other areas. When TF 373 killed Commander Sahib at the end of December in Hasanabad, another Taliban leader arrived to agitate the population. Rioting started and threatened to engulf other parts of the district. PSYOPS was able to convince the district leader to go on the radio and calm the situation down. This was successful and the enemy information operations offensive evaporated overnight.²²⁵

Introducing the Air Wing

The idea of having a Canadian air force contribution to the mission in Afghanistan was reactivated after the Manley Report. The details of how the Canadian Forces moved from the Manley Report to deploying an Air Wing in Kandahar lie outside the parameters of this history, as do the details of airframe procurement, but the need for an air advisor at TF Kandahar and a coordinator for airspace management was recognized back in 2007. By late 2007, there was a four-man team in the Provincial Operations Centre. After the Manley Report, the decision was taken by the Canadian government to acquire: ScanEagle SUAVs; a medium-weight UAV to replace the Sperwer TUAVs; and transport helicopters. There were already CC-130 transports available for in-theatre movements,



Photo Credit: Author

After some delay, the decision was made to deploy CH-146 Griffon helicopters to Afghanistan. These multi-role machines came equipped with sensor systems, defensive suites, and machine guns.



Photo Credit: DND AR2008-A036-03

Rented from Israel, the CU-170 Heron replaced the CU-161 TUAV in 2009. In addition to its electro-optical systems, the Heron carried a robust electronic warfare and collection package that dramatically increased Canadian capabilities in southern Afghanistan.

and Canada was exploring contract helicopter transport. The command and support elements for such a force could become problematic for TF Kandahar so the Chief of the Air Staff LGen Watt, LGen Andy Leslie and CEFCOM commander LGen Mike Gauthier agreed to form an Air Wing and group all Canadian air assets into it.²²⁶ Col Chris Coates was selected to stand for the Air Wing and took command of it on 6 December 2008.

A perplexing problem was the lack of a Canadian armed escort helicopter. Transport machines were not permitted to fly unescorted in Afghanistan, so a request went out from Canada to a variety of NATO allies in Europe to see if they would be willing to provide armed helicopters for this role. Despite the fact that continental European NATO countries operated more than an estimated 250 attack helicopters and were not at war elsewhere, none were willing to provide six or eight aircraft to assist Canada. This led to dusting off existing plans to arm the CH-146 Griffon with something larger and more capable than a 5.56mm or 7.62mm machine gun on a pedestal mount.²²⁷ The CH-146 Griffons were known to be “power-limited” but engineers at 1 Canadian Air Division figured out how to tweak the engine software on the airframes to gain better performance in the tough Afghan environment.²²⁸



Photo Credit: Author

Eventually, the CH-146 Griffons were equipped with Dillon Gatling guns and were manned by reservist infantrymen. These fearsome weapons were given the names of female Canadian soldiers killed in Afghanistan.

Airframes and personnel arrived in late November and mid-December 2008. Six CH-146 Griffons were flown in on 22 December, followed by a pair of CH-147D Chinooks on 25 December. Three more Chinooks arrived on 29 December. The Chinooks were handed over from American sources in Afghanistan and Canadian crews trained alongside American crews in-theatre.²²⁹

By this time, six Mi-8 HIP transport helicopters were already supporting Canadian operations in Afghanistan. SkyLink won the bid to supply these machines, flown by Moldovan and Kyrgyz pilots, with the first missions to resupply Canadian forward operating bases flown in November. The sight of Canadian markings on former Soviet aircraft was somewhat jarring at first to some.²³⁰

The Canadian government decided, for a variety of questionable reasons, not to acquire an armed UAV like MQ-1 or MQ-9. Instead, the government decided to rent a trio of unarmed Heron UAVs from Israel. Designated CU-170, the Herons had a variety of electro-optical and electronic warfare sensors. They arrived in December with the first test flight conducted on 2 January 2009. The Sperwer TUAVs continued to soldier on, as it were, alongside the increased size of the ScanEagle fleet of ten.²³¹ The Air Wing was well on its way to achieving an operational posture as 2009 dawned.

Governance

Governance matters affecting Canadian operations in Kandahar in late 2008 broke down into three areas: policing, voter registration in preparation for the planned 2009 elections, and Governor–TF Kandahar relations. On the policing front, BGen Thompson and LCol Woodworth generated significantly more coordination to get a grip on the policing “Tower of Babel.” These mechanisms consisted of a series of regular meetings to get all players around one table at the same time. There was a Focused District Development Steering Committee, which included all the relevant Canadian, American and Afghan players: TF Kandahar, Afghan Regional Security Integration Command–South, Regional Command (South), the U.S. Police Mentoring Team, and Regional Police Advisory Command. The PRT formed a Police Coordination Cell, which had CIVPOL, Police Mentoring Teams, the P-OMLT, and Afghan Ministry of the Interior representatives. For the most part, these organizations were designed to get all of the Western policing organizations together on the same sheet of music before interacting with their Afghan counterparts.²³²

The current Kandahar Province police chief, Brigadier–General Matiullah Qati, was mentored by American Colonel Peter Savage. In terms of the Kandahar power structure, Matiullah was assessed as a man put in place to placate the Barakzai, who were feeling marginalized, and the Alikozai, who were, in fact, already marginalized. Matiullah was Achakzai and was linked to the Sherzais.²³³ The Popalzai power structure, however,

held the reins at the regional policing level in the personage of Abdullah Khan, the second-in-command of the Maywand Regional Police Headquarters who was directly linked to Ahmad Wali Karzai. The Raufi-Matiullah combination was thus balanced by the Karzai-Abdullah Khan combination. The Alikozais were by now subordinated to the Popalzais, so by late 2008 there were two tribally based loci of power in the province, not three. It was only a matter of time before there was a struggle between the two.

These realities of power did not stop voter registration process planning. The 2009 elections were crucial: they were the first since 2004 and would be a measurement of how much legitimacy the Karzai government held, which, in turn, underpinned the entire counter-insurgency effort in the country, let alone in Kandahar. Improper voter registration or undue enemy interference with Voter Registration and Election operations could seriously skew the results. BGen Thompson was well aware of the stakes and was concerned about the effects of the Popalzai power structure interfering with the process or results and giving the enemy what they needed on a silver platter.²³⁴

The Canadian role in the voter registration security plan was deliberately kept in the background to get the Afghan forces working together. BGen Thompson and his staff, as well as the Canadian staff at the provincial coordination centre, facilitated meetings between the police, National Directorate of Security, army, the Governor, and the Independent Election Commission representatives (CIDA also funded the commission through its Kabul programming). Maj Fraser Auld, a TF Kandahar planner, had experience with the 2005 elections and was able to bring that to bear on the problems. There would be 40 Voters Registration Centres, with three rings of security: police, then army, then ISAF. Each district would form a QRF to respond to attacks against Voters Registration Centres in their area of operation. Afghan National Army kandaks were also on call to support. TF Kandahar was prepared to allow its contracted Mi-8 helicopters to fly forces wherever they were required. Canadian PSYOPS, CIMIC and the PRT helped get the message out at the district and community levels and the message was: “voting is a weapon against the Taliban.” TF Kandahar also crafted the SHAHI TANDAR series of operations to specifically disrupt enemy activity in a given area prior to voter registration commencing. These plans were pushed to the battle group.²³⁵

Unfortunately, Governor Raufi publicly embarrassed his former subordinate General Bashir at a provincial security meeting, which likely led to Afghan army withdrawal from the vital provincial coordination centre at the Governor’s Palace. This attenuated voter registration security planning for some time.²³⁶

The situation got worse. The idea of a large 600- to 1,000-man tribal jirga for Kandahar Province was mooted, partly in order to appeal to the sub-district and community elders. Ahmad Wali Karzai embraced the idea and wanted to lead the event with 50 of his hand-picked people. Raufi disagreed and thought this was a means to bypass the

provincial council. As a result, the two men stopped speaking to each other. BGen Denis Thompson and the Representative of Canada in Kandahar Elissa Golberg got the two men together on 4 December, where Thompson noted that it was “like being a marriage counsellor.” Raufi and Karzai got into a shouting match, with Raufi yelling “Who is the Governor?” at Karzai. Karzai stormed out. Thirty minutes later, Thompson got a phone call telling him President Karzai fired Governor Raufi. Thompson was told before the Canadian ambassador or the Representative of Canada in Kandahar, which generated bad blood once again between the Army and the OGDs.²³⁷ Raufi was out, but who was in?

The Raufi-Karzai affair collaterally unmasked one of the primary motivations for impediments to development in Kandahar. A very senior member of the government connected to Ahmad Wali Karzai did not, in fact, want the National Solidarity Programme development committee-assembly-council system to work at all. In effect, empowering local communities had adverse effects: the tribal leaders in the province believed that they were no longer in charge and, as a result, those in power could not financially benefit directly from the process.²³⁸ With Raufi in charge, the system had a chance to work. With Raufi gone, there was serious concern that there would be a slide back to the methodologies employed by Asadullah Khalid. The provincial coordination centre staff were told by a senior Afghan that the “Alikozai tribal leader Kalimullah and the entire Alikozai tribe are reportedly very disappointed by the president’s decision to replace Raufi who they claim ‘was a good guy’ who ‘wanted to do things.’”²³⁹

The new governor was Tooryalai Wessa, who arrived in Kandahar in a rumpled suit with three-days change of clothes and a “deer-in-the-headlights” look. Thompson believed Wessa, a boyhood friend of both Hamid and Qayyum Karzai, was the perfect candidate: “When he fucks up, he’s Canadian. When he succeeds, he’s Afghan.”²⁴⁰ As for Wessa’s affiliations and tribal loyalties, TF Kandahar reported that “Wessa is firmly in the Karzai camp and will not challenge AWK.”²⁴¹

OMLT Operations in Helmand: December 2008–January 2009

Once again, 2nd (Strike) Kandak was called out to Helmand Province by 205 Corps to assist with ongoing operations. This had detrimental effects on voter registration security operations in the kandak’s area of operation in Kandahar Province.²⁴² Capt Sean French led the Canadian mentor teams as they linked up with 200 Afghan National Army soldiers and deployed west on 9 January. On arrival at the British facilities near Gereshk, they learned that they were part of a 3-205 Brigade-led operation designed to clear west down the Nahr-e Bughra Canal to the Spin Masjid community to “mitigate insurgent influence on Highway 1, draw insurgent attention away from Lashkar Gah, and reinforce the Afghan National Police throughout the area of operations.”²⁴³ (See Figure 4-18.)

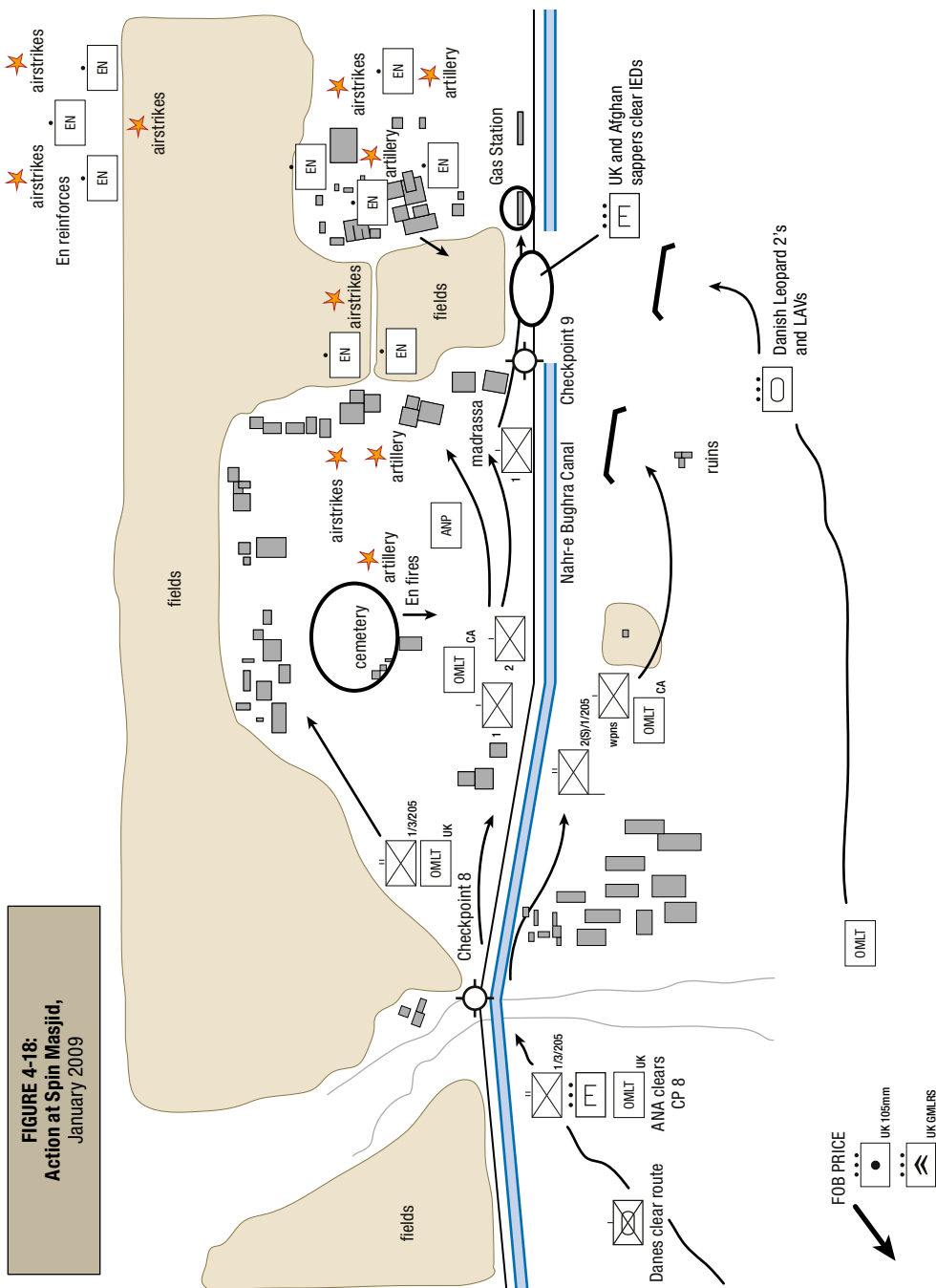


FIGURE 4-18:
Action at Spin Masjid,
January 2009

Figure 4-18: Action at Spin Masjid, January 2009

The larger aspects of the operation were not clear to the Canadian mentors: they focused on the tactical issues confronting them and 2nd (Strike) Kandak. It was a brigade-sized operation involving another kandak from 3-205 Brigade, British mentors, Danish tank support and British artillery. The immediate objective was to retake several Afghan police checkpoints between Gereshk and Spin Masjid, one of two major crossing points on the canal between the capital and Gereshk, and repopulate them after the Afghan engineers cleared and rebuilt them. Clearly, the enemy held sway in the area and had driven off the police.

The scheme of manoeuvre had a Danish armoured unit clear the route from FOB Price to the bridge. 1st Kandak, 3-205 Brigade would seize the bridge and continue south. 2nd (Strike) Kandak was to move to the bridge, send one company to the southern side of canal and, with the other company moving in parallel to the north, sweep west. Danish Leopard 2 tanks would screen to the north and provide support as required. This is essentially what happened on the first day of the operation. As 2nd (Strike) Kandak moved west, however, they were engaged from compound complexes along the way and had to call in artillery support. Eventually, they reached Spin Masjid and were engaged by significant enemy forces ensconced in compounds to the south and west. The company north of the canal ran into IEDs, one of which seriously wounded an Afghan officer while he was conducting ablutions for prayers late in the day. OMLT medics did their best to keep him alive but he succumbed to multiple traumatic amputations and died.

The ability of the OMLT to act as a facilitator for coalition close air and artillery support and to direct precision strikes paid off as the firefight escalated. Numerous strikes were delivered to enemy reinforcements as they moved north to engage the Afghan army and police forces. Similarly, the night vision optics in the RG-31s remote weapons system was a force multiplier in this action as the Afghans had no night vision capability at this time at all.

A significant problem were the IEDs uncovered at the sites of the destroyed police checkpoints. One excavator was destroyed, leaving the Afghan engineers unable to conduct a complete clearance of the sites. The enemy continued to reinforce, so the kandak commander decided to move across the wadi to a gas station and give his forces more room to fire at them. The wadi, as it turned out, was strewn with IEDs. Taking no casualties, the Afghans, Canadians and, eventually, a British fire control team, made it to the gas station, but they were effectively marooned until engineers could move forward to clear the wadi. The “defence of the gas station” lasted two days and nights. Six Canadian mentors and a pair of British forward observation officers, plus a platoon of Afghans, rained fire down on an enemy that was significantly agitated and determined to wipe out the small force. Fire from British guided MLRS rockets, 105mm guns and American B-1B bombers

were all directed onto enemy sections that had been flushed out with accurate fire from Canadian machine guns, the RG-31 remote weapons system and the Afghan infantry. Afghan engineers, using primitive equipment, essentially Second World War era gear and methods, were eventually able to clear lanes to the gas station positions so they could be resupplied.

The inability of the 3-205 Brigade forces to reconstruct and then man the checkpoints, coupled with the enemy deciding to quit the field and disperse south resulted in the withdrawal and redeployment of 2nd (Strike) Kandak and its mentors to FOB Price and then Kandahar Province. Spin Masjid was a brave fight by the OMLT and their counterparts resulting in substantial enemy casualties, but its larger operational-level effects were questionable. It was a diversion from Canadian priorities in Kandahar but demonstrated for all to see how well the Canadian-Afghan relationship worked within 2nd (Strike) Kandak.

Kandahar City Operations, January 2009

The insurgent intimidation campaign in Kandahar City slackened off toward the end of January and targeting shifted to the voter registration process instead of the police and the government bureaucracy. This permitted the PRT to focus on municipal issues. CIMIC and CIDA worked together to build relationships with UNAMA, UN HABITAT, USAID and Mayor Hamidi. Generally, the consensus was that there was a lack of coordination capacity for the Mayor, who was as overwhelmed as provincial governors had been in the past. Hamidi made headway on garbage collection, something not to be sneered at due to the prevalence of disease and contaminated water supplies, and his right-hand man, the city engineer, knew what needed to be done but lacked the staff. Tax collection was underway, another Hamidi initiative that was crucial to any infrastructure and bureaucratic developments. CIMIC teams continued to support where they could.²⁴⁴

A Loosening Grip on Arghandab and Lower Shah Wali Kot Districts, January 2009

Maj Tremblay and Recce Squadron continued economy of effort operations in Arghandab into the new year. By this time, more enemy IED cells were attracted to Arghandab, some of them migrating north from Senjaray. This included suicide bombers. On New Year's Day, a Canadian mounted patrol on Route Oregon engaged a car that would not respond to direction, shot the driver and found three 250-pound bombs in the vehicle. The large size of this particular weapon was of some concern.²⁴⁵

The Afghan grip on the district was slipping. The district leader, it turned out, resigned but did not bother to tell anyone. And, to make matters worse, a prominent stabilizing factor in the district, a former Mujahideen shura elder, passed away of natural causes.

There was, once again, a serious leadership vacuum in Arghandab. Kalimullah was nowhere on the scene. The district shura was all but dissolved. Zmaray Khan was away with his police while about 100 ANCOF and another 80 augmentees manned the police checkpoints. The long-standing desire to have a strong point in Jelawur was suddenly canceled by the Afghans. Bewildered, Recce Squadron and the police continued to provide the best security presence they could, given the circumstances. Then they got hit again. A large IED took out a police patrol on 6 January, killing two and wounding five police officers. Recce Squadron was hit on 7 January; this IED took out a Coyote, wounded three Canadians, and killed Tpr Brian Good. Another Coyote struck an IED two days later: there were no casualties but the vehicle was a mobility kill. There was a pair of IED attacks against police targets on 17 January, but the worst was yet to come. On 24 January, 50 insurgents dressed in Afghan army uniforms and driving Afghan army Ranger trucks approached the police checkpoint near Jelawur and “arrested” the police. They proceeded to execute three of the officers and abducted three more. A Canadian Police Mentoring Team was sent to investigate, escorted by a recce patrol. Another Coyote struck an IED, wounding three more Canadians.

The only positive developments were a raid conducted by Recce Squadron and the police. Acting on a tip, a cordon and search operation seized a substantial cache of ammonium nitrate. And, in a related development, American SOF swooped down and prosecuted a leadership target 3 kilometres north of the district centre.²⁴⁶

TF Kandahar’s assessment was pessimistic. The police were pulling back out of the small communities and into the larger population centres in the Alikozai-dominated parts of the district:

The insurgents have been attempting to shape the Arghandab battle-space over the last two years through a campaign of intimidation aimed at obtaining control of the local population rather than their outright support...the willingness of the Arghandab acting Chief of Police to effectively cede part of the district to the insurgents will provide them with the opportunity to increase their influence in Northern Arghandab.²⁴⁷

Without police or army forces to hold, and with a dwindling number of operational vehicles and mounting personnel losses, Recce Squadron could do very little to influence events. Arghandab was in the process of being lost to the insurgency while Afghan and coalition forces surged into Helmand Province, and Canadian forces struggled in Zharey District to keep Highway 1 open for them.

Maywand District Operations, January 2009

For whatever reason, the successful special operations forces' strike at Hasanabad against Commander Sahib had significant spillover effects on the Maywand insurgency. Right after that strike, the violence level ramped up significantly throughout January. In the first week, there were three kidnapping incidents against construction crews and agricultural consultants. Another construction worker was assassinated at the controls of his bulldozer. At the same time, a series of coordinated attacks took place around the perimeter of FOB Hotal. There was also a specialist intimidation team roaming along the Maywand stretch of the Kajaki-Kandahar City power lines, beating electrical crews and beating villagers for taking wheat seed. Then on 8 January, a vehicle-borne suicide bomber detonated in the Hotal bazaar. The blast killed Sgt. Joshua Rath and Specialist Keith Essary, wounded nine other Americans from C Company, killed three Afghans and wounded 11 more. Elsewhere, the enemy reacted to the establishment of COP Terminator. Clearly, positioning American forces in this location seriously irritated the insurgents much in the same way as Strong Point Mushan did in Panjwayi. The construction team was subjected to all forms of enemy fire. The American platoons operating from the site came under attack with IEDs on three occasions. Maywand was progressively heating up and something had to be done about that, so LTC Hurlbut and LCol Barrett explored their options.

More CIMIC resources were brought to bear in Maywand in January and by this time, the Human Terrain Team had had several months to make some tentative assessments of the situation. Overall, CIMIC operators reported that

The insurgency in Maywand was not only religious-driven, but also a political struggle of disenfranchised people. Allegedly two of the main Taliban commanders...were high-ranking military commanders during the Taliban regime. Neither of the men were included in the [Government of Afghanistan] formulation and do not feel represented by the Karzai administration....The assessment is that, on the whole, people in Maywand do not like the Taliban because they are destroying the country, but the people are very afraid of them. The Taliban have spies in almost every village and report people who are seen as cooperating with ISAF...people who went to the district centre to get wheat seed were followed home and killed by the Taliban.²⁴⁸

The population wanted more police but did not want to go to the existing government:

It is CIMIC's assessment that the people of Maywand have more trust in the Taliban than they do in the district leader and the ANP because they are seen to be corrupt and have repeatedly abused their authority.²⁴⁹

Zharey District Operations, January 2009

In a departure from previous months, enemy activity in January focused in the Kolk–Spin Pir area, with isolated incidents in Ghundy Ghar and Lakokhel, as well as ongoing efforts to interfere with Highway 1. The battle group controlled engagement system, coupled with N Company and 1st Kandak patrolling generated results. An example of this was an engagement on 3 January. A Sperwer TUAV monitoring Highway 1 spotted a dig team. Maj Marc St-Yves, watching from the Tactical Operations Centre, authorized close air support in the form of an orbiting B-1B bomber. The first JDAM airburst did not kill the entire dig team and they ran from the site toward Kolk. An MQ-1 Predator in the area was vectored on and killed one insurgent with a Hellfire. The B-1B engaged another with a GBU-12 bomb but missed. An A-10 moved in and took him and the third emplacer out with four strafing runs. ISTAR reportage the next day confirmed seven enemy dead.²⁵⁰ (See Figure 4-19.) A similar engagement using a combination of Sperwer TUAV, OH-58D helicopters, and an F-15 fighter bomber took place on 11 January.

The next day, police and Canadian mentors found an IED consisting of two jugs of homemade explosive under the asphalt and a command wire leading to an abandoned compound set up as a firing point. Another device was found on an egress route with a spider device. It was connected to yet another jug of homemade explosive. Badger AEVs were brought in to level the compound.²⁵¹

To prove they were still in the game, the insurgents tried to rocket Ma'Sum Ghar the following night. An A Squadron tank crew spotted a team digging rockets into the ground at a known point of origin. The insurgents lit a 400 metre-long fire in order to blind the night optics on the tanks, but two 120mm rounds found their way to the enemy team, killing them. There were secondary explosions as the rockets cooked off.²⁵²

1st Kandak surprised their mentors with a well-structured fighting patrol south of Howz-e Madad supported by N Company and OH-58D helicopter support from TF Wings who replaced TF Eagle Assault. Though there was no contact, it was evident that 1st Kandak improved its ability to plan and mount independent operations.²⁵³

One problem that emerged was poor police leadership at Spin Pir. This translated into less patrolling and less influence in the area and thus increased enemy activity. On 11 January, the insurgents kidnapped four people from the area, took them to Kolk, and then hanged them in public. Two more were hanged in another village. Apparently, items like satellite phones and infrared beacons were discovered on their persons and, deemed to be spies for ISAF, they were executed. Canadian analysis was that “This recent targeting is likely a reaction to the latest successful CF direct actions against insurgent commanders and perceived enemy operational security issues.”²⁵⁴

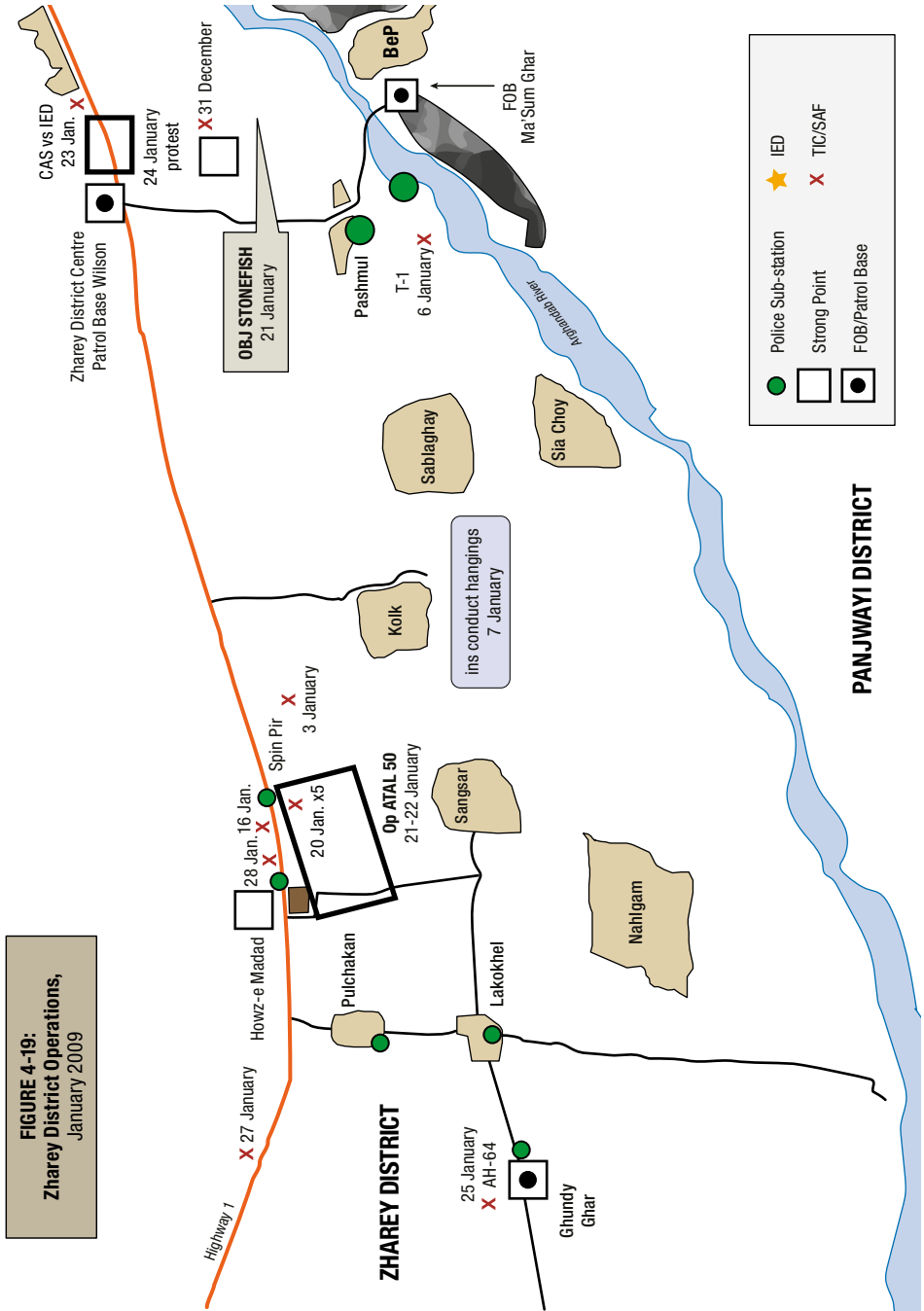


Figure 4-19: Zharey District Operations, January 2009

The lack of significant enemy activities resulted in a battle group assessment later in the month. It was determined that close air support strikes seriously wounded one of the few IED facilitators still left in the district and he was repatriated by the insurgent medical system back to Pakistan. The new strong point in Senjaray prompted the enemy command node to relocate from that part of the district. Tribal elders in the area now shifted back to the government camp. As a result, there were more and more weapons and IED turn-ins by local people. The police under Bismillah Khan remained problematic, however.²⁵⁵

To further reinforce Afghan presence, 1st Kandak launched Operation ATAL 50 on 20 January. This was a cordon and search effort in the triangle between Spin Pir, Lakokhel and Howz-e Madad. A Canadian LAV III platoon and a combat engineering section were attached to the kandak instead of the other way around. ATAL 50 forces came under fire on six occasions as they manoeuvred, but it was all “shoot and scoot,” so much so that it was difficult to bring close air or artillery to bear on the enemy. When they could, the OMLT vectored a pair of U.S. Marine Corps F-18s onto one contact while the Canadian guns fired off 12 rounds of high explosive. During the search of one compound, it was found to be booby-trapped by the retreating enemy. The ATAL 50 forces overnighted at Spin Pir before resuming operations.²⁵⁶

That night, agitated enemy commanders who were unclear as to the scope of Operation ATAL 50, moved around and communicated. At a compound in Zharey District, special operations forces took out Mullah Abdul Rahim Akhund, the man who replaced Mullah Sahib and who played a key role in the December killings. There they found a tunnel system, which they cleared. N Company deployed to the site the next day to find scattered medical supplies and the tunnels flooded. That was not all: another SOF team engaged and killed yet another prominent enemy commander from Helmand who used Maywand as a rest and resupply area.²⁵⁷

Operation ATAL 50 wound down with limited harassing contact. A follow-on close air support engagement killed yet another dig team on the road. This resulted in remonstrations from local elders that the men killed were not insurgents, but further investigations concluded that they lifted an anti-IED culvert grate at night and were engaged in some activity under the road. That was not enough; soon Zharey police, the Afghan army and the Canadians were confronted with a large-scale demonstration of 300 people in Makuan and the Zharey District Centre. The Joint District Coordination Centre members approached the leadership and were able to convince them to disperse. P-OMLT sources noted that a HiG Mullah operating in the Senjaray area was the prime mover behind the protest, and that the crowd contained a number of insurgents with weapons and one suicide bomber. They were unable to get into or near FOB Wilson because of the police and army cordon, so they backed off.²⁵⁸ BGen Thompson, concerned about these developments, held a shura in Zharey with

local power brokers. The message was delivered: you are responsible for helping ISAF with security. This was best done through communication and the Joint District Coordination Centre. Frustrated with the eastern Zharey population's shift toward the government, the insurgents resorted to a threatening "night letter" campaign from the FOB Wilson area to Senjaray.²⁵⁹

There was very little development activity, though CIMIC continued to patrol where it could and add to the PRT's knowledge of the district. In essence, it was looking better for the Canadians and Afghans in Zharey: Highway 1 was not threatened to the same extent as it had been in November and December. Enemy leadership was in serious disarray. The population was wavering toward the government. But the police were still in a poor state. The balance could tip the other way on a whim. The kandaks and the mentors continued to push out patrols and on 31 January, one such patrol was ambushed, seriously wounding an Afghan soldier, who could not make it to cover. Cpl Richard Anderson and the patrol medic tried to shift the casualty but were unable to, so they started medical assistance in the open while under fire. The patrol provided cover fire, was able to recover the three men and conducted a fighting withdrawal. Cpl Anderson was awarded the Medal of Military Valour for his actions.

Panjwayi District Operations, January 2009

Once the decision was made to cede control of the Panjwayi West area between Sperwan Ghar and Mushan to the enemy by removing the strong points on Route Fosters West, the enemy focused their activity in and around Bazaar-e Panjwayi while maintaining pressure on Mushan and protecting his base areas south of Fosters East near Nakhonay (see Figure 4-20). Indeed, Canadian analysis in January asserted that

Upon conclusion of CF ops in the area, the insurgents returned to exact reprisals on local nationals....the insurgents have nearly complete freedom of movement in villages that line the south or Route Fosters....ANSF can only exert influence 1 km south along Fosters.... the insurgents are able to continue to exert influence and control over the villages east of FOB Ma'Sum Ghar.²⁶⁰

M Company, operating from Sperwan Ghar, mounted a series of large patrols into the Zangabad area and continued with route security activity on Routes Brown and Fosters East in support of CMT-1. These patrols turned up little other than stockpiled drugs and were likely compromised before they were launched.

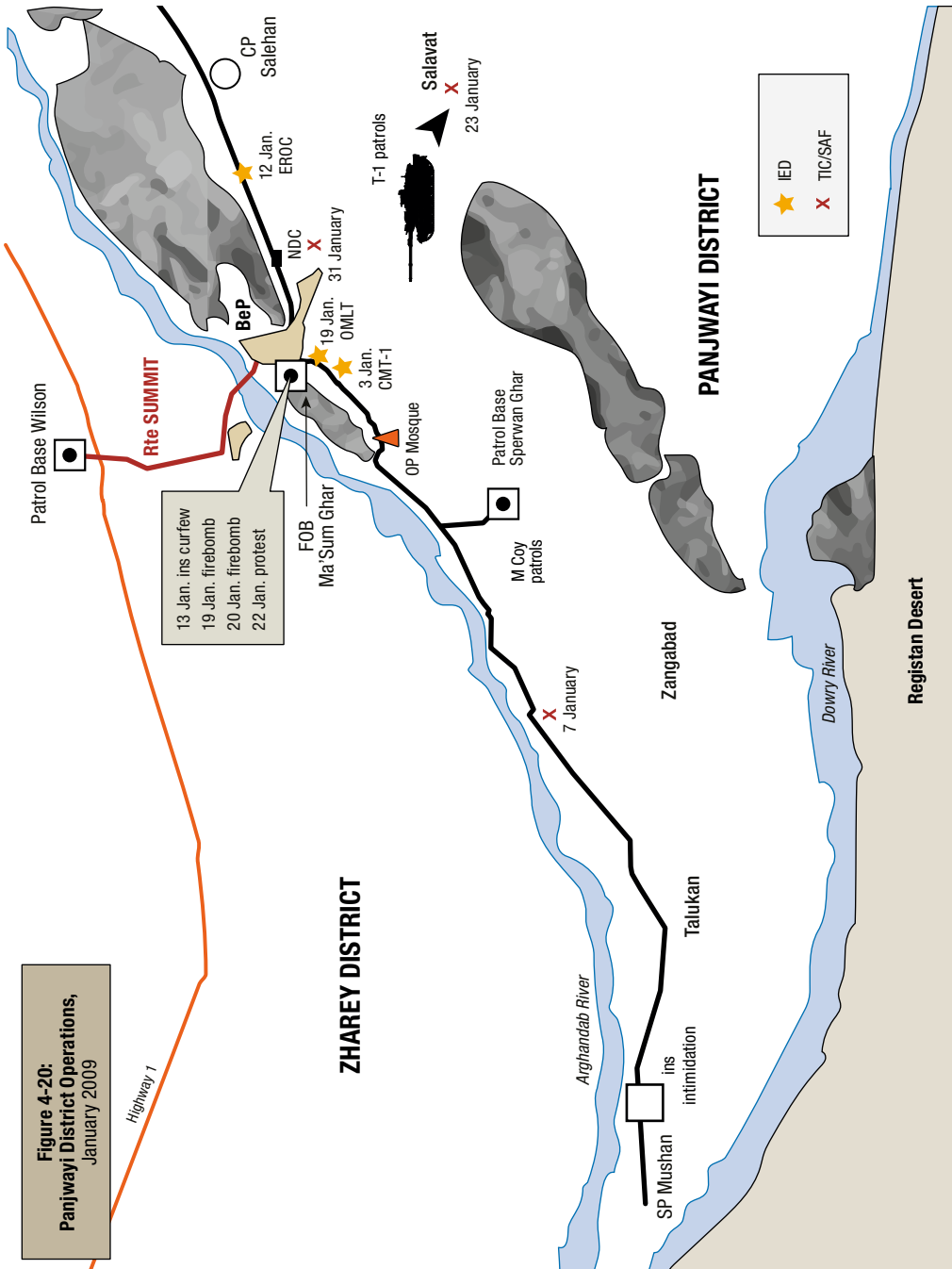


Figure 4-20: Panjwayi District Operations, January 2009

CMT-1, now augmented with Blue Hackle private security, continued with the Fosters paving project. By now, a combination of mechanical paving and manual labour superseded the original manpower-intensive paving plan. It still employed several hundred local people and the micro-economy expanded as the project inched west. CIMIC worked with CMT-1 in an effort to refurbish some of the mosques along the route but it was really personal connections between CMT-1 personnel and their communities back in Canada that brought in donations from the Toronto area to fix the problem. The synergy generated in these communities by the activities of CMT-1 was offset slightly by increased attempts to harass the project. An IED killed one worker while he was eating lunch—the IED was emplaced at a shaded area where the workers ate. On another occasion, four workers were abducted, taken to what they referred to as a “jail” near Lakokhel, beaten, their money stolen, and then released with instructions not to work on the project. From time to time, ineffective small-arms fire was directed at the project area, but CMT-1, in its TLAVs, covered the Afghan paving machines as they laid the road and verified its quality.²⁶¹

Closer in, the Afghan police in Bazaar-e Panjwayi were subjected to firebombing attacks on two occasions, with three casualties. Right after these attacks, the insurgents declared that there was to be a curfew in Bazaar-e Panjwayi and anyone violating it would be roughed up or worse. This was a bold challenge to civil authority, right in the administrative centre of the district, and only metres away from FOB Ma’Sum Ghar with its tank run-ups. District leader Haji Baran countered with his own curfew, stating that anybody seen after dark would be considered an insurgent and dealt with. The insurgents in the town continued to focus on targeting the police: a Canadian P-OMLT member was severely wounded on one incident. Another attack, this time a suicide bomber, futilely tried to take on a group of EROC vehicles as they swept Fosters east of the town.²⁶²

There was, however, more to all of this than surface reporting suggests. Canadian observers of the Panjwayi situation detected that the relationship between Baran and chief of police Mohammad Naeem was problematic and that there was some connection between the increasingly violent activity in the Bazaar-e Panjwayi area and relationships between Baran, Naeem and the Taliban.

Both men interfered with the Salehan checkpoint construction job, according to the Canadians on the Specialist Engineer Team.²⁶³ CIMIC consistently reported that the people in Panjwayi did not trust the police because they took money from the locals.²⁶⁴ Naeem even tried to “shake down” an American private security contractor.²⁶⁵ However, on 22 January, around 150 people launched a violent protest in Bazaar-e Panjwayi, burning tires and blocking the road. Ostensibly, this was a protest against the police, who were accused of beating local shopkeepers. Haji Baran and his security team intervened when

they saw a policeman beating a person in the bazaar, so his security team publicly beat the policeman up. The demonstration was, apparently, spontaneous, the people demanded that the Afghan National Army take over security and that Naeem be removed as police chief. However, when Naeem's side of the story was obtained, he told the P-OMLT that the demonstration only took place after he called the National Directorate of Security and told them that "Haji Baran was in fact a Taliban supporter and had orchestrated the morning's demonstration."²⁶⁶ Then information was received that Haji "Dollars" Agha Lalai, who had connections with Baran, wanted Naeem fired. Another source asserted that the protest was in response to the deaths of three men whom locals said were not insurgents but were killed in an airstrike.²⁶⁷ To complicate matters further, the media claimed Naeem was corrupt and stealing from the innocent in a campaign orchestrated by Baran. In other words, it was impossible to sort out exactly what was going on other than the fact that somebody was manufacturing disorder in Bazaar-e Panjwayi, disrupting governance, and generating suspicion, while others profited from the chaos.

Coincidentally, the next day, shopkeepers in Mushan reported Taliban intimidation and taxation attempts by local commanders. Instead of going to the Afghan troops at the strong point,

The fact that the local nationals reportedly sought adjudication from the Pakistan-based Insurgent Commission vice the Government of Afghanistan or CF/ANSF stationed at SP Mushan demonstrates that local nationals have more faith in the insurgents to solve their local issues.²⁶⁸

The insurgent's new tact also included going after the education system. One school south of Three Tank Hill was taken over by the Taliban, who trashed the site, gutted the buildings and poisoned the well.²⁶⁹ They forced the school in another location to become a madrassa: "When the insurgents found out about the school they beat the teachers and threatened to destroy the building unless the schooling stopped. The school subsequently moved to one of the mosques and therefore is a "madrassa"."²⁷⁰

Taken together, all of these approaches undermined any attempts at government authority in Panjwayi District. Haji Baran was barely the leader of the New District Centre, let alone Bazaar-e Panjwayi, or any other locality in the district. Without connecting projects like the Fosters paving project, the projects became local ends unto themselves to governance.

That said, Strong Point Mushan continued to hold and interfere with enemy activities despite resupply problems, the insurgency did not appear to have serious inroads in the Sperwan Ghar area, and there were no serious IED attacks on Route Fosters East or West.

Battle group and Afghan National Army sub-units generally had freedom of movement from Sperwan Ghar to Bazaar-e Panjwayi. However, that was not enough. It was at best a stalemated situation in some areas, with the enemy having control or influence over the bulk of the district.

Diverging Development: The PRT, October 2008–January 2009

By fall 2008, the combination of the organizational changes to accommodate the Representative of Canada in Kandahar and an influx of civilian staff from the OGDs involved in Kandahar operations constituted a radical departure from the past three years in matters related to development and reconstruction. It was a direct result of the strategic direction taken after the Manley Report and, consequently, was not a great surprise. It is at this point that the development narrative and the Canadian Army's narrative diverged. The centrality of the military components of the PRT and its commander in provincial-level reconstruction and development was progressively reduced by the end of 2008. It was partially replaced with the Representative of Canada in Kandahar's staff at TF Kandahar and the boosted civilian presence at the PRT. Military aspects of PRT operations reverted more and more toward CIMIC and Specialist Engineer Team operations plus the usual protected movements of the PRT civilians. For example, the pioneering work done on the Kandahari justice system by Canadian military legal advisors was shut down and shifted where possible to the UN Development Programme.²⁷¹ This pattern followed in other areas. For example, CIDA sought out more and more "implementing partners" so that they could achieve objectives set by the new strategy. Wheat seed distribution was handled in conjunction with Mercy Corps, and CIDA courted the World Food Programme to handle "Winterization" (that is, making sure the people of Kutch did not freeze to death), while the assistance of the UN Development Programme was sought to support the municipal government in Kandahar City. These relationships extended in a number of directions and in some cases, it was not clear if it was Canadian money being spent through them in a direct fashion, so it was, according to reports, difficult to measure specific Canadian effects.²⁷² An additional effect of this approach was to spread the responsibility for project validation and, most importantly, for completion, away from Canada and its representatives. Other international organizations, some of which possessed notoriously cumbersome bureaucracies, could be blamed if targets established by the new Ottawa process were not met on time.

For the most part, Canadian development personnel focused on the Dahla Dam project, which was renamed the Arghandab Irrigation Rehabilitation Project. The Byzantine specifics of this project and its contracting do not concern us here. The military involvement in the project itself for practical purposes ceased in late 2008. However, there remained the

issue of security in Arghandab District and the casualties incurred by Recce Squadron to ensure access to the Dahla Dam area via Arghandab, plus the ongoing discussions over the possibility of future American command of Arghandab District.

As the civilian component of the PRT expanded its range of implementing partners at the provincial level, very little was done by them at the district level. In effect, CIDA and DFAIT were in their comfort zone in Kandahar City dealing at the provincial and national levels. They progressively lost interest in what was happening in the districts and, in their reportage, increasingly developed a dismissive tone. They lauded the fact that they deployed a handful of people for two weeks to Panjwayi, and talked about “an aggressive level of planning,” but this was a far cry from establishing a permanent and effective presence.²⁷³ And, as time progressed, BGen Thompson was less and less interested in the larger Canadian development objectives because they had virtually nothing to do with the deteriorating security system, let alone addressing the real problems that continued to fuel the insurgency.²⁷⁴

Strengthening a system that was increasingly seen to be illegitimate by the population, using all of these tools at the PRT, was a serious error on Canada’s part. The fact that Governor Raufi did have a higher level of credibility bought Canada some time and likely played a role in generating equilibrium in fall 2008, but these positive steps were effectively canceled out by Ahmad Wali Karzai’s machinations, which in turn resulted in Wessa’s appointment in January 2009. These factors played out well into 2009.

Supporting TF Kandahar

The NSE, led by LCol Steven Blair, underwent several structural changes during this rotation. This NSE consisted of 455 soldiers but remained responsible for 72 Canadian Forces Personnel Support Agency civilians and 288 civilian contractors. After considerable debate, R Company, the battle group administration company, was formed. Based around 86 drivers and maintainers taken from the NSE, this move was a return to doctrinal structures long discussed in the logistics community since 2006.²⁷⁵ Initially, there were two NSE force protection platoons. Canadian responsibility for covering the KAF entry control point gates ceased when a Slovak unit came in and, with the casualties taken by the OMLT in December, the decision was made to distribute one platoon between the OMLT SECFOR and the Construction Management Organization. Mounted in TLAVs retrieved from Regional Command (South) when the command changed,²⁷⁶ this improved both organizations’ capabilities in the field and also acted to free up forces by protecting MEWTs if they were deployed in vulnerable locations.

In terms of equipment, the heavily armoured Mercedes AHSVS trucks was now fully deployed in Canadian units. And, more importantly, the vehicle had high crew confidence. Early in the tour, an AHSVS struck an IED consisting of 10 kilograms of homemade explosive. One tire out of eight was blown off and the crew did not feel a thing. On another occasion during a “river run,” the hydraulics were shot away from one vehicle and it still drove 300 metres out of the kill zone. A new system called the “People Pod” also came online, mostly due to increased concerns about the vulnerability of the Bison fleet to IEDs. The People Pod was an armoured, air-conditioned box that was mounted on an AHSVS and used to move large numbers of personnel from KAF to Ma’Sum Ghar.

By summer 2008, vehicle modifications made by electrical and mechanical engineers included the addition of protection kits to the LAV IIIs. Exposed crew commanders and air sentries had in the past been subjected to blast effects from IEDs. Analysis concluded that adding angled plates around the crew would be effective at deflecting a blast that originated from a point lower than the turret, that is, an IED in the ground or a suicide car. The entire LAV III fleet received these modifications, with vehicles rotated to Ma’Sum Ghar and KAF so the add-on kits could be applied.

The lack of appropriate gap crossing equipment for operations in Zharey and Panjwayi dogged the Canadian troops operating there. The Beaver armoured vehicle launched bridge, which used the Leopard chassis, was deemed too vulnerable to be employed. As a result, the engineers and armoured soldiers recalled a Second World War method instead: fascines. Sixty years ago, armoured engineering vehicles carried bundles of tree trunks lashed together, which were then deposited in a water obstacle or against a wall so that vehicles could cross. In Afghanistan, fascines were made out of medium-diameter heavy PVC piping cut, lashed together, and deposited by AHSVS or by Badger AEVs with their booms into numerous small canals in the districts. The PVC tubes were hollow, so irrigation water could still run through them.²⁷⁷

The NSE continued with its Afghan army mentoring and other assistance tasks. In particular LCol Blair maintained relationships with the 5th Kandak commander. The NSE mentors focused on practical aspects of operations, particularly vehicle recovery and basic maintenance over at Camp Hero. When 5th Kandak lacked the skill set to weld new grenade launcher mounts onto 1-205 Brigade vehicles, the NSE ran a welding course for the Afghans so they could do it themselves.

The NSE concept of support for this rotation changed significantly. Previously, the NSE supported the PRT by rotating its cooks, transport, supply and maintenance personnel from other locations. Now, the NSE created an NSE detachment and left it at Camp Nathan Smith under the command of the PRT. There were four other detachments, which consisted

of R Company and NSE: Sperwan Ghar, Wilson, Frontenac and Ma'Sum Ghar. These detachments could form echelons for the battle group sub-units to handle recovery, resupply and repair tasks.

With all of the changes going on in Kabul after the removal of SAT-A and the arrival of the military training personnel, the NSE also had to rethink how it supported and protected them. In time, an NSE detachment of 20 personnel (medical, signals, administrative, close protection party) was established at Camp Souter, the British base in Kabul.

TF Kandahar and the NSE looked at innovative ideas to facilitate logistics support in the Afghan environment. One of these was the Light Logistics Detachment. One issue identified during summer operations was the problem of resupplying dismounted troops in the complex interior of Zharey District with water, particularly Afghan troops working alongside Canadian troops. There were no Canadian helicopters available and the ICATS Mi-8s would not fly in to do this kind of job. Camelback systems (in some case the troops resorted to carrying two of them) were not enough. Some troops carried commercial portable decontamination kits and used local wells when they could, though the preventative medicine staff looked askance at this practice. This led to an experiment involving pack animals. Using Second World War historical data in Italy as a starting point, Maj Charles Jansen crafted and propelled the Light Logistics Detachment idea through the Canadian bureaucracy. In time, a test detachment was formed but there were cultural issues between the Afghan troops and the donkeys which could not be overcome. Over time, the project faded away due to lack of support. In any event, Canadian helicopters were deployed in early 2009, thus facilitating resupply operations in the field.²⁷⁸

Reduction of Canadian Influence in Kabul

To briefly recap, the Canadian forces in Afghanistan originally exerted influence in the strategic environment of Kabul through six mechanisms: staff officers and command positions at NATO-led ISAF in Afghanistan and the American-led CSTC-A; SAT-A; the Policy Action Group; a staff officer at UNAMA; and the Canadian Embassy. And, as noted previously, the overall purpose of wielding such influence was the long-standing need to have Canadian planning input and situational awareness to protect Canadian interests and to prevent the misuse of Canadian troops by other entities.

By late 2008 and early 2009, the system had nearly completely broken down. SAT-A was gone, due more to bureaucratic rivalry than any other reason. The Americans quickly filled the vacuum. Personality conflicts at UNAMA led to the withdrawal of the Canadian military representative there for the time being. The Policy Action Group, which had SAT-A representation, was also defunct. This left Canadian positions in the two military commands, ISAF and CSTC-A.²⁷⁹

Estrangement also built between the Kandahar PRT and NATO ISAF. By 2009, Canadian officers assigned to ISAF responsible for reporting PRT data were told by other Canadians they would not be welcome at the Kandahar PRT. As it turned out, this was just the symptom of a larger issue. In effect, the Canadian government decided to distance itself from Kabul politics and focus its efforts solely on Kandahar Province. This coincided with the deteriorating Kabul political scene, which, in turn, was related to the continuation of Hamid Karzai as President and the upcoming elections. As the elections loomed in late 2008, any coherency in the Kabul political process ceased to exist and any national agenda that could be tracked back to the heady days of the Constitutional Loya Jirga of 2003–2004 was shunted aside. Indeed, Canadian officers tracking the situation believed there were three uncontrollable issues affecting the Afghan political scene: narcotics, Pakistan, and Hamid Karzai.

There were still positive effects that could be generated in Kabul, particularly on the training side, which built on relationships dating back to the 2003 ETT relationships. Nine personnel positions from SAT-A were transferred to CSTC-A and, working with the Americans, the Canadians focused on improving and developing the Junior Officer Staff Course with an eye to influencing a future generation of Afghan officers. In addition, the Canadian Army also supported the Staff and Language Training Centre Afghanistan. Given the horrifyingly high illiteracy level, anything that could be done to improve the ANSF in that area was welcome. Another agenda in both of these structures was to depoliticize the Afghan National Army as much as possible by encouraging socialization beyond tribal and ethnic groupings. These remained long-term projects. It was recognized that there would be no immediate effects on the campaign in Kandahar but this sort of investment might have an impact on the future stability of the country.

However, the entire international effort in Kabul was simply not meshing in 2008 and 2009 and it is possible that this led some in Ottawa to focus on Kandahar Province and stay out of the strategic level. Maj.-Gen. Al Howard noted that:

In ISAF headquarters there are two teams. There's the ISAF team and then the inner-circle American team. The inner-circle American team is hunting with Reapers and all sorts of stuff, banging away at things. What's not going on is any outreach to the UN to say, "Hey Mr. UN dude, can you come over here and help us mentor and create a governance system with the Afghans?" The last guy who does any effective nation building is [General] David Richards when he forms the PAG....My impression was that the UN and NATO guys aren't getting along [in 2008] and this is a missed opportunity.

The Canadian Army representative at UNAMA was Col Mark Skidmore, who, as we will recall from Volume I, served with the UN in Kabul in the 1990s. Skidmore thought the situation with the UN in Afghanistan was untenable. According to MGen Howard, “I think the whole UN thing was so ineffective, so petty, and so ridiculous that he [Skidmore] just put his hands up and said, ‘You can get me out of here.’” Howard believed that ISAF commanders did not get along with the UNAMA leadership at all “but it may have been the personality of the [UN] Head of Mission as well.”²⁸⁰ Indeed, the closure of SAT-A only compounded the situation: it was the only organization that was providing dedicated assistance to the highest level of government in Afghanistan:

So Canada decides to put some more effort down south. This is where the RoCK comes in. The emphasis is now on Kandahar Province and not on the higher- level. Probably at the military’s insistence, we’ve got [LGen] Mike Gauthier [at CEFCOM] and all that yelling and screaming, “More focus, more focus.” So DFAIT and CIDA answer the mail by putting more focus more focus, by putting as big a team as we’re ever going to get down south. But it diminishes what was going on in Kabul...there’s a bit of a power drain there. Canada has influence. If you have troops in Kandahar Province, you have influence....We don’t use the influence.²⁸¹

It was around this time that a number of Canadian senior officers believed that the Canadian government was seriously ambivalent about the war in Afghanistan:

I think the government comes to the realization that this is a lost cause. The early heady days of Canada demanding, “Fix this, fix that”: None of this “fix this or fix that” is happening. There is nothing effective happening in Kabul. So there’s nothing to influence anyway.... So you’ve got the commander of ISAF, troops dealing with the tactical issues, and that’s where he puts his emphasis....We’ve got a government that isn’t effective and we’re not trying to improve it. And [there was] safe sanctuary for the Taliban [in Pakistan].²⁸²

There was, in effect, a strategic vacuum in Kabul:

So here are the Canadians, mowing the grass down, winning tactically, doing all the right stuff. But it’s not being matched at the higher level, the Canadian government is not engaging strong enough...and the Americans don’t know how to do it. They’re not doing the nation-building pieces.²⁸³

Thompson Departs

BGen Thompson distributed his “Parting Thoughts” on 7 February 2009 to the staff at JTF-A HQ.²⁸⁴ They are worth quoting in some detail, as they were the clearest and most cogent expression of the Canadian situation in Afghanistan up to this point in the war. Thompson stressed up front that “these are my thoughts which may not precisely align with other interested parties.” Thompson characterized Pakistan as the “number one” problem:

At the root, an inexhaustible supply of willing recruits from the unregulated madrassas just across the border. These factories of willing jihadists show no signs of letting up. I would go so far as to suggest that if we fixed this one element, we would be a long way down the road to solving the whole problem allowing the Pashtun belt to return to its steady state (one that would still be alien to us all)....I believe we must look for mitigating strategies in the short term and while the new U.S. Administration develops their strategy on this side of the Durand Line.

Thompson was increasingly concerned about the continued legitimacy of the Kabul government:

With a declared election date of 20 August 2009, there is an important marker on the table. Without question, the potential suspension of executive government power’s [sic] beyond 25 May is troubling. It could mean, bearing in mind time for a runoff election and inauguration preparations, a gap in executive government until November 2009. All the more reason to show resolve in the election’s conduct.

Voter registration had gone well in Kandahar and there would be no excuses as there were in 2004: “I would assert that if the Pashtun are disenfranchised they will have only themselves to blame.”

The next largest problem for Thompson was

the folly of our current command construct. NATO ISAF, CENTCOM, CSTC-A U.S. SOCOM SOF, national agendas etc. It is practically speaking an untenable muddle. Without unity of command, unity of effort is almost impossible....It is nugatory effort for nations to write elaborate plans, often without reference to in-theatre documents, for their narrow patches from capitals. We need to develop a new construct....

At the operational level,

I arrived believing that a thorough understanding of tribal dynamics was essential to success.... Nevertheless, we are still Ferengi and were surprised, as an example, by the abrupt dismissal of Governor Raufi and the subsequent appointment of Governor Wessa. Perhaps surprised is too dramatic and astonished would be more fitting—astonished at the Mafia-like functioning of Afghan politics. In short we need to continue to bore into the detail of tribal dynamics if we are to ascertain which levers truly move the people of Southern Afghanistan.

As for development issues, Thompson favoured the delivery of “tangible results” in irrigation, electricity, roads and unemployment, citing the work of the Construction Management Organization as the way forward. “And then there is my hobby horse, ridden mercilessly since I arrived - increasing troop density.” 2-2 Infantry and the expansion of 1-205 Brigade was a big help but “some thought should be given to deploying Afghan National Army forces south from quieter northern sectors.” A doubling of police and the retention of mentors with them in the districts was necessary if the Focused District Development process were to work.

He paid tribute to tactical successes:

Apart from our soldiers on the ground facing the enemy day and night, our tactical level intelligence has most impressed me. We know the populated areas of Kandahar Province. The level of detail to which we know the grounds a marvel permitting true partnered operations that are intelligence-cued against known targets (individuals or compounds of interest). Large-scale advance-to-contacts are no longer necessary because of the quality of the intelligence we receive, which drives precision operations aimed at deepening and protecting the hold. The entire process is a gem that must be captured for future operations.

Finally,

People’s will seems a fickle trait. As I follow the debate in Canada about the mission in Afghanistan, I’m left to wonder how our countrymen of the day shouldered the losses of previous wars. Are we the same nation? One thing is certain. We are served by the finest soldiers in the world. They have held this province during a difficult fighting season without complaint, hell, with unbridled enthusiasm. I leave with a renewed respect for our soldiers. We should count ourselves privileged to have walked in their company.

Conclusion

By early 2009, the situation in Kandahar Province remained stalemated. The Canadians and Afghan forces were unable to gain complete control of the districts west of Kandahar City and a series of terrorist attacks challenged the perception that Kandahar City was under some form of coalition control. In those districts lay islands of stability which, when combined with manoeuvring coalition forces, acted to disrupt enemy activities directed at taking complete control of those districts or those directed at the city. Several factors contributed to this equilibrium. First, scarce resources were directed at keeping Highway 1 west of the city open so that British operations could be resupplied and supported in Helmand. Second, the inability of the Afghans to progress in the governance sphere, coupled with inter-tribal and inter-power-broker rivalry was exploited by the enemy to gain lodgments in Arghandab and Senjaray. Third, withdrawal from tactical infrastructure, which made sense for economic reasons, actually made the situation worse in Zharey and Panjwayi.

Police capacity-building was, by the end of 2008, proceeding at a crawl but there were still far too many entities involved in solving the problem. This was significantly influenced by the incoherent American approach to fixing policing after the Germans passed it off to them, and to some extent by personality issues in Kandahar Province. These issues were beyond Canadian control and were really the long-term effects of Germany's failed policing policy, this being seven years after the Bonn Agreement. Canadian P-OMLT, Canadian CIVPOL, and American police mentors, however, were effective at propping up district-level police despite risk, losses and scarce resources.

Afghan National Army capacity-building was a Canadian success story. With a full Afghan brigade deployed into the districts backed up with Canadian OMLT resources, troop density levels were promising—if only the policing and governance pieces could have been sorted out. The main issue for the Afghan army and the OMLTs was the continual redeployment of 2nd Kandak to prop up the flagging British effort in Helmand. This stripped away forces and reduced troop density in the front-line districts, just when they were needed to implement Hold and Build functions.

What is best described as “attrition operations” were stunningly successful. Leadership targeting by special operations forces and airpower; the large numbers of insurgents that exposed themselves and were killed during Operation ASP-E JANUBI; and the armed ISTAR fight conducted at the JTF Afghanistan and battle group levels significantly attenuated the enemy's capabilities in Kandahar Province during 2008.

As for the crucial governance issue, the extreme turbulence of the shift from Khalid to Raufi to Wessa severely undermined government legitimacy. General Raufi was the best hope for the government in improving its credibility and legitimacy. Ahmad Wali Karzai,

and those in the Popalzai power structure who felt threatened by a non-Popalzai in command with growing cross-tribal public support, snuffed this fleeting light of hope. This above all else undermined Canadian efforts across the board and ensured that the population remained on the fence. Similarly, the district-level mechanisms like the Joint District Coordination Centres continued to mature but were themselves fatally undermined by a combination of tribal dynamics, individual lack of vision, and by association with increasingly questionable provincial-level government legitimacy.

No level of development was going to address these systemic problems. Indeed, the new Canadian strategy was nearly completely disconnected from these crucial issues: schools, polio eradication, and the Dahla Dam project bore no relationship to anything other than trying to improve Afghan lives. Though this may seem to be a laudable goal, it was counterproductive in a counter-insurgency war. Aid projects unconnected to the government become ostensibly neutral, which, in turn, means that the insurgency can claim credit for allowing them to take place. The new strategy laudably addressed security capacity-building but this took a back seat to the “signature” projects. In effect, those who crafted the new strategy established a number of projects, determined a means of measuring the progress of those projects, and created a method of reporting progress. However, as seen, none of them addressed the key issues fuelling the insurgency in Kandahar Province.

The dysfunctional approach to development in the districts consisted of a plethora of projects designed to improve the livelihood of the population but, again, they were not connected to governance. And, like the larger projects, the enemy could claim that they were “allowing” local projects to continue in a leadership vacuum. Canadian forces did what they could to integrate development at the district level but were hampered by the inability to have OGD continuity at the district level. That left the continuity to CIMIC, the Construction Management Organization, and the Specialist Engineer Team. Without a Canadian OGD “piece” at the district level, the three lines of operation (governance, development and security) could not be synchronized.

At best, the Canadians and the Afghans could continue to disrupt the enemy and challenge them wherever they were operating. Capacity-building efforts with the police and army continued apace, while incremental and ad hoc measures to capacity-build at the district level slowly moved forward. The Highway 1 main service route remained open for the British in Helmand while TF Kandahar awaited reinforcements.

ENDNOTES

1. CBC, "Party leaders blast Taliban remarks on Canadian election" (10 September 2008).
2. The Canadian Press, "Taliban urges Canada's next PM to pull troops" (9 September 2008).
3. CCOA, "Canada's Engagement in Afghanistan, September 2008," p. 1.
4. Ibid.
5. Interviews with Col Spike Hazleton and Col Rene Melançon [Op TOLO].
6. Interview with BGen Denis Thompson (Ottawa, 14 February 2012).
7. Telephone interview with LCol Lee Hammond (13 July 2012).
8. As depicted in Bing West's *No True Glory: A Frontline Account of the Battle for Fallujah* (New York: Bantam Books, 2005).
9. Thompson papers, "Operational Philosophy V2" (4 October 2008).
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Casualty reporting was connected to maintaining support of the mission. Grieving family members now had immediate access to or could be exploited by the media, which could result in negative publicity for the Canadian Forces, DND, and the government in general.
13. Interview with Colonel Jamie Cade (Kandahar, 2 February 2009).
14. Discussions between the author and senior Canadian representatives at ISAF HQ (Kabul, 6–7 March 2009).
15. Thompson interview.
16. Interviews with LCol Hugh Ferguson (KAF, 1 and 2 February 2009).
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. JTF-A HQ DSR (17 November 2008).
22. JTF-A HQ DSR (6 December 2008).
23. TF 3-08 DSR (4 September 2008).
24. TF 3-08 DSR (7 September 2008).
25. JDCC DSR (22 September 2008).
26. TF 3-08 DSRs (9 and 10 September 2008).
27. TF 3-08 DSRs (7, 9 and 27 September 2008).
28. TF 3-08 DSRs (5 and 9 September 2008).
29. TF 3-08 DSRs (4, 9, 11, 24, 27 September 2008).
30. TF 3-08 DSRs (7, 8, 9, 10, 17 September 2008); OMLT DSR.
31. OMLT DSR (3 September 2008).

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32. OMLT DSR (4 September 2008).
33. OMLT DSRs (4, 5, 6, 7 September 2008).
34. OMLT DSR (17 September 2008).
35. PRT DSR (25 September 2008). It is likely Nabi was killed because he was a potential obstacle to elements of the Panjwayi power structure and their objectives.
36. JDCC DSR (5 September 2008).
37. PRT DSR (17 September 2008).
38. Battle group DSR (28 September 2008).
39. JTF-A HQ DSRs (2 and 3 September 2008).
40. Battle group DSR (16 September 2008).
41. OMLT DSRs (2–6 September 2008).
42. OMLT DSRs (7–13 September 2008).
43. JTF-A HQ DSR (18 September 2008).
44. OMLT DSR (28 September 2008).
45. OMLT DSR (23 September 2008).
46. Battle group DSR (16 September 2008).
47. JDCC DSR (16 September 2008).
48. PRT DSR (21 September 2008).
49. JTF-A HQ DSR (6 September 2008).
50. PRT DSR (20 September 2008).
51. JTF-A HQ DSR (3 September 2008).
52. Battle group DSR (5 September 2008).
53. PRT DSR (8 September 2008).
54. JTF-A HQ DSRs (1–30 September 2008).
55. JTF-A HQ DSR (5 September 2008).
56. PRT DSR (1 September 2008).
57. PRT DSR (1–5 September 2008).
58. PRT DSRs (6–15 September 2008).
59. JTF-A HQ DSRs (8–9 September 2008).
60. JTF-A HQ DSRs (10–15 September 2008).
61. OMLT DSR (17 September 2008).
62. JTF-A HQ DSR (22 September 2008).
63. Ibid.
64. JTF-A HQ DSR (28 September 2008).

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65. JTF-A HQ DSR (29 September 2008).
66. PRT DSRs (9 and 14 October 2008).
67. JTF-A HQ DSR (19 October 2008).
68. J2 DSR (21 October 2008).
69. J2 DSR (23 October 2008).
70. "OMLT Rotation 5-End of Tour Report" (13 September 2008).
71. Interview with Col Jamie Cade (KAF, 4 February 2009). Interview with Major Chris Comeau (Kingston, 15 May 2012).
72. Comeau interview.
73. Comeau suggests that when his rotation departed, the limited view was in play: "When I arrived early 2009, it appeared to me that the expanded view was in play." See interview with Major Steve Nolan (Ma'Sum Ghar, 11 February 2009).
74. OCCP DSR (28 September 2008); Cade interview.
75. Interview with LCol Dana Woodworth (Camp Nathan Smith, 10 February 2009).
76. Ibid.
77. Ibid.
78. Confidential interview.
79. Interview with Andrew Scyner (Camp Nathan Smith, 6 February 2009).
80. Based on numerous exasperated and vehement discussions between civilian and military JTF-A HQ personnel, and the author in the summer of 2008 and spring 2009.
81. Ibid.
82. NATO, *Afghanistan Report 2009*, pp. 24–25.
83. Ibid., p. 16.
84. WikiLeaks, message American embassy Kabul to State, "General McKiernan's January 4, 2009 Briefing on The Afghan Public Protection Force (APPF)" (8 January 2009); WikiLeaks, message American embassy Kabul to State, "Informing NATO Allies of Potential Changes to US SOF Posture in Afghanistan" (27 February 2009); NATO, *Afghanistan Report 2009*, p. 16.
85. Scyner interview.
86. Thompson, Woodworth and Cade discussions with the author (KAF, February 2009).
87. Cade interview.
88. Woodworth interview.
89. PRT DSRs (15–25 September 2008).
90. JTF-A HQ DSRs (30, 31 October; 2, 3, 8, 28, 29 November; and 1, 2, 16 December 2008).
91. Discussions with LCol Bob Chamberlain (KAF, January 2008).
92. JTF-A HQ DSR (31 October 2008 to 1 January 2009).
93. PRT DSR (13 November 2008).

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94. PRT DSR (14 January 2009); confidential interview. It was unclear to the CIMIC teams, at least in their daily reportage, why all of this was taking place at the time but in retrospect, it may have been related to the planned Kandahar City bypass highway project that Ahmad Wali Karzai was so interested in. Acquisition of land, and then its sale to the government so that the road could be built, could be profitable. Even more so if the same individual's construction consortium built the road.
95. The author was confronted with this logic by numerous Afghans in social environments over several years in various districts of Kandahar Province.
96. JTF-A HQ DSRs (5–10 October 2008).
97. Cade interview (2 February 2009).
98. OCC-P DSR (10 January 2009). When read between the lines, it appears as though Ahmad Wali Karzai was pressuring Hamid Karzai to do something about Ghorak. The implication is that Ahmad Wali Karzai was either involved in the illicit activities in that district or was acting on behalf of somebody else in the Kandahar or Helmand power structures who were.
99. This section is based on Ch. 11 in Sean M. Maloney, *War in Afghanistan: Eight Battles in the South* (Kingston: CDA Press, 2012).
100. JTF-A HQ DSR (2 October 2008).
101. JTF-A HQ DSR (16 October 2008).
102. JTF-A DSR (24 October 2008).
103. PRT DSR (5 October 2008).
104. PRT DSR (9 October 2008).
105. OMLT DSR (5 October 2008).
106. OMLT DSR (8 October 2008).
107. PRT DSR (15 October 2008).
108. PRT DSR (30 October 2008).
109. "Operation ARTASH CONOP Level 1 Briefing" (24 October 2008).
110. JTF-A HQ DSR (28 October 2008); note that the JTF-A HQ briefing slide for the Op ARTASH contacts was labelled "Today's nonsense" instead of its usual title.
111. JTF-A HQ DSR (4 October 2008). This was the start of a psychological trap that subsequent rotations got into. The delineation of the 28-29 easting on the map for Panjwayi District cognitively constrained thinking about the district and this amounted to accepting psychologically that the enemy controlled the area west of the 28-29 easting, with long-term effects on Canadian operations.
112. OMLT DSR (13 October 2008).
113. Battle group DSR (4 October 2008).
114. Battle group DSR (20 October 2008).
115. OMLT DSR (5 October 2008).
116. OMLT DSR (13 October 2008).
117. Interview with LCol Hugh Ferguson (KAF, 2 February 2008).
118. "Op SHNA DARA 2 Frag O Op ARAY Lvl 2 CONOP Brief" (2 October 2008).

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119. Battle group DSR (6 October 2008).
120. JTF-A HQ DSR (7 October 2008). See also "Op ARAY SIGACT Slide, 5 October 2008."
121. Interview with Major Fraser Auld (KAF, 3 February 2009). To what extent the ICRC provided medical support to the Taliban and undermined the Afghan government's attempts to establish a health care system in Kandahar is something that requires more detailed examination elsewhere.
122. Battle group DSR; "Op ARAY SIGACAT Slide, 6 October 2008." (7 October 2008).
123. JTF-A HQ DSR (8 October 2008).
124. "Op ARAY SIGACAT Slide, 8 October 2008."
125. Battle group DSR (10 October 2008).
126. PRT DSR (17 October 2008).
127. JTF-A DSR (23 October 2008).
128. Interview with Major Dean Tremblay (Harrowsmith, 4 March 2013).
129. Ibid.
130. Ibid.
131. PRT DSR (17 October 2008).
132. Battle group DSRs (1–10 October 2008).
133. Battle group DSRs (23–24 October 2008).
134. PRT DSR (24 October 2008).
135. JTF-A HQ DSR (7 October 2008).
136. PRT DSR (3 October 2008).
137. JTF-A HQ DSR (17 October 2008).
138. JTF-A HQ DSR (20 October 2008).
139. JTF-A HQ DSRs (29–31 October 2008).
140. PRT DSRs (1, 5, 6 November 2008).
141. J2 DSR (8 November 2008).
142. Interview with LCol Hugh Ferguson (KAF, 1 February 2009).
143. OMLT DSR (10–12 November 2008).
144. JTF-A HQ DSR (13 November 2008).
145. Ibid.
146. OMLT DSR (13 November 2008).
147. JTF-A HQ DSRs (20–24 November 2008).
148. JTF-A HQ DSRs (1–30 December 2008).
149. JTF-A HQ DSRs (29 and 31 December 2008).
150. Battle group DSR (6 November 2008).

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151. JTF-A HQ DSR (9 November 2008).
152. Interview with LCol Roger Barrett (KAF, 5 February 2009).
153. Battle group DSR (6 November 2008).
154. Battle group DSR (7 November 2008).
155. OMLT DSRs (8–11 November 2008).
156. OMLT DSRs (12–19 November 2008).
157. JTF-A HQ DSRs (17–19 November 2008).
158. JTF-A HQ DSR (2 November 2008).
159. Derived from JTF- A HQ reported SIGACTS for the month of December 2008.
160. JTF-A HQ DSR (1 December 2008).
161. JTF-A HQ SIGACT slides (27 December 2008).
162. Compiled from CIMIC reportage through the PRT to JTF-A HQ for November 2008.
163. Author's observations after spending time with CMT-1 during February 2009.
164. Compiled from CIMIC reportage through the PRT to JTF-A HQ for December 2008.
165. Ibid.
166. Ibid.
167. Compiled from JTF-A HQ SIGACTS for the month of November 2008.
168. Battle group DSR (16 November 2008).
169. Battle group DSR (17 November 2008).
170. JTF-A HQ DSR (17 November 2008).
171. JTF-A HQ DSR (20 November 2008).
172. OMLT DSR (24 November 2008).
173. JTF-A HQ DSRs (25–29 November 2008).
174. Battle group DSR (14 December 2008).
175. PRT CIMIC report (10 November 2008). Note that I have removed the elder's name to protect him.
176. Ibid.
177. PRT DSRs (17, 19 and 28 November 2008).
178. PRT DSR (16 December 2008).
179. JTF-A HQ DSR (23 December 2008).
180. PRT CIMIC report (18 December 2008).
181. JTF-A HQ DSR (19 December 2008).
182. Ferguson interview.
183. Compiled from JTF-A HQ DSR and SIGACTS for the month of November 2008.
184. J2 DSR (13 November 2008).

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185. JTF-A HQ DSR (24 November 2008).
186. JTF-A HQ DSR (27 November 2008).
187. SIGACT slide, "BG C/S 22 IED Strike" (5 December 2008).
188. SIGACT Slide, "OMLT C/S 71D IED Strike IVO Senjaray" (5 December 2008).
189. SIGACT Slide, "KPRT QRF IED Attack IVO Senjaray" (13 December 2008).
190. Ferguson interview.
191. Mulawshyn interview; Thompson interviews.
192. JTF-A HQ DSR (11 September 2008).
193. Mulawshyn interview. See also "Op KASSAT Action Plan RRS-East of Senjaray IEDs as at 201200D December. 2008."
194. Ibid.
195. JTF-A HQ DSR (16 December 2008).
196. Battle group DSR (17 December 2008).
197. Ibid.
198. J2 DSR (16 December 2008).
199. JTF-A HQ DSR (18 December 2008).
200. TFK "Operation PANCAR CONOP Level 1 Briefing" (19 December 2008); JTF-A HQ DSR (16 December 2008).
201. Battle group DSR (19 December 2008).
202. JTF-A HQ DSRs (18–20 December 2008).
203. Battle group DSR (20 December 2008).
204. JTF-A HQ DSR (22 December 2008).
205. J2 DSR (23 December 2008).
206. JTF-A HQ "Op JAKAR" (18 December 2008).
207. JTF-A HQ DSRs (24–29 December 2008); Ferguson interview; WikiLeaks, "Afghanistan War Log: 2008" identifies TF 373 as the SOF unit involved.
208. Email correspondence with LCol Marc St Yves (23 and 25 June 2012).
209. Compiled from JTF-A HQ DSRs and SIGACTS for the month of November 2008.
210. Ibid.
211. Ibid. Tremblay interview.
212. Tremblay interview.
213. Compiled from JTF-A HQ DSRs and SIGACTS for the month of December 2008.
214. PRT DSR CIMIC report (2 November 2008).
215. PRT DSR (20 December 2008).

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216. One of the more surreal reports from CIMIC involved a visit to the village of Munara Sharifa: "When it was asked if there were any insurgents in the village or area, the language assistant heard someone say, "I am an insurgent." A male 30 to 34 years old, heavy build, 6ft tall, dressed in black with a large black beard. He left immediately after the question was asked, heading north." PRT CIMIC report (5 November 2008).
217. Compiled from JTF-A HQ DSRs and SIGACTS for September–December 2008.
218. JTF-A HQ DSR (18 November 2008).
219. Compiled from 2-2 Infantry daily reportage to JTF-A HQ for the month of November as expressed in the DSR.
220. Ibid.
221. It was never clear whether this was the act of a deranged man or an event incited by a local Taliban commander. The author worked with the 2-2 Infantry HTT during Operation JALEY and discussed the Lloyd killing with the team. There was a theory that a particular insurgent commander may have been behind the incident, but there was no means of proving it.
222. JTF-A HQ DSR (12 November 2008).
223. PRT DSR (17 December 2008).
224. JTF-A HQ DSRs (14–16 December 2008).
225. JTF-A HQ DSR (30 December 2008).
226. JTF-A HQ Air Wing briefing to the author (KAF, 8 March 2009).
227. Discussion with Colonel Chris Coates (KAF, 8 March 2009). Note that Turkey had about 30 upgraded AH-1F Cobras, many of which were in storage having just come out of service while they transitioned to a new Italian machine.
228. Air Wing briefing to the author (KAF, 28 July 2010).
229. JTF-A Air Wing DSRs (22, 25, 29, 30 December 2009).
230. SkyLink briefing to the author (KAF, 2 February 2009).
231. JTF-A HQ Air Wing briefing to the author (KAF, 8 March 2009).
232. See Thompson Papers, Daily Diary for October–December 2008; Woodworth interview (10 February 2009). Note that the post-Ritz environment was significantly more collegial and conducive to inter-organizational cooperation.
233. Woodworth interview.
234. Thompson interview (KAF, 31 January 2009).
235. Auld interview; Interview with Jennie Chen (KAF, 7 February 2009).
236. Cade interview.
237. Thompson interview.
238. Discussion with Major Orest Babij (KAF, 4 February 2009).
239. OCC-P DSR (6 December 2008).
240. Thompson interview.
241. JTF-A HQ Monthly Assessment Report for December 2008 (January 2009).
242. This section is based on Chapter 12 in Maloney, *War in Afghanistan: Eight Battles in the South* (Kingston: CDA Press, 2012).

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243. OMLT DSR (17 January 2008).
244. PRT DSRs (1–30 January 2008).
245. JTF-A HQ DSR (2 January 2008).
246. Compiled from JTF-A HQ DSRs and SIGACT reports for January 2008.
247. J2 DSR (18 January 2008).
248. PRT DSR (22 January 2008).
249. PRT DSR (20 January 2008).
250. JTF-A HQ DSR (5 January 2008).
251. Ibid.
252. Battle group DSR (7 January 2008).
253. OMLT DSR (9 January 2008).
254. JTF-A HQ DSR (10 January 2008).
255. Battle group DSRs (16–17 January 2008).
256. OMLT and battle group DSRs (20–21 January 2008).
257. JTF-A HQ DSRs (22 and 24 January 2008).
258. OMLT DSR (24 January 2008).
259. OMLT and battle group DSRs (24–26 January 2008).
260. J2 DSR (6 January 2008).
261. The author spent several days with CMT-1 observing its operations in February 2009.
262. Compiled from JTF-A HQ DSRs for the month of January 2009 plus author's notes from the field.
263. PRT DSR (13 January 2009).
264. PRT DSRs (12, 14 and 18 January 2009).
265. PRT DSR (18 January 2009).
266. PRT DSR (22 January 2009).
267. JTF-A HQ DSR (24 January 2009).
268. JTF-A HQ DSR (23 January 2009).
269. Ironically, this was in Haji Agha Lalai Dastagiri Village.
270. PRT DSR (19 January 2008).
271. JTF-A HQ "Task Force Kandahar Monthly Assessment Report for October 2008" (November 2008).
272. JTF-A HQ "Monthly Assessment Report for December 2008" (January 2009).
273. My take on this is derived from reading the MARs for September, October, November, and December 2008.
274. Thompson interview.
275. This section is based on an interview with LCol S.T. Blair (KAF, 10 February 2009) and a briefing by the NSE to the author.

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276. Regional Command (South) appropriated a TLAV platoon for force protection and QRF which reduced the Construction Management Organization's ability to move around, which led at the time to some friction between the two headquarters.
277. Certainly if LCol Hope and Lavoie's units had proper gap-crossing equipment on 3 August and 3 September they would not have been canalized by the canal on the left flank on approach to the White School.
278. "Light Logistics Det (LLD) Proposal by Maj C. Jansen, TFK G4" (n/d).
279. This section is based on numerous discussions by the author with Canadian officers in Kabul in March 2009.
280. Howard interview.
281. Ibid.
282. Ibid.
283. Ibid.
284. BGen Denis Thompson, "Parting Thoughts, 7 February 2009."

APPENDIX A:

CONVERGENCE OF INTERESTS IN THE SARPOSA PRISON BREAK AND ARGHANDAB II, JUNE 2008

The effects of the June 2008 Sarposa Prison break and its aftermath highlight the complexities of Kandahar provincial politics, the insurgency, and Canada's inability to react effectively to this dynamic during the course of the war. In Sarposa, numerous competing interests may have temporarily aligned, leaving Canada to take the blame as a mark would in a confidence scam. This appendix is one means of depicting this complexity and should not be seen as a final, definitive theory pending the availability of better or additional information.

The interested parties in this event included: the Popalzai representatives in the Kandahar power structure; the Taliban based in northern Kandahar province; and the Taliban based in Quetta. The targets in this scheme included: the remnants of the Alikozai power base in Arghandab; their Alizai allies in Asheque and Senjaray led by Habibullah Jan; and some emergent or potential power competitors that were not tribally-based.

The Taliban operation into Arghandab immediately following Sarposa effectively suppressed the remnants of the Alikozai tribe who were loyal to the deceased Mullah Naqib. Karimullah was seen by many to be an extension of Asadullah Khalid's power and seen less and less as a legitimate descendent of his father's power base. This situation split the Alikozais, leaving them vulnerable to Taliban activity. Indeed, the Arghandab chief of police was targeted the same day as the Sarposa attack, rendering a timely district-level response to heightened Taliban activity impotent. This was a win-win situation for both the Taliban and the Popalzai representatives. The Alikozais were the losers.

The Taliban in Quetta benefitted from the 'spectacular' information operations generated by the Sarposa breakout. That was possibly worth more to them in the long run than the subsequent failed operation into Arghandab. Within six weeks, their fighters from Shah Wali Kot and Khakrez were back to work assassinating and intimidating the Alikozai power structure remnants into submission. The Popalzai representatives probably counted on a swift ISAF and ANSF response to the Arghandab incursion to balance out any geographical gains made by the insurgents in the district. In addition, they likely believed that they would keep them at bay. The Taliban and the Popalzai representatives were once again in a win-win situation: the Alikozais, who were an impediment to the Taliban and would not submit to the Popalzais, have their influence steadily reduced by both. The Alikozais were once again the losers.

The Taliban who escaped from Sarposa dispersed to Arghandab, Senjaray, and Nakhonay. Some continued on to Band-e Timor via Mushan, but the bulk stayed in Kandahar province. The Alizai leadership in Senjaray and Asheque were aligned with the Alikozais and had antagonistic relations with the Popalzai power structure. A large number of escaped Taliban headed for Senjaray where they reinforced a flagging insurgency in that crucial area on Highway 1. This was problematic for Habibullah Jan and his people. Eventually Habibullah Jan was assassinated but not by the Taliban. This, coupled with the reduction of Alikozai influence in Kandahar, resulted in a catastrophic loss of Alizai influence. The Taliban and the Popalzai power structure were, once again, in a win-win situation. Once again, the Popalzai power structure knew that ISAF would use force to suppress the Taliban in Senjaray in order to keep the road open. In time, security forces controlled by the Popalzai power structure deployed to Senjaray to 'help' Habibullah Jan's brother defend the district. The Alizais were the losers in this situation, as were the Alikozais.

General Saqib's role in proceedings is interesting. He was fired for inaction by Asadullah Khalid but that inaction may have been purchased by someone, whether the Taliban or by someone in the Popalzai power structure. It may have been lower-level police personnel whose inaction was purchased. Saqib was, apparently, investigating the Popalzai power structure for corruption either to use it as leverage to become a player in it (one view), or because he was actually interested in cleaning up Kandahar (another view). This latter view did not coincide with Saqib's involvement in moving 'his' police into Maywand to replace 'police' controlled by Haji Saifullah (an ally of the Popalzai power structure) and then using those police to conduct selective poppy eradication. Notably, Saqib did not like competing police organizations that were not under his control and he was involved in the emergent and expanding security company boon that was generated when ISAF needed forward operating base security coverage while forces deployed on operations. As we saw with UNAMA poaching police in 2006 with higher salaries, there was a lot of money to be made by 'moonlighting' police. Moreover, Asadullah Khalid's private militia was now ascendant and less likely to be disbanded because of the 'failure' of Saqib's provincial police. The Taliban and the Popalzai power structure once again had a win-win situation: the Taliban gained from the removal of an effective police chief, the Popalzai power structure gained from the removal of a possible threat or rival. Saqib was the loser.

The escapees who reached Nakhonay eventually initiated operations against Dand, a Barakzai-dominated and relatively quiet district. The Governor's private militia then heavily augmented the Dand police right after Sarposa. It is likely that this was a measure to reassure the Barakzai power structure and protect their interests in that district from any fall-out that may be generated by enhanced Taliban operations after Sarposa.

This was a win-win for the Popalzai power structure and the Barakzai power structure. Dand was protected from collateral damage and the Popalzai power structure did not have to worry about a two-front war against the Barakzai and the Taliban. The only losers here were the Taliban escapees in Nakhonay who wound up fighting Khalid's militia.

Finally, there was the Governor, Asadullah Khalid. The Canadian government wanted Khalid removed for corruption and went public with these desires in April when Maxime Bernier was quoted by the media. This was a major personal slight that could not go unanswered by Khalid. The inaction of the Afghan security forces to the Sarposa attack, which led to the Canadian Army temporarily abandoning its efforts in Zharey and Panjwayi in order to deal with Arghandab, undermined the Canadian strategic agenda in Kandahar. Ahmad Wali Karzai publicly blamed Canada for not responding fast enough to Sarposa. Whether Asadullah Khalid played a role in influencing this inaction or not is unknown. If it were ever proven, this would constitute another win-win for the Taliban and the Popalzai representatives in Kandahar. Security pressure on the Taliban in Zharey and Panjwayi was removed, while Canada was publicly humiliated. Canada and ultimately the Afghan people of Kandahar were the losers. It should also be noted that Governor Asadullah Khalid departed Kandahar province prior to the Sarposa break out and Operation DOUR BURKHOU and did not return for some time, leaving his deputy governor in charge.

One can debate whether these events were calculated, opportunistic or random and there is plenty of room to manoeuvre when it comes to personal motivations. There is no debate that the Sarposa affair and the second Arghandab operation seriously undermined Canada's position in Afghanistan and accelerated the demise of Alikozai power in Kandahar.

GLOSSARY

ACP	Access control point
ADATS	Air defence anti-tank system
ADZ	Afghan Development Zone
AEV	Armoured engineer vehicle
AHDS	Afghan Health Delivery Services
AHP	Afghan Highway Police
ALP	Afghan Local Police
ANA	Afghan National Army
ANCOP	Afghan National Civil Order Police
ANDS	Afghan National Development Strategy
ANP	Afghan National Police
ANSF	Afghan national security forces, ISAF shorthand for both the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police as a collective.
APC	Armoured personnel carrier
APPP or AP3	Afghan Public Protection Program
APRP	Afghan Peace and Reintegration Program
ARSIC	Afghan Regional Security Integration Commands
ARV	Armoured recovery vehicle
ASIC	All Source Intelligence Centre
ASOP	Afghan Social Outreach Program
AUP	Afghan Uniformed Police

GLOSSARY

AVIDV	Arghandab Valley Integrated Development Vision
AVLB	Armoured vehicle-launched bridge
AWK	Ahmad Wali Karzai
Bdr	Bombardier
BG	Battle group
BIP	Blow in place
BSC	Battle space commander
C/S	Callsign
CADG	Central Asian Development Group
CANSOFCOM	Canadian Special Operations Forces Command
CCDC	Clustered Community Development Council
CDC	Community Development Council
CEFCOM	Canadian Expeditionary Force Command
CER	Combat Engineer Regiment
CEXC	Combined Explosives Exploitation Cell
CF	Canadian Forces
CFC-A	Combined Forces Command–Afghanistan
CFNIS	Canadian Forces National Investigative Service
CGSO	Canadian Government Support Office
CHF	Canadian Helicopter Force
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
C-IED	Counter-IED
CIMIC	Civil-military cooperation

GLOSSARY

CIVPOL	Civilian Police, or the 30-strong RCMP contingent assigned to the civilian police component of the United Nations Protection Force
CJSOTF	Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force
CJTF	Combined Joint Task Force
CLJ	Constitutional Loya Jirga
CLP	Combat logistics patrol
CMO	Construction Management Organization
CMT	Construction Management Team
CNN	Cable News Network
CO	Commanding Officer
COIN	Counterinsurgency
COP	Combat Outpost
CPEP	Central Poppy Eradication Program
CSOR	Canadian Special Operations Regiment
CSTC-A	Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan
CSYEP	Culturally Structured Youth Employment Program
CTF	Combined Task Force
CTKC	Combined Team Kandahar City
DAFA	Demining Agency for Afghanistan
DAGR	Defence Advanced Global Positioning System (GPS) Receiver, a Canadian GPS system
DCC	District Community Council
DCO	Deputy Commanding Officer
DComd	Deputy Commander
DDA	District Development Assembly
DDCT	Dand District Combat Team

GLOSSARY

DDD	District Delivery Program
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration
DEVAD	Development Advisor
DFAIT	Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade
DFFC	Directionally focused fragmentation charge
DND	Department of National Defence
DST	District Stability or Stabilization Team
EBO	Effects-based operations
ECM	Electronic countermeasures
ECP	Entry control points
ECS	Engineer Construction Squadron
ECT	Engineer Construction Team
EDD	Explosive detection dog team
EOD	Explosive ordnance disposal
EROC	Expedient route-opening capability
ESU	Engineer Support Unit
ETT	Embedded Training Team
Eurocorps	European Corps
EW	Electronic warfare
FATA	Federally Administered Tribal Agency
FDD	Focused District Development
FOB	Forward Operating Base
FOO/FAC	Forward observation officer/forward air controller
GBU	Guided bomb unit
GIRoA	Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

GLOSSARY

GMIC	Government Media and Information Centre
GMLRS	Guided multiple-launch rocket system
HALO	Hostile Artillery Locating
HELQUEST	Helicopter Request Message
HESH	High-explosive squash-head (munition)
HFA	Haji Fazluddin Agha
HiG	Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin
HME	Home-made explosive
HQ	Headquarters
HSU	Health Service Unit
HTT	Human Terrain Team
IC	International community
ID	Identification
ICATS	ISAF Contract Air Transport Support
ICEPAK	ISAF Coordination Element Pakistan
IDLG	Independent Directorate for Local Governance
IDP	Internally displaced person
IEC	Independent Electoral Commission
IED	Improvised explosive device
IFF	Identification friend or foe
IFOR	Implementation Force
IJC	ISAF Joint Command
ILDS	Improved landmine detection system
Int	Intelligence
IO	Information operations

GLOSSARY

IPAP	Interim Provincial Action Plan
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
ISI	Inter-Services Intelligence
ISID	Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate
ISR	Intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance
ISTAR	Intelligence, surveillance, target-acquisition and reconnaissance
JAG	Judge Advocate General
JDAMS	Joint direct-attack munition system
JDCC	Joint District Coordination Centre
JECB	Joint Effects Coordinating Board
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
JOA	Joint operating area (ISAF)
JOC	Joint Operations Centre
JOG	Joint Operations Group
JP	Joint patrols
JPCC	Joint Provincial Coordination Centre
JPEL	Joint Prioritized Effects List
JTAC	Joint terminal air controller
JTF	Joint Task Force
JTF-A	Joint Task Force–Afghanistan
K-9	Dog team
KAFF	Kandahar Airfield
KAP	Kandahar Action Plan
KC	Kandahar City
KCSWG	Kandahar City Security Working Group

GLOSSARY

KFC	Kandahar Fusion Centre
KIFC	Kandahar Intelligence Fusion Centre
KLE	Key leader engagement
KLIP	Kandahar Local Initiative Program
KMTC	Kabul Military Training Centre
KPRT	Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team
KTD	Key terrain districts
KUS	Kandahar Ulema Shura
KVA	Key Village Approach
KVI	Key Village Insurgent
LAV	Light armoured vehicle
LAW	Light Antitank Weapon
LCMD	Lightweight counter-mine detector
LCMR	Lightweight counter-mortar radar
LeT	Lashkar-e-Taiba
LLD	Light Logistics Detachment
LORIT	LAV Operational Requirements Integration Task
MASCAL	Mass casualty event
MASINT	Measurement and Signature Intelligence
M-ATV	MRAP all-terrain vehicle
MCLC	Mine-clearance line charge (micklick)
MDC	Mine Detection Centre
MEDEVAC	Medical evacuation
MEU	Marine Expeditionary Unit
MEWT	Mobile Electronic Warfare Team

GLOSSARY

MILAD	Military advisor
MMU	Multinational Medical Unit
MP	Military Police
MPMTT	Military Police Mobile Training Team
MRAP	Mine-resistant ambush-protected (vehicle)
MRRD	Ministry of Rural Reconstruction and Development
MSO	Municipal Support Office
MTTF	Mission Transition Task Force
MWR	Morale, welfare and recreation
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCCIS	National Command and Control and Information Systems
NDC	New District Centre
NDS	National Directorate of Security
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NIS	National Investigative Service
NORSOF	Norwegian Special Operations Forces
NSE	National Support Element
NTM-A	NATO Training Mission–Afghanistan
OCC-D(D)	Operations Coordination Center–District (Dand)
OCC-D(P)	Operational Coordination Centre–District (Panjwayi)
OCC-D	Operational Coordination Center–District
OCC-K	Operational Coordination Center–Kandahar City
OCC-P	Operations Coordination Center–Province (replaced JPCC)
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
ODA	Operational Detachment Alpha

GLOSSARY

ODRP	Office of the Defense Representative Pakistan
OEF	Operation ENDURING FREEDOM
OGD	Other government departments
OMLT	Operational Mentor and Liaison Team
OP	Observation post
Op	Operation
OPLAN	Operation Plan
OPORD	Operation order
OPP	Operations planning process
Op tempo	Operational tempo
OPV	Optionally piloted vehicle
OSC-A	Office of Security Cooperation–Afghanistan
PAG	Policy Action Group
PAKMIL	Pakistani military
PB	Patrol Base
PD	Police district
PDC	Provincial Development Committee
PECOG	Panjwayi East Combined Operations Centre
Pfc	Private First Class
PMN	A type of Soviet pressure-activated anti-personnel mine
PMT	Police Mentor Team
POC	Provincial Operations Centre
POLAD	Political Advisor
P-OMLT	Police Operational Mentor and Liaison Team
PPCLI	Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry

GLOSSARY

PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team
PSS	Persistent surveillance system
PSS	Police sub-station
PSYOPS	Psychological operations
PTDS	Persistent threat-denial system
PTS	Program Takhim-e Sohl
QIP	Quick Impact Project
QRF	Quick Reaction Force
RASC	Rapid Accelerated Security Course
RBG(S)	Regional Battle Group (South)
RC	Regional Command
RC (South), RC(S)	NATO ISAF Regional Command (South)
RCIED	Radio-controlled improvised explosive device
RCP	Route clearance package
RIP	Relief in place
RoCK	Representative of Canada in Kandahar
RPAC	Regional Policing Assistance Command
RPG	Rocket-propelled grenade
RWS	Remote weapons system
SA	Situational awareness
SAT-A	Strategic Advisory Team–Afghanistan
SBPF	Security Belt Protection Force
SBS	Special Boat Squadron
SEAL	Sea, Air and Land, i.e, U.S. Navy special forces operators
SECFOR	OMLT Security Force

GLOSSARY

SET	Specialist Engineer Team
SFAT	Security Force Advisory Teams
SIGACT	Significant Action
SLTCA	Staff and Language Training Centre Afghanistan
SMA	Sher Mohammad Akhundzada
SNC	SNC-Lavalin Group Inc.
SOF	Special Operations Forces
SOIC	Special Operations Intelligence Centre
SOTF	Special Operations Task Force
SRPF	Security Ring Protection Force
STA	Surveillance and target acquisition
Stab	Stabilization
SUAV	Small unmanned aerial vehicle
SVBIED	Suicide vehicle-borne IED
TAA	Tactical assembly area
TACNET	Tactical air control network
TACSAT	Tactical satellite; i.e., a type of crypto-capable radio
TAV	Tactical assistance visit
TET	Tactical Exploitation Team
TF	Task Force
TFK	TF Kandahar
TFK/BG	Task Force Kandahar Battle Group
TFK/GDA	Task Force Kandahar Ground Defence Area
TFS FOM	Task Force Stryker Freedom of Movement (corridor)
THREATWARN	Threat warning

GLOSSARY

TI	Tactical infrastructure
TIC	Troops in contact
TLAV	Tracked light armoured vehicle
TMJ	Taj Mir Jawad Network
TOC	Tactical Operations Centre
TSB	Theatre Support Base
TSE	Theatre Support Element
TTP	Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan
TTP	Tactics, techniques and procedures
TUAV	Tactical unmanned aerial vehicle
UAV	Unmanned aerial vehicle
UGS	Unattended ground sensors
UIP	Unified Implementation Plan
UN	United Nations
UN HABITAT	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
UNAMA	United Nations Mission in Afghanistan
UNAMIR	United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda
UNDP-ELECT	United Nations Development Program–Enhanced Legal and Electoral Capacity for Tomorrow
UNHCR	United Nations Commission on Human Rights
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
UNMACA	United Nations Mine Awareness Centre
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
UNPA	United Nations Protected Area
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

GLOSSARY

USG	United States Government
USPI	United States Protection and Investigation
UTAMS	Unattended transient acoustic MASINT (measurement and signature intelligence) system
UXO	Unexploded ordnance
VBIED	Vehicle-borne improvised explosive device
VHF	Very high frequency
VMO	Village Medical Outreach
VR	Voter Registration
VSO	Village Stability Operations
WHO	World Health Organization
WHOPPER	Whole of Government Panjwayi Program for Enhanced Revitalization (or Reconstruction)
WMD	Weapons of mass destruction
XO	Executive Officer

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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