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Afghanistan

This is the fifth year that our *Annual Review* has covered the international stabilization efforts in Afghanistan. Each year, the security and political situation has been worse than the year prior.

The year 2009 was the deadliest in Afghanistan since the beginning of Operation Enduring Freedom in October 2001. International military forces suffered record losses, with 520 coalition soldiers killed, compared to 295 fatalities during the whole of 2008.¹ The Afghan government also faced unprecedented levels of civilian and uniformed casualties.² According to the United Nations, 1,630 civilians had been killed. Insurgent attacks were responsible for the majority of the deaths. But international military operations—particularly air strikes—remained a major cause, as demonstrated by the death of

30 civilians in a NATO attack in Kunduz in September.

President Hamid Karzai was reelected to a second five-year term in an election marked by widespread fraud. Insecurity deterred voter turnout for the 20 August presidential and provincial council elections and hindered the deployment of independent election monitors at polling stations across southern Afghanistan. The election significantly weakened public confidence in the democratic process and threatened to plunge Afghanistan into a crisis of political transition. Following an audit, the number of votes won by President Karzai dropped below the 50 percent threshold necessary to avoid a runoff against candidate Abdullah Abdullah. The second round was canceled after Abdullah withdrew, citing insufficient reform to the balloting process. An attack by the Taliban on a UN guest house in Kabul in October killed five UN staff and eight others in an effort to derail the second round of voting; the UN responded by temporarily withdrawing 600 of its 1,300 international staff from the country.

The electoral crisis has further eroded international support for military deployment in Afghanistan. This comes at a time of growing skepticism among the public and political leaders in key NATO member states—while senior policymakers within the US government debated a revision of the stabilization strategy, deployment of military reinforcements, and accelerated training of the Afghan National Security Forces.

The 2008 US presidential election had a significant impact on the direction of international stabilization efforts in Afghanistan. After taking office in January 2009, President Barack Obama shifted priority from Iraq to Afghanistan,



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ordering a strategy review aimed at reversing the worsening insurgency and addressing regional dimensions of the conflict. Ambassador Richard Holbrooke was appointed as Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan. In June 2009, General Stanley McChrystal was named commander of US and ISAF forces, replacing General David McKiernan; he immediately instituted tighter guidelines on air strikes, to minimize civilian casualties, and ordered a top-to-bottom review of US military strategy, finding that a failure to reverse the worsening insurgency in the next year “risks an outcome where defeating the insurgency is no longer possible.”³ The president released the new Afghanistan strategy in late 2009, committing the United States to contribute roughly 30,000 more troops.

Background

In response to the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, the US-led coalition forces of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) initiated military action in Afghanistan in October of that year, quickly sweeping the Taliban government from power. Despite OEF’s objective of killing or capturing the leaders of the al Qaeda terrorist network, destroying their training camps, and denying them safe haven in Afghanistan, the Al Qaeda and Taliban leadership escaped across the border into Pakistan. Many rank-and-file members of the Taliban reintegrated into their villages.

On 5 December 2001, following the fall of the Taliban regime, participants in the UN-sponsored talks on Afghanistan—including the United Front, supporters of the ancien régime of King Zahir Shah, and other Afghan constituencies—signed the Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan. In March 2002 (Resolution 1401), the Security Council established the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) to support the political objectives identified by the Bonn Agreement for establishing a permanent Afghan government, as well as to promote aid coordination and provide mediation of disputes. The Bonn Agreement was not a peace agreement. Representatives of the former

International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)

• Authorization Date	20 December 2001 (UNSC Res. 1386)
• Start Date	December 2001
• Force Commander	General Stanley A. McChrystal (United States)
• Budget	\$391.6 million (1 October 2008–30 September 2009)
• Strength as of 31 October 2009	Troops: 71,030

UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA)

• Authorization and Start Date	28 March 2002 (UNSC Res. 1401)
• SRSG	Kai Eide (Norway)
• Senior Military Advisor	Brigadier-General Mark Skidmore (Canada)
• Budget	\$243.9 million (1 January 2008–31 December 2009)
• Strength as of 31 October 2009	Military Observers: 17 Police: 8 International Civilian Staff: 339 Local Civilian Staff: 1,298 UN Volunteers: 53

For detailed mission information see p. 242

EU Police Mission in Afghanistan (EUPOL Afghanistan)

• Authorization Date	30 May 2007 (CJA 2007/369ICSFP)
• Start Date	June 2007
• Police Commissioner	Kai Vittrup (Denmark)
• Budget	\$78.7 million (1 October 2008–30 September 2009)
• Strength as of 31 October 2009	Civilian Police: 173 Civilian Staff: 93

Taliban government were excluded from the new dispensation, laying the foundation for the current insurgency.

The coalition forces pursued a narrow counterterrorism agenda across the breadth of Afghan

territory. To provide security in Kabul and the surrounding areas, the Security Council established the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), requested by the Bonn Agreement, under Security Council Resolution 1386 (2001). The Afghan government, the UN, and nongovernmental aid organizations repeatedly called for expansion of ISAF beyond Kabul in order to provide security for political and development assistance. In 2003, NATO assumed command of ISAF (which had previously rotated among participating troop contributors on an ad hoc basis). From 2004 to 2005, ISAF gradually expanded to the provinces, taking command of existing provincial reconstruction teams in the northern and western regions. In 2006, the United Kingdom deployed to Helmand, Canada to Kandahar, and the Netherlands and Australia to Uruzgan, marking the beginning of robust combat operations by ISAF. The same year, following the integration of nearly 12,000 US troops under the NATO chain of command, ISAF replaced OEF as the main combat force on the ground.

Following the 2005 Afghan parliamentary elections, the political benchmarks established by the Bonn Agreement were completed. In response to the expressed need for a follow-on framework of cooperation, the Afghan government and its international partners signed the Afghanistan Compact in January 2006, committing each to high-level benchmarks in the areas of security, governance, reconstruction, and counternarcotics. The Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board (JCMB), cochaired by UNAMA and the Afghan government, was established to oversee implementation of the compact. UNAMA's mandate was revised in 2007 and 2008, providing additional authorities and capacity for donor coordination and aid effectiveness.

Under Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) Kai Eide, appointed in March 2008, the JCMB has become the main forum for strategic coordination and joint policy formation between the Afghan government and the international donor community. In 2010, UNAMA is set to further strengthen its staffing by 1,000 national and international personnel,

particularly in the area of governance support, and further increase its geographic presence through the use of seven new provincial field offices opened in 2009.

Through an integrated approach, UNAMA, ISAF, key donors, and the Afghan government's Independent Directorate for Local Governance are adapting assistance responses to better reflect variation in different regions of the country—focusing on economic development in the north and west, building security forces and linking government to communities in the south and east, and shoring up policing, justice, and governance elsewhere.

Key Developments

Presidential and Provincial Council Elections

The major strategic and political development during 2009 was the 20 August presidential and provincial council elections. Providing adequate security for elections was a preoccupation of the Afghan government and international community. Several NATO members increased their deployments ahead of the election to bolster security; nonetheless, due to inadequate security presence, particularly of the Afghan National Security Forces (military and police), over 300 polling centers could not be opened on election day.

Insurgents stepped up intimidation tactics and attacks in the weeks prior to the elections in an effort to deter Afghans from turning out in large numbers to vote. On 15 August, a vehicle-borne suicide bomb detonated near ISAF headquarters in Kabul, killing seven people and wounding seventy; on 18 August, another suicide bomber rammed into an ISAF convoy, killing nine people and injuring more than fifty.⁴ Although there were few civilian casualties on polling day, 20 August had the highest number of security incidents—some 300—on a single day since 2001. The campaign of violence appears to have limited turnout to 30–40 percent of registered voters (compared with 70 percent in the 2004 presidential election).⁵

Initial returns showed that President Karzai won 54.6 percent of the votes cast, clearing the 50 percent threshold necessary to avoid a runoff against his closest rival, Abdullah, a former foreign minister, who won 27.8 percent. Following “clear and convincing evidence of fraud,” the UN-backed Electoral Complaints Commission ordered the Independent Election Commission (IEC) to audit and recount ballots from 2,516 polling stations—nearly 10 percent—where either more than 600 ballots were cast, or more than 100 votes and 95 percent of ballots cast were for a single candidate. Following public differences between SRS G Eide and Deputy SRS G Peter Galbraith over UNAMA’s handling of electoral fraud, the UN recalled Galbraith—a rare move by the Secretary-General.

On 20 October, President Karzai conceded that a runoff election was necessary, after the IEC formally certified results from the 20 August election that reduced his lead from 54.6 to 49.7 percent (from 3,093,256 to 2,283,907 votes). Abdullah subsequently withdrew from the race on 1 November, arguing that the planned runoff would also be tainted by fraud. Following the announcement by the IEC of Karzai as the winner, Western capitals appeared to accept the legitimacy of his reelection—albeit with demands, as from President Obama in the United States, to stamp out corruption. Karzai was sworn in on 19 November. Meanwhile, the outcome of the provincial council elections—an important dimension of strengthening subnational governance institutions—has gone unnoticed and unreported.

The international community was concerned that insecurity risked disenfranchising many voters, especially in the volatile southern region, but holding elections on time was viewed as a necessary risk. Dissatisfaction with the government of President Karzai among Afghans and international partners grew as the corruption became more prevalent and service delivery—particularly security, justice, and good governance—fell short of public expectation. There was consensus that he was the legitimately elected president of Afghanistan, however. Any



Afghan citizen goes to the polls to vote in presidential and provincial council elections. Herat, Afghanistan, 20 August 2009.

UN PHOTO/Tim Page

delay in the constitutionally defined electoral timeline—already postponed once, from April to August, with the sanction of the Supreme Court—risked exposing Karzai to political attack from opposition groups and signaling military weakness.

The international community believed that a credible election would strengthen the authority and legitimacy of the government. Instead, it has deepened disenchantment and undermined confidence in the democratic process. This has potentially far-reaching effects on international public support for the mission in Afghanistan, particularly from NATO members, at a time when militaries are sustaining heavier casualties. For many countries, their support for continued military engagement—and tolerance for increased losses—are based on assistance to a democratically elected and legitimate government. A fraudulent electoral process risks further erosion of support, possibly leading to increased pressure for the withdrawal of troops.

International Military Deployment: NATO and OEF

ISAF commander Stanley McChrystal’s initial assessment, leaked ten days after the Afghan

election, recommended that additional US troops were required in order to prevent military failure. Estimates of the number of troops needed, provided separately, ranged from 10,000 to as many as 40,000 beyond the 68,000 US troops already deployed or en route to Afghanistan at the time. A decision by President Obama on supplemental forces was pending on the outcome of discussions with senior US officials on a new strategic course, as well as the outcome of the November runoff presidential election in Afghanistan. Earlier, in March 2009, President Obama authorized deployment of 21,000 troops, including 4,000 military trainers. Their deployment increased the total number of US troops in Afghanistan to 68,000, more than double the number of US troops in Afghanistan at the end of the George W. Bush administration.⁶

As of 31 October 2009, ISAF comprised 71,030 troops, including 34,800 from the United States and 36,230 from forty-two other countries. Meanwhile, the Taliban insurgency has grown fourfold since 2006, from 7,000 to 25,000 fighters, according to a US intelligence estimate.⁷

The new NATO Secretary-General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, began his appointment in August 2009 with a call for members of the alliance to “better balance” the deployment of military forces in Afghanistan. In October, NATO defense ministers, in an important show of commitment to Afghanistan, endorsed General McChrystal’s recommendations for a new counterinsurgency strategy. The strategy called for a major change in the focus of the military effort—from seizing terrain and destroying insurgents to protecting population centers; revisions to the ISAF command structure; and greater cooperation and synchronization with the Afghan government, UNAMA, and the international civilian effort to support local and national governance. NATO defense ministers did not explicitly include a decision on new troop deployments.

Long-term support among many NATO allies remains in doubt. Canada, the fifth largest ISAF contributor (2,800 troops), has pledged to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan in 2011,

though it has indicated that a smaller force might remain behind. Italy, the sixth largest contributor (2,795 troops), also indicated that it was considering withdrawal, following the death of six soldiers in an attack in Kabul in September. Higher-than-expected military losses by the United Kingdom and Poland, both major ISAF contributors (respectively, second largest with 9,000 troops, and seventh largest with 2,000), have also raised discussion of possible draw-down dates amid growing popular opposition to the war.⁸ In October, the United Kingdom pledged 500 additional troops—but this amounts to only one-quarter of the reinforcement sought by the British military.⁹

The war in Afghanistan is also notable for its record use of private contractors, including private security companies. As of August 2009, the total number of US Department of Defense contractor personnel in Afghanistan (68,197) exceeded the total number of uniformed personnel (52,300). In March 2009, contractors composed 57 percent of the Defense Department’s work force in Afghanistan—the highest percentage ever used by the United States in any conflict.¹⁰

The UN Security Council unanimously renewed the ISAF mandate for a further twelve months on 12 October. In its resolution, it authorized countries participating in ISAF to take all necessary measures to fulfill its mandate, called on member states to contribute personnel, equipment, and other resources to ISAF, and stressed the importance of increasing the functionality, professionalism, and accountability of Afghanistan’s security sector, to enable it to establish the rule of law.¹¹

Strengthening the Afghan National Security Forces

There is broad consensus that reversing deteriorating security trends in Afghanistan requires more—and more effective—national security forces. The Afghan National Army has emerged as one of the most effective Afghan government institutions. By contrast, Afghanistan’s regular, uniformed police suffer from a lack of public trust, due to incompetence and corruption, as

Box 2.1.1 The Public Cost of Private Security in Afghanistan

Jake Sherman and Victoria DiDomenico

“The Public Cost of Private Security in Afghanistan,” published by the Center on International Cooperation at New York University in September 2009, found that overdependence on private security providers (PSPs) by international military forces in Afghanistan—particularly overdependence on local militia groups—negatively affects stabilization efforts. The authors of the report argue that lack of effective oversight of the private security sector is detrimental to the stabilization of Afghanistan and to Afghan perceptions of the Afghan government and the international military and civilian community.

There are a range of PSPs currently operating in Afghanistan, including international and national private security companies, operating with or without the mandatory Afghan government licenses, as well as illegal militias or “armed support groups”—many of which are

controlled by Afghan elites and entrenched in criminal activities.

Although the use of PSPs in Afghanistan is not a new phenomenon, the private security industry has grown in response to widening insecurity and the related demand from the increased presence of international military forces. Following the deployment of US military forces, the US Department of Defense—the largest employer of private security in Afghanistan—reported a 19 percent increase in the number of private security contractors as of August 2009. There are also many cases where private security services are necessary, and blanket condemnation of the use of these services would be imprudent, but those employing PSPs must undertake due diligence to ensure professionalism.

Afghan government regulation has done little to militate against the power that Afghan elites have over security

services, particularly outside the capital, Kabul. The international community’s use of PSPs that serve the interests of Afghan elites has created parallel security structures that compete with state authority, undermining international efforts to strengthen Afghan governance institutions and public security forces, while at the same time increasing the costs of international reconstruction efforts.

The authors of the report conclude that the long-term goal of the international presence in Afghanistan to strengthen national security services cannot currently be achieved without PSPs. However, implementing better government regulation, monitoring, and enforcement on the part of both the consumers and the providers of private security will serve to enhance rather than diminish stabilization efforts.

Note: For more information, visit <http://www.cic.nyu.edu>.

well as from an inability to protect themselves from insurgent attacks, due to inadequate leadership, training, and equipment. More Afghan police than soldiers die fighting insurgents. To rectify shortcomings in operational readiness of the Afghan National Police, units are now being retrained through the Focused District Development program that commenced in February 2009.

Plans to generate additional Afghan combat forces—increasing the size of the Afghan National Army to 134,000 personnel and of the Afghan National Police to nearly 97,000—will require several years (at minimum) to achieve. ISAF commander Stanley McChrystal’s assessment calls for eventual further increases up to 240,000 and 160,000 army and police personnel, respectively. However, expansion faces

several constraints, including trade-offs between the speed and quality of training, shortage of international military and police trainers, a lack of depth from which to build an experienced national officer corps, high rates of illiteracy and of attrition, and overall financial unsustainability. Recurrent costs for 400,000 Afghan National Security Forces is estimated at \$10 billion per annum, or more than 80 percent of Afghanistan’s current (licit) gross domestic product.

The NATO Training Mission in Afghanistan (NTM-A) was established in June by the North Atlantic Council and commenced activities in late 2009 to oversee higher-level training for the Afghan National Army and development of the Afghan National Police.¹² The NTM-A unifies the existing NATO Directorate for Afghan National Army Training and Equipment and the

US Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan (CSTC-A) under a single joint command responsible for generating and training Afghanistan’s security forces—with the aim of bringing greater coherence and enforcement of standards. An ISAF joint command is being established to oversee field-based mentoring of Afghan military and police, a role previously held by the CSTC-A and NTM-A. In theory, this will reduce the political risks for non-NATO countries—China, India, Iran, Indonesia, South Korea—of contributing noncombat troops to training efforts.

Alongside the NTM-A, the European Union continued to maintain its police mission in the country, EUPOL Afghanistan, which was established in June 2007. However, the mission still lacks adequate staffing, security, and transportation, and has not yet developed a uniform training program.¹³

Justice Sector Reform

Afghanistan’s national justice sector strategy provides the overarching blueprint for strengthening its weak justice system. According to the UN, progress is limited by resource shortages for the Ministry of Justice, the Office of the Attorney General, and the Supreme Court—the three main state justice sector organs—as well as by a dearth of qualified and experienced judicial personnel, including judges and prosecutors, and inadequate infrastructure. Nonetheless, there has been some notable progress, such as completion of priority reforms and restructuring by the Ministry of Justice in early 2009. Moreover, following an evolving discussion among donors on the role of traditional justice providers in Afghanistan, including tribal shuras and jirgas—groups of elders or other tribal authorities—the US Agency for International Development (USAID) is now supporting pilot justice projects in five districts.

The United States has also taken steps to address detention conditions of insurgents and problems of radicalization within US- and Afghan-run prisons. In November, the United States opened a new facility at Bagram Airbase that includes procedures to increase transparency,

such as review boards that enable detainees to challenge their detainment, as well as advocates who are assigned to detainees to explain the review process. Legal issues that would enable detainees held by the United States to be tried under Afghan law have yet to be resolved, however.

In an effort to address rampant corruption, the Afghan government passed legislation in November to establish a serious-crimes task force and anticorruption unit. The latter, the country’s third such unit, is tasked to prosecute cases of corruption, among other crimes, involving high-level officials. Western governments will be keenly watching to see whether the measures will be effective. Karzai, however, as well as critics both inside and outside Afghanistan, argue that Western military and development organizations aid corruption through mismanagement and loose oversight of billions of dollars in reconstruction assistance.

Drug Revenue, Insurgency, and Corruption

Drug revenue remains a major source of financing for corruption and insurgency in Afghanistan. During 2009, the production of opium declined 10 percent—from 7,700 to 6,900 metric tons—due to market forces and interdiction efforts. Home to 90 percent of global production, Afghanistan remains far and away the largest producer of opium and heroin. In addition, cannabis production is fast rising, including in areas where opium production has declined in recent years; cannabis is now grown in twenty of the country’s thirty-four provinces. Afghanistan eclipsed Morocco as the top producer of cannabis resin (hashish) in 2009. With hashish worth some \$110 per kilogram, compared to \$64 per kilogram for opium, the drug is a lucrative but underexploited source of revenue.¹⁴

According to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), there is growing evidence of the emergence of “narco-cartels”—armed groups that, motivated by securing drug profits, are “moving up the value chain.” No longer satisfied with taxing supply and transit by criminal gangs and corrupt officials, they are now

expanding into production, processing, stocking, and exporting.¹⁵

Regional Context

Stabilization of Afghanistan is contingent on wider regional dynamics, above all on the deteriorating security situation across the border in Pakistan. During the last quarter of 2009, Pakistan suffered a spate of attacks by insurgent groups in retaliation for military operations in Swat Valley and in South Waziristan. On 5 October, militants bombed the offices of the World Food Programme in Islamabad, killing five staff members; less than a week later, gunmen penetrated the defenses of the headquarters of the Pakistani army in Rawalpindi, killing six soldiers. Peshawar, capital of Northwest Frontier province, similarly has experienced frequent attacks against military and civilian targets. In response, Pakistani public opinion has firmly supported military operations against Pakistan's Taliban regime, Tehrik-i-Taliban.

Far more controversial is US military assistance to Pakistan, including Predator drone attacks against terrorist and militant leaders, which have increased under the Obama administration (in August, Baitullah Mehsud, the leader of Tehrik-i-Taliban, was killed in one such attack). Indeed, the Pakistani government has struggled to control military support from the United States amid concerns over its sovereignty and strong, negative public opinion of US involvement. Meanwhile, as the year closed, there were growing signs that the Pakistani army, led by General Ashfaq Pervez Kayani, was becoming frustrated with the weak and unpopular civilian government of President Asif Ali Zardari.

Elsewhere in the region, tensions between the United States and Iran over the latter's

nuclear program continued to overshadow possible opportunities for cooperation on Afghan stabilization, including counternarcotics and police training. In October, a suicide bomb struck the Indian embassy—a repeat of the attack in June 2008—in what was widely viewed as a response to fears of India's growing influence in Afghanistan. China and Russia both have an interest in controlling the spread of Islamic extremism, though China's presence on the ground—including its investment at the Aynak copper mine—has provided more immediate security concerns that may draw it further into international stabilization efforts.

Conclusion

As 2009 drew to a close, the situation in Afghanistan was dire. The swearing-in of President Karzai marked the beginning of an uphill struggle for the Afghan government to regain the trust of both the Afghan people and the international community. Whether he succeeds or fails is likely to have enormous consequences for the willingness of foreign governments and their citizens to persevere in an increasingly bloody war. Indeed, calls for withdrawal and for talks with the Taliban are on the rise, even among formerly unwavering NATO allies. Currently, strengthening the Afghan National Security Forces remains a prerequisite for drawdown despite the redoubling of the contributions to ISAF of the United States and its partners. The coming year will demonstrate whether these efforts are sufficient to reverse the downward spiral of violence that has engulfed much of Afghanistan. The looming question is whether time is running out.

Notes

1. D. Fikins, "UN Blames Taliban for Afghan Toll," *New York Times*, 14 January 2010.

2. The Afghan government lost 341 Afghan National Police and 114 Afghan National Army personnel by May 2009, the last date for which information is publicly available. See Jason H. Campbell and Jeremy Shapiro, "Afghanistan Index: Tracking Variables of Reconstruction and Security in Post-9/11 Afghanistan," Brookings Institution, 23 September 2009, <http://www.brookings.edu/foreign-policy/afghanistan-index.aspx>, p. 10.

3. NATO and ISAF, "COMISAF's Initial Assessment [unclassified version]," 30 August 2009, pp. 1–2.

4. Ibid.
5. CIGI Afghanistan SSR Monitor.
6. In fact, the actual authorization was for 34,000 troops, as it included 13,000 support troops. Ann Scott Tyson, "Support Troops Swelling U.S. Force in Afghanistan: Additional Deployments Unannounced and Rarely Noted," *Washington Post*, 13 October 2009, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/10/12/ar2009101203142.html>.
7. Al-Jazeera, "US: Taliban Has Grown Four-Fold," <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/americas/2009/10/20091091814483962.html>.
8. ISAF troop figures as of 22 October 2009.
9. See <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2009/nov/01/uk-death-toll-afghanistan-troops>.
10. Moshe Schwartz, "Department of Defense Contractors in Iraq and Afghanistan: Background and Analysis," Congressional Research Service, 13 August 2009, p. 8.
11. SCR 1890 (2009).
12. NATO and ISAF, "COMISAF's Initial Assessment [unclassified version]," p. G-3.
13. Judy Dempsey, "Training of Afghan Police by Europe Is Found Lacking," *New York Times*, 18 November 2009, p. A16.
14. Matthew C. DuPee, "Afghanistan's Other Narcotics Nightmare," *World Politics Review*, 1 October 2009, <http://www.offnews.info/verarticulo.php?contenido=17955>.
15. UNODC, "Afghanistan Opium Survey 2009: Summary of Findings," September 2009, <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/drugs/afghan-opium-survey.html>.