Studies in Conflict & Terrorism

ISSN: 1057-610X (Print) 1521-0731 (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/uter20

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To cite this article: Niels Terpstra (2020): Opportunity Structures, Rebel Governance, and Disputed Leadership: The Taliban's Upsurge in Kunduz Province, Afghanistan, 2011–2015, Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, DOI: 10.1080/1057610X.2019.1702256

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2019.1702256

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Published online: 09 Feb 2020.

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STUDIES IN CONFLICT & TERRORISM
https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2019.1702256

Opportunity Structures, Rebel Governance, and Disputed Leadership: The Taliban's Upsurge in Kunduz Province, Afghanistan, 2011–2015

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ABSTRACT
Even though Kunduz province in Afghanistan was under relatively firm government control in 2011, the Taliban insurgency was able to consolidate its power throughout the province in the years that followed and to temporarily take-over the provincial capital of Kunduz city for the first time since the U.S.-led intervention in 2001. Based on field research in 2013 and 2016, I argue that the Taliban's upsurge took place because of a favorable opportunity structure for the insurgency that coincided with sufficient organizational capacities and a sense of urgency among the Taliban's senior leadership.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 17 May 2019
Accepted 23 August 2019

In 2011, Kunduz province in Northern Afghanistan was under relatively firm government control with the backing of international forces and co-opted militiamen. Within four years, however, the tables had turned, and the insurgency made a gradual upsurge throughout several districts of the province. On September 28, 2015, after two months of intense fighting around the provincial capital, Taliban fighters walked into the streets of Kunduz city. They entered the city during an early morning assault, storming the regional hospital and clashing with security forces at the nearby university. The insurgents took over government buildings and the city's central prison. On the central roundabout of the city, a white Taliban flag waved as a sign of control. It was the first time since the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001 that the insurgents were able to seize a provincial capital. The Afghan government itself also confirmed that the city had fallen to the Taliban. Only with the support of U.S. airstrikes and Afghan Special Forces was the Afghan government able to regain control over the city after fifteen days. The Taliban also consolidated its insurgent rule throughout all districts of the province.

Remarkably, Kunduz fell even though the insurgents were vastly outnumbered, with an estimated force of only 500–1,000 Taliban fighters against about 7,000 government troops and allied militia members.[1] Under other circumstances, this should have provided the government side with clear military advantages. The timing was surprising, too. The assault on the city came only two months after the confirmed death of long-standing

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Color versions of one or more of the figures in the article can be found online at www.tandfonline.com/uter.

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central Taliban leader Mullah Omar, resulting in factionalized fights within the Taliban's central leadership.[2] Despite the internal fragmentation, the Taliban was able to regain its stance in Kunduz city and consolidate its power throughout the province.

In this article, I investigate how the Taliban was able to consolidate its power in the province and why Kunduz city eventually fell to a faction of the Taliban insurgency. This requires an analysis of the Afghan government's capacities and actions in that period and an investigation of the actions of the armed opposition groups in Kunduz province. I will first use the analytical framework of opportunity structures[3] to analyze which circumstances enabled the upsurge of the Taliban. In the first section of the article, the relevant features of that opportunity structure are identified: (1) the openness to "new" actors due to the departure of international forces, (2) the instability of political alignments between the Afghan government and progovernment militias, and (3) the multiplicity of independent factions of power within the Afghan government. In the second and third sections of the article, I move beyond these structural opportunities to address the capacities and agency of the Taliban insurgency and show how the faction of Mullah Mansur consolidated its power. The article concludes that the Taliban's upsurge in Kunduz mainly emerged as a response to a fragmented political constellation of co-opted strongmen and militias, a dysfunctional incumbent government, and abusive militias. This coincided with an active strategy by the Taliban of messaging and infiltration, the administration of its judiciary, taxation, and eventually Mullah Mansur's push for the symbolic take-over of the provincial capital.

The article builds on fieldwork conducted in Kabul and Kunduz in 2013 and 2016 in collaboration with various Afghan research organizations. In 2013, a total of 99 structured interviews were held with community members, militiamen, local elders, *jirga*[4] and *shura*[5] members, civil society representatives, Afghan Local Police (ALP) members, and Afghan National Police (ANP) officers in Kunduz.[6] Moreover, in-depth interviews were conducted with police trainers, military staff, diplomats, and NGO workers at the German-led Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT)[7] in Kunduz. During the fieldwork conducted in 2016, various analysts, NGO workers, diplomats, military staff, and informants from Kunduz were interviewed in Kabul. Throughout 2018, local sources in Kunduz province were consulted in interviews and by email to verify some of the details described throughout this article and to triangulate some of the findings from open source data.

Theoretical Framework

The Taliban's upsurge in Kunduz can be analyzed as a matter of structural opportunities but also one of internal organizational capacity, agency, and motivation. With this approach, I bring together a longer tradition of literature on contentious politics[8] and a more recent strand of literature on rebel governance.[9]

Opportunity Structure

The concept of "opportunity structure"[10] assumes that individual and collective action are facilitated or constrained within a larger environment of discursive, social,

and political opportunities.[11] Collective action against the Afghan government and pro-government militias by the insurgent Taliban in Kunduz is the focus of this article. I define an insurgent or rebel organization as a "group of individuals claiming to be a collective organization that uses a name to designate itself, is made up of formal structures of command and control, and intends to seize political power using violence."[12]

According to Tilly and Tarrow, contentious politics should be understood as "interactions in which actors make claims bearing on someone else's interest, leading to coordinated efforts on behalf of shared interests or programs, in which governments are involved as targets, initiators of claims or third parties."[13] Within contentious politics, we can analyze collective action through the frame of opportunity structures. If we analyze the features of a particular regime at a particular time and trace the changes, we can investigate how those features facilitate a particular outcome. The outcome studied in this article is the fall of Kunduz and the consolidation of the Taliban rule. Several features of an opportunity structure can be identified to analyze changes in political regimes and plausibly explain why a shift in regime happened in Kunduz province between 2011 and 2015. I follow Tilly and Tarrow by analyzing the following features of the opportunity structure: (1) the regime's openness to new actors, (2) the instability of political alignments, and (3) the multiplicity of independent centers of power.[14]

Rebel Strategies, Organizational Capacity, and Rebel Governance

The Taliban's upsurge was facilitated by external opportunities. Understanding how the Taliban seized those opportunities, however, requires an analysis of internal organizational capacities and the motivations of the insurgency itself. On a strategic level, this involved the infiltration of new territories, messaging to the civilian population, and the governance practices of a rebel judiciary and taxation.

As Kalyvas points out, insurgency can be understood as "a process of competitive state building."[15] An insurgency such as that carried out by the Taliban indeed reflects a process of statebuilding, where the insurgency competes to provide governance to the population.[16] O'Neill speaks in this regard of "parallel hierarchies," referring to the creation of political structures or institutions to administer, organize, and rule a population in areas controlled by insurgents.[17] This becomes apparent by the Taliban's setup of a shadow administration in various provinces of Northern Afghanistan.[18] Insurgents assume state-like functions and thereby take advantage of situations of weak governance.[19]

At the very minimum, rebel governance means "the organization of civilians within rebel-held territory for a public purpose."[20] Although acquiring territorial control is usually recognized as a prime objective of rebel groups, armed groups will also use pockets of territorial control that they have already acquired to maximize a potential range of strategic benefits. For example, territorial control can translate into additional economic resources, access to key networks, the recruitment of new followers, and gaining of additional popular support.[21] Moreover, a level of relative stability and order facilitates opportunities to monitor civilian populations and increases the likelihood of civilian compliance.[22] The creation of minimal or more elaborate forms of "wartime institutions" or political order is deemed important to elicit cooperation from civilians, which in turn is essential to maintain control over a geographical territory.[23]

In most recent studies, rebel governance is treated as the dependent variable. Mampilly, for example, uses a number of case studies to understand which factors are likely to lead to an effective system of rebel governance.[24] Arjona looks at factors that determine what kind of social order will emerge in conflict zones.[25] In this article, my contribution to the rebel governance literature is to inquire whether the existence of rebel governance had any effect on the military success of the insurgency. I therefore analyze how the Taliban filled the political vacuum in Kunduz by creating its own political and judicial order and whether this contributed to its eventual military success.

Disputed Leadership

In the third section of this article, I show how the fall of Kunduz city occurred precisely in fall 2015, within months of Mullah Mansur officially taking over the leadership of the Taliban movement from his predecessor and long-standing leader Mullah Omar. Mansur's faction pushed into Kunduz as a necessary show of success to other commanders who were "on the fence" and whose loyalty to the new leadership was still in doubt. This is particularly interesting because the general literature on insurgency and collective action usually regards a unified command and organization as an important factor for an insurgent's success and regards disunity as something that may have detrimental consequences.[26] O'Neill lists several detrimental effects: undercutting of political and military organizational efforts; conflicting political and military policies; reduced combat support; inability to plan sizable military operations; diversion of personnel and materials from the main enemy toward insiders; and lower opportunities for external support, collaboration with, and intelligence leakage to, the main enemy, and so on.[27] Hence, if an insurgency like the Taliban can form a unified command structure, it is more likely to succeed.

Interestingly, however, the fall of Kunduz took place after a split within the Taliban leadership between the factions of Mansur and Rasul. Hence, the existence of a "unified political command" at the top is not the most convincing argument to explain the fall of the provincial capital. In fact, it is plausible that it happened precisely because of the split in leadership. Moreover, even if the split took place at the highest level of the insurgent's command, unity was still possible at the level of the separate factions. Before turning to the actual case study analysis, a brief introduction of the demographics and recent history of Kunduz province is necessary.

Kunduz Province: Demographics and Recent History until 2011

Kunduz province is located in Northeast Afghanistan.[28] Until 2015, it consisted of seven districts: Imam Sahib, Dasht-e Archi (also known as Archi), Khan Abad, Aliabad, Chahar Dara, Qal-e-Zal, and Kunduz city.[29] The population is estimated to be one million and consists of various ethnic groups. Approximately 34 percent of the population is Pashtun, 27 percent is Uzbek, 20 percent is Tajik, 9 percent is Turkmen, 5 percent is Arab, and 3 percent is Hazara.[30] Additionally, there are a few small groups of Baluch, Pashai, and Nuristani people.[31] Although the Taliban historically has its main Pashtun constituency in the South and East of Afghanistan, a relatively high number of Pashtuns

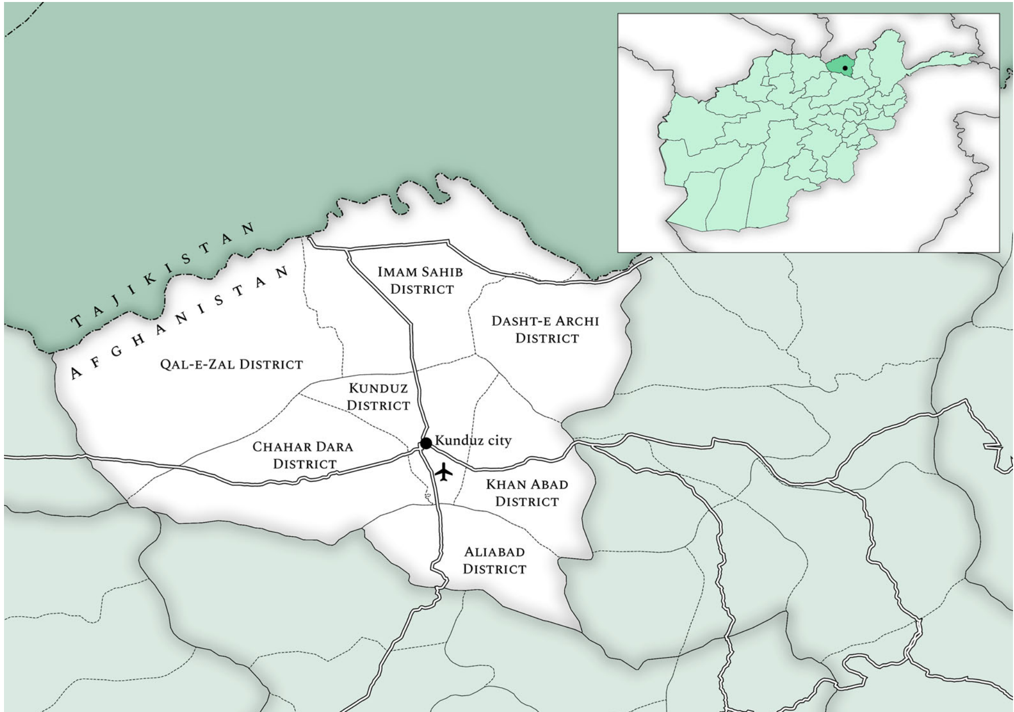

Figure 1. Map of Kunduz province.

are living in Kunduz province because of forced and voluntary migration in the nineteenth and twentieth century from the Southeast to the North.[32] Though the Taliban's strength and operations are concentrated in the South and the East, the Northern province of Kunduz remains an important strategic place for the insurgency as a gateway between Kabul and the border to Tajikistan and as a base to target the central Northern town of Mazar-i-Sharif.[33]

After the fall of the Najibullah regime in 1992, several factions fought over Kunduz province, creating a high number of casualties and shifting frontlines.[34] In spring 1997, the Taliban and commanders who had defected to the Taliban took over most territories of Kunduz province. From June 1997 until the U.S.-led invasion in November 2001, the Taliban ruled Kunduz city and most parts of the province.[35] Impressed by the U.S. forces and expecting a Taliban defeat, many local commanders defected from the Taliban to the Northern Alliance during the U.S. invasion. Kandahar in the south and Kunduz in the North were the last remaining strongholds of the Taliban before the final take-over by the U.S. and Northern Alliance militias in late November 2001.[36]

When the Northern Alliance and the U.S. coalition forces took over Kunduz province in 2001, the commanders and governors who ruled the province reflected the networks of powerbrokers that existed during the 1992–1997 period.[37] Moreover, in the wake of the Taliban regime's collapse, ethnic Pashtuns throughout the North faced widespread abuses, including murder, sexual violence, beatings, extortion, and stealing.[38] Pashtuns were specifically targeted because they were seen as closely related to the Taliban, whose leadership consisted mostly of Pashtuns from Southern Afghanistan.[39] In some

instances, affiliates of the new ruling elite captured Pashtun lands.[40] The Pashtun community mainly lost land in areas where it constituted a clear minority, such as the districts of Qal-e-Zal and Imam Sahib, but even in Archi and Chahar Dara, where it was better represented, some Pashtun lands were captured.[41] The Taliban would muster support among those excluded segments in the following decade and effectively challenge the existing power structures in a number of Kunduz districts.[42]

The Taliban insurgency made its first inroads back into the Pashtun-dominated areas of Kunduz in 2006.[43] The insurgency gradually started to invest more resources in North Afghanistan by setting up local cells from 2007 onwards and increasing its military operations. In parallel, the increased military pressure of the international forces in South Afghanistan also pushed the Taliban to move a larger part of its assets North.[44]

For the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), the North was of increased strategic importance by 2008–2009.[45] Because its convoys from Pakistan were severely targeted, the Northern supply route for international troop contributions (through the Central Asian republics) started to attract more attention.[46] This in turn increased the strategic importance of Kunduz as a gateway to Kabul. In response to the insurgency and low capacity of the Afghan forces, a new solution of mobilizing antiTaliban militias was implemented in Kunduz in 2009. In the short term, these militia programs seemed successful. The Taliban's inroads into Kunduz territories were slowed down, and together with international forces, a status quo emerged by late 2010. Many Taliban commanders were killed, arrested, or ordered to return to Pakistan.[47] However, clandestine operators and local shadow organizations remained largely intact.[48]

Opportunity Structure and the Taliban's Upsurge (2011–2015)

In this section, I analyze the relevant features of the opportunity structure that facilitated the Taliban's upsurge and the eventual take-over of Kunduz city in 2015. I discuss (1) the openness to "new" actors due to the departure of international forces, (2) the instability of political alignments between the Afghan government and progovernment militias, and (3) the multiplicity of independent factions of power within the Afghan government.

Departure of International Forces

From 2003 until 2013, German armed forces were active in Kunduz province and set up a PRT close to Kunduz city. The German involvement in Northern Afghanistan focused on "reconstruction" and, to a lesser extent, on "fighting."[49] Toward the Taliban, the German position was best characterized as a type of in-between, whereby they did not relentlessly fight the Taliban, nor did they negotiate with them.[50] To engage crime and insurgency, they relied heavily on intermediaries and cooperated mainly with the chiefs of police.[51] The German troops thus maintained a relatively passive role, working with commander power structures rather than challenging them.[52] That is why Münch, referring to the time frame between 2001 and 2013, concludes that the "local power structures in (…) Kunduz fluctuated but as a whole remained largely unchanged over the course of the intervention."[53] The most important exception to this was probably

the United States, which became more heavily involved in fighting around 2009–2010 to push back the Taliban's offensive at the time.[54]

In late 2013, however, the responsibility over the PRT in Kunduz was transferred to Afghan security forces, and international troops either withdrew or transferred to other bases. After the transfer, the ANSF increasingly experienced heat from an offensive Taliban insurgency throughout 2014–2015. The insurgency tested the ANSF's capacities to maintain territorial control.[55] The departure of international forces left a vacuum of territorial control for other power brokers to move in. An intelligence analyst in April 2011 predicted in this regard,

> The German Bundeswehr, which is based near Kunduz airport, has dramatically failed in their stabilisation efforts, largely due to not understanding the concept of COIN. This does not bode well for the future security situation in Kunduz. (…) [The] NATO forces in the area are on the backfoot as everyone is well aware that NATO will leave within the next 2-3 years. Local power brokers (Taliban, arbaki, corrupt police, ANA, etc.) are preparing to fight for the power gap that NATO forces will leave behind when they will eventually draw back.[56]

This indeed happened after 2013, when different power brokers jumped into the vacuum that the German forces had left behind. One of those power brokers was the Taliban. Hence, the first feature of the opportunity structure was the departure of the international troops.

Unstable Political Alignments

The Afghan government and international coalition forces started to mobilize antiTaliban militias in Kunduz in 2009. The idea was that progovernment militia programs such as the ALP and its predecessors would enforce the security capacity of the Afghan state by means of local defense forces.[57] Even though Kunduz is an ethnically heterogeneous province with the Pashtuns forming the largest group, these antiTaliban militias were dominated by nonPashtun commanders, often with Jamiat-e Islami affiliations.[58] The militias comprised mainly Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Turkmen.[59] The NDS, with General Mohammad Daud as its Kunduz chief, coordinated the recruitment of the antiTaliban militias.[60] Daud mainly relied on his brother-in-law, Mir Alam, for the selection of new recruits into the militia program. Mir Alam was a powerful well-connected Jamiat-e Islami commander. On the national level, Mir Alam was supported by the Tajik- and Jamiat-affiliated vice president at the time, Mohammad Qasim Fahim.[61] In the early years (2009–2011) the antiTaliban mobilization was relatively successful for the Afghan government.[62] In 2010 and 2011, it served to stop the Taliban from advancing. Most Taliban commanders were killed or fled to other parts of the country or into Pakistan.

The Political Alignments Collapse

After some early successes, the alignments between the militias and the Afghan government started to collapse. The failure of these militia programs opened opportunities for the Taliban. After the departure of international troops in 2013, the ALP constituted the last defense against the Taliban in most Kunduz districts.[63] In 2013 and 2014, it

became clear that the force was ill-equipped and regularly outnumbered, and that the degrees of loyalty toward the government were varying.[64] Delays in the payment of salaries and increased frustration about holding the frontlines against the insurgency were common. There were also notable concerns among ALP members about the duration of the ALP program.[65] Reportedly, many already considered surrendering to the Taliban in case of the program's closure.[66]

In September 2014, President Ashraf Ghani was inaugurated president of Afghanistan. He soon indicated that he was not keen on sustaining the militia programs and cut the funding of several, including those in Kunduz. Militias in the ALP program and important local strongmen like Mir Alam were therefore unwilling and partly also unable to keep territorial control in 2014 and 2015. As a Kabul-based analyst explained to me, referring to the months before the fall of Kunduz,

> The militias were standing down and were actually leaving the road open for the Taliban to move in. And the ALP also did not step in afterwards because they did not want to clean up the mess for the government that stopped to support them.[67]

The progovernment militias were unwilling to stand their ground. Some sold their weapons to the insurgency, and others defected.[68] Another feature of the opportunity structure for the Taliban's upsurge, therefore, was the collapse of previous political alignments.

Abusive Militia Behavior Backfires into Taliban Support

Despite short-term successes of the militia programs in 2009–2010, they backfired for another reason. A new wave of ethnic resentment occurred because of the militia programs, as Pashtun populations in Kunduz became targets of abusive Tajik- and, to a lesser extent, Uzbek-dominated militias, leading Pashtun communities to seek shelter with the Taliban.[69] The ALP was "hijacked" by local power brokers because the commanders rather than local elders and *shuras* channeled the recruitment process and the selection of ALP members.[70] The militias targeted Pashtun communities out of ethnic chauvinism and suspected support for the Taliban insurgency.[71] Like most armed actors during contemporary irregular wars, these militias faced the "identification problem"[72]: who was affiliated to the Taliban and who was not? This led to violence and abusive behavior toward Pashtun communities and civilians in general.[73]

The predatory behavior of the ALP and other militias drove Pashtun populations into the hands of the Taliban.[74] Nearly all my respondents in 2016 also explained how militia abuse contributed to Taliban support. As one them explained,

> (…) there are cases of harassment and rape of women, and as a consequence these women would be obliged to marry these ALP commanders! A lot of these women would definitely not agree to that, which puts them and their families in a very shameful and difficult position. This is something that really disturbed any sympathy that was there for the Afghan Local Police. This is something that the Taliban commanders would generally not be involved in.[75]

Another respondent from Kunduz stated,

> The Afghan Local Police – they are bad people. (…) A friend of mine is a tailor. One time, 1 km from his home in the morning, he crossed the road and he had an accident with the dog of the ALP. The ALP fired at him with mortars because of that dog! The

> ALP broke his leg; this happened three years ago. They could just do that because he was from a poor family.[76]

Another feature of the opportunity structure for the Taliban was therefore the resentment that emerged from its Pashtun constituency. Because of this misbehavior of progovernment militias, the Pashtuns became in need of protection, which the government did not provide to them.[77] The Taliban was able to exploit this void in security provision.

A Dysfunctional Afghan Government

Since 2001, much has been written about shortcomings in the Afghan government. The ANSF has lacked the structural capacity to effectively fight and defeat the insurgency. Even after the extensive training programs in Kunduz, the ANSF has had a low capacity and high levels of corruption within its ranks.[78] This was the case in the early years of ISAF, but most of the structural problems remained after the departure of the German forces from the PRT in Kunduz in 2013.[79] The ANSF took charge of security in Kunduz but was unable to provide it effectively. The Taliban already had an opportunity in Kunduz because of the weak Afghan army, but it was also able to exploit the government's corruption by providing a less corrupt alternative through its shadow judiciary.[80] In particular, the factionalized Afghan national government deterred the preventive function of the ANSF to stop the Taliban's upsurge in 2014 and 2015, and during the fall of Kunduz, the ANSF's response was uncoordinated.[81]

A Factionalized National "Unity" Government Paralyzed the ANSF

After the 2014 presidential elections, disagreement emerged over the results between the candidates dr. Ashraf Ghani and dr. Abdullah Abdullah, with both candidates claiming victory. Then U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry flew in with the aim of defuzing an emerging political crisis. Kerry brokered an agreement for a National Unity Government (NUG) with Ghani as president and Abdullah in the role of national "CEO" that came into effect in September 2014.[82] The years following the agreement, however, showed a lack of clarity in the president and CEO's respective roles and responsibilities, creating severe internal tensions and governmental dysfunction.[83]

These internal tensions became manifest in the coordination between different ministries. Under the NUG power-sharing agreement, Abdullah's team appointed senior officials in the Ministry of Interior and therefore had an influence on the ANP.[84] President Ghani's team, however, appointed and controlled senior officials in the Defense Ministry and therefore the ANA.[85] Ghani also controlled the NDS, which is the most important military intelligence agency.[86] Coordination was lacking between these different ministries, and communication went vertically more than horizontally.[87]

The factionalized NUG jeopardized the responsiveness of the Afghan forces on the provincial level in Kunduz during the Taliban's upsurge in 2014–2015.[88] In December 2014 president Ghani appointed Mohammad Omar Safi, a Pashtun, as governor of Kunduz. Hamdullah Daneshi, a Tajik loyal to the Jamiat-e Islami party of CEO Abdullah, was retained as Safi's deputy governor and General Abdul Sabur Nasrati, also a Tajik from CEO Abdullah's camp was appointed as police chief.[89] The governor and the police chief soon got into fierce conflict, in the first place over 'illegal' local militias

operating in the province.[90] National level political contention about the abandonment of militia programs trickled down to the provincial level.[91] This created coordination problems on pressing security issues that should have been dealt with cooperatively by the ANP, ANA, and NDS.[92] Lacking unity, Afghan government forces were not able to respond swiftly and effectively against the upcoming insurgency.

Second, political tensions on the national level directly reinforced societal ethnic tensions amongst the population in Kunduz province. As Cecchinel observed, the Taliban "(…) indirectly benefited from the presidential election crisis and rising polarization among groups supporting the two presidential candidates (…)."[93] She further noted that in a "province where all of the country's ethnic groups are present and major political factions hold ground at the expense of others, insurgents have an easy game taking advantage of tensions that are constantly being fueled by feelings of being marginalized."[94] The Taliban was able to emphasize how the Afghan government and its aligned militias were corrupt, inefficient, and predatory, something that large segments of the population experienced in person.

The Taliban's Strategy in Kunduz

How did these opportunity structures relate to the Taliban's strategy and tactics? The Taliban generally seeks to base itself where the coalition forces and the Afghan government are the weakest.[95] It is a classic insurgent strategy to carry out armed resistance in rural areas characterized by rugged terrain and weak government control.[96] The Taliban's strategy throughout Afghanistan has been to take advantage of the discontent with the Kabul government's inability to maintain a level of local security, offer effective services, or establish the rule of law.[97] From 2002 onwards, the Afghan government's inability to provide essential services and security in rural areas increasingly marginalized those populations, making them a target for insurgents throughout the country.[98]

Infiltration, Messaging, and New Strongholds

As Giustozzi and Reuter explain, the Taliban generally follows its insurgency "template" in its attempts to take control throughout Northern Afghanistan.[99] The template consists of a number of phases that include "recruitment" and the selection of "appropriate strongholds." What the authors observed is the following:

> These phases of recruitment can be observed all over the north: the infiltration of political agents to re-establish contact with old supporters or to identify new ones; the arrival of preachers who invite locals to join *jihad*; the establishment of small groups of armed men (a mix of returning locals and outsiders) to conduct armed propaganda and the intimidation of hostile elements; and finally, extensive local recruitment and military escalation.[100]

Infiltration of Taliban operatives is known to have happened during the upsurge of the Taliban in Kunduz.[101] According to one of my respondents, an undercover Taliban presence existed in Kunduz city even during the times the city was mainly under government control:

> In the city area, there are also Taliban. They have a hiding system in the city; some Taliban commanders are there undercover. They work together with the Taliban outside the city. If some people do not accept the solution in the city, the undercover Taliban will place a bomb in the city. They will put different kinds of pressure.[102]

Moreover, as Azam Ahmed reported in 2014, the Taliban secretly visited Chahar Dara district at several instances to ask the local elders for support to push the government officials and government forces out. The local elders were susceptible to the proposals precisely because the governor of the Afghan government did not listen to their complaints.[103] In a similar vein, Cecchinel reported that complaints about the ALP abuses usually did not seem to go anywhere in the formal judiciary system.[104] In 2013, a number of community elders from different areas in Chahar Dara visited the district prosecutor's office to file a complaint against ALP commanders Najib, Ghafar Wahab, and Sayed Murad.[105] According to Cecchinel's report, these three ALP commanders were arrested and their cases were sent to the office of the public prosecutor of Kunduz province. However, the ALP commanders were soon released through the interference of "high-ranking officials".[106] Afterwards, Commander Najib "warned the residents of Chahar Dara of the dire consequences should they complain about him again."[107] One of the Ahmed's interviewees noted, "At least 20 elders would complain to the district governor every day (…). When the Taliban secretly came to us and asked for support to kick them out, the people agreed."[108] In summer 2014, the Taliban had overrun approximately 20 police checkpoints in the district, helped by villagers who had grown tired of the abusive local police forces.[109]

During the Taliban's upsurge in Kunduz, the messaging of the Taliban was relatively, but significantly, stronger and more convincing than the Afghan government's.[110] The Taliban dominated the flow of information, so the population did not believe that the Afghan government would respond swiftly and effectively against the Taliban's upsurge.[111] As a Kabul-based analyst explained to me,

> The Taliban was clearly doing a better job on this than the government. The government was basically not communicating anything at all. So the people of Kunduz had no idea what the response of the government would be. In the meantime the rumor spread that the Taliban were coming and would be taking over large parts of the districts. [112]

The minimal communication on the government's side helped the Taliban control the expectations of the inhabitants. Crucially, the Taliban's messaging focused less on the creation of an Islamic state and more heavily on the Kabul government's inability to defend Kunduz and protect its own interests.[113] The Taliban emphasized the Afghan government was working with foreigners—the "infidels"—and the same was said about the "puppets" of the ALP. As a Taliban fighter in Kunduz noted during an interview,

> When the Americans left [Kunduz], they left behind the Afghan Local Police. These *Arbakis* [Afghan Local Police] were disgusting human beings. They were wrongdoers. They were pedophiles. They oppressed the people.[114]

These messages resonated well with the population because there was little factual evidence that would justify future protection for civilians by the government forces.[115] On the contrary, the abusive progovernment militias only strengthened the impression that the government would not help the people.[116] As one of my respondents from Kunduz noted, the relatively safe "base areas" were within the Taliban strongholds:

> In Chahar Dara (…), the people there are happy with the Taliban system. They also protect some of the poor people. Now, when the Taliban are taking over the checkpoints from the ALP, the people are celebrating![117]

The Taliban clearly chose a number of locations as appropriate strongholds, particularly in summer 2014 and 2015. Two key districts during the upsurge of the Taliban were Chahar Dara and Archi.[118] The Taliban took control of Archi in June 2015, and it became a major stronghold for the insurgency in Kunduz province as a whole. The Taliban established military training camps and a military commission in Archi before the attack on Kunduz city took place.[119] Moreover, Archi is the homeland of the Taliban commander who orchestrated the Kunduz assault in September 2015: Mullah Abdul Salam. According to Obaid Ali, a researcher at the Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN), the main task of the military commission was to "draw up military operational plans, not only for Archi, but also for the other districts in the province."[120] Ali further noted, "It is difficult to estimate the exact number of fighters this commission controls. Local sources report between 800 and 1200 fighters in the district."[121]

Chahar Dara was another key district in the take-over of Kunduz city. The district has a longstanding insurgent presence of Taliban fighters. The Taliban took over the district in mid-June 2015.[122] According to Ali, the Taliban insurgency ruled the district for several days, but "local elders requested that their fighters be removed from the district center in order to prevent fighting with government forces during the harvest season."[123] Ali reported that the Taliban left the district center peacefully for a while to let the government officials return to their offices. Ali stated that this "arrangement lasted until the attack on Kunduz city, at which point government officials in Chahar Dara fled to Kholm district in neighboring Balkh province and the district once again fell to the Taleban."[124] Chahar Dara district certainly was one of the main strongholds of the Taliban in Kunduz. Chahar Dara is very close to Kunduz city, approximately about six kilometers away, and it was used as a stepping stone in September 2015 to enter the city areas.[125] Most of the Taliban fighters who entered the city were equipped from Chahar Dara district.[126] Throughout the district, the insurgency created a system of governance, including a judiciary, prisons, finance, and transport departments.[127] Further, the Taliban was known to have a military center and training center for new recruits in Chahar Dara.

Rebel Governance

By late 2015, after the fall of Kunduz, the Taliban controlled about 80 to 90 percent of Kunduz province.[128] In 2015, the Taliban insurgency had an open presence and territorial control throughout the districts of Kunduz province, with only the central areas of Kunduz city and the main roads to the district centers remaining under government or progovernment militia control.[129] The Taliban gradually expanded its involvement in some governance sectors. We should not overestimate the governing capacities of the Taliban in Kunduz, but it was able to tax the population and administer its form of a judiciary. The Taliban also provided some protection to segments of the civilian population, mainly against the behavior of abusive militias. The Taliban aimed to provide a

relatively stable environment in the areas it controlled. What did these governance practices look like in organizational terms?

Generally, the Taliban as an organization is most accurately described as dualistic, both structurally and ideologically.[130] On the one hand, there is a vertical organizational structure, which can be observed in the shape of a centralized "shadow state".[131] This vertical structure reflects its overarching Islamist ideology, which appears to be "nationalistic" at times. On the other hand, there is the Taliban's horizontal network that reflect its roots in the segmented Pashtun tribal society.[132] Under Mansur's regime, this structure remained largely in place, as Osman noted,

> Mansur's Taleban was not a fully centralized organization, but this has always been the case with the Taleban movement. Its structure is characterized by an acknowledged and religiously legitimized leadership and defined hierarchical structure, but one that is permissive for local operational decision-making and fund raising.[133]

In contrast to the pre2001 Taliban, however, the resurgent Taliban insurgency somewhat shifted its ideological stance.[134] As Barfield noted,

> They [the Taliban] now [post-2001] portrayed themselves less as Muslim zealots and more as God-fearing nationalists seeking to expel infidel foreigners from the country. They played on the suspicions of the rural population that the Kabul government and its international backers were attempting to impose alien values on them, harking back to old hot button issues. They downplayed their earlier demands for strict adherence to Salafist Islam and implied that if given power again they would not be as intolerant of other sects.[135]

The instructions by Mullah Akhtar Mansur and his deputy and now successor Mawlawi Hibatullah on how to govern Taliban territories were broad and general directives. Reportedly, under Mansur's regime, the commanders were told to "protect public infrastructure, treat the local population well, not hinder the activities of humanitarian organizations, and work to persuade enemies to surrender."[136]

How these general policy directives trickle down to lower ranks works out differently throughout provinces, districts, and localities. As Jackson explains, "the implementation of policies, even widely known and adopted ones, is far from uniform. While the Taliban shows more coherence than previously, even widespread and long-standing policies are subject to occasional rejection by local commanders."[137] Mullah Abdul Salam, the then shadow governor of Kunduz and strategist of the 2015 Kunduz siege was "able to go his own way on various issues in part because he had a strong personal power base: he was widely respected for his military prowess and also exerted strong control over the illicit economy in the North."[138] Taliban governance in Kunduz did not emerge as one unified set of rules but was embedded in localized networks and *ad hoc* resolutions, implemented by Taliban commanders and Taliban judges. Linkages to important civilian groups in Kunduz were very localized, whether the ties were religious, ethnic, or clan based. That is why there have been some instances of Taliban governance, recruitment, and participation by nonPashtuns, such as Tajiks and Turkmen.[139]

The Taliban's Judiciary

As Baczko notes, the judicial system is generally the core institution of the Taliban's administration.[140] The Taliban seeks exclusiveness of authority, and this is key in the setup of its shadow government.[141] In most of the districts of Kunduz, there were one

or more Taliban judges active on behalf of the insurgency.[142] As one of my respondents from Kunduz noted,

> (…) [Chahar Dara] is under total control of the Taliban. There is a complete system of the Taliban. They have certain policies, they have strong rules, no thieves for example. There is also a strong justice system in Chahar Dara.[143]

Another native Kunduz city resident working as a researcher noted during an interview in 2016,

> For dispute resolution the point of contact now is always the Taliban. They resolve it within two days, without payment. People in Taliban-controlled territory go to the Taliban obviously, but also people in Kunduz city now go to the Taliban judges. If a village person sues a person from the city, that person will be called to the Taliban court in the village. This works for all people, for Uzbek, Pashtun, Turkmen, all.[144]

The Taliban judges are not stationary but usually travel from one place to another. In some cases, not Taliban judges but local *mullahs* take-over part of the responsibilities on behalf of the Taliban.[145] The insurgency co-opts these local actors into its judicial system. The Taliban installed its own prisons throughout various districts, with the largest being in Archi district.[146] Inside Taliban-controlled territory, the Taliban defines the dispensation of justice, but it also does so in areas of contested control to infiltrate new territory.

The Taliban forbids the civilian population from using government courts. Civilians who approach government institutions to solve their disputes risk punishment by the Taliban. As one of my respondents from Kunduz city noted, "(…) the [government] courts are still working in Kunduz. However, if the Taliban knows you go to the government institutions, they will threaten the person that goes there."[147] The insurgency established a localized monopoly on violence but also a localized monopoly on the execution of judicial verdicts.

Generally, the judiciary has a clear function in the Taliban's larger military strategy.[148] As noted by Giustozzi and Reuter, rivalries among communities and competition for influence among local notables are often exploited by the Taliban to infiltrate local communities.[149] The Taliban is usually well-informed about village politics and "manipulate[s] local conflicts and drive[s] a wedge into existing fissures."[150] The Taliban has made use of its local networks to monitor the behavior of civilian populations. As one of my respondents explained, for example,

> The Taliban shows up and the people know their faces, this in contrast to the government. The government is never present in the districts, so why go there? The people know the Taliban in the area, and they know they will take care of these things.[151]

The Taliban has attempted—though not always successfully—to maintain discipline within its own ranks. That discipline depicts the insurgency as a predictable force that can counter the impunity of "bad militias" in Kunduz.[152] The insurgency is able to discipline and punish, but at the same time, it is able to provide targeted protection from certain militias.

Taxation

The collection of taxes is an important element of state-making and generally leads to more elaborate civilian administrations.[153] Rebel groups that hold control over territory

and a population are likely to implement some form of taxation.[154] The Taliban generally taxes the population by the collection of *zakat* and *ushr*.[155] *Zakat* is one of the five "pillars" of Islam and generally understood as a religious obligation on Muslims to donate 2.5 percent of their disposable income to the poor.[156] *Ushr* - which literally means one-tenth - is a traditional Islamic tax on agricultural productions, and the sharing of 10 percent is seen as a religious duty.[157] It is different from taxation by the Afghan state. *Ushr* and *zakat* go to the Taliban, local commanders, religious organizations, or poor community members.[158] Survey data collected by Böhnke and colleagues shows that not more than 4 percent of the population in Kunduz paid taxes to the Afghan state between 2007 and 2015.[159] That same dataset shows that approximately one-third of the population paid *ushr* in 2007, and in 2015, this rose to approximately two-thirds of the population.[160] One of the explanations is that the Taliban and local militias were able to collect a large share of *ushr*.[161] When the Taliban reasserted its control from 2014 onwards, it started to increase taxation.[162]

Because the main economic activity in areas under Taliban control is normally farming, *ushr* is an important source of income.[163] In some areas, this also included the collection of a 10 percent tax from local shopkeepers and other small businesses.[164] On January 28, 2017, the *New York Times* reported that the Taliban had started to collect bills for Afghan utilities in the provinces of Kunduz and Helmand.[165] Haji Ayoub, an elder from Boz Qandahari village, north of Kunduz city, explained that the Taliban had stopped the government's electricity workers from collecting payments and started calling the people to come to the local mosque and pay to the insurgency.[166] Some of the aforementioned types of income allowed the Taliban to purchase weaponry and expand its operations.

Overall, the Taliban's involvement in governance served several purposes. First, it allowed the Taliban to fill a vacuum of authority by providing local communities some level of protection from abusive militias and by ensuring quick dispensation of justice. Through its involvement in governance, the Taliban created goodwill among the population at the expense of the abusive progovernment militias. This further increased the Taliban's opportunities to monitor events on the ground and control civilian behavior. Finally, through taxation, the Taliban was able to increase its revenue and financial resources. The Taliban had the ability to further consolidate its power through these governance structures, the Taliban had the ability to further consolidate its power through these governance structures in 2015[167] and later.[168]

The Kunduz City Siege during a Transition in Taliban Leadership

In a video released by the Taliban on August 25, 2015, approximately a month before the assault on Kunduz city, more than 100 fighters under the local command of Mullah Abdul Salam publicly pledged their alliance to Mullah Akhtar Muhammad Mansur.[169] One month later, the key figures in the Kunduz upsurge were that same Mullah Abdul Salam—the shadow governor—and his deputy Mullah Mohammad Akhund, operating in the North as a part of Mansur's faction.[170] Mullah Abdul Salam was imprisoned by the Pakistani Inter-Service Intelligence in 2010 but was released in late 2012.[171] He

returned to Kunduz province, where he resumed his position as Taliban shadow governor in 2013.[172]

Mansur's faction, under the provincial command of Mullah Abdul Salam, led the siege of Kunduz city in September 2015.[173] The Taliban essentially had the city surrounded, and according to some observers, the Taliban could take-over the city anytime it wanted. From locations around the city, Taliban fighters closed in on Kunduz city, holding on to it for two weeks in September 2015. The questions that remains, however, is why the fall of the city occurred at this specific moment in time.

Transition in Taliban Leadership in Summer 2015

The fall of Kunduz city should be understood in the context of a transition in Taliban leadership. The siege of Kunduz was part of a larger process in which Mullah Mansur as the new *amir ul-mumenin*—commander of the faithful—attempted to consolidate his power over the various Taliban factions in the first months of his publicly assumed leadership. Mullah Omar, the Taliban leader since the movement's inception, had already been declared dead on several occasions. As early as 2011, rumors started to spread that Mullah Omar, the central leader of the Taliban, had died.[174] In reality, Mullah Omar died in 2013, but this was kept a secret.[175] On July 29, 2015, the Afghan government publicly announced that Mullah Omar had died.[176] Contrary to earlier reports, the Taliban itself soon confirmed the authenticity of Mullah Omar's death and announced that Mullah Omar's then "deputy" Mullah Akhtar Muhammad Mansur had been appointed as his successor.[177] Mansur's appointment, however, could be seen merely as a formalization of what had already been his position in practice. Mansur, as a deputy to Mullah Omar, had been running the Taliban movement for approximately five years already.[178]

Who was Mullah Akhtar Muhammad Mansur? During the 1990s, Mullah Mansur served as a bureaucrat under the Taliban government.[179] He held the position of chief of aviation when Afghanistan had very few planes operating. In parallel, he was responsible for the tourism department in what had already been one of the world's least accessible tourist destinations at the time. Mansur was not one of the founders of the Taliban, but he became an increasingly important figure upon the return of the Taliban as an insurgency after 2001. From Pakistan, in 2003, the Taliban leadership created the *Rabbari shura*, also known as the *Quetta shura*, which originally consisted of ten members and announced the return of the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan.[180] The *Rabbari shura* was headed by Mullah Omar, and Mansur was one of those first ten *shura* members.[181] In the years after, Mansur led the Taliban's activities in Kandahar province. In 2010, he was appointed the sole deputy of Mullah Omar.[182] Mansur was able to capitalize on Omar's legitimacy even after Mullah Omar died by keeping it a secret.

Since its inception, the Taliban movement had largely stuck together. Despite the flexibility and "looseness" of some networks on the lower levels, the movement had largely remained unified. This changed in 2015, once news of its deceased leader became public knowledge. One day after the publicly confirmed death of Mullah Omar and the announcement that Mullah Mansur had taken his position, two current

members, Hassan Rahmani and Abdul Razaq, and one former member, Muhammad Rasul, of the *Rabbari shura* expressed open disagreement with Mansur as the new leader.[183] As Osman explained, Mansur faced opposition from various sides: (1) armed opposition from Muhammad Rasul and Munsur Dadullah; (2) opposing members in the *Rabbari shura*; (3) dissidents on the Eastern front; (4) leaders in political office; (5) Mansur's long-term rival Qayum Zaker; and (6) Mullah Omar's son, Mullah Yaqoub.[184] Mansur, therefore, had to make every effort to stabilize his newly acquired position, and he did. Some of these dissidents fell in line a few months later. Mullah Omar's eldest son and other family members initially opposed him but came around after they were offered some positions of influence.[185] Mansur's long-term rival Qayum Zaker pledged his alliance after reportedly receiving financial compensation.[186] Another essential ingredient that Mansur needed was a public show of battlefield success.

Given his vulnerable position as Mullah Omar's successor, it is not surprising that Mansur publicly claimed success for the Kunduz siege after it happened. Mansur spoke to the AP by telephone, stating the following:

> The victory [in Kunduz] is a symbolic victory for us, (…) Moreover, it is also a historical event which will be remembered. (…) People who said we were a small force with an unchosen leader can now see how wrong they were about the potential and strength my people have.[187]

The Kunduz victory, even though it was relatively brief, distracted attention from the existing internal tensions. Mansur could claim the Kunduz siege as his success because it was carried out by one of his own commanders. There was only two weeks of Taliban rule in the city, but this was still a symbolic victory that served Mansur well. Psychologically, it was a major event on all sides of the conflict.[188] Mansur's rule after Mullah Omar's death did not last for very long. He was killed in a drone strike on May 21, 2016.

Conclusion

By bringing together the literature on contentious politics and rebel governance, this article has shown how the Taliban insurgency was able to consolidate its power throughout Kunduz province from 2011 to 2015. Despite the fact that Kunduz province was under relatively firm government- and progovernment militia control in 2011, Mansur's faction of the Taliban was able to seize control over the whole of Kunduz by September 2015. This was the first time a provincial capital fell back into the hands of the Taliban since the U.S.-led intervention started in Afghanistan in 2001. I have demonstrated how the Taliban's upsurge took place because of a favorable opportunity structure for the insurgency that coincided with sufficient organizational capacities and a sense of urgency during the disputed leadership of Mullah Mansur.

The upsurge of the Taliban in Kunduz emerged in response to the departure of international forces in 2013, which created what Tilly and Tarrow referred to as an openness to new actors.[189] It shifted part of the international responsibilities on to the antiTaliban militias. Second, the antiTaliban militias proved to be an effective solution for the Afghan government, but only in the short term. The militias upheld the status quo during the first years, but the militia programs backfired after the change of

administration from President Karzai to President Ghani. Because of unstable political alignments with the elites in Kabul, some militias defected, whereas others were unwilling to stand their ground. Moreover, the abusive behavior of several ALP militias toward civilian communities – condoned by, or even in collaboration with the ANP, paved the way for the Taliban insurgency to expand its influence. A third feature of the opportunity structure was the multiplicity of independent factions of power within the Afghan government. The factionalized NUG was plagued by uncoordinated responses in the security sector. The performance of the incumbent government was fragmented and poor, which enabled the Taliban to fill the political and military void.

In the case of Kunduz, the Taliban did not have to be superior over its competitors in all facets to be successful militarily; it had to possess enough resources and organizational capacities to make sure it would seize the opportunity that emerged in the years after the international troop withdrawal. The militia problem for the Afghan government was a gift to the insurgency in military terms. A substantial part of the civilian population was fed up with the abusive militia behavior at its doorstep. The Taliban generally followed a similar strategy to what it had used before, but this time it turned out to be more successful because the Taliban did not encounter as much resistance from Afghan forces as it had previously from international forces. The Kunduz case study indicates that the exit of a powerful external powerful actor from an area can shape a window of opportunity for an insurgency. The withdrawal from Kunduz opened spaces of territorial control and shifted alliances within complex networks of strongmen, militias, and Afghan government forces. Unstable political alignments between progovernment militias and the Afghan government opened opportunities for the insurgency to gain and maintain territorial control.

In the time frame studied, the Taliban insurgency can indeed be understood as "a process of competitive state building."[190] The Taliban insurgency not only competed with the Afghan government in military terms, but also by providing some form of governance to the population, as becomes apparent in the Taliban's setup of a shadow administration. The Taliban generally seeks to base itself in rural areas where it possesses a network or where the coalition forces and the Afghan government are weaker or absent. The Taliban infiltrated new territories and dominated the messaging to the civilian population. The Taliban's capacity to govern served several purposes. The Taliban filled a vacuum of authority through its quick dispensation of justice, and it provided local communities some level of protection from abusive militias. Through taxation, it was able to increase its revenue and its financial resources. Governance practices therefore contributed to the Taliban's military success, but they should be seen as one factor among others, such as the aforementioned external opportunities.

Even though the Taliban faced an internal leadership crisis in 2015, it was able to temporarily take-over the provincial capital of Kunduz with a relatively low number of fighters. This happened after the split in leadership that created a sense of urgency within the Mansur faction. Mullah Mansur pushed his faction forward in the wake of Mullah Omar's announced death to avoid further fragmentation within the Taliban's ranks. This can be seen as a show of potency and a means to acquire support from other Taliban commanders who were not yet certain about whom they would support.

Interestingly, factionalism on the Taliban's side had an empowering effect, in contrast to the factionalism of the Afghan government, which resulted in poor coordination among security forces in the province.

The Pashtun civilian communities in Kunduz in the years before the fall of Kunduz city were essentially caught between a hostile local power structure (the nonPashtun commanders and/or ALP recruited programs) from which they were politically excluded, and the Taliban on the other side. Within such a dynamic, they became, as a consequence, dependent on the Taliban for targeted protection.[191] This does not imply that they had warm sympathies for the Taliban; rather, it signifies that there was a lack of a middle ground with the Taliban, the only remaining alternative to a failing Afghan government. The Taliban used the grievances that these communities held against the progovernment militias to infiltrate the communities and to persuade them to cooperate with it or at least to not obstruct its advancement.

Theoretically, the article has brought together two strands of literature that generally do not directly speak to each other: (1) contentious politics and (2) rebel governance during civil wars. The two strands of literature proved to be complementary. Regarding the contentious politics literature, the insights into rebel governance helped to understand the organizational capacity of insurgent groups once they take on state-like functions. Regarding the rebel governance literature, the contentious politics framework helped in viewing rebel governance as an explanatory factor for why rebel groups may be successful or unsuccessful in achieving their political and military objectives. This article is the first attempt to bring these strands of literature together. It has also shown how rebel governance can be used not as a dependent variable but rather as one factor among other explanatory factors for the military success of insurgencies. Testing these processes and mechanisms more extensively from a comparative perspective is an endeavor worth undertaking in future scholarly work.

In terms of policy, a few general observations can be made on the basis of this case study on Kunduz province. First, the events in Kunduz from 2011 to 2015 show that a withdrawal or partial withdrawal of international forces can create a power vacuum. For armed actors on both the Afghan government's side and armed opposition's side, such a power vacuum can be an opportunity to reconfigure their positions, politically and militarily. In response to a withdrawal, some armed actors will attack, others will defect and/or shift their alliances, while others may remain relatively passive. Second, antiTaliban militia programs and other forms of intermediary measures of the international coalition forces to fight the insurgency may appear effective in the short term, but can be unpredictable in the long term. Third, for the Afghan government the Kunduz case study demonstrates that escalating factionalism within the Afghan government seriously hampers the coordination and maintenance of security on the province and district level.

Notes

1. Interview code: KI2016 – 03, 30 March 2016, Kabul city; Joseph Goldstein and Mujib Mashal, "Taliban Fighters Capture Kunduz City as Afghan Forces Retreat," *The New York Times*, September 28, 2015.

2. Borhan Osman, "Toward Fragmentation? Mapping the Post-Omar Taleban" (AAN Dispatch, Afghanistan Analysts Network, Kabul, 2015).
3. Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow, *Contentious Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Marco Giugni, "Political Opportunities: From Tilly to Tilly," *Swiss Political Science Review* 15, no. 2 (2009), 361–67.
4. The term jirga is understood here as the institution that has historically resolved political, social, economic, cultural, judicial, and religious conflicts by making authoritative decisions. Jirga is "the product of Pashtun tribal society and operates according to the dictates of the Pashtunwali, an inclusive code of conduct guiding all aspects of Pashtun behavior and often superseding the dictates of both Islam and the central government." Lynn Carter and Kerry Connor, "A Preliminary Investigation of Contemporary Afghan Councils" (Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief, Peshawar, 1989), 7. For the origins of the term, see, Ali Wardak, "Jirga – A Traditional Mechanism of Conflict Resolution in Afghanistan" (University of Glamorgan, Pontypridd, UK, 2003).
5. According to Carter and Connor (1989: 9), a shura is a "group of individuals which meets only in response to a specific need in order to decide how to meet the need. In most cases, this need is to resolve a conflict between individuals, families, groups of families, or whole tribes." For elaboration on informal justice institutions in Afghanistan, see, Noah Coburn, *Informal Justice and the International Community in Afghanistan* (Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace [USIP], 2013).
6. The Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) consist of the ANP, which is the regular police force; the ALP, which are generally militias incorporated into the government forces; the Afghan National Army (ANA), which is the regular army; and the National Directorate of Security (NDS), which is the national intelligence agency.
7. The PRTs were invented by the United States. They generally consist of military compounds with military officers but also of diplomats and reconstruction subject matter experts who work together on reconstruction.
8. Tilly and Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*, 2007; Giugni, "Political Opportunities"; John Gledhill, "Disaggregating Opportunities: Opportunity Structures and Organisational Resources in the Study of Armed Conflict," *Civil Wars* 20, no. 4 (2018): 500–28.
9. Zachariah Cherian Mampilly, *Rebel Rulers: Insurgent Governance and Civilian Life during War* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2011); Ana Arjona, *Rebelocracy: Social Order in the Colombian Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Nelson Kasfir, Georg Frerks, and Niels Terpstra, "Introduction: Armed Groups and Multi-Layered Governance," *Civil Wars* 19, no. 3 (2017), 257–78.
10. I am aware that the concept of "opportunity structure" originated in a longer scholarly tradition in which it has mainly been applied to analyze social movements and other forms of collective action in situations that would generally not be classified as civil wars. Tilly and Tarrow (2007), however, showed how the same concept can also be applied to instances of civil war to analyze the opportunity structure for other types of movements, such as insurgencies. See for overview of the application of the concept to armed conflicts: Gledhill, 2018.
11. Julie Berclaz and Marco Giugni, "Specifying the Concept of Political Opportunity Structures," in *Economic and Political Contention in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Maria Kousis and Charles Tilly (New York: Routledge, 2005), 15–32; Giugni, "Political Opportunities"; Tilly and Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*, 2007.
12. Paul Staniland, *Networks of Rebellion: Explaining Insurgent Cohesion and Collapse* (Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press, 2014), 5.
13. Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow, *Contentious Politics* (Boulder, Colorado: Paradigm Publishers, 2007), 4.
14. Tilly and Tarrow, 57.
15. Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 218.

16. Seth G. Jones, “The Rise of Afghanistan’s Insurgency: State Failure and Jihad,” *International Security* 32, no. 4 (2008): 17.
17. Bard O’Neill, *From Revolution to Apocalypse: Insurgency and Terrorism* (Dulles: Potomac Books, 2005), 116–21.
18. Antonio Giustozzi and Christoph Reuter, “The Insurgents of the Afghan North: The Rise of the Taliban, the Self Abandonment of the Afghan Government, and the Effects of ISAF’s ‘Capture-and-Kill Campaign’” (Afghanistan Analysts Network, Kabul, 2011), 19–20.
19. Jones, “The Rise of Afghanistan’s Insurgency,” 17.
20. Nelson Kasfir, “Rebel Governance – Constructing a Field of Inquiry: Definitions, Scope, Patterns, Order, Causes,” in *Rebel Governance in Civil War*, ed. Ana Arjona, Nelson Kasfir, and Zacharia Mampilly (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 24.
21. Arjona, *Rebelocracy: Social Order in the Colombian Civil War*, 45.
22. Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 128; Arjona, *Rebelocracy: Social Order in the Colombian Civil War*, 48.
23. Ana Arjona, “Wartime Institutions: A Research Agenda,” 58, no. 8 (2014): 1361.
24. Mampilly, *Rebel Rulers*, 19.
25. Arjona, *Rebelocracy: Social Order in the Colombian Civil War*, 3.
26. O’Neill, *From Revolution to Apocalypse*, 124–35.
27. O’Neill, 125–28.
28. See figure 1, a map of Kunduz province.
29. See also figure 1, a map of Kunduz province. Late 2015, President Ghani announced the addition of three more districts within the geography of the already existing seven districts: Aqtash, Gultapa, and Gulbad.
30. TLO, *Provincial Assessment Kunduz* (The Liaison Office [TLO], Kabul, May 2010), 87. These figures should be seen as a reasonable estimation. There are no official uncontested statistics on ethnicity.
31. TLO, *Provincial Assessment Kunduz,* 87.
32. Nils Wörmer, *The Networks of Kunduz: A History of Conflict and Their Actors, from 1992 to 2001* (AAN Thematic Report 02, Afghanistan Analysts Network, Kabul, 2012), 7–9.
33. See figure 1, a map of Kunduz province.
34. Wörmer, 13–20. In Kunduz province, the most important *mujahedeen* factions included *Jamiat-e Islami, Jombesh-e Melli, Hezb-e Islami, and Ittehad-e Islami*. For an excellent overview of the *mujahedeen* factions in Kunduz province specifically, see Wörmer (2012).
35. Wörmer, 33.
36. Wörmer, 38–40.
37. Wörmer, 2.
38. Peter Bouckaert, “Afghanistan – Paying for the Taliban’s Crimes: Abuses Against Ethnic Pashtuns in Northern Afghanistan” (Human Rights Watch, Kabul, 2002), 43–44.
39. Bouckaert, 1.
40. Philipp Münch, “Local Afghan Power Structures and the International Military Intervention” (Afghanistan Analysts Network, Kabul, 2013), 15.
41. Münch, 15.
42. Münch, 1.
43. Giustozzi and Reuter, “The Insurgents of the Afghan North,” 7.
44. Giustozzi and Reuter, 7.
45. See for example: Timo Noetzel, “The German Politics of War: Kunduz and the War in Afghanistan,” *International Affairs* 87, no. 2 (2011): 400; Giustozzi and Reuter, “The Insurgents of the Afghan North,” 7.
46. IISS, “Northern route eases supplies to US forces in Afghanistan,” *Strategic Comments 16,* no. 5 (2010): 1-3.
47. Giustozzi and Reuter, “The Insurgents of the Afghan North,” 14. Reportedly, half of the Taliban commanders in charge of the Kunduz region before early 2010 were killed and most of the remaining ones moved to Pakistan due to the United States ‘capture-and-kill campaign’ (Giustozzi and Reuter 2011, 29).

48. Giustozzi and Reuter, 14.
49. Noetzel, “The German Politics of War: Kunduz and the War in Afghanistan”; Giustozzi and Reuter, “The Insurgents of the Afghan North,”; Münch, “Local Afghan Power Structures and the International Military Intervention”. The German engagement in Kunduz started as a low-risk stabilization operation. However, the deteriorating security situation and increased insurgent activity, particularly from 2008-2009 onwards, changed the realities on the ground (Giustozzi and Reuter 2011). Due to political, operational, and conceptual constraints, the Germans were slow to adapt to these changes in the local context (Noetzel 2011).
50. Münch, “Local Afghan Power Structures and the International Military Intervention,” 68.
51. Philipp Münch and Alex Veit, “Intermediaries of Intervention: How Local Power Brokers Shape External Peace- and State-Building in Afghanistan and Congo,” *International Peacekeeping* 25, no. 2 (2018): 274–79.
52. Jonathan Goodhand and Aziz Hakimi, “Counterinsurgency, Local Militias, and Statebuilding in Afghanistan” (Peaceworks 90, Washington D.C., USIP, 2014), 32.
53. Münch, “Local Afghan Power Structures and the International Military Intervention,” 1.
54. Giustozzi and Reuter, “The Insurgents of the Afghan North,” 27–32.
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Acknowledgements

Special thanks go to (in alphabetical order): Chris van der Borgh, Jolle Demmers, Toon Dirkx, Georg Frerks, Mario Fumerton, Lauren Gould, Corinna Jentzsch, Nelson Kasfir, Romain Malejacq, Ingrid Samset, Abbey Steele, Nora Stel, and Marij Swinkels for insightful comments on earlier versions of this paper. I also thank TLO and CPAU for their hospitality and cooperation at various stages of this research project and the two anonymous reviewers for sharing their insights and helping me to improve the manuscript. I am grateful to the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO) and the Hofvijverkring for financial contributions to this research project.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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