

## *e-Insights; A view from within:*

HAMKARI (Co-Operation), or the 2010 Summer Campaign for Southern Afghanistan.

The recent change of Command at the head of International Security Assistance Force or ISAF, highlighted the perils of the overall mission: From IEDs, to evasive insurgents, even interviews. It is obvious that Strategic Communications are at the heart of the battle, shaping expectations, a virtual fight in which thus far insurgents have had the upper hand; that is only until very recently. Indeed, in spite of media sensationalism that focuses more on explosions and blood than in-depth understanding there are clear signs of progress for which the story has yet to be told to the world. Specialists will tell you: Counterinsurgency takes time, not the least of which is the precious time needed for conventional contemporary militaries to understand it and so, transform their mindset. From fighting insurgents to fighting their ideas, their information as well as seizing the initiative, sadly, the lessons of this campaign have been learned in time, but to the cost of great sacrifices... Fortunately these lessons have now sunken in the hearts and the minds of our own militaries, and we are just starting to see the type of grassroots COIN success that can turn the insurgent's head. This creates interesting opportunities as much however as it recreates a series of new challenges: Progress is still lacking, less on the security front however, than on the comprehensive approach. In this article I offer a comprehensive overview of insights in southern Afghanistan's Campaign; HAMKARI (Co-operation) has no D-Day and is not even an operation; it's a series of activities.

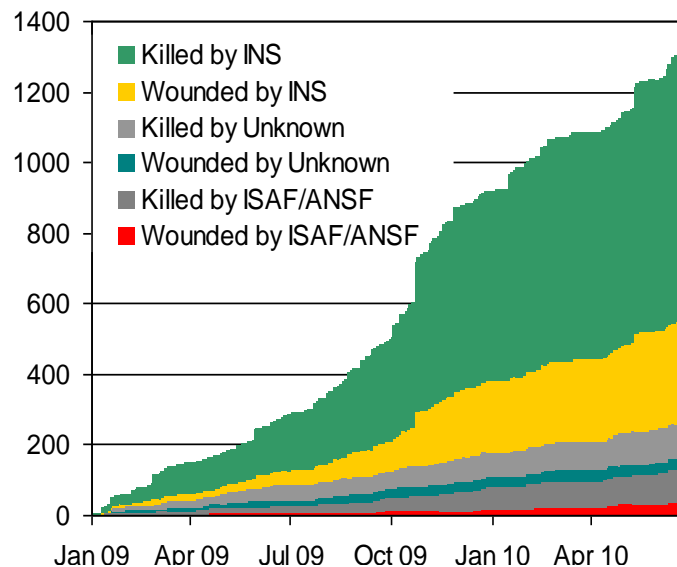
***“COIN is also about our own Hearts & Minds!”***

LCol Eric Dion

### **Afghan Civil Society**

For the original afghan insurgents whom like their mujahedeen fathers and grand-fathers joined the cause to liberate Afghanistan from the invaders, it appears after some 9 years in country that the invaders are not so bad after all, compared to those out-of-area fighters that have resurfaced. Contrary to the original local insurgents, who were used as proxy by transnational terrorists that made Afghanistan their base, the new generation of out-of-area fighters are not welcomed in the spirit of the Pasthunwali code since Afghan-Pasthuns have figured insurgents have been abusing.

Since July of 2009, the insurgents have been responsible for no less than 76% of Civilian Casualties (CivCas) in southern Afghanistan, trend that has continued in spite of the significant surge in the total number of Coalition Forces in southern Afghanistan from 5000 within TFK to an astounding 35,000 Coalition Force total, although no ISAF CivCas is acceptable!! Conversely however, media coverage of the CivCas attributable to ISAF makes a good headline for our national media in search of sensationalism, while in effect it plays into the insurgency's own story, where they attempt to attribute to ISAF, most if not all of their intentional deaths.



This interesting change of situation illustrates that the Afghan people are really not dupe and have started to realise thanks to some significant local security developments that they may be missing great opportunities offered by the international community, through its security assistance force. Moreover, if Afghanistan was once a base for transnational terrorists, today it can be considered a key nexus for transnational narco-traffickers that have found weak governance to be exploited. The people of Afghanistan are not oblivious to this overall context as much as the insurgents are also very much aware of growing expectations (i.e. pressure) to transition to an Afghan solution. Thus, promises of rapid re-integration risk compromising scarce national integrity and authority while corruption to the highest level remains endemic and undermines Afghanistan's credibility.

Henceforth, the population now firmly realizes that their fate is "in their own hands" and recent Local Defence Initiatives (LDI) have spread in the south under leadership of some fed up elders. Even President Karzai echoed these views: "*We have reached the stage to run this country with our own hands ...[and] ensure our national sovereignty*", President Karzai speech, 7 Aug 2010. The Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan or GIROA has also started to consider a new Afghan Local Police (ALP) manned by trained local villagers, with some crucial assistance, the key point in all of this however being that in spite of risks to themselves and their supporters, these initiatives are emerging from the local Afghans themselves, which are still very precarious, but which nonetheless demonstrates great resiliency and popular desire for security and stability.

Following the clearing of key terrain however, it is doubtful to say the least, that the ALP or LDI will be in any position to hold, ensuring sustainable security, or providing local sense of stability. Furthermore, there is real danger that these may turn into local militias, and attract back warlords and powerbrokers that prey on a range of self-interests none the least of which are the insurgents. It is also worth noting that Private Security Companies (PSC) are an integral part of the problem and a lesser part of the solution as Warlord Inc. eminently pointed out in a recent report on PSCs: "*One of the major sources of funding for the Taliban, is the protection money*"<sup>1</sup>, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's Testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Dec 3, 2009. Let's note by the way that the President's half-brother is a very central figure within many PSCs. Unfortunately without sustainable security and a sense of stability, civil society hardly takes root, so any military operation that seeks to clear key terrains, must be willing to hold'em indefinitely.

### **Surging Force Structure**

Thus, understanding COIN, the mission has changed to "*clear only what you hold*" to secure and stabilize, something Canadians have long understood, but haven't managed to do, lacking forces. In these critical times, ensuring a degree of security and stability to the Afghan population in the south, and particularly within Kandahar City (KC) which is a vital ground for ISAF's campaign, is quintessential for demonstrating tangible progress. As such, the establishment of the Security Ring Protection Force (SRPF), as an all-around defence on key access routes into Kandahar city, now serves as Afghan National Police (ANP) security perimeter beyond which Afghan National Army (ANA) in the lead, supported by its ISAF partners conduct operations to expand influence. Henceforth, it may well be that the ANA offers the best prospects for a sustainable security, as to give local Afghans a sense of stability to which the ANP is slowly but surely catching up largely thanks to the exemplary conduct on the SRPF by Afghan National Civil Order Police (ANCOP).

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<sup>1</sup> Majority staff of the Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs of the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, Warlord, Inc.; *Extortion and Corruption Along the U.S. Supply Chain in Afghanistan*, June 10.

In large thanks to the Coalition Forces (CF) (read mostly US surge in the south) from only 5,000 within TFK to an astounding 35,000 CF, from Sep 09 to Sep 10, as well as a 100% growth of the ANA and a 60% growth of the ANP for the same period, for a net growth from 5,500 to 10,000 Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) in the Regional Command South (RC(S)) area of Ops, it has actually become possible to envisage securing the city's perimeter, and even expanding it, which until recently was impossible with only 3 Battalions; There are now 6 Brigades in RC (S)! However, as much as the CF considers expanding West and South from Kandahar City, there are still areas within the greater city that are of concern which hosts insurgents, perhaps unwillingly, but nevertheless, that still very much directly affects the security and stability of this key terrain.

As consequence of the US surge and leveraging the SRPF, Canada's engagement in Afghanistan<sup>2</sup> mostly under the joint command of Task Force Kandahar (TFK) has refocused its efforts into the southern environs of Kandahar city, mainly Panjwa'i, infamously known to soldiers, and families of the fallen. Concurrently however Canada's relative influence in the battlespace has diminished proportionally in relation to TFK's weight versus three American army brigades in and around of Kandahar city, and in relation to key staff officer positions who hold influence within HQ RC(S). At a recent strategic level meeting with key staff of the ISAF Joint Command down in Kandahar, there were 15 US, 8 British, 6 Aussies, 2 Canucks, 2 Dutch, 1 French, 1 Belgium & 1 Singapore present and the key decision makers around the table were clearly American, British and Aussie. Nonetheless, Canada is still very much at the heart of the COIN fight for the southern environs of Kandahar and although Canadians have an enviable bank of tremendous respect and camaraderie, their net effect relative to the surge is diminished, which also plays into a well announced pull out.

Nevertheless, one aspect that really pays off for Canada is the independent nature of its Brigades with their integral engineers and other enablers found in Canadian Mechanized Brigade Groups; really self-sustaining Task Forces which however have to relearn to operate in divisional context. Moreover, the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team (KPRT) in Camp Nathan Smith (CNS) plays an enviable strategic role: Enabling governance through Governor Wesa, and development through the Canadian International Development Agency's (CIDA) extensive projects' program. Clearly, Canada is still playing a very active role within HAMKARI that sets the right conditions for sustainable Afghan led security that provides a sense of stability to reconnect with the people. Supported by Operation MOSTHARAK: *To clear only what we intend to hold*; HAMKARI may well be the bleak afghan heartbeat of governance that may be externally defibrillated, hopefully, taking Afghanistan out of its misery and back into a descent life, even if "*hope is not a method*".

### **Population-Centric Strategy**

Through an information campaign around assassinations that in fact turn out for the most part to be murders unrelated to the insurgency but for which insurgents quickly claim the responsibility, local Afghans falsely perceive the insurgency to be bigger than it is. Furthermore, by paying off their way in society or simply threatening legitimate government employees, insurgents manage to control the population through intimidation or disinformation thus shaping overall perceptions. To a great extent, these false perceptions influence negatively the international media reporting, which for fear to their own security, largely rely on local reporters to provide images and stories. Hence, insurgents continuously aim for 'iconic attacks' that will, inevitably, attract international media attention which they know well, will easily focus on the big bang over the small victories.

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<sup>2</sup> Not with Afghanistan (see Eric Dion: [e-Impllosion: Countering Global Insurgency in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century](#), April 07).

Unfortunately for them, over this Summer Campaign, most of their wanted-to be ‘iconic attacks’, ended up in total failure demonstrating diminished capability and weakened insurgent leadership; It must be hard indeed to direct a disenfranchised Afghan to suicide, through a Quetta cell phone. These, along with a slower fighting season, poor use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and hit and run tactics on the rise also seem to indicate that the Anaconda strategy may be slowly but surely squeezing the life out of the insurgency while allowing the Afghan people to breath easier. However, as long as foreign intelligence services keep running the insurgency behind the scenes, as long as Pakistan is concerned with Indian commercial and strategic influences in Afghanistan, and as long as Iran sees the intervention as a foothold in south-west Asia, Afghanistan is unlikely to become stable. Conversely without sustained security, Afghanistan will never be a safe society and obviously then, the narco-traffickers, criminals, thugs, murderers and scumbags will flourish.

Hence for the coalition force of some 47 nations, the *modus operandi* has shifted from defeating the insurgency to winning back the Afghan people and reconnecting them with GIROA & ANSF, and although this sounds nice in theory, it is easier said than done, pragmatically, in Afghanistan. However as noted, Local Defence Initiatives and the Afghan Local Police are positive indicators, and indeed, concentrating efforts on protecting key populations, through increased security, does seem to be a positive population-centric strategy that offers better prospect to the Afghan people. Consequently, the first order of battle has become to convince the people of our own nations that this fight is winnable and well worth it, so that enduring security presence can be sustained, such that our own governments don’t pull plug on slow success which is measured at an Afghan pace. Historians would be quick to point out that this is one key lesson learned from the Vietnam War, when the US military had a chance to victory but their government pulled plug, under pressure<sup>3</sup>.

In light of the upcoming NATO Alliance Council (NAC) mid-November, and the US’ Afghanistan Strategic Review in the middle of December, it is necessary to demonstrate progress, specifically in southern Afghanistan, and particularly in Kandahar and the city, as the campaign’s strategic key terrain. Moreover, it is crucial to demonstrate success to our own national populations as to convince their hearts and minds that this campaign is well worth fighting, at the cost of our blood and treasure, in spite of the ongoing challenges. US’ Time Magazine recently made this case with one simple picture of a young disfigured Afghan woman, bluntly stating on its cover: “What happens if we leave Afghanistan”<sup>4</sup>...



So if for the sole purpose of saving NATO’s face to the world, saving another Afghan girl’s face, or perhaps to maintain the strange homeostasis within the would-be Caliphate of south-west Asia where a delicate regional balance of power between Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India is key, ensuring that allies leave Afghanistan in a better state of affairs then we found it is quintessential.

<sup>3</sup>THOMAS, Evan & BARRY, John, *The Surprising Lessons of Vietnam; Unraveling the mysteries of Vietnam may prevent us from repeating its mistakes*, Newsweek, 16 Nov 2009 & SORLEY, Lewis (ret LCol), *A Better War*, 1999.

<sup>4</sup> Time Magazine Cover, *Portrait of Aisha*, 9 Aug 2010: [www.time.com/time/magazine/0,9263,7601100809,00.html](http://www.time.com/time/magazine/0,9263,7601100809,00.html)

Moreover ensuring that Afghans have a good enough governance that is at least equal to or better than other war ravaged countries in the world, and fundamentally sovereign, whether Afghans do accept some level of corruption as necessary to grease the system, then somewhat becomes mute, so long as Afghanistan is self-secured, self-sustained & self-governed to the benefit of its people, recognizing that our own nations had to go through years of tumultuous *Revolutions* to get there. Nevertheless, corruption remains an endemic problem within Afghanistan society which literally undermines GIROA legitimacy, credibility and authority, as much internally and internationally. Fundamentally, this is about a population centric strategy that reconnects Afghans to the World, without however attempting to impose our self-deterministic view of the World to the Afghans, all while respecting Afghan culture and adhering to international good governance conventions.

The recent Kabul conference re-energized the international community's expectations and trust in President Karzai whom perhaps in spite of his good intentions will need more than charisma. Being seen recently supporting Iran's civil nuclear ambitions and attempting lately to reintegrate some elements of the insurgency within Afghan civil society, can both seem to be contradictory messages for an international community expecting at least, fair parliamentary elections for the Wolesi Jirga on 18 Sep 2010, perhaps as the benchmark of governance progress in Afghanistan. In any measure however, we must not compare these parliamentary elections to those we know. For positive reasons the eyes and ears of the International Community are focusing on Kandahar particularly for these upcoming parliamentary elections, but such global attention is not given to other fragile countries' electoral processes and it exercises great pressure upon a 'good enough' Afghan government that in most respects is equal to governments in other war torn countries too.

***“Perception is only one dimension; think through!”***

LCol Eric Dion

Hence we should not be surprised that the upcoming parliamentary elections will be somewhat as dubious as preceding ones, recognising however that Afghan governance takes place at the micro level through local villages' shura. Henceforth, we should probably focus our governance efforts at this level, since addressing basic grievances: Land claims, water or seeds distribution; is at the heart of the Afghan rhythm of life, one which however is largely left ungoverned by a centralised system of state imposed according to a western view of how Afghans should govern themselves. In giving Afghanistan a chance in its young democratic history, is the simple recognition it takes little time to destroy what needs many years to build, just like the scars of the Banyan Buddhas, as well as the recognition that our centralised modes of governance may not be suitable to tribes, lessons that we should perhaps relearn from our own challenging interactions with First Nations. But again, ensuring that any population-centric strategy holds depends on a sustainable security.

### **Supporting Systems**

From the security perspective the ANA is slowly but surely honing military skills, demonstrating an increasing sense of leadership in planning and conducting operations, gaining popular respect. The ANA, however, is mostly composed of infantry soldiers and lacks crucial enablers that have become essential force multipliers such as engineering capabilities like route clearance packages, explosive ordinance disposal, roads and bridging repairs, explosive detection dogs, or unmanned aerial vehicles, secure communications, development & reconstruction teams and nodal logistics.

Conversely the ANP very much remains the weakest link of the Afghan national security system, as they often operate in isolated posts, a few individuals lightly armed and relatively poorly paid when compared to the ANA or even the ANCOP, which has been praised for its professionalism. Recent successes from the Afghan Border Police have also highlighted the great potential there is in developing this force that could prove significant as well for national tax & revenue collection. And numerous other agencies; the Afghan Highway Police (AHP), the Afghan Uniformed Police (AUP), the Afghan Local Police (ALP), the National Directorate of Security (NDS), many more Private Security and/or Military Companies (PSC/PMC) contracted both by the coalition and the Afghan government, as well as private individuals and other militias, warlords and the like make for a fundamentally lawless security apparatus where each is competing for resources and power.

So, if sustainable security is crucial to social stability, controlling the booming security industry is another order of business, returning to basic sovereignty rules where the state has a monopoly on the use of force, however, with appropriate checks and balances that must emerge in parallel. Nonetheless, the security front is progressing, unlike the other aspects of this counterinsurgency. Precisely, the complexity of these challenges can only be met by well integrated support systems. The Afghan formal justice system for example, experiences critical challenges where prosecutors are in fact paid one third of what an ANP member is paid as basic salary; one third! Furthermore, attempting to impose our models of justice upon a society traditionally versed in informal justice, where local mediation and rapid resolution are keys, may prove to be counter-productive. Within our own societies, we are more and more referring to informal or alternative modes of resolution, so who are we to say then that our formal justice system is better and therefore must be adopted?

The fundamental key to all of this is that the Afghan people, through their representatives, which may not necessarily be elected as we would in our countries (indeed elders often serve this role), that Afghan peoples are free to speak their mind and shape their country to their image, not ours, nor that of their interested neighbours. In order to do so however Afghan society support systems must be independent and free of interference as to gradually transition to Afghan led institutions. Such institutions may well be Islamic in nature, so long as the extremist biased interpretation of the Holly Coran is not allowed to flourish again under a Taliban regime abusing the Sharia Law. Indeed, their perverse interpretation of Islam is purely ideological and instrumental, not Islamic. Amongst other challenges posed by the insurgents is the leverage they make of narco-trafficking to corrupt their way through the fragile Afghan civil society writ large, bribing the ANP and key officials or otherwise threatening them, ensuring tight population control measures in key areas.

Additionally, Afghanistan's economy is essentially on life support: Electricity for Kandahar city will, in due course, be produced by two power generating stations fuelled by petroleum convoys, clearly an unsustainable solution for a country with little to no tax revenue from its long borders. Innovative solutions, such as solar road lighting on the SRPF check-points or solar water pumps, may provide interesting alternatives for Afghanistan's energy need strong in solar luminescence; there may well be an unexplored solar market provided sustainable security and societal stability and recent gem stones and oil discoveries may offer Afghans prospect of a better, brighter future. But this does not account for black market financing, of which we still have little understanding, in terms of the astronomical amount of currency that is literally walked out of the country daily, as we have yet to uncover the depth, scale and height at which corruption alienates Afghanistan. Without an independent and effective judicial system keeping check, governance is undermined.

Precisely, this is where the weakest link of all is found in Afghanistan, that is: In the institutions that we westerners take for granted, that we often blame for our issues, but turn to for resolution. Indeed if security is to be sustainable it has to rest on stable social support systems, for example: A functioning governance system, a judicial and correctional system, or in the case of elections a census and registration system; in the case of the Afghan economy a tax and revenue system and even a customs and borders system, or simpler yet, what we call 'critical infrastructure' systems, precisely because everything else we take for granted essentially rests on those basic things such as clean water, electricity, roads and your ability to circulate freely, without fear to your security.

### **Comprehensive Solutions**

Sadly, the recent disasters in Pakistan, stemming from severe rains, causing flooding, devastating farms and crops, and displacing millions into camps may present an opportunity for Afghanistan. Furthermore these unfortunate turn of events may also present a unique opportunity to the world. Indeed combined with the wild fires in Russia that have also destroyed crops, experts predict that the price of wheat will increase significantly as a humanitarian crisis may emerge in Baluchistan. As unfortunate as this situation may be, it nevertheless presents an opportunity for many farmers in Afghanistan, where the most fertile southern land lies on the banks of Arghandad and Helmand rivers, to sow wheat cash crops instead of risky poppy fields and thus legitimise their livelihoods. As much as this offers Afghan civil society a commercial link with Pakistan it also leverages the economic potential of Afghanistan legitimately, turning a destructive spiral into a positive effect. However, this is fundamentally premised on the condition that those legitimate Afghan farmers are not intimidated by disinformation, threatened by insurgents or let down by their institutions.

Since these are in turn premised on a sustainable security and the sense of social stability, it thus appears clearly that Security & Stability are quintessential pre-conditions which implicitly drive military imperatives to Clear & Hold key population centers to enable comprehensive solutions. Indeed, this is well understood and actually, there are indicators of progress, such as within KC: Recently the ANSF with elements of the ANP, ANCOP, ANA and NDS, under the leadership of KC's Chief of Security (CoS) and Chief of Police (CoP), conducted an independent operation in the south of sub-district 6 which in spite of a significant insurgent presence and quite a few IEDs, demonstrated the willingness and ability of ANSF to plan and conduct operations on short order, reacting quickly to a resurgence of insurgents in that staging area, held aback by this new SRPF. Henceforth to enable Afghan security and foster a sense of stability there are now enough forces.

Conversely however, we can already foresee population-centric strategic issues in synchronising and coordinating all elements of Afghan civil-military national power to achieve comprehensive solutions. Indeed, this whole of government approach is quintessential to counter the insurgency, re-establish civil society, reinforce institutions and reconnect the majority of the population to a legitimate 'good enough' GIRoA, which provides sustainable sovereign security, and everything else that follows, provided the international community doesn't pull plug on life support systems. The crucial challenge however, is that without a sustainable security and a sense of stability even the international community is hesitant to ramp-up its comprehensive approach to develop those enduring life support systems to ensure Afghanistan will be able to walk away from life-support. Hence, a legitimate pragmatic question arises: Where is the so-called Comprehensive Approach? Where are all the judge mentors, correction mentors, border & custom mentors, teacher mentors, doctor mentors, engineer mentors, geological mentors, agricultural mentors, management gurus?



For if Afghanistan is about security for the sake of security, insecurity is actually good business, and there currently are more vested interests towards insecurity, than with security and stability!

***“We serve in Afghanistan at a critical time”.***

Gen Petraeus’ 4 July 2010 letter to the troops

### **Executive Summary**

We can say loud and clear: “*Afghanistan has been given a great chance*”, but its neighbours have found all the reasons in the world to create a self-generating conundrum, profiting from its chaos. To a large extent, local Pashtu insurgent fighters have become weary of external leadership that sits comfortably back outside Afghanistan to direct operations and resupply or drive intelligence; their exist opportunities to drive the wedge between local fighters and their foreign manipulators. If Afghanistan is going to be given a real chance to stand-up it must do so independently. Hence, Afghan sovereignty becomes a fundamental principle to the establishment of a governable space, able to counter-balance negative influences from its interested neighbours and re-instate stability. Progress in that domain is culminating, and will start diminishing come the spring of 2011 when Canada withdraws its Task Force Kandahar, really, a significant well integrated force multiplier. The ANA, ANCOF & ABP are making good progress but lack the crucial enablers to sustain an enduring population-centric COIN strategy while the ANP seriously needs significant assistance.

GIRoA is a ‘good enough’ Afghan government but corruption at the highest levels even through the security industry, seriously undermines its credibility, authority and legitimacy. In any case, now is time to enable the comprehensive approach that has been lauded in academic circles, but experts in all other domains than security (or insecurity for that matter) are notably absent from Afghanistan. As a planner put it: “*Here and now is as good as it gets militarily for Afghanistan*”. Leveraging this opportunity is quintessential if we are to unplug Afghanistan from life support, leaving it in a better state of affairs that we found it, ensuring it doesn’t fall back into darkness. And as much as the emerging crisis in Pakistan may present a limited opportunity to Afghans willing to legitimise their livelihood, it also presents a strategic challenge for the international community which in no time may be facing a major crisis in there, requiring as much support.

NATO’s Alliance Council (NAC) meeting in Lisbon will be a key determinant of Afghanistan’s future but more to the point, if the international community writ large does not mobilise to truly implement a comprehensive approach in Afghanistan, starting from a civil-military perspective, but seriously expanding support to Afghan governance, development and reconstruction, there is a real risk that Afghanistan’s disenfranchised will have no other option than to profit from chaos. This may well be exacerbated by the disenfranchised of Pakistan for whom in the recent disasters extremist funded aid agencies have been their saviours, in bleak comparison to their government. Kandahar city is as secure today as many tough North-American neighbourhoods, where gangs do roam the streets at night; we have issues of our own that we can’t expect Afghanistan to resolve. So, if we are to hand back a Secure & Stable Afghanistan back to the Afghans, there will have to be a shift from self-security where everybody has a gun like in the far west, to sustained security that truly delivers stability through a new social contract, within a fundamentally sovereign state. To this end, now is the time for the international community’s comprehensive approach to thrive. The fundamental lesson of HAMKARI or the 2010 Summer Campaign for Southern Afghanistan is precisely that it’s not an operation; it’s a series of activities that require a comprehensive team!



### **Editorial Note**

This article represents the personal views of the author; it does not represent those of any agency.

### **Biographical Note**

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