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## Introduction

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In 2001, the United States led a successful insurgency against the Taliban government, reaching out to Tajik and Uzbek forces in northern and western Afghanistan, Hazara forces in the center, and Pashtun forces in the east and south. By 2002, however, the Taliban and other groups began to conduct initial offensive operations against NATO forces and the newly established Afghan government. The United States soon found itself in the unenviable position of waging a counterinsurgency. In barely a year, U.S. forces had shifted from operating as insurgents to counterinsurgents. By 2010, the insurgency had deepened. U.S. GEN Stanley McChrystal's assessment of Afghanistan noted that "we face not only a resilient and growing insurgency; there is also a crisis of confidence among Afghans—in both their government and the international community—that undermines our credibility and emboldens the insurgents."<sup>1</sup>

Among stated U.S. objectives in Afghanistan is facilitating Afghanistan's ability to govern itself. Governance is in part determined by the capabilities of local and national security forces to protect borders and respond to internal strife. However, Afghan history demonstrates that local security forces are important for establishing national security. This document examines the viability of establishing a bottom-up security strategy in Afghanistan to complement ongoing efforts at the national level. The focus here is on *security* measures, although economic and development efforts are clearly also key elements of a stable

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<sup>1</sup> Stanley A. McChrystal, "COMISAF's Initial Assessment," memorandum to the Honorable Robert M. Gates, August 30, 2009, pp. 1-1.

nation and government. The overall success of any counterinsurgency campaign, of course, depends on a variety of interrelated factors.

In exploring a bottom-up strategy, we adopted several methodological approaches. First, we compiled a list of nearly two dozen tribal and other local policing cases dating from 1880 and briefly assessed their effectiveness. The results informed our analysis of local defense forces. Second, we met with dozens of tribal and community leaders across rural Afghanistan—especially the west, south, and east. We were particularly interested in gauging their views on several specific issues: the strength of tribes, subtribes, clans, and other social structures; the competence and strength of Afghan national security forces in their areas; the historical use of community policing structures, such as *arbakai* and *chalweshtai*; and the current status of these structures. Third, we examined the anthropological work on tribal and community dynamics.

For several reasons, there is a great deal of ignorance about power and politics in rural Afghanistan, especially in Pashtun areas affected by the insurgency. The first reason is selection bias. Few international civilians spend time in violent areas because of security concerns. Indeed, far too many U.S. and other NATO government officials are prohibited from traveling outside their bases or urban areas because of risk aversion. Most academics cannot access rural areas of the insurgency because it is too dangerous. Yet the insurgency is primarily a *rural* one. The increasing size of international bases in Kabul, Bagram, Kandahar, and other areas—including the traffic jams that we have personally experienced on several of these bases—is a testament to this risk aversion. It prevents foreigners from understanding rural Afghanistan and its inhabitants. Second, many foreigners, including government officials, project their Western views on Afghanistan. This bias has caused many foreigners, and even some Western-educated Afghan government officials, to look *only* to the central government for solutions. But security has required—and will continue to require—a combination of top-down and bottom-up efforts.

The rest of this document is divided as follows. Chapter Two outlines the debate between top-down and bottom-up models for Afghanistan, and examines the challenge of protecting the population. Chap-

ter Three assesses the social structures in rural Afghanistan, especially the Pashtun areas in which the insurgency is primarily being waged. It also discusses some of the key policing institutions that Pashtuns and others have used to establish security in their villages. Chapter Four analyzes the effectiveness of local forces in Afghanistan and Pakistan since 1880. Chapter Five outlines a bottom-up security strategy and argues that local defense forces should be organized according to several key principles. Chapter Six discusses potential objections to the establishment of local forces and provides a brief conclusion.

