

## BATTLEFIELD UPDATE: TASK FORCE DREADNAUGHT IN MAIWAND DISTRICT, KANDAHAR

In mid-2010, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) launched Hamkari, a series of operations in Kandahar to seize militarily key terrain from Taliban forces while simultaneously improving local governance and development throughout the province. Although the Taliban historically utilized safe havens throughout Kandahar, ISAF's increased combat power in Hamkari enabled U.S. units to force insurgents out of their strongholds and disrupt their ability to control the population. U.S. forces held the key terrain through the past winter season and implemented programs to secure local support while undercutting the Taliban's ability to re-infiltrate and intimidate the local population.

In the past insurgent operations in Kandahar have been shaped around the population and the geography of the province. The majority of the population resides in Kandahar City or its surrounding districts along the Arghandab River. The river, which runs east-west through central Kandahar, is straddled by green, fertile land that has been cultivated for centuries. Insurgents have used the foliage and canals of such areas in Zhari, Panjwai, and Arghandab districts to cover their movement. Maiwand district, with its flatter terrain and sparse vegetation, was used as a staging area for attacks into neighboring Zhari and Panjwai.<sup>1</sup>

Prior to the launch of Hamkari, ISAF units were unable to dislodge insurgents from districts in central Kandahar. U.S. and Canadian disruption operations, often conducted with battalion-sized units, were able to secure limited objectives but unable to hold them for long periods. The Taliban, therefore, enjoyed the ability to move and operate in the cultivated land along the Arghandab River, and their presence in the districts around Kandahar City allowed them to intimidate the population. Pockets of sympathetic locals enabled the establishment of staging areas for attacks into the city and safe locations for constructing bombs and improvised explosive devices (IEDs). ISAF units were forced to react to the significant improvised explosive device (IED) threat and focus on force protection. Until 2010, ISAF units in Kandahar continued to primarily conduct disruption operations.<sup>2</sup>

In December 2009, the U.S. government authorized the influx of 30,000 additional troops into Afghanistan. A portion of the forces were deployed to Kandahar under Regional Command (RC) South divisional headquarters for Hamkari. As ISAF forces were building up to launch Hamkari, insurgents in Kandahar responded by increasing

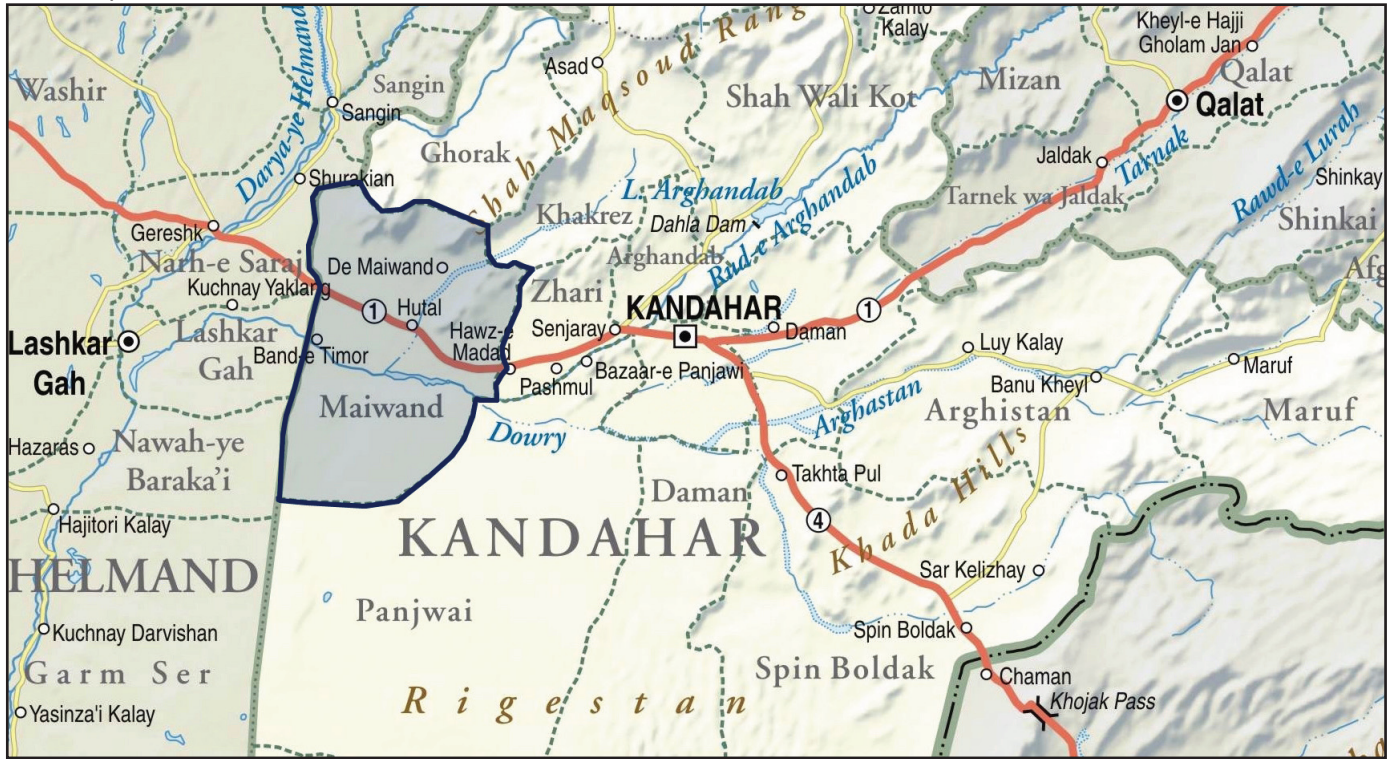
IED and small-arms attacks to force U.S. units into adopting a defensive, reactive posture. However, the influx of U.S. troops in 2010 enabled ISAF to increase its presence along Highway 1 and secure major transit routes in central Kandahar. ISAF and coalition Special Forces also began conducting raids against Taliban leadership throughout the province and killed and captured dozens of insurgent commanders.<sup>3</sup> U.S. units continued to target insurgent networks and hubs while holding key terrain to support local governance and enable the delivery of basic services to the population.

Beginning in mid-2010, Hamkari proceeded in stages. ISAF first secured Kandahar City and began kinetic operations in the central districts. U.S. army units under Major General James Terry of the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division assumed responsibility for Kandahar Province in November 2010 and divided the province between the division's three brigade combat teams (BCTs).<sup>4</sup>

Task Force Spartan, led by Colonel Patrick D. Frank, arrived in April 2011 and began working with Afghan partners to conduct operations to improve security to assist the population of Zhari and Maiwand districts. The defeat of insurgent forces operating in these areas was critical to enable the Afghan government to take increasing security responsibility and provide basic services to their populations.<sup>5</sup>

This report provides an update on ISAF operations in Maiwand district, primarily during the latter half of 2011.

**FIGURE 1 | CENTRAL KANDAHAR PROVINCE & 10<sup>TH</sup> MOUNTAIN DIVISION BCTs**



	U.S. ARMY UNIT	AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITY
"WARHORSE"	2 <sup>ND</sup> BCT, 4 <sup>TH</sup> INFANTRY DIV.	KANDAHAR CITY, ARGHANDAB DISTRICT
"SPARTAN"	3 <sup>RD</sup> BCT, 10 <sup>TH</sup> MOUNTAIN DIV.	MAIWAND, ZHARI DISTRICTS
"ARCTIC WOLVES"	1 <sup>ST</sup> SBCT, 25 <sup>TH</sup> INFANTRY DIV.	PANJWAI, DAND, DAMAN DISTRICTS

**SECURITY IN MAIWAND**

Given its strategic location linking central Kandahar with Helmand province, insurgents have long used Maiwand district as a line of communication and an infiltration route.<sup>6</sup> Maiwand and other locales in Khakrez and Shah Wali Kot districts form an outer support zone for insurgents transiting through Uruzgan, Kandahar, and Helmand provinces. The inner loop immediately around Kandahar City through Zhari, Panjwai, and Arghandab districts has been disrupted by Coalition operations. Insurgents have typically moved east and west through farmland along the Arghandab River and used the terrain to regroup and stage attacks into neighboring Zhari and Panjwai districts.<sup>7</sup> To disrupt the Taliban’s kinetic operations in Zhari and Panjwai, Hamkari included a plan for Combined Task Force Strike (2<sup>nd</sup> BCT, 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne) to target this insurgent support network.

The responsibility for Maiwand district was given to Task Force Wolfpack (3<sup>rd</sup> Squadron, 2<sup>nd</sup> Stryker Cavalry Regiment, or 3-2 Stryker), commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Bryan Denny. Task Force Wolfpack noted insurgents had previously been able to move with little difficulty along cultivated farmland south of Highway 1, which permitted them to bury IEDs along main routes across the district.

In late 2010, 3-2 Stryker constructed an eight-kilometer wall of barriers through a dry riverbed from Highway 1 directly southward to the Arghandab River, approximately ten kilometers west of the Zhari border.<sup>8</sup> The “Wolfpack Wall,” named for 3-2 Stryker’s Task Force call sign, has two primary crossing points along east-west routes of travel into Zhari district. Task Force Wolfpack established watchtowers, set up traffic control, and conducted inspections to limit the amount of illicit material traveling along those routes. Channeling civilian traffic through the monitored access areas forced insurgents away from cultivated land and into open exposed lines of travel.<sup>9</sup> Although insurgents targeted the Wolfpack Wall with IEDs, 3-2 Stryker employed mine-clearing line charges in an effort to detonate the buried explosives and established over watch through the winter months.<sup>10</sup>

Task Force Dreadnaught (2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 34<sup>th</sup> Armor Regiment, or 2-34 AR), commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Christopher J. Kidd, arrived in Maiwand in April 2011 and took over responsibility from 3-2 Stryker the following month.<sup>11</sup> Although previous U.S. units had conducted a series of air assault

operations in western Maiwand, they lacked the combat force to establish a consistent presence. Kidd had little intelligence about the west, but he had concerns about the main population base of Huta in central Maiwand and the southeastern route leading to Zhari and Panjwai. While 3-2 Stryker had pushed insurgents off Highway I to the south, the larger force structure of Hamkari permitted Kidd to expand his unit's presence beyond Highway I and provide security in previously uncontrolled territory.<sup>12</sup>

The construction of the Wolfpack Wall had allowed 3-2 Stryker a chance to seize the initiative from insurgents by breaking the enemy's previously established methods of operation. The nearly constant traffic on Highway I made it difficult for insurgents to have time to bury IEDs powerful enough to affect ISAF vehicles. Instead, they preferred to use smaller explosives that were not expertly concealed in the ground and targeted vehicles belonging to 6<sup>th</sup> Kandak, 205<sup>th</sup> Corps of the Afghan National Army (6/205<sup>th</sup>, ANA). As 2-34 AR and 6/205<sup>th</sup> conducted route clearing missions and daily patrols to deter insurgent activity throughout the summer, the IED discovery rate climbed and the number of attacks plummeted. However, insurgent forces countered by shifting their pressure-plate IEDs to roads south of Highway I where U.S. surveillance was inconsistent.<sup>13</sup>

## WORKING TO IMPROVE GOVERNANCE

U.S. counterinsurgency strategy avers that good governance enables better security and encourages development. Prior to the increase of troops in Kandahar, Maiwand District Governor Obaidullah Bawari stayed in Kandahar City and had very little presence in his district. The Taliban also intimidated or assassinated local elders to keep them from attending community *shuras*, or gatherings. The dearth of leadership and lack of access to basic services empowered the Taliban to fill the void and provide more than the local government, leading locals to distrust their officials.<sup>14</sup>

Starting in mid-2010, U.S. personnel began mentoring Bawari, encouraging him to spend the majority of his time in his district and take an active role in mediating disputes and addressing local grievances. The U.S. district team for Maiwand was composed of governance, police, and development advisors from Task Force Spartan, the U.S. State Department, and the US Agency for International Development. Task Force Dreadnaught helped coordinate efforts and the improved security situation enabled U.S. personnel to guide Bawari to implement construction projects and work programs, as well as to organize *shuras* to enlist the assistance of local elders. The increased involvement in the planning and implementation of those projects empowered the elders and strengthened their direct connection to the local community and to Bawari.<sup>15</sup>

As of December 2011, Bawari has been running two weekly *shuras* on a variety of issues. On Monday mornings, he meets with local commanders from the Afghan National Army, Police, Civil Order Police, Special Forces and the Afghan Local Police. Although 2-34 AR leadership also participate, Afghans, not by ISAF personnel, organize and administer the meetings. On Wednesdays, Bawari runs a *shura* with local elders to address their grievances or discuss security and development issues. Although ISAF helped build a courtroom in Maiwand, the district still does not have a strong legal system or staff, so Barwari and his police officials also tackle legal disputes.<sup>16</sup>

The regular *shuras* have also offered an opportunity for the local government to try and persuade Taliban fighters to abandon the fighting and return to civil society. Afghan President Hamid Karzai has publicly backed the government's effort to reintegrate low- to mid-level insurgents in July 2010, but local implementation of the program has been fragmented, largely due to inconsistent funding. Even so, ISAF personnel in Kandahar have backed the reintegration program to permit former insurgents to serve in apprenticeship programs, receive salaries, and become certified in skilled labor.<sup>17</sup>

The local government has also offered alternative livelihoods to local farmers who harvest poppy throughout the district, as narcotics revenues previously financed the Taliban's efforts against ISAF and Afghan forces. Task Force Spartan has therefore integrated the counternarcotics effort into its comprehensive counterinsurgency strategy by introducing a "New Opportunities Program," a plan to transition locals to harvest wheat instead of poppy or marijuana. A designated amount of wheat seed and fertilizer (per *jerib*, or 1/3 acre of land) was distributed to farmers across Maiwand for the coming season, while Afghan National Security Forces identified and then eradicated drug fields.<sup>18</sup> Farmers in Maiwand also learn new farming techniques and receive farming assistance at a "model farm" in Huta.



PHOTO 1 | A DEMONSTRATION AT THE HUTAL DISTRICT MODEL FARM

## BUILDING FACILITIES & CREATING OPPORTUNITIES

The Maiwand district center, bazaar, and a school are all located within a few hundred meters of each other off Highway 1 in Hatal, a town of approximately 15,000 people. In previous years, local presence at the market had become almost nonexistent, as insurgent forces were able to conduct spectacular attacks around Hatal using IEDs and small arms. The numbers of troops from 2-34 AR provided an opportunity to strengthen and expand the security bubble around Hatal and to improve locals' access to basic services.

In response to local requests, 2-34 AR cleared out a de facto open truck stop next to the school and built a low, three-foot wall around the compound. They added a small soccer pitch and installed more than 30 pieces of playground equipment on the other. 2-34 AR reported a "dramatic" change as hundreds of children began to enjoy the playground daily.<sup>19</sup> Local women said that even though their boys attended school, a separate school for girls was needed. They also requested a center where they could socialize and receive vocational training. U.S. personnel planned to construct a six-foot wall to provide privacy for the women and girls and have created training programs on sewing, making rugs, and contract negotiating to enable women to sell their goods in local shops.<sup>20</sup>



PHOTO 2 | LOCAL SCHOOLCHILDREN OUTSIDE A SCHOOL IN HUTAL

The bazaar in Hatal, a gathering of nearly 500 shops less than 100 meters from the district center, is the key location for locals to market their goods and socialize. Although radios are distributed and used to varying degrees across the district, Task Force Dreadnaught noted verbal communication in the bazaar remains the primary method of exchanging news and information. An outdoor farmer's market is held in the large dry riverbed that passes through Hatal on Monday and Thursday of each week, and hundreds of men from the surrounding areas participate. Through 2-34 AR's deployment, there was only

one insurgent attack. Insurgents reportedly parked a motorcycle in a secluded section of the bazaar at night and detonated the explosive as an Afghan police truck passed by. The blast missed its target but killed a ten-year-old boy. Although insurgents failed to destroy the police truck, the attack demonstrated their ability to get into the Hatal bazaar and detonate an explosive. Task Force Dreadnaught's Afghan partners countered the next morning by discussing the incident with locals in the bazaar to reassure them and discuss the incident. They also increased their physical presence around the bazaar and increased patrolling.<sup>21</sup>

Although Maiwand's nascent district center faces staffing and funding shortages, the improved security situation offers an opportunity to address governance and development challenges and begin restoring the government's legitimacy. ISAF's partnership with Bawari and his staff have focused on standing up the district government's administration and on strengthening its ability to deliver basic services. However, building legitimacy and trust will take time, and Bawari's effectiveness remains tied to international funding and resources. It is therefore uncertain whether the district government in Maiwand will be able to operate independently of international security assistance and funding as U.S. troop numbers begin to decrease in 2012.

## LOOKING FORWARD

The counterinsurgency operations undertaken by coalition and Afghan troops in Maiwand illustrate the progression of security outward from Kandahar City to its surrounding areas. Operations in Maiwand and other, more remote districts are essential to push insurgents into areas sufficiently far from the city and its environs to make it more difficult to attack the city at the same frequency.

The density of coalition forces involved, however, remains less than what the more populated central districts required. Although ANSF units have taken on many responsibilities for bringing Maiwand under government control, they have required close partnering and support from coalition forces due to their remote location away from the city center and the degree of insurgent control they initially encountered.

If areas surrounding Kandahar City as well as outlying districts remain under the control of the ANSF, the insurgency will have a far smaller prospect of regenerating itself. However, it remains unclear whether coalition and ANSF forces can sustain the defense of the outer loop around Kandahar as troop levels fall over the course of 2012.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Forsberg, Carl, “Counterinsurgency in Kandahar,” Institute for the Study of War, December 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Naylor, Sean, “Soldiers Say Commanders Failed Them,” *Army Times*, January 2, 2010.

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<sup>3</sup> “The War in Afghanistan Notebook,” *The Houston Chronicle*, June 1, 2010.

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Khan, Mirwais, “Afghan President Visits Volatile Southern Province,” Associated Press, October 9, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> “10th Mountain Division takes command in Afghanistan,” *The Mountaineer*, November 4, 2010.

<sup>5</sup> “Regional Command South,” International Security Assistance Force – Afghanistan. Last accessed November 7, 2011.

<sup>6</sup> Robson, Seth, “‘Wolfpack Wall’ designed to push insurgents into open terrain,” *Stars and Stripes*, October 21, 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Forsberg, Carl, “Counterinsurgency in Kandahar,” Institute for the Study of War, December 2010.

<sup>8</sup> The Wolfpack Wall was made of HESCO barriers, which are large containers made of wire-mesh that are filled with dirt to provide protection against an explosive blast or small-arms fire.

<sup>9</sup> Robson, Seth, “‘Wolfpack Wall’ designed to push insurgents into open terrain,” *Stars and Stripes*, October 21, 2010.

<sup>10</sup> Robson, Seth, “‘Wolfpack Wall’ designed to push insurgents into open terrain,” *Stars and Stripes*, October 21, 2010.

<sup>11</sup> 2-34 AR is a combined arms battalion and consists of two tank companies and two infantry companies.

<sup>12</sup> Interviews with Task Force Dreadnaught, October-November 2011.

<sup>13</sup> Interviews with Task Force Dreadnaught, October-November 2011.

<sup>14</sup> Schiffrin, Nick, and Matt McGarry, “If Afghan Gov’t Doesn’t Improve, We’re Going to Lose,” ABC News, May 27, 2010.

<sup>15</sup> Interviews with Task Force Dreadnaught, October-November 2011.

<sup>16</sup> Interviews with Task Force Dreadnaught, October-November 2011.

<sup>17</sup> Rauch, Laura, “10<sup>th</sup> Mountain soldiers add job program to win over enemy fighters,” *Stars and Stripes*, July 1, 2011.

<sup>18</sup> Interviews with Task Force Spartan, October-November 2011.

<sup>19</sup> Interviews with Task Force Dreadnaught, October-November 2011.

<sup>20</sup> Regional Command South, “Maiwand Women’s Center Creates Learning, Business Opportunities,” International Security Assistance Force – Afghanistan, October 18, 2011.

<sup>21</sup> Interviews with Task Force Dreadnaught, October-November 2011.