HELMAND

Open for Business

هلمند

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Message from Helmand Government

As a result of International Security Assistance Force support in the last three years, the security conditions in Helmand Province have much improved. Out of 14 Districts in the Province, 12 Districts have functioning local governance with delivery of basic services to the residents of their districts. Cultivation of illicit crops has dramatically been reduced in the food zone areas which are considered the green zone of the province. As a result of improved security and basic services provided by the Afghan National Security Forces and local government, the number of students who attend dozens of schools has increased from 35,000 to 165,000.

A large number of girls have taken advantage of the educational opportunity by attending schools as well. Small businesses have expanded due to the hundreds of kilometers of improved highways, streets, and major routes throughout the province and in Lashkar Gah which have brought relief and peace of mind to the lives of ordinary Helmandis. Most Afghans use these routes for transportation on a provincial and national level. The improved security enabled the provincial capital to be included in Tranche 1 Transition of Authority with multiple districts scheduled for future Tranche Transition of Authority.

Gulab Mangal,
Provincial Governor, Helmand Province

د هلمند په ولایت کی د ایساف د قواو د مرستو په نتیجه کی نوي پرمختګونه

د تېرو دریو کلونو را په دېخوا د ایساف د خواکونو د مرستو او همکاری په نتیجه کی د هلمند ولایت په امنیتي وضع کی ډېر مثبت بدلون راغلی. د هلمند د ولایت د ۱۴ ولسوالیو څخه په ۱۲ ولسوالیو کی دولتي حاکمیت ټینګ دی او د خپلو ولسوالیو اوسیدونکو ته لومړني خدمات وړاندي کوي. د دي ولایت په حاصلخېزه سیمو کی د زراعتي مرستو په نتیجه کی د کوکنارو په کرنه او تولید کی د پام وړ کموالی رامنځته شوی. د هلمند د ولایت د والي ښاغلي محمد ګلاب منګل له قوله د افغانستان د ملي امنیت د خواکونو او د محلي حکومتداری له خوا د ښه امنیت او لومړنیو خدماتو د عرضه کولو په نتیجه کی په ښونځیو کی د زده کونکو شمېره د ۳۵ زره نه ۱۶۵ زره ته رسېدلی. یو زیات شمېر نجونی هم د دغو فرصتونو نه په ګټي اخستلو سره ښونځیو ته ځي. د لشکرګاه په ښار او د هلمند د ولایت په کچه د سلګونو کیلو متّرو کوڅو، سړکونو او لویو لارو جوړولو او پخولو د خلکو په کاروبار کی پراخوالی راوستی، د هلمندیانو په ژوند کي یي ډېري اسانتیاوی رامنځته کړي او نه یواځي د هلمند د ولایت په کچه، بلکه د مملکت په کچه د دغو سړکونو او لویو لارو نه د ترانسپورټي خدماتو په اړوند ګټه اخستل کېږي . د ښه امنیت په نتیجه کی د هلمند د ولایت مرکز لشکرګاه د امنیتي قدرت د انتقال د پروسی په لومړی مرحله کی شامل او څو ولسوالی یي د دی پروسی په دوهمه مرحله کی په نظر کی نیول شوي.

A LOOK AT HELMAND

History

Since Alexander the Great arrived in 329BC, the history of the region has been marked by the passage of conquering armies. Located at the confluence of ancient silk trade routes, Afghanistan was strategically important and flourished as a progressive, multi-ethnic and multi-religious centre with strong Buddhist and Christian influences.

One of Afghanistan's largest provinces, Helmand lies in the southwest of the country. Helmand borders Nimroz and Farah Provinces to the west and north west, Ghor Province to the north, Day Kundi and Uruzgan provinces to the northeast, and Kandahar Province to the east. To the south of Helmand, and sharing 160 km-long border is Pakistan's Baluchistan Province.

Helmand, which means 'many dams' takes its name after the Hazar Shakha River (Thousand Branch River) that flows through it. Lashkar Gah, the Provincial capital, emerged as a riverside barracks town for soldiers accompanying the Ghaznawi nobility to the city of Bost a thousand years ago. Castles, temples and orchards built during the Ghaznawi period were destroyed by King Alauddin Ghori in 1150 and later by Changez Khan. Qala-e-Bost, the great fortress of Bost, is an impressive ruin at the junction of the Helmand and Arghandab rivers, south of the capital.

In recent times, Helmand Province became known as 'Little America' when it became the centre of a US development programme in the 1950's. As part of the programme, a network of irrigation canals was built and a large hydroelectric dam was constructed at Kajaki. The modern city of Lashkar Gah was built as a headquarters for the American

The Pashtunwali, or "Pashtun way" regulates social and political relations between groups and defines relations amongst kin.

It underpins social behaviour and consists of the principles of honour, hospitality and revenge.

engineers working on the Helmand valley irrigation project. As a result, the capital was built in American style, with broad tree-lined streets and brick houses. However the programme was abandoned in the wake of the Soviet invasion in 1979. Since then, the landscape of Helmand has changed considerably along with the population; it was estimated that by 1985 nearly half the Afghan population had fled across the borders as a result of political turbulance.

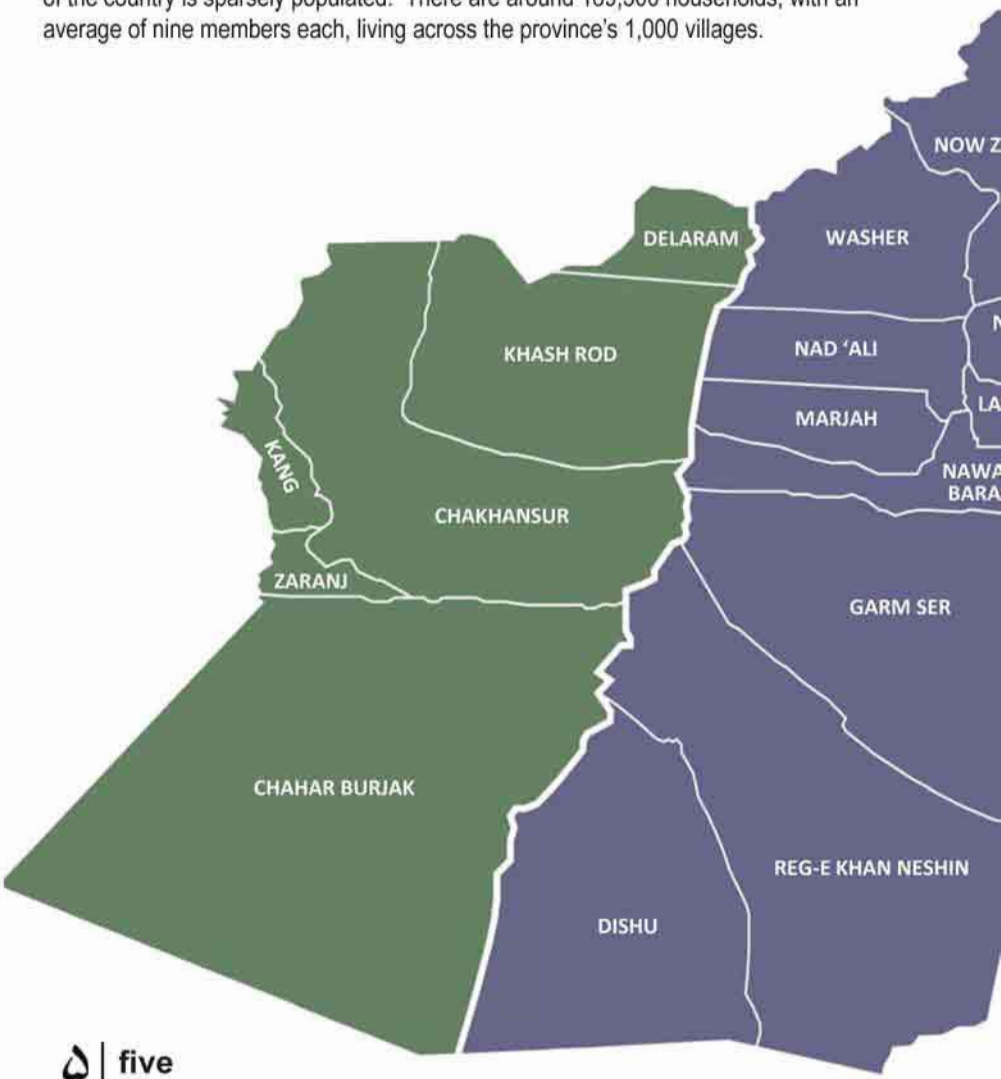
Topography

Helmand has a flat, arid landscape, punctuated with looming rocky outcroppings that can rise to 1,000 meters. Helmand's elevation rises from south to north, and the northern quarter of the province, mainly in Baghran, Musa Qala, and Naw Zad Districts, is dominated by rough, mountainous terrain. Further south, the terrain tapers off significantly, and becomes a flat, desert plain. The dominant physical features in Helmand are the Helmand and Arghandab Rivers. The Helmand river, the longest in Afghanistan, from which the Province takes its name, runs almost across the entirety of the province and provides critical water resources for crop irrigation. The river flows southwest from the southern border with Uruzgan Province, through Kajaki, Sangin District, Sangin and Nahr-e Saraj Districts, while the Arghandab flows west from Kandahar Province, where it meets the Helmand in Lashkar Gah. The Helmand then flows south, through Nawah-ye Barakzai and Garmser Districts before flowing west through Reg-e Khan Neshin and Dishu, into Nimroz Province. The Helmand River is unpredictable and is susceptible to both severe flooding and periods of drought.

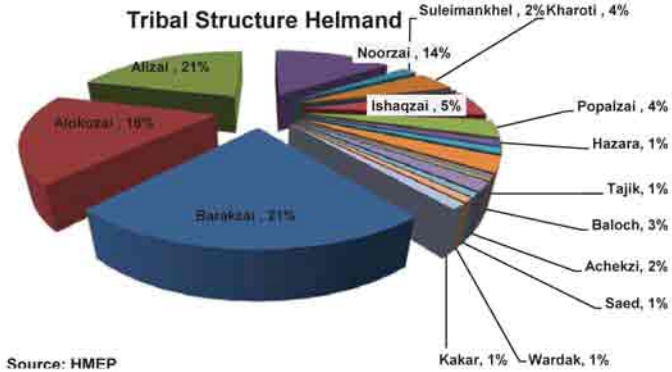
Helmand Today

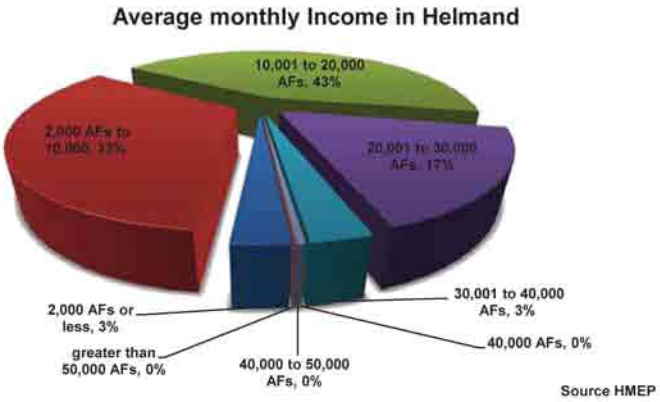
Today Helmand's population is overwhelmingly rural: approximately 94% of the province's 1 million population lives in rural districts. Lashkar Gah district, which includes the province's capital and main urban center, has a population of around 202,000. Pashtuns are the majority in Helmand, and Pashto is spoken by 92% of the population. Tajiks and Hazaras reside in smaller numbers in the province, mainly in some areas in the north and in urban centers.

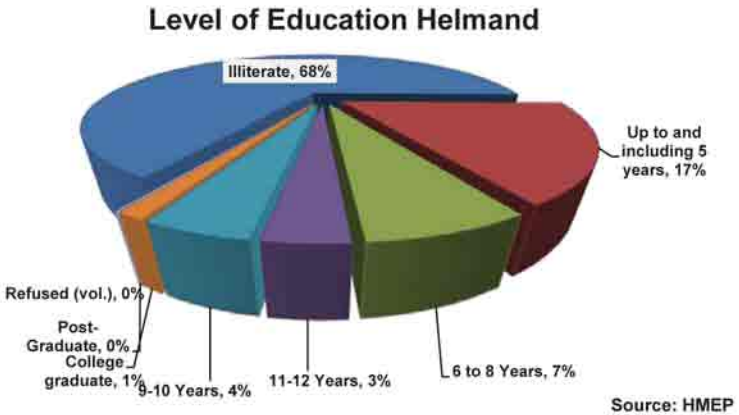
The population is concentrated largely in the center and north of the Province along the Helmand River. The most populous districts (over 100,000 people) after Lashkar Gah, are Baghran, Musa Qala, Kajaki, Naw Zad, Nad Ali, and Nahr-e Saraj. The arid south of the country is sparsely populated. There are around 189,500 households, with an average of nine members each, living across the province's 1,000 villages.



There are a number of prominent Pashtun tribes that live across the province: The Alizai reside in the northern districts, the Barakzai are clustered in the center of the province, around Lashkar Gah, the Ishaqzai are prominent in Sangin District and in the southwest, and the Noorzai reside in the Washer and Gamser districts.





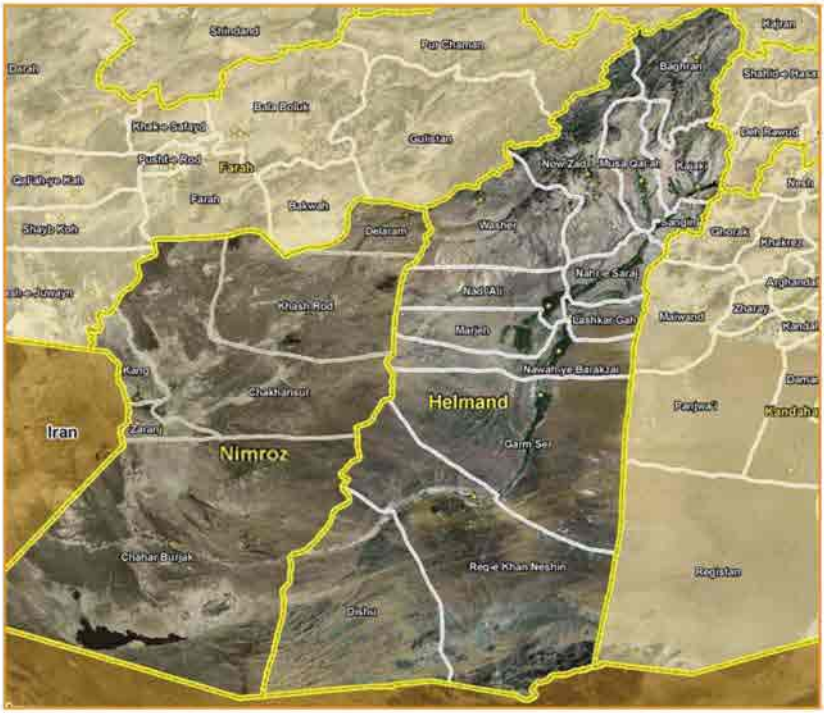


Regional Command (Southwest)

Regional Command (Southwest) was established in June 2010 to command International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in 2 provinces, Helmand and Nimroz, covering over 40,000 square miles. The Command comprises around 30,000 troops from 8 contributing nations together with our Afghan partners. This represents 22% of the international forces in the country total, but together we routinely face 40% of the nationwide significant events in a large, diverse and demanding area of operations across 16% of the country.

A strategically important area, 11 of the 14 Helmand Districts have been defined by the Ministry of Interior (MOI), Ministry of Defence (MOD), National Directorate of Security (NDS), and the International Security Assistance Force as key terrain. The purpose of these areas is to: focus resources for maximum effect for the Afghan government in support of the Afghan people; maximize effect on population centers, commerce routes, and production centers; and, provide security to enable governance and development. It is consequently in these areas that our effort is focused.

Water is the most important natural resource in Regional Command (Southwest), and waters control and continued provision cuts across all lines of operations. The Helmand River is both vital ground and a critical resource because it is needed for human consumption, crop irrigation, electricity generation, and ecosystem support. Fed by snow melt from the mountains of central Afghanistan, the river is the primary source of surface water in Helmand Province. Its use, management, and availability also affects downstream Nimroz Province. Its waters are extracted, captured, and diverted to support agriculture and development projects. Management of the river watershed (surface and groundwater) is necessary to sustain and to grow development and governance.



Counter-insurgency Operations (COIN)

Defeating The Insurgent

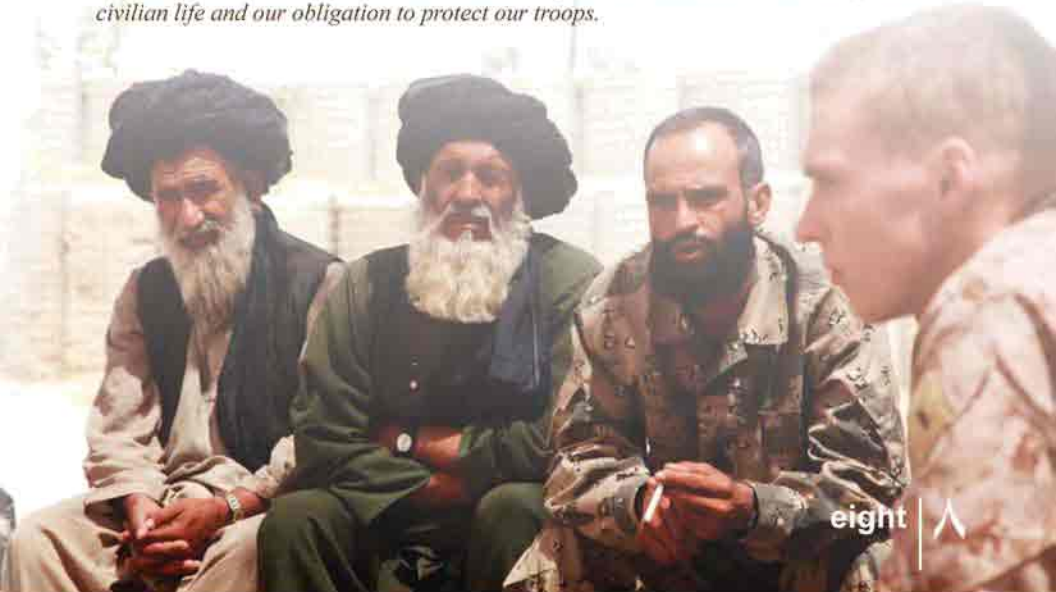
As a counter-insurgency operation, this conflict is all about gaining and maintaining the support of the Afghan people; it is they who will ultimately determine the future of Afghanistan. Consequently, the protection of the population from physical security to the protection of their futures and livelihoods, is a key tenet of the operation. Only by securing and serving the population can we earn their trust, and only with their trust and confidence can the Afghan Government, supported by the International Security Assistance Force, prevail.

This is a complex process that has to be relevant to, and owned by, the Afghan people. To achieve success we need to be amongst the people. This directly impacts the way in which we approach our operations.

Central Helmand will remain our main effort until an appropriate level of security and governance is irrefutably established. Operations in Northern Helmand, in particular in Sangin, Musa Qal'ah and Kajaki, will continue to support both the effort in Central Helmand and Regional Command (South) operations in Kandahar. This area is important because it is the gateway to Central Helmand, the cross-roads to Kandahar, at the heart of the narcotics industry, and a population centre in its own right.

The insurgent can offer the Afghan people nothing but brutality, fear, and uncertainty. Instead, an honest, active and credible Government offers the Afghan people more than the insurgents can ever hope to. In partnership with the Government of Afghanistan and the Afghan security forces, our aim is to help the Afghan people make their country stable and secure by choosing to reject the insurgency in favour of the legitimate Government.

Coalition forces fight with great discipline and tactical patience. We relentlessly pursue the enemy, but balance this with the absolute requirement to minimize the loss of innocent civilian life and our obligation to protect our troops.



Partnering with Afghan security forces and the Government

We stand together at every level with our international and Afghan partners, civilian as well as military. This includes the Government, Afghan National Army, National Police, Regional Platform and the Provincial Reconstruction Team. We work, plan and operate together as one team and rely on each other to complete our mission. Through collaborative working, this enables us to build relationships and improve situational awareness, whilst staying true to our values. Together, we are helping to address the culture of impunity by countering inadequate governance, corruption and abuse of power; and relentlessly pursuing the insurgent. Our approach is 3-fold:

Governance – Enabling enduring stability

Historically, the institutions of state have had little presence in rural areas of Afghanistan and central government has been largely irrelevant to many Helmandis. Instead, traditional jirgas (usually, all-male gatherings of tribal representatives) have been the main decision-making and dispute-resolution institutions in Pashtun life. However, since 2008, under Provincial Governor Gulab Mangal, improved security is facilitating the spread of government control services and influence from the District Centres to more rural areas, which is reducing the malign influence of the Taliban. Governor-led agricultural and judicial programs are reducing the insurgents' hold on the people, while the Afghan authorities, supported by international forces and the Provincial Reconstruction Team, are building their capacity to provide basic services that people need: power and water, roads, a judicial system, and security. The objective is to provide a capability that the people believe in, so that the Afghan government's authority will not be questioned.

The road connecting the Nad 'Ali district centre with Lashkar Gah opened mid August. It has been hugely popular with locals who can now more easily reach the Provincial capital, increasing economic opportunities and commerce. These economic opportunities have been supported by refurbishment of Nad 'Ali's bazaars; since June 2010 almost 400 shops have opened.

Development – Improving Afghan confidence

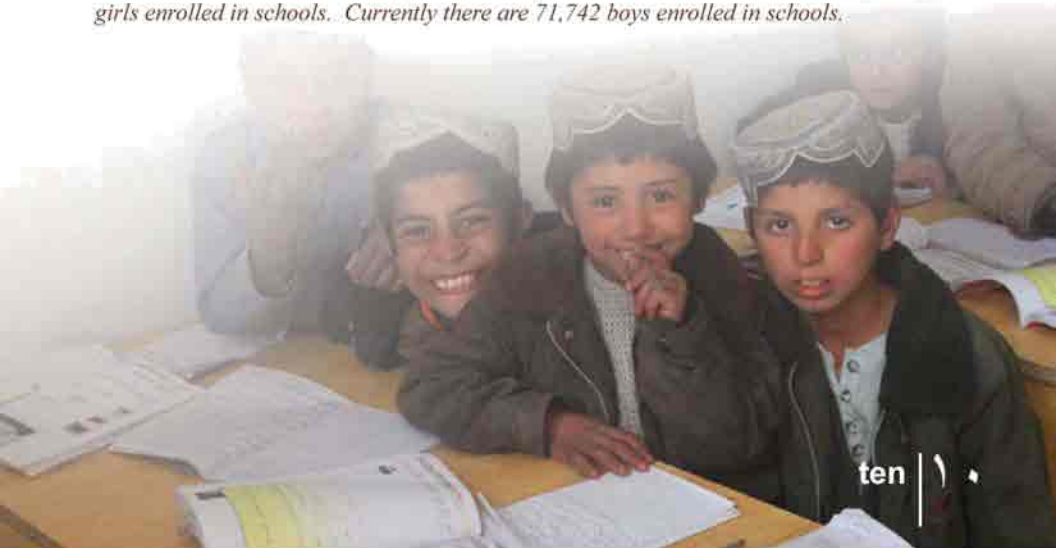
Across large areas of both Helmand and Nimroz provinces development projects, that the people have asked for and that are important to them, are generating benefits for the people. New and newly cleared roads are beginning to increase freedom of movement between principal population centres, which helps to improve trade, keep prices low and spread the benefits of legitimate economic activity across the region. Meanwhile, expanding medical facilities, including the Khan Neshin Comprehensive Health Clinic, are improving the well-being of the population, but there is still much to be done.

Regional Command (Southwest) is supporting reconstruction and development across the Province. Small projects, owned by District Development Councils, are used to create short-term employment in local communities, providing a much-needed infusion of cash, whilst building trust with the local people. Larger projects range from simple infrastructure repairs, to building roads, schools and irrigation systems through to governance capacity building programs.

Over the summer of 2011, new and refurbished schools were prepared for the beginning of the new term and the opportunity for education is ever-increasing. Ensuring good quality education and equitable access to education and skills are some of the important ways to raise human capital, reduce poverty and facilitate economic growth. Nationally, 43% of males are literate, but in Helmand only 8% of men and 1% of women are thought to be able to read and write. There is limited TV and little commercial radio in outlying areas, so word of mouth is the primary way in which news travels. This makes Helmand a particularly fertile ground for rumour, exaggeration and disinformation. To address this, the Afghan Government and Provincial Reconstruction Team programs are supporting not only the construction and refurbishment of schools, but are also encouraging attendance from both boys and girls. Additionally, an ongoing infrastructure project will see an extension of state television and radio coverage to 75% of the province.

74 schools have re-opened across Helmand since December 2008. There are now 133 schools open in the Province, up from a low point of 47 in December 2007.

Pupil enrolment is steadily rising in Helmand. The latest, April 2011, figures, show 93,173 students enrolled in schools. An increase of 76% since 2007. 21,431 females students are enrolled in schools, an increase of 50% since 2007. In 2001 there were no girls enrolled in schools. Currently there are 71,742 boys enrolled in schools.



Security – Protecting the Afghan people

The security situation across this region remains challenging but this has not prevented progress in many areas. Our security approach is based on two principles: protecting the Afghan people and partnering at all levels, together we take the fight to the insurgent.

Alongside our Afghan partners, we provide security to afford local people self- determination and freedom of movement. This means that people can go about their lives; they can go to school, go to the bazaar, conduct business, and decide what they want for their future. Free from the threat of Taliban influence, economic development, effective governance and improving living standards will create opportunities for the people to prosper and render the insurgency irrelevant.

The Provincial Reconstruction Team has worked with the Chief Provincial Prosecutor on a programme to increase the presence of prosecutors in districts. Prosecutors are now allocated and operating in Gereshk, Nad 'Ali, Nawa, Garmsir, Marjeh and Musa Qala. A surge prosecutor travels to Khaneshin as required. Helmand's run down prison has benefited from a rolling programme of refurbishment, that in September 2011 saw the opening of an additional wing, extending detention facilities for over 1,000 prisoners.

Developing Afghan security capabilities

Partnering, coupled with joint Army and Police combined training, enables us to work together to build an integrated, capable and credible force to defeat the insurgency and keep the Afghan people safe. For the first time 2011 has seen Joint Army and Police recruit and Non-Commissioned Officer training, which will increase their effectiveness throughout the rank range. The two forces are now working and training together and showing real signs of progress; they understand their complementary capabilities and are operating together, leveraging each other's strengths. Success in this will be measured by the ability of the Afghan security forces gradually to assume responsibility for security from international forces, and there are signs of real progress: the establishment or a four-tier command structure from National through to District Coordination Centers, is a perfect example of such progress.

There is now one provincial hospital, two district hospitals and fifty three health clinics covering the main areas of population. A further 410 health posts are providing basic health care at local level. This is a real step forward in the provision of healthcare for Helmandis. (NB in 2006, there was one hospital and 29 health clinics.)

The efforts of the Government of Afghanistan, and Coalition forces, to protect the Afghan people stand in stark contrast to the indiscriminate conduct of the insurgents. In areas where we have increased security and have reduced the number of accidental civilian casualties caused by coalition forces we have seen the Afghan population become increasingly supportive of our efforts. We are committed to continually reducing civilian casualties; we investigate every incident and claim. We are open and honest about our findings and seek to learn lessons when we are at fault.

Conversely, we have seen the support for the insurgency fall in many areas as the number of deliberate insurgent-caused civilian casualties has risen dramatically.

Forced onto the back foot, the insurgents extort money from the population and intimidate and murder innocent men, women, and children. The insurgents hide in civilian homes and attack Afghan National Security Forces and International Security Assistance Forces from homes and mosques and use children as human shields. They try to lure coalition forces into fighting back in these situations, but we are aware that any supposed tactical victory would be revealed as a chimera; in reality the safety of the Afghan people is the prize, and remains foremost in our minds.

"Now is the time for us to be 'all in' as we support the prosecution of the campaign, the development and fielding of the Afghan National Security Forces and the process of transition."

John R. Allen
Commander, NATO International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)
and U.S. Forces Afghanistan (USFOR-A)

Governor Mangal developed and launched his Counter Narcotics Strategy/Food Zone Programme in 2008, the first such comprehensive Provincial CN Strategy in Afghanistan. It is a holistic approach to the drug problem in Helmand and involves public information, alternative livelihoods, eradication and drug demand reduction. The strategy contributed to a 40% reduction in poppy cultivation in Helmand since 2008 from 103,000ha to approx 63,000ha.

This year US Government sources announced a further 19%. reduction in poppy cultivation in Helmand, against a background of increased cultivation in Afghanistan.

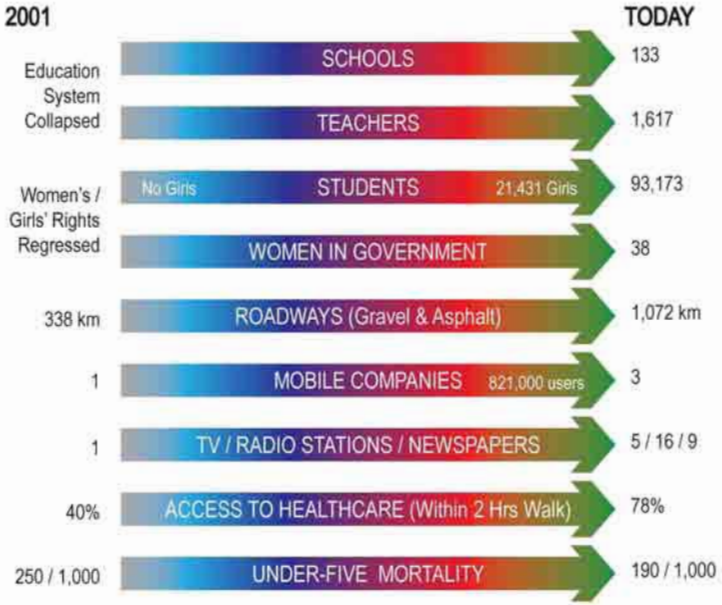
THE HELMAND PLAN

The Helmand Plan has been developed by the international partners in Helmand, and guides our partnership with GIRoA. The plan brings together previous provincial schemes and is the single document against which progress is measured. It is aligned with the policies of and guidance from the Afghan and individual NATO governments, and converts that guidance into objectives at provincial and district level. The plan enables all partners in Helmand to prioritise and coordinate our activities and resources to support the delivery of common goals. The Helmand Plan is a living document and is subject to regular review.

The overarching objective of the Helmand Plan is that Helmand's population increasingly rejects the insurgency and supports the Afghan Government. The end state of the current plan is that:

- The central districts in Helmand of Lashkar Gah, Nahr-e Saraj, Marjeh, Garmsir, Nawa and Nad 'Ali are secure and increasingly under full Afghan Government control.
- There is freedom of movement in, around and through these districts to outside centres of economic opportunity and to regional centres.
- Outlying districts do not serve as staging areas for insurgent activity across the region and deliver an acceptable level of security.
- Conditions are being set for the future emergence of the Helmand Economic Corridor a a driver of overall development.

Against these milestones, different districts are progressing at varying speeds, but overall good progress is being made, and, in some areas the potential to transfer lead security responsibilities to the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police is gradually beginning to emerge.



Transfer of lead security responsibility

The Helmand Plan is not itself the blueprint for transition to Afghan lead security responsibility, but the results it sets out to deliver will help set the conditions for transition on a district by district basis. As such, it will help prepare effectively for a transition process, which will need to be irreversible and continue to strengthen the Province against anti-government forces.

The capabilities of the Afghan National Army and Police are growing and, concurrently, the threat from the insurgent is being reduced. Every day there are encouraging signs of visible progress, particularly in districts where there has been a substantial presence for some time: places like Garm Ser, Nad 'Ali and Nawa. The Afghan National Army is fully manned to the manning requirement, known as the tashkiel, and both Afghan National Army and Police forces have planned, executed and led successful independent operations.

Summary

In the population centres of the Central Helmand River Valley, Afghans can see the benefits of legitimate governance. As they see these benefits spread across the province they are gaining confidence in the ability of their Government to act in their best interests and we are seeing evidence of Afghans having the confidence to stand up for themselves against the insurgency.

But the war is not won, yet. Regional Command (Southwest) continues to have a critical enabling role to play, the success of which will depend on collaborative planning with the Government of Afghanistan, Afghan security forces, the Regional Platform and the Provincial Reconstruction Team. We will continue to act with the goal of delivering the necessary security to enable tangiable, relevant, and effective progress in the establishment of legitimate governance and economic and social development within Helmand Province.

As we support the Afghan people, we will continue to demonstrate our resolve. We will do so through our relentless pursuit of the insurgents, through the example we provide to our Afghan partners, and through our compassion for the Afghan people.

In Nawa District, improved security is allowing Nawa to benefit from an Afghan government presence that is increasingly delivering public services that the local community need. The District Community Council (DCC) is now managing Afghan government funding that is delivering public services to meet population needs.

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Produced by
RC(SW) STRATCOM
DEC 2011