

Province: Helmand
Governor: Mohammad Gulab Mangal
Provincial Police Chief: Brigadier General Abdul Hakim Angar

Updated: May 1, 2010

Population Estimate: 1,441,769	Urban: 86,506 (6%)	Rural: 1,355,263 (94%) ¹
Population Estimate by Gender:	Male: 51%	Female: 49%
Area in Square Kilometers: 58,584	Capital: Lashkar Gah	
Major Languages:	Pashtu: 94%	Dari/Balochi- 6%
Names of Districts: Dishu, Garmser, Reg, Nad Ali, Nawai Barakzai, Lashkar Gah, Nahrissarraj (Gereshk), Sangin, Washer, Naw Zad, Musa Qala, Kajaki, and Baghran.		
Ethnic Groups: Pashtun majority, Baluch minority in South, <i>Naqalin</i> ("migrant;" usually eastern Pashtun tribes).	Religious Groups: Sunni Muslim, minority Shi'a, Hindu and Sikh population	Tribal Groups: Barakzai (32%), Noorzai (16%), Alokzai (9%), Eshaqzai (5.2%)
Occupation of Population	Major: Farming. ²	Minor: agriculture, animal husbandry, potential for fishery
Crops/Farming/Livestock:	Opium, tobacco, sugar beets, cotton, sesame, wheat, mung beans, maize, onions, nuts, sub flowers, onions, potato, tomato, cauliflower, peanut, apricot, grape, and melon. Animals include donkey, sheep, goats, chickens, cows, and camels.	
Irrigation trends:	Access to irrigated land: 97%	Access to rain-fed land- 5% ³
Literacy Rate Total: 4% ⁴		
Poppy (Opium) Cultivation: *UNODC statistics	<u>2006:</u> 69,500 ha	<u>2007:</u> 102,770 ha
	<u>2008:</u> 103,590 ha	<u>2009:</u> 69,833 ha
		<u>2010:</u> Forth-coming
Transportation:	Primary Roads: The ring road passes through Helmand from Kandahar to Delaram. There is a major north-south route (Highway 611) that goes from Lashkar Gah to Sangin. 33% of Helmand's roads are not passable during certain seasons and in some areas there are no roads at all. ⁵	
Electricity: Could be quite extensive should the Kajaki dam become fully operational. In the Sangin district, electricity is available to 90% of the population. Musa Qala residents also enjoy adequate access to electricity.		

¹ Ministry of Reconstruction and Rural Development, *Provincial Development Report, Helmand*, 2007, available from <http://www.mrrd.gov.af/nabdp/Provincial%20Profiles/Helmand%20PDP%20Provincial%20profile.pdf>.

² Helmand is among the few provinces where 90% of farming is done via mechanical means. National Risk And Vulnerability Assessment 2007/8 A profile of Afghanistan, Page 50. <http://nrva.cso.gov.af/NRVA%202007-08%20Report.pdf>

³ Ministry of Reconstruction and Rural Development, *Provincial Development Report, Helmand*, 2007, available from <http://www.mrrd.gov.af/nabdp/Provincial%20Profiles/Helmand%20PDP%20Provincial%20profile.pdf>.

⁴ *Afghanistan Human Development Report 2007*, United Nations Development Program, 2007, 164.

⁵ Provincial Development Plan, Helmand: *Provincial Profile*, <http://www.mrrd.gov.af/nabdp/Provincial%20Profiles/Helmand%20PDP%20Provincial%20profile.pdf>

<u>Communications:</u>	<u>Cellular Coverage</u> ⁶ : ❖ Afghan Wireless Communication Company (AWCC) (GSM 900/1800) ❖ Etisalat Afghanistan (GSM 900/1800) ❖ MTN Afghanistan (GSM 900/1800) ❖ Telecom Development Company Afghanistan Ltd. (ROSHAN) (GSM 900)		
<u>Media:</u>	<u>Television:</u> Lashkar Gah TV station	<u>Radio:</u> Helmand Radio, <i>Saboon</i> Radio, <i>Samoan</i> Radio	<u>Newspapers:</u> Helmand Journal, <i>Bost</i> , <i>Sehat Palwashy</i> , and <i>Bagree</i>
<u>Education</u> ⁷ :	<u>Schools:</u> 81	<u>Boys:</u> 45,037	<u>Girls:</u> 14,214
<u>Rivers:</u> Helmand, Musa Qala,	<u>Irrigation canals:</u> Boghra Irrigation Canal, Nahr e Saraj Boghra, Grishk Boghra, Nawa Main canal, Nawa drainage canal, Shamalan Canal, Darwishan Canal, and Bolan, Ainak, Bashran, Sarkar and Qala are in Lashkar Gah.		<u>Karez:</u> Barakzai Karez (Lashkar Gah), Karez Koka, Land Karez, Haji Abdur Rashid Khan Karez and Karyza.
<u>Wells:</u>	<u>Garmsir:</u> 100 wells, no <i>karez</i>	<u>Gereshk:</u> 1,000 shallow wells (15-30 meters deep), but only 850 were functioning in 2007. 60 new “tube wells.”	<u>Sangin:</u> Over 6,000 shallow wells according to UNHCR.
Significant Topographic Features	Desert in the South, rising to hills in the north. Fertile Helmand River Valley runs the length of the province. ⁸		

Political Landscape:

Political Leaders:

Governor Mohammad Gulab Mangal (aka Golub Mongul, Gulabuddin Mongal):



Pashtun Mangal, born in Gardez, Paktia. Approximately 52 years old. Received B.S. degree in Literature from Kabul University. Worked in Interior Ministry under the Communist government during the 1970s. Participant in anti-Soviet jihad. Served as Head of Constitution Commission in the United Nations and as governor of Paktika from March 2004 to March 2006.

Previously governor of Paktika and Laghman, he was re-appointed as governor of Helmand on March 22, 2008 replacing Assadullah Wafa. His leadership as governor is considered to be among the best in Afghanistan since 2001, bringing experience and credibility on security and development issues to the job.⁹ He has

⁶ GSM Association, GSMWorld, http://www.gsmworld.com/Roaming/Gsminfo/cou_af.shtml

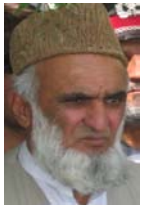
⁷ Reconstructing Lashkar Gah, UK Ministry of Defense: Defense Policy and Business News, June 25, 2009. <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/tna/+http://www.mod.uk:80/DefenceInternet/DefenceNews/DefencePolicyAndBusiness/ReconstructingLashkarGah.htm>

⁸ *Afghanistan Human Development Report 2007*, United Nations Development Program, 2007, 166.

⁹ Alastair Leithead, “New Hope for Helmand province,” *BBC News, Kabul*. March 23, 2008 http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7310472.stm (March 25, 2008).

proven to bridge the divide between the government and the people and his appointment to Helmand is anticipated to do just that with the Taliban. “Anyone who wants to lay down their guns and accept the Afghan constitution, values and current version of the administration can enjoy all the privileges of any Afghan. It’s always been the policy.”¹⁰ Mangal has discussed plans to open a dialogue with top-tier Taliban, whom he described as “foreign-affiliated” and Al-Qaeda militants.¹¹ His relationship with British in Helmand are very good and he comes well recommended by members of the international community.¹²

Former Governor Assadullah Wafa



As of February 29, 2008, Assadullah Wafa has been reassigned to the national government in Kabul as , perhaps due to perceived deficiencies in leadership. A replacement has not yet been selected.¹³ Becoming governor in 2006, Wafa was previously governor of Kunar, and before that, Paktia. He is widely viewed as conciliatory, negotiating both Taliban and Hezb-e Islami members into surrendering. He is from Spin Boldak along the border with Pakistan in Kandahar province, where his native Achekzai have been in competition with the Noorzai for supremacy. He has sons abroad in Dubai and elsewhere, and is evidently independently wealthy. He is in his 60’s, and educated, although he speaks no English and speaks Dari rather haltingly. During recent operations in Musa Qala he demonstrated an extensive ability to multitask.

Deputy Governor Haji Abdul Satar Mirzakawal



Haji Abudl Satar replaced deputy governor Mullah Amir Mohammed in 2008. Satar has participated in agriculture reform projects in Garmser and police training programs since becoming Helmand’s new deputy governor.

(Former) Deputy Governor Mullah Amir Mohammed - Deceased



Also known as Hajji Pir Mohammad and the brother of former Governor Sher Muhammad Ahkundzada. Originally from the Musa Qala area, his other brother, a shura member, was still residing their during the recent episode of Taliban control in the district. He was killed January 21, 2008 by a suicide bombing at a mosque in Lashkar Gah.¹⁴

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ “Afghanistan: New Helmand Governor Confirms Desire for Talks with Taliban,” *RadioFreeEurope*, March 21, 2008, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2008/3/6577FDE7-395C-47F4-987F-925A4861DFC1.html> (March 25, 2008).

¹² Alastair Leithead, “New Hope for Helmand province,” *BBC News, Kabul*. March 23, 2008 http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7310472.stm (March 25, 2008).

¹³ “Helmand governor moved from job,” *BBC News*, February 29, 2008, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7271407.stm (accessed February 29, 2008).

¹⁴ “Blast kills top Afghan official,” *BBC News*, 31 January 2008 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7219312.stm> (31 January 2008).

Police Chief Brigadier General Abdul Hakim Angar



General Abdul Hakim Angar replaced Col. Sherzad as Helmand’s new police chief in late April 2010. On April 30, the General promised to do his best to bring improvement to the security situation in the volatile region. He previously served as an area police commander in Kabul and deputy security chief in Kandahar.

(Former) Chief of Police Colonel Asadullah Sherzad



Asadullah Sherzad replaced Mohammed Hussein Andiwal as the Helmand police chief sometime in 2009 or early 2010. Some reports indicate that Sherzad was removed from Helmand and is the new police chief for Zabul Province as of April 20, 2010. Some reporting suggest Sherzad underperformed as the security chief of Helmand and is accused of graft and corruption.

(Former) Chief of Police Mohammed Hussein Andiwal (Barakzai)



He is a Barakzai and native of Lashkar Gah hailing from the village of Bashran. He previously served as the Chief of Police of Helmand during the PDPA regime and also worked in the political section of the PDPA intelligence in Helmand. He was targeted for assassination in Gereshk District on August 23, 2007 by anti-government forces, but escaped unharmed. Three civilians were killed, however, and 14 wounded. There have been a staggering number of assassinations of district police chiefs in Helmand. The previous police chief was Abdul Rehman Jan.

(Former) Chief of Police Abdul Rehman Jan (Noorzai)- At around 57-years old, Abdul Rehman Jan is the former Chief of Police for Helmand. The man whose return to power they might fear most is 57-year-old former Helmand police chief Abdul Rahman, He rose to prominence during the anti-Soviet jihad and fought along the western outskirts of Lashkar Gah near his native district of Nad Ali (Marjah). Jan was removed from his post by 2006 amid allegations his militia pillaged, raped and engaged in the drug trade, according to locals.¹⁵ Locals typically refer to him as Abdul “robber” Jan and blame his Noorzai militia for specifically targeting Ishaqzai rivals. He recently created the Marjah-shura in anticipation of returning to power following the outcome of Operation *Moshtarak* (Together); the joint Coalition-Afghan offensive to regain control of Marjah from the Taliban (Jan-Feb. 2010).











National Directorate of Security Chief




Previously occupied by the late MP Amir Dad Muhammad Khan. Major General Muhammad Naem is currently the new head of Helmand’s NDS.

¹⁵ Mohammad Elyas Dae and Abubakar Siddique, “Marjah fears return of warlords,” *Asia Times Online*, May 11, 2010.

Wolesi Jirga Members (2005):¹⁶



	Haji Wali Jan Sabri	Male Noorzai Pashtun	Member of Rules Committee. Primary education. Former Gereshk police chief. Father was provincial police chief.
	Dad Mohammad Khan (Amir Dado) *Killed in an IED attack, March 19, 2009	Male Alokzai	Allied with Qanooni's Jamiat. Member of Counternarcotics Committee. Former Helmand NDS chief. Powerful in Sangin area. His brother was the former district governor of Sangin (deceased).
	Shaikh Nimatullah Ghafari	Male Shi'a Hazara	Allied with Wahdat. Member of Education Committee. High school grad with fluent English. Brother is provincial director of public health.
	Haji Mir Wali Khan	Male Barakzai	Allied with Hezb-e Islami. Member of Internal Security Committee. High school grad, powerful in Gereshk District.
	Engineer Abdul Matin	Male Barakzai	National economy deputy. University educated, wealthy.
	Haji Mohammad Anwar Khan	Male Ishaqzai Pashtun	Member of Rules Committee. Very respected tribal elder, formerly allied with HiG.
	Nasima Niazi	Female Naizi Pashtun	Member of Communications Committee. Girls' high school principal.
	Naz Parwar Hadi	Female Laghmani Pashtun	Member of Rules Committee. Former girls' high school principal.

Meshrano Jirga Members:¹⁷

	Mullah Sher Mohammad Akhundzadah	Male Alizai (Jalozai sub-tribe)	Former Helmand governor. Member of Internal Security Committee. Has bachelors' degree.
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¹⁶ US Embassy Kabul Afghanistan Election Observation Team and Joint Election Management Board, 2005.

¹⁷ US Embassy Kabul Afghanistan Election Observation Team and Joint Election Management Board, 2005.

	Haji Maboob Khan	Male Alokzai	Secretary of Armed Services Committee. Has bachelors' degree. Large landholder from Garmseer.
	Haji Abdul Wahid	Male Barakzai	Has 9 th grade education. From Lashkar Gah, where he owns a string of pharmacies.

Provincial Council Members 2009:

	Al Haj Abdul Bari Barakzai (Independent) (14,297 votes, 11.5%)		Saiful Muluk Nuri (Independent) (9,912 votes/8%)
	Ali Ahmad (Independent) (9,590 votes/7.7%)		Attaullah (Independent) (7,623 votes/6.2%)
	Haji Mir Ahmad (aka Haji Mullah) (Independent) (5,476 votes/4.4%)		Haji Fazel Bari Fayaz (Independent) (4,921 votes/4.0%)
	Haji Naematullah (Independent) (4,346 votes/3.5%)		Haji Abdul Ahad (Independent) (4,341 votes/3.5%)
	Haji Mohawmad Anwur Khan (Independent) (3,661 votes/3%)		Haji Mohawmad Naem Khan (Independent) (3,427 votes/2.8%)
	Haji Abdullah Jan (Afghan Mellat Party) (3,219 votes /2.6%)		Raazia Baluch (Afghanistan Peace Movement Party) (1,680 votes/1.4%)
	Malikia Helmandi (Independent) (1,361 votes/1.1%)		Karima (Independent) (1,139 votes/.09%)
	Bibi Laiqa (Republican Party of Afghanistan) (1,014 votes/.08%)		

Provincial Council Members 2005:

	Haji Mohammad Salim Wardak		Shirina Barakzai
	Haji Abdul Ahad Khan		Raazia Baluch
	Mohammad Anwar		Salima Sharifi
	Haji Mohammad Gul		Haji Talib
	Haji Qurban Ali Urozgani		Haji Toor Khan
	Haji Din Mohammad		Reza Gul
	Al-haj Mohammad Hasan		Haji Mohammad Naeem

Human Terrain:

Alakozai: The Alakozai (Alikozai; Alokzai) form the majority of the population in Sangin District. They belong to the Durrani confederation, and can be further divided into the Khalozai (or Khan Khel), the Yarizai, the Surkani, the Kotezai, the Dadozai, the Khanizai, the Daolatzai (which are also found in the North of Afghanistan due to forced relocations in centuries previous), the Nasozai, and the Bashozai. The Alokzai people stretch from Farah to Kandahar, constitute a majority in the Arghandab District of Kandahar

Alizai: The Alizai mainly inhabit the North of Helmand, particularly Baghran, Musa Qala, Naw Zad, and Kajaki districts. They form a major branch of the Panjpay Durrani Pashtuns with two main sub-tribes, **Jalozai** and **Hasanzai**. Clashes between the Jalozai and Hasanzai have been a major source of tension in northern Helmand province. Present Governor Sher Mohammad Akhundzada is Jalozai while Abdul Wahid, a major figure in Baghran district, Helmand province is Hasanzai. The feud between Abdul Wahid and the father of Sher Mohammad dates back to the Jihad period.

Baluch: The Baluch, thought to number over a million in Afghanistan, are an Indo-Iranian ethnic group spread over Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran. Significant numbers also exist abroad. In Pakistan, Baluchi independence groups have look fought with Islamabad over the revenues from natural resources in Baluchistan. The capital of Pakistani Baluchistan is Quetta, where many of the Taliban are thought to have fled after their fall from power, but Kalat, further south, has traditionally been the seat of the Baluch Khans. The Baluch are overwhelmingly but not entirely Sunni Muslims. Their power-structures, based on the khan, are generally perceived to be more concentrated than those of the more fractious Pashtuns. In Afghanistan they are primarily nomadic, roaming the southernmost districts of the three southernmost provinces. In Helmand they are prominent in the Dishu and Garmseer districts.

Barakzai: The Barakzai Zirk Durrani mainly inhabit the East of Helmand, particularly Gereshk, Lashkar Gah, and Naway-i Barakzai districts. They rose to prominence with Dost Mohammad Shah (the British East India Company's adversary in the first Anglo-Afghan War) and furnished a string of kings through the current aspirant to the throne, Heir Apparent Ahmad Shah. Accordingly, they are one of the most respected tribes in the country. Barakzai are considered the most prominent tribal group in terms of population size, especially in Lashkar Gah. Generally speaking, the Barakzai tribe is considered to have more educated class, government positions, land ownership, tribal unity and businesses in Lashkar Gah.

Barech: The Barech Durrani Pashtuns mainly inhabit Dishu District. There appears to be little ethnographic literature on the Barech beyond the observations of some 19th and early 20th century British civil and military personnel (see Adamec, *Historical and Political Gazetteer of Afghanistan, Vol. 5, Kandahar and South-Central Afghanistan* 1980, *Akademische Druck-u. Verlagsanstalt, Graz-Austria*). Despite the Barech claims of Durrani kinship, there is reason to believe that the Barech have a different ethnic origin, perhaps Baloch, and transferred their ethnic/tribal identity during a shift in the power balance between the Kingdom of Afghanistan and the Emirate of Qalat.

Ishaqzai: Most numerous in the Northeast of Helmand, the Ishaqzai are strongest in Musa Qala, Sangin, and Nawzad. They are a subset of the Durrani confederation. There are also many in Farah and Herat provinces. They can be broken down into the Misrikhel (Khankhel), the Mandinzai, and the Hawazai. In the past, they were derogatorily referred to as "Sagzai," or "vegetable people."¹⁸ The Ishaqzai of Helmand province is the only Pashtun tribe of Helmand that have deep roots among the religious network in the region. The Ishaqzai tend to be most influential in the northern district of Sangin but have long standing feuds with the Alokozai and Noorzai tribes of Sangin and Nad Ali districts.

Kharoti: The Kharoti Powindah Ghilzais are Kuchi nomads. The Kharoti clan is the second largest Ghilzai Pashtun tribal group. Generally, they do not cooperate with anti-coalition militias or participate in their activities. Their political stance and support for the government is in part, at least, due to their rivalry with the Suleimankhel and the Waziris. Notable members of the Kharoti clan include Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and Harakat, both of Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin (HIG). Overall, however, the Kharoti are not

¹⁸ Ludwig W. Adamec, *Historical and Political Gazetteer of Afghanistan, Farah and Southwestern Afghanistan*, Graz: Akademische Druck, 1973, pg 128.

supportive of HIG. Former Paktika provincial governor, Ghulab Mangal, considered the Kharoti among the most reliable of Ghilzai tribal groups.¹⁹

Kuchi: Kuchis are most often Pashtuns, but occasionally some are of non-Pashtun ethnicity, such as Baluch. To be a Kuchi is not who one is, or what one does, but what one is. More than a vocation and less than a race, the Kuchi are more appropriately thought of as a caste of nomadic herdsman. Their four main animals are sheep, goats, camels and donkeys. They cross boundaries with ease. They have a very high illiteracy rate.²⁰ Involved in a constant and centuries old range war with the Hazara, the Kuchis have moved across Afghanistan and Pakistan for generations. Dispersed and well-traveled, they often receive news from distant relations in far-away provinces relatively quickly. The self-declared “leader” of the Kuchis is one Hashmat Ghani Ahmadzai. Partially settled by the king and the following socialist governments, they were strong supporters of the Taliban, both ideologically and pragmatically, as they came into possession of many Hazara lands thanks to the repression of the Shi’ite Hazara by the Taliban. There are estimated to be around three million Kuchi in Afghanistan, with at least 60% remaining fully nomadic and over 100,000 displaced in the South of Afghanistan due to drought in the past few years.²¹ The Kuchi settled south of Lashkar Gah are of the Barakzai tribe but have difficulty living in close proximity to the already settled Barakzai communities south of Lashkar Gah.

Noorzai: The Noorzai Panjpai Durrani Pashtuns primarily inhabit Garmser, Nad Ali and Washer districts, in the Northwest and Southeast of the province. The Noorzai in Lashkar Gah are primarily those who moved from the districts of Helmand to Lashkar Gah after it was turned in to provincial capital. The Noorzai of Helmand are a traditionally influential group especially in Lashkar Gah in terms of government positions, education, wealth including land, large business community and population size.

Suleimankhel: Part of the Ghilzai confederation, the Suleimankhel is one of the largest sub-tribes. The bias of some sub-tribes toward the Taliban in part may be explained by their proximity to the Pakistan border and the influx of insurgents and the radical politics. They have been allied with the Hotaki in the past, and their traditional rivals include the Karoti.²² Principal sub-divisions of the Suleimankhel include the Alizai, Sulemanzai, and Jalalzai. Other sub-divisions include the Alikhel, the Nizamkhel, and the Shakhel. It is interesting to note that the Alikhel sub-tribe, which primarily lives in the northwest of Paktika, has been more cooperative with the central government and coalition forces. The Nizamkhel and Shakhel also remain more supportive of the government, which may be explained in part by their rivalry with the Jalalzai.²³

Security Landscape:

General Level of Security: Security in Helmand Province is extremely poor. The Province has long suffered from serious infiltration of anti-government forces. Opium cultivation and production forms the vast majority of the province’s income, and almost every family is involved in the pernicious trade.

¹⁹ US State Department Gardez Provincial Reconstruction Team Political Officer Reporting, 2004.

²⁰ “Afghanistan,” 2007 CIA World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html> (accessed June 8, 2007), and Marc Herold, “War and Modernity: Hard Times for Afghanistan’s Kuchi Nomads,” *Cursor*, <http://www.cursor.org/stories/kuchi.html#5> (accessed June 8, 2007).

²¹ “Afghan Nomads Say U.S. Bombing Killed Nine,” Associated Press, September 25, 2003 http://abcnews.go.com/wire/World/ap20030925_221.html (accessed June 8, 2007), and Paul Garwood, “Poverty, violence put Afghanistan’s fabled Kuchi nomads on a road to nowhere,” Associated Press, May 14, 2006, <http://www.rawa.org/nomad.htm/> (accessed June 8, 2007).

²² US Department of State Gardez Provincial Reconstruction Team Political Officer Reporting, 2004.

²³ US Department of State Gardez Provincial Reconstruction Team Political Officer Reporting, 2004.

The districts of primary concern are:

Nad Ali- Occasionally referred to as Marjah, the Nad Ali district is located southwest of Lashkar Gah and has been at the center of Helmand's illicit opium trade since 2002. The former police chief of Helmand, Abdul Rahman Jan (ARJ) Noorzai, hails from the district and since his removal the security situation has deteriorated rapidly. Although ARJ is faulted for mobilizing some of his militia forces to protect his narcotics interests in Marjah, elements of the Taliban movement became entrenched in the district in 2008.²⁴ During the summer of 2009, Operation Siege Engine was launched against two opium markets in Marjah that killed 60 militants and led to the seizure of "roughly 100 tons of heroin, hashish, opium paste, poppy seeds and precursor chemicals used to turn opium into heroin. The troops also uncovered a cache of weapons, suicide belts and explosives as well as sophisticated communications equipment inside the opium bazaar, indicating that the Taliban had used it as a command center."²⁵ By early 2010, U.S., Coalition and Afghan forces launched Operation *Moshtarak* (Together) in an attempt to restore governance to the area before pushing east in a much wider security offensive that will attempt to pacify the troubled and destabilized region of Kandahar.

Garmser: Bordering on Kandahar Province and Pakistan's Baluchistan Province, Garmser has seen a number of cross-border raids. The district center was overrun in November of 2007, and a number of other Afghan security force checkpoints have been attacked. In April of 2008, US Marines from the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit moved into Garmser and launched a series of assaults against insurgent and criminal positions. The Marines initial objective was to secure the roadway that connects Garmser with Pakistan, but after a few days of skirmishes the Marines were tasked to stay longer and help quell insurgent activity throughout the district. By the following month, the Marines succeeded in restoring security to a large portion of Garmser and residents held the first community shura in years.

Greshk: Scene of intense fighting since 2006, Greshk remains a highly volatile area. A NATO offensive launched in September 2007, dubbed Operation 'Palk Wahel' ('Sledgehammer Hit'), targeted Taliban positions in the upper Greshk Valley. The operation followed the insurgent abduction of Greshk's district governor the month before. IEDs, suicide bombings, and ambushes continue to plague the district. NATO forces have launched a series of targeted strikes against Greshk insurgent leaders, including two high profile operations in November 2008 that killed Mullah Asad and Mullah Mashar.

Musa Qala: Located in northern Helmand and is one of the most unstable districts in Helmand. Taliban fighters overran the district in retaliation for the series of airstrikes that targeted their leadership in early 2007. The Taliban occupied the district for nearly 10-months before a joint Afghan-NATO operation (OP Mar Kadad Snake pit) flushed out the Taliban from the district center. President Karzai appointed Mullah Abdul Salaam, a former Musa Qala based Taliban commander, as the new district chief after Salaam laid down his arms prior to OP Snakepit. Salaam has been the target of Taliban assassins who attempted to kill him at least four times since his appointment as district governor. On January 1 2009, Taliban gunmen raided Salaam's compound killing 20 of his body guards but Salaam was not in the compound at the time of the attack. On February, an IED blast targeting Salaam's convoy killed six of his bodyguards.

Lashkar Gah: The capital of Helmand has endured sporadic periods of violence over the last two years. Suicide bombings and IEDs have both infrequently occurred in Lashkar Gah. During the late hours of October 12 2008, an estimated 170 insurgents attacked Lashkar Gah from three sides resulting in

²⁴ Tom Coghlan, "Weak government allows Taleban to prosper in Afghanistan," *Times Online*, September 29, 2008.

²⁵ Senate Foreign Relations Committee, "Afghanistan's Narco War: Breaking the Link Between Drug Traffickers and Insurgents, August 19, 2009, 19.

widespread fighting that lasted half of a day. NATO airstrikes pounded insurgent positions killing scores of fighters and repulsed the attack.

Kajaki: Sandwiched between Musa Qala, Sangin and Baghran districts, the Kajaki district is home to the legendary Kajaki dam complex. Decades of neglect and warfare has left most of the complex in need of a serious overhaul. International efforts to restore the dam's critical turbine components has come in spurts and the high level of insecurity in Kajaki and surrounding districts has further stalled the dam's refurbishment.

Sangin: The Upper Sangin Valley has seen heavy fighting since 2006. US and British forces pushed out large numbers of insurgents from the Valley during a three-day operation in April 2007 following months of large scale engagements. Some security improvements in Sangin were visible by the summer of 2008. The main bazaar in Sangin is open, police check points have been constructed and the town's main mosque is being renovated. Security outside the town's center remains elusive as insurgents and drug traffickers continue to launch IED and mine attacks, ambushes and the occasional suicide bombing. British forward operating bases north and south of Sangin's district center are attacked nearly every day. On February 7, over 700 British Royal Marines partook in Operation Diesel in the Sangin Valley, destroying scores of secret drug labs and bomb factories. Officials later estimated the raw opium and chemicals destroyed during the raid at around £50million

DISTRICTS

The districts of Helmand Province are nebulous. At present the thirteen districts of Helmand are Dishu, Garmser, Reg, Nad Ali, Nawai Barakzai, Lashkar Gah, Nahrissarraj, Sangin, Washer, Naw Zad, Musa Qala, Kajaki, and Baghran.

