

# ISAF'S Afghan Truck Drivers: The Overlooked Counterinsurgency Population

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# ISAF'S Afghan Truck Drivers: The Overlooked Counterinsurgency Population

## **Author Biography**

Dr. Myron Varouhakis is an independent international affairs researcher. In 2013 he was deployed to Afghanistan as a U.S. Department of Defense civilian and served as a strategic analyst for the ISAF Joint Command in Kabul. In the past he taught at the Brunel Centre for Intelligence and Security Studies in London and at the University of South Carolina in Columbia. His peer-reviewed publication record cuts across disciplines, including communication and intelligence studies. He earned his B.A. and Ph.D. degrees from Michigan State University. In 2009, he received the Walter L. Pforzheimer Award presented by the Central Intelligence Agency's publication Studies in Intelligence. Dr. Mark Stewart is a consultant with CGI. From 2013 to 2014 worked as a U.S. Department of Defense civilian and was deployed to Afghanistan. Prior to his deployment he taught at San Joaquin Delta College and the University of the Pacific, both in Stockton, CA.

## **Abstract**

A yearlong U.S. Army field study in Afghanistan examined the demographics and threat perceptions of one of the most-at-risk populations, that of Afghan truck drivers working for NATO's International Security Assistance Force Afghanistan (ISAF). The study collected data from 766 Afghan truck drivers at the U.S.-operated Kandahar Airfield in ISAF's Regional Command South. The findings show a wide diversity in age of the Afghan drivers as well as in terms of their home province. The findings also show that although all Afghan truck drivers had acute awareness and understanding of the high risks and dangers of the job, they all noted that the attractive salary and scarcity of jobs were dominant reasons for staying on the job. Findings also reveal a strong resentment among the Afghan truck drivers about their treatment by ISAF soldiers, as for the lack of protection for them and their families after the 2014 departure of NATO forces. The findings can provide significant insights and enhance the understanding of scholars, counterinsurgency strategists, policymakers, and military planners about "Host Country Nationals" as an important population of the human terrain.

## Introduction

Over the last 20 years the United States and a number of its allies from NATO and beyond have conducted a series of large-scale military interventions in various parts of the world with lasting duration. Many of these operations (e.g. Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan) have certainly caught the scholarly attention of a multitude of researchers, who examined them from several perspectives. Those perspectives included military and political strategy,<sup>1</sup> medical,<sup>2</sup> diplomacy, and international relations<sup>3</sup> and much more. Of course, there is also a large body of literature that has investigated humanitarian affairs<sup>4</sup> relating to those conflicts. There has also been a rapidly growing body of literature examining counterinsurgency<sup>5</sup> in recent conflicts.

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<sup>1</sup> See John Cerone, "Minding the Gap: Outlining KFOR Accountability in Post-Conflict Kosovo," *European Journal of International Law* 12:3 (2001): 469-488; Michael Pugh, "Civil-Military Relations in the Kosovo Crisis: An Emerging Hegemony," *Security Dialogue* 31:2 (2000): 229-242; Steven E. Miler, "The Iraq Experiment and U.S. National Security," *Survival* 48:4 (2006): 17-50; Alice Hills, "Something Old, Something New: Security Governance in Iraq: Analysis," *Conflict, Security and Development* 5:2 (2005): 183-202; Rathman Indurthy, "The Obama Administration's Strategy in Afghanistan," *International Journal on World Peace* 28:3 (2011): 7-52; Priyanka Singh, "American Strategy in Afghanistan: Dilemmas, Miscalculations and Outcomes," *Strategic Analysis* 38:3 (2014): 369-375.

<sup>2</sup> See Samuel Loewenberg, "Afghanistan's Hidden Health Issue," *The Lancet* 9700(374) (2009): 1487-1488; Valerie Percival and Egbert Sondorp, "A Case Study of Health Sector Reform in Kosovo," *Conflict and Health* 4:7 (2010): 7; Salaman Rawaf, "The Health Crisis in Iraq," *Critical Public Health* 15:2 (2005): 181-188.

<sup>3</sup> See Carol M. Glen, "Multilateralism in a Unipolar World: The U.N. Security Council and Iraq," *International Relations of the Asia Pacific* 6:2 (2006): 307-323; Irene Bernabeu, "Laying the Foundations of Democracy? Reconsidering Security Sector Reform Under U.N. Auspices in Kosovo," *Security Dialogue* 38:1 (2007): 71-92; Alexander Mattelaer, "How Afghanistan has Strengthened NATO," *Survival* 53:6 (2011): 127-140.

<sup>4</sup> See Urs von Arb, "Return and Reintegration: The Swiss Experience in Kosovo," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 20:2 (2014): 135-140; Andrew Harper, "Iraq's Refugees: Ignored and Unwanted," *International Review of the Red Cross* 90:869 (2008): 169-190; Alpslan Ozerdem and Abdul Hal Sofizada, "Sustainable Reintegration to Returning Refugees in Post-Taliban Afghanistan: Land-related Challenges," *Conflict, Security and Development* 6:1 (2006): 75-100.

<sup>5</sup> See Galula, David, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Security International, 2006); David Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Paul B. Rich, "Counterinsurgency or a War on Terror," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 21:2 (2010): 414-428; Lisa Hultman, "COIN and Civilian Collaterals: Patterns of Violence in Afghanistan, 2004-2009," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 23:2 (2012): 245-263; Eric Jardine, "Population-Centric Counterinsurgency and the Movement of Peoples," *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 23:2 (2012): 264-294; James A. Russell, "Counterinsurgency American Style: Considering David Petraeus and Twenty-First Century Irregular War," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 25:1 (2014): 69-90; Ward Celeste Gventer, "Keep the Change: Counterinsurgency, Iraq, and Historical Understanding," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 25:1 (2014): 242-253; Paul Melshen, "Mapping Out a Counterinsurgency Campaign Plan," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 18:4 (2007): 665-698; Brian Burton and John Nagl, "Learning as We Go: The US Army Adapts

Although these studies are extremely important in enhancing our understanding of conflict-related issues, one area that has received little attention from scholars is the role of “Host Country Nationals” working for those foreign military forces. This study aims at shifting scholarly attention by examining Afghan nationals working as truck drivers for the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), and trying to understand who they are and their perceptions of threat and risk. The reason for focusing on Afghanistan is because Host Country Nationals represent the largest percentage of contractors ever employed by the U.S. Department of Defense in any foreign conflict,<sup>6</sup> and because truck drivers represent one of the highest at-risk groups<sup>7</sup> within the population of Host Country Nationals contractors. This knowledge should in turn allow for a more enhanced and nuanced understanding that can inform counterinsurgency strategists, policymakers, and scholars alike. The study also aims at identifying potential indicators and theoretical frameworks that can be used in future research involving similar populations.

There are several reasons why Host Country Nationals deserve focus by the scholarly community and counterinsurgency strategists: 1) in every large-scale military intervention the U.S. and allied forces employed thousands of Host Country Nationals to support their day-to-day operations of military bases, 2) employing large numbers of Host Country Nationals has a direct impact on the local economy, 3) being employed by foreign military forces often makes them a default “high risk”<sup>8</sup> segment of the population as they are often targeted by insurgents or opposition forces, 4) their employment has security implications for both the employees and the forces they work for, and 5) they should also be seen as an element in the overall counterinsurgency strategy.

This assessment in a way echoes the views of Gen. David. H. Petraeus, who first noted the critical nature of the human terrain in counterinsurgency

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to Counterinsurgency in Iraq, July 2004–December 2006,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 19:3 (2008): 303–327.

<sup>6</sup> Schwartz, Moshe, *Training the Military to Manage Contractors During Expeditionary Operations*, CRS Report R40057 (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> Shelia J. McClaney and Douglas A. LeVien, “International Security Assistance Force Logistics Operations in Afghanistan,” *Army Sustainment* (2010), available at: [http://www.alu.army.mil/alog/issues/JanFeb10/secassist\\_logop.html](http://www.alu.army.mil/alog/issues/JanFeb10/secassist_logop.html)

<sup>8</sup> For the purposes of this study, the term “high risk” is used to denote the significantly higher risk of being killed or injured in targeted insurgent attacks. The term is used for the purpose of distinguishing that level or risk between Afghan truck drivers working for ISAF and all other Afghan contractors employed by ISAF.

operations in an essay he co-authored with Gen. John Galvin in 1986. In an interview in 2013, Petraeus said: “Noting the importance of human terrain, I believe, is a fundamental aspect of crafting a counterinsurgency campaign.”<sup>9</sup> Petraeus, who as commander at Fort Leavenworth supported the establishment of the Army’s Human Terrain System, noted the need for very nuanced understanding of the human terrain, “not just nationally, but sub-nationally and literally all the way down to each valley and each village.”<sup>10</sup> His views are also reflected by Melshen, who argued in 2007 that “a counterinsurgency strategist must be familiar with the unique parameters of the conflict—military, political, sociological, religious, cultural, ethnic, tribal, economic, and a multiplicity of others.”<sup>11</sup>

Although Gen. Petraeus and Melshen did not specifically mention the Host Country Nationals as part of that human terrain, there is no doubt that they are very much at the heart of it. A 2010 *Congressional Research Service* report examining the issue of contractors noted:

“According to a [Department of Defense] official, contracting local nationals is an important element in counterinsurgency strategy. Employing local nationals injects money into the local economy, provides job training, and can give the U.S. a more sophisticated understanding of the local landscape.”<sup>12</sup>

Although this statement by the defense official underscores the importance of Host Country Nationals, in order for someone to incorporate them in any counterinsurgency strategy and plan, s/he would first need to know more about them. Also, their recognized importance has made them extremely vulnerable. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, between September 2001 and March 2007 as many as 990 contractors had been killed in Iraq and Afghanistan, while 13,000 others were injured.<sup>13</sup> This translates to an average of “one civilian contractor of every four members of the U.S. Armed Forces.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Octavia Manea, “Reflections on the ‘Counterinsurgency Decade: Small Wars Journal Interview with General David. H. Petraeus,” *Small Wars Journal*, September 1, 2013, available at: <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/reflections-on-the-counterinsurgency-decade-small-wars-journal-interview-with-general-david>.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Melshen, “Mapping out a Counterinsurgency Campaign,” p.667.

<sup>12</sup> Moshe Schwartz, “Department of Defense Contractors in Iraq and Afghanistan: Background and Analysis,” *Congressional Research Service* (2010), p.9.

<sup>13</sup> Bernard Debusmann, “In Outsourced U.S. Wars, Contractors Deaths Top 1,000,” *Reuters*, July 3, 2007, available at: <http://www.reuters.com/assets/print?aid=USN0318650320070703>

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

Although the specific data does not offer a breakdown in terms of those contractors' countries of origin of, it offers an overall picture about the risks faced by contractors in general in the two conflict zones.

Still, Host Country Nationals remain neglected by the scholarly community and counterinsurgency strategists, and thus very little is known and understood about them. That is particularly true for those who would be classified as being high risk. There are several reasons that may have contributed to this trend, including the difficulty of identifying the relevant sample and gaining systematic and prolonged access to it.

### Contractors in Afghanistan

The U.S. military's dependency on contractors in the conducting of "Operation Enduring Freedom" in Afghanistan is substantial. Data from the Central Command and analyzed by the Congressional Research Service<sup>15</sup> (See Figure 1), show that as of March 2010 there were significantly more contractors than U.S. forces on the ground. Specifically, contractors represented 59 percent of the workforce in Afghanistan—a 10 percent decrease from 2008.<sup>16</sup> The 2008 level appears to have been the highest number of contractors employed by the Department of Defense in any conflict in the history of the United States.<sup>17</sup>

Although there were multiple factors that pushed those numbers higher (e.g. the additional 30,000 U.S. troops that arrived in the country to boost offensive operations—part of the "Surge" strategy—and the logistical support they needed), the figures are still unprecedented.

**FIGURE 1. Comparison of Contractor Personnel to Troops Levels in Afghanistan**  
(March 2010)

	<b>Contractors</b>	<b>Troops</b>	<b>Ratio</b>
<b>Afghanistan Only</b>	112,092	79,100	1.42:1
<b>CENTCOM AOR*</b>	250,335	272,260	.92:1

Source: CENTCOM 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter Contractor Census Report.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> CRS Report R40057, "Training the Military."

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

Just like in Iraq, the DoD contractors supporting operations in Afghanistan (See Figure 2) represented a mix of U.S. nationals and third-country and local nationals. In Afghanistan’s case, though, there are some very distinct differences. One striking comparison is that in Iraq the “Third Country Nationals” accounted for 56 percent of all contractors in the country, compared to just 16 percent in Afghanistan.<sup>19</sup> But perhaps the most interesting comparison of all is that of “Local Nationals”—or Host Country Nationals—who in Iraq accounted for just 18 percent but in Afghanistan represented an impressive 70 percent of all DoD contractors in the country.<sup>20</sup> This massive reliance on Host Country Nationals contractors by the U.S. Department of Defense makes Afghanistan an important case study, an importance that is highlighted even further by the daily risks that those contractors had to overcome because of their affiliation with U.S. forces.

**FIGURE 2. Profile of DoD Contractor Personnel in Afghanistan**  
(March 2010)

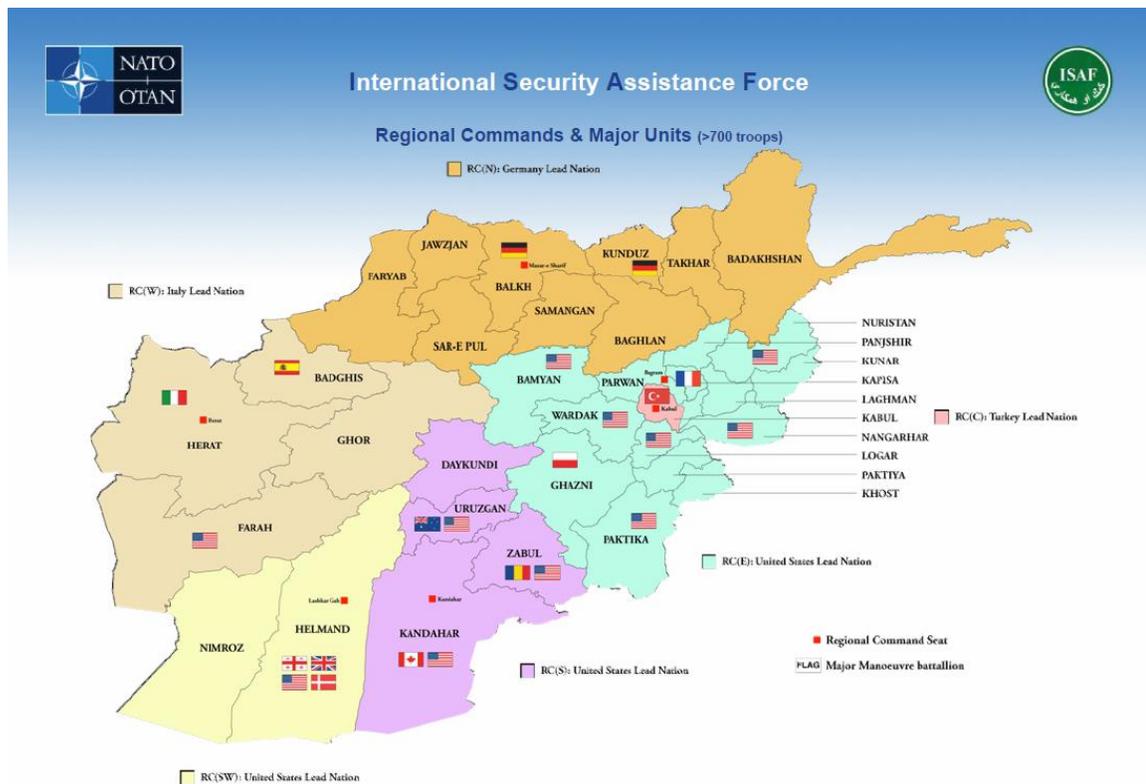
	<b>Total Contractors</b>	<b>U.S. Citizens</b>	<b>Third-country Nationals</b>	<b>Host Country Nationals</b>
<b>Number</b>	112,092	16,081	17,512	78,499
<b>Percent of Total</b>	100%	14%	16%	70%

Source: CENTCOM 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter Contractor Census Report.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.



Source: NATO.<sup>22</sup>

## Trucking in Afghanistan

U.S. government contracting in Afghanistan has been the largest of the three conflicts reviewed, with the U.S. government having spent more than \$50 billion for contracts between 2005 and 2011 alone.<sup>23</sup> Trucking is certainly one of the key logistical functions on which the U.S. government has relied to assist with the supplying of U.S. forces deployed to the landlocked and war-torn country of Afghanistan. In 2011, the U.S. military signed a \$1 billion contract with 20 Afghan trucking companies.<sup>24</sup> With each Afghan trucking company employing hundreds of drivers to meet the sustainment needs of tens of thousands of U.S. troops, this is one of the highest at-risk groups of the

<sup>22</sup> Note: The map illustrates the areas of responsibility of the various ISAF regional commands, including that of Regional Command South (RC-S) in Kandahar province where the study was conducted.

<sup>23</sup> Moshe Schwartz, "Wartime Contracting in Afghanistan: Analysis and Issues for Congress," *Congressional Research Service* (November 14, 2011): pp.1-20.

<sup>24</sup> David Lerman, "U.S. Army \$1 Billion Afghan Trucking Plan Aims to End 'Racket,'" *Bloomberg*, September 15, 2011, available at: <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2011-09-15/u-s-army-1-billion-afghan-trucking-plan-aims-to-end-racket->.

Afghan population. In 2008, one Afghan trucking company contracted by ISAF recorded as many as 202 insurgent attacks against its convoys (a 44% increase from 2007), that resulted in the killing of as many as 100 of its drivers and the destruction of over 200,000 liters of fuel.<sup>25</sup> That same year, insurgent attacks on Highway 1 that links the national capital of Kabul with Kandahar reached historic heights, prompting the ISAF commander to make freedom of movement his top priority.<sup>26</sup>

In spite of improved security measures by ISAF and contractors, such insurgent attacks continued to occur every year. On August 28, 2013 in a single insurgent attack in the western Farah province six contractor truck drivers were killed and 35 ISAF supply fuel trucks were destroyed.<sup>27</sup> Overall, in 2013 the Taliban carried out a total of about 24,000 attacks throughout the country against various targets, while in 2014 that number was around 18,000.<sup>28</sup>

This sustained and acute threat from the Taliban shows that the risks to Afghan truck drivers working for ISAF never went away. All data indicates that the specific factor of risk was rather constant across time, a consistency that made it a very reliable criterion with which to study this group of Host Country Nationals.

## Hypotheses

The study investigated a total of five hypotheses. The hypotheses are rooted in the existing understanding about the Afghan demographics and the overall appreciation of the relationship between the Afghan population and ISAF forces. All five hypotheses were addressed via semi-structured field interviews that were conducted in the form of quasi focus groups. The data generated by the hypotheses aims at investigating several assumptions and identifying potential indicators and theoretical frameworks that can be used in future research involving similar populations.

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<sup>25</sup> McClaney and LeVien, "International Security Assistance."

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Zahin, "35 ISAF Supply Trucks Torched, 6 Drivers Killed," *Pajhwok Network*, August 28, 2013, available at: <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2013/08/28/35-isaf-supply-trucks-torched-6-drivers-killed>.

<sup>28</sup> The Associated Press, "Afghan Troop Deaths up; Called 'Unsustainable,'" November 5, 2014, available at: [http://m.apnews.com/ap/db\\_268780/contentdetail.htm?contentguid=eP4IrYVn](http://m.apnews.com/ap/db_268780/contentdetail.htm?contentguid=eP4IrYVn).

**H1.** A lower life expectancy for males in the country will be positively correlated with a younger demographic for the Afghan truck drivers working for ISAF in Kandahar.

The variable of life expectancy was chosen specifically to test a set of assumptions about the demographic makeup of Afghan truck drivers working for ISAF in Regional Command-South (RC-S). This was one of three variables that aimed at testing and exploring demographic assumptions.

**H2.** Afghan truck drivers whose home is near the ISAF's base in Kandahar will be more likely to be employed by the coalition forces at the specific base than those whose home is further away.

The hypothesis explores the variable "home" to test a set of assumptions about the demographic makeup of Afghan truck drivers working for ISAF in RC-S. For the purposes of the study, "home" is designated at the provincial and district levels. This was one of three variables that aimed at testing and exploring demographic assumptions.

**H3.** The country's ethnic and tribal composition will be reflected in the ethnic and tribal composition of the Afghan truck drivers working for ISAF in Kandahar.

The hypothesis explores the ethnic and tribal background to test a set of assumptions about the demographic makeup of Afghan truck drivers working for ISAF in RC-S. This was one of three variables that aimed at testing and exploring demographic assumptions.

**H4.** Afghans who have a high threat and risk perception of truck driving in the country are less likely to be working as truck drivers by ISAF in Kandahar than those who have a lower threat and risk perception.

The hypothesis explores the relationship between an individual's risk/threat perception about an activity and the likelihood of engaging in that activity. Exploring this relationship will result in an enhanced understanding of the Afghan truck drivers working for ISAF in RC-S.

**H5.** Afghans who have a positive view of ISAF are more likely to choose to work as truck drivers for ISAF in Kandahar than those who don't.

The hypothesis explores the relationship between an individual's perception of an institution and the likelihood of deciding to work for that institution. Exploring this relationship will result to an enhanced understanding about the Afghan truck drivers working for ISAF in RC-S.

## Methodology

The study employed the qualitative method of semi-structured field interviews. The method was deemed appropriate as the subject has not been investigated previously and as with all exploratory studies, the use of qualitative methods can identify indicators and variables that can be tested in future studies.

The interviews were conducted by social scientists employed by the U.S. Army's Human Terrain System. The project underwent an ethics review and approval process, which included an assessment of the sample type and questionnaire, prior to the initiation of the project. The question set was derived from the particular requirements set by the Command General of Regional Command South, who sanctioned the specific study. A list of ten open-ended questions was constructed and the interviews were conducted in a fluid "focus group" type of environment. The U.S. Army cleared the data generated from the project for public release.

### *Sampling*

The study employed a non-probability purposive sampling strategy. As the study was conducted to address questions of field commanders on the ground, the population of interest was Afghan truck drivers working for ISAF, and specifically those who deliver cargo to the U.S.-operated Kandahar Airfield military base. As such, the scope and type of sample pose certain restrictions and limitations on any inference to the larger population of Afghan truck drivers who are employed by ISAF in other regions around the country. Despite those limitations, the final sample size was large enough (n=766) to allow for a better understanding about the Afghan truck drivers working for ISAF in Regional Command South.<sup>29</sup>

Due to the hazardous and unpredictable nature of the security conditions on the ground, not all participants were able to answer the entire questionnaire, thus generating variations in the samples for each research question. The

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<sup>29</sup> The Regional Command South was one of four regional commands operated by ISAF and it covered a total of six provinces: Day Kundi, Helmand, Kandahar, Nimruz, Uruzgan, and Zabul. The headquarters of the regional command was in Kandahar.

study did not use any form of incentive for participation. Moreover, participation in the interviews was on a volunteer basis and in no way had an effect on the employment of the Afghan truck drivers.

The truck drivers came from all over Regional Command South and at times other parts of Afghanistan. Even though predominantly Pashtun, there were also Hazaras and Tajiks. Drivers were exclusively male, so this was always a limitation. Ages were anywhere from 18 to 59, although Afghans seldom know their exact age. Even though they have a *tazkera* (identity document) which lists date of birth, this is often based on a guess by those issuing the *tazkera*. If a driver attended school, he was issued a *tazkera* at that time but even then the age was arbitrarily assigned to an approximate year.

### *Data Collection*

Data collection started on May 6, 2013 and ended on April 30, 2014. All drivers were interviewed at the Entry Control Points just outside of Kandahar Airfield base. Each engagement (a separate day for each Entry Control Point each week) was done weekly for 3 to 4 hours per Entry Control Point. Engagements took place at two of the Entry Control Points at Kandahar Airfield, namely Entry Control Point 4 and Entry Control Point 5. The driver holding area of Entry Control Point 4 was just outside the far eastern gate of the airfield, while the Entry Control Point 5 holding area was outside the south gate.

Drivers had to first have their trucks searched and weighed at a yard about 1km outside of Kandahar Air Field's perimeter then pass inspection at the Afghan National Army gate to the airbase. Once through that gate the drivers had to park their trucks outside the entry control points and go through a security check. The ISAF soldiers manning Entry Control Point 4 were Bulgarian and those manning the Entry Control Point 5 were Slovakian. Drivers entered each holding area through a long corridor where they were physically searched. They then entered the biometric trailer where they had their retina's scanned to see if they were on the blacklist.

Once cleared by security, the drivers entered the resting area which had shops where they could buy food. At any given time the entry control point's holding area had 75 to 150 drivers. During the engagements the interviewer and linguist would enter the inner enclosure by the drivers. Eventually the drivers, through word of mouth, knew who they were. The interviewer would sit on the ground with a group of men and explain the purpose of his visit, gaining their verbal consent for the interview. Soon the numbers would swell

as the Afghan drivers were keen to make their opinions known and to participate in what they viewed as a “Shura”—a type of a decision-making council that is found in Islamic tradition.

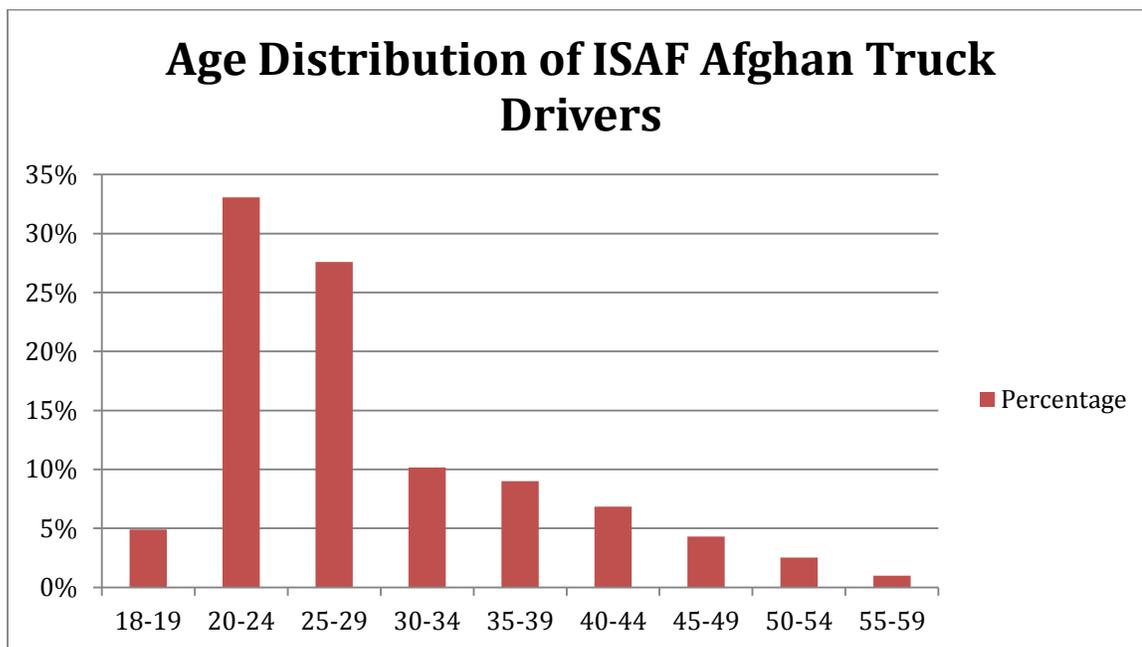
The typical group size during an interview was 10 to 15 Afghan truck drivers, but often would attract a crowd of up to 50 drivers. Typically, the engagement would open by drivers airing their grievances about the conditions at the entry control points, but they would willingly engage with the questions asked by the researcher. Usually one or two of the drivers would attempt to dominate the initial discussions, but the researcher would direct questions to the others who then would voice their own opinions. The linguist/interpreter also played an integral role in the process as he would field questions from the drivers and provide cues to what was happening in sidebar discussions as well.

Each engagement lasted anywhere from 1 to 3 hours. Sometimes they were shorter because of extremes in temperatures. Typically the interviewer offered chai to the drivers; at times the drivers reciprocated and bought chai from the storekeepers to provide for the interviewer. Once the engagement was over, the interviewer and linguist spent an hour or two reviewing notes on what had taken place. Any corrections or additions were carefully and fully discussed and, once both were satisfied, the notes were typed up verbatim. Later that same day, the interviewer met once again with the linguist to review the typed notes and, once fully satisfied, the reports were drafted from those notes. Since the linguist had a security clearance, he also read the report draft to ensure that everything was represented accurately.

## Findings

**H1** stated that there is a positive correlation between a country's lower life expectancy and younger age of the truck drivers working for ISAF in Kandahar. The sample size for this particular hypothesis was  $n=512$ . The findings (See Table 1) show that the ages of the truck drivers ranged from 18 to 59 years of age, with the vast majority of them (60%) between the ages of 20 to 29. As such, the findings appear to support the hypothesis, although the notable presence of older drivers—about 15 percent—40 years of age and older.

**TABLE 1. Age of Afghan Truck Drivers in Regional Command-South**



**H2** stated that Afghan truck drivers whose home is near the ISAF’s base in Kandahar will be more likely to be employed by the coalition forces at the specific base than those whose home is further away. The hypothesis was answered with two samples. The first sample focused on province of origin and had n=766. The findings (See Table 2) show that the majority of the drivers (58%) were from the province of Kandahar. The findings also show that the drivers call home 30 of the country’s 34 provinces. As such, the findings appear to support the hypothesis, but at the same time the large percentage (42%) of truck drivers who called faraway provinces home raise serious questions about the relationship between proximity to workplace in the specific context.

**TABLE 2. Province of Origin**

Province	Number of Truck Drivers	Percentage
<b>Kandahar</b>	446	58%
<b>Heart</b>	58	8%
<b>Zabul</b>	41	5%
<b>Helmand</b>	31	4%

<b>Ghazni</b>	25	3%
<b>Paktia</b>	28	3%
<b>Kabul</b>	21	3%
<b>Wardak</b>	19	2.5%
<b>Farah</b>	14	2%
<b>Logar</b>	10	1%
<b>Paktika</b>	8	1%
<b>Uruzgan</b>	8	1%
<b>Kunduz</b>	6	1%
<b>Nangarhar</b>	6	1%
<b>Badakhshan</b>	5	1%
<b>Panjsher</b>	5	1%
<b>Parwan</b>	5	.6%
<b>Baghlan</b>	4	.6%
<b>Mazar-e-Sharif</b>	4	.5%
<b>Gardez</b>	3	.4%
<b>Jawzjan</b>	3	.4%
<b>Laghman</b>	3	.4%
<b>Pakistan*</b>	3	.4%
<b>Takhar</b>	2	.3%
<b>Balkh</b>	1	.1%
<b>Bamiyan</b>	1	.1%
<b>Ghor</b>	1	.1%
<b>Jalalabad</b>	2	.3%
<b>Kapisa</b>	1	.1%
<b>Peshawar</b>	1	.1%
<b>Samangan</b>	1	.1%
<b>Total</b>	766	100%

\* Three drivers identified themselves as being from Pakistan.

The second sample focused on the district of origin and had n-152. The findings (See Table 3) show that 53 drivers (or 35 %) came from Kandahar and Kandahar City, while another 11 drivers (or 7%) came from the district of Dand of Kandahar province. Overall, the majority of the drivers surveyed in this question came from districts located in Kandahar province.

**TABLE 3. District of Origin**

<b>District</b>	<b>Number of Afghan Truck Drivers</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Kandahar</b>	35	23%
<b>Kandahar City</b>	18	12%
<b>Dand</b>	11	7%
<b>Arghandab</b>	6	4%
<b>Spin Boldak</b>	6	4%
<b>Arghistan</b>	5	3%
<b>Daman</b>	4	3%
<b>Panjwa'i</b>	4	3%
<b>Zharay</b>	4	3%
<b>Hamid Aba</b>	3	2%
<b>Qalat</b>	3	2%
<b>Shah Wali Kot</b>	3	2%
<b>Shindand</b>	3	2%
<b>Kheng</b>	2	1%
<b>Mirwaz</b>	2	1%
<b>Shah Joy</b>	2	1%
<b>Wordak</b>	2	1%
<b>Other</b>	39	26%
<b>Total</b>	152	100%

**H3** stated that the country's ethnic and tribal composition will be reflected in the ethnic and tribal composition of the Afghan truck drivers working for ISAF in Kandahar. The hypothesis was address with two different samples. The first sample focused on the ethnic group origin and had n=546. The findings (See Table 4) show that the vast majority of the drivers (86%) were Pashtuns, while the second largest group was the Tajiks who accounted for 8 percent.

**TABLE 4. Ethnic Groups**

<b>Ethnic Group</b>	<b>Number of Afghan truck Drivers</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Pasthun</b>	468	86%
<b>Tajik</b>	46	8%
<b>Baloch</b>	9	2%

<b>Hazara</b>	5	1%
<b>Mangal</b>	6	1%
<b>Uzbek</b>	5	1%
<b>Sayed</b>	3	<.05%
<b>Punjabi – Pakistan</b>	2	<.05%
<b>Arab</b>	2	<.05%
<b>Total</b>	546	100%

The second sample for this hypothesis focused on the Pashtun tribes and had n=468. The findings (See Table 5) show that 82 (or 17%) of the surveyed drivers came from the Pashtun tribe of Popalzai, while 59 (or 13%) came from Achakzai tribe.

**TABLE 5. Pashtun Tribes**

<b>Pashtun Tribes</b>	<b>Number of Afghan Truck Drivers</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Popalzai</b>	82	17%
<b>Achakzai</b>	59	13%
<b>Noorzai</b>	42	9%
<b>Barakzai</b>	39	8%
<b>Kakar</b>	30	6%
<b>Alikozai</b>	29	6%
<b>Suleiman Khil</b>	24	5%
<b>Alizai</b>	20	5%
<b>Ahmadzai</b>	20	5%
<b>Taraki</b>	12	3%
<b>Hotak</b>	10	2%
<b>Tokhi</b>	11	2%
<b>Other*</b>	90	19%
<b>Total</b>	468	100%

\*Representing some of the remaining 39 Pashtun tribal groups.

**H4** stated that Afghans who have a high threat and risk perception of truck driving in the country are less likely to be employed as truck drivers by ISAF in Kandahar than those who have a lower threat and risk perception. The particular hypothesis was answered with qualitative data and the sample size was n=766.

The findings do not support the hypothesis. Specifically, the findings show that the Taliban and the Afghan National Security Forces threaten the Afghan truck drivers daily. The findings also reveal that while all drivers had acute awareness and clear understanding of the high risks and dangers of the job, the monetary compensation was singled out as the dominant reason for staying on the job. In terms of their perspective about their future after the NATO forces withdraw at the end of 2014, the findings show that the drivers were resigned to the fact that after the “Americans leave” they will be without employment and protection—particularly the kind of protection that locally-hired linguists/interpreters would get.

Specifically, truck drivers face clear and constant danger during the course of their work in Afghanistan, particularly on the “ring road”—a road network that connects 16 of Afghanistan’s 34 provinces, and which includes Highway 1 that connects Kandahar and Kabul. Drivers face threat from Improvised Explosive Devices, ambushes by insurgents as well as criminals, and hijacking. Truck drivers would often show the researcher scars from bullet wounds or other injuries related to their work. The dangers of working in a warzone are exacerbated for the truck drivers because they are targeted, not only by the insurgents, but also by corrupt Afghan National Police, Afghan Local Police, Traffic Police and the Afghan Civil Order Police. The Afghan Civil Order Police, in particular, not only exploited the men they were to accompany in convoy by soliciting bribes, but also abandoned the convoys when they were under attack. The other branches of police often directly targeted the drivers for bribes and failure to pay either meant direct assaults or failure to protect the drivers.

The truck drivers also spoke of the other risks involved by associating with ISAF, particularly “the Americans.” Not only were they at risk from the Taliban but also they were victimized and made to pay large bribes by Afghan National Police at checkpoints and even ostracized in their own towns and villages because of their association with Coalition Forces. Even in their own villages drivers felt that they were treated contemptuously because of their work for what they termed as “the Americans.” Drivers who had to make their way through Kandahar City complained that the Traffic Police, whose commander was apparently at the forefront of this, would target specifically drivers who carried goods for the coalition and extort large sums of money from them.

Another danger reported by the truck drivers was from within their own ranks. On numerous occasions the truck drivers articulated their fear that

some of the other drivers were colluding with the Taliban. On two occasions drivers informed the researcher that specific individuals were working for the Taliban and providing critical route and timing information to the insurgents. Drivers expressed ongoing concern that their families would be in danger if the Taliban found out that they were working for the Coalition Forces, but that work was scarce and it was a risk that they had to take. Taliban sympathizers or infiltrators in their ranks became a great concern because of this.

In terms of the overall threat assessment related to their job, the truck drivers pointed out that the income was the most attractive feature and noted the scarcity of jobs in the region. For a number of the men it was the first and only job they had ever had. Also, they noted that this was the highest paid job they could attain as they lacked any formal education. Overall, they appeared to deem the risk to be worth the reward. Still, the drivers were resigned to the fact that after the "Americans leave" they would be without employment and protection. Unlike the local linguists who were expecting to receive visas to one of the ISAF countries due to the danger they would face if they were left behind, the drivers had no such expectation. Their attitude about those prospects varied between bravado in the form of "If they attack us we will fight because we are Pashtun men," to utter resignation.

**H5** stated that Afghans who have a positive view of ISAF are more likely to choose to work as truck drivers for ISAF in Kandahar than those who don't. The particular hypothesis was answered with qualitative data and the sample size was  $n=766$ .

The findings do not support the hypothesis. Specifically, the findings show that the Afghan truck drivers feel humiliated by nature of the security searches carried out at checkpoints by ISAF and the poor conditions of the resting areas at those checkpoints. A recurrent theme among the truck drivers was that they were treated poorly from all sides. They felt that they were not treated with respect by the Coalition Forces because of conditions at the entry control points of the airbase and because of the nature of the personal and vehicle searches. Specifically, if any of the drivers failed a retina scan at an ECP then they would be held in a holding cell no larger than 8' by 8' that was also known as a "cage." This was in itself a great affront, particularly at Entry Control Point 5 where the "cage" was in full view of all of the other drivers. Although there were shops at the entry control points where they could buy food, many drivers were often forced to stay in the holding area for three or four days—in extreme cases for several weeks—and

as such the cost of buying food became prohibitive. Accommodation at the entry control points was also an issue. Initially the mattresses at Entry Control Point 5 were on the ground and in very poor condition—basically just springs with cloth on them. After the issue was brought to the attention of the command, new beds and mattresses were brought to Entry Control Point 5. The beds at Entry Control Point 4 were always adequate.

Another issue at the entry control points was the treatment by the ISAF soldiers. They often verbally abused and shouted at the Afghan men, which was very insulting according to the drivers interviewed. The men felt that they were not given respect and that they were “treated like animals.” Lack of understanding by the Coalition Forces of the Afghan ways and culture was a major issue for the truck drivers, especially when it came to the manner of the physical search (Afghan men did not mind lifting their shirts in front but lifting it in the back they claimed was a homosexual act—both were required during the search.)

## Conclusion

The study aimed at examining one of the largely overlooked groups in recent conflict zones, that of Host Country Nationals working as contractors for foreign forces in their country. The study focused on Afghan truck drivers working for NATO’s ISAF mission in an effort to understand more about their background, motivation and threat perceptions. The Afghan truck drivers represent a unique subset group of the Host Country Nationals population, being one of the highest at-risk groups of local contractors employed by ISAF.<sup>30</sup> The systematic field data collection over a 12-month period generated several significant insights about them, allowing for a better understanding and for the expansion of literature about the specific segment of the population.

Specifically, findings showed that their age ranged between 18 and 59, making them highly diverse in that regard. Although the vast majority (some 60%) was between the ages of 20 and 29, the data also showed that there was a significant representation of the aging population, with 30% of the sample being between 35 and 59. Considering that life expectancy in Afghanistan for 2013 was 61 years of age,<sup>31</sup> it can be argued that although this seems to be job

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<sup>30</sup> See McClaney and LeVien, “International Security Assistance”; Debusmann, “In Outsourced U.S. Wars”; Zahin, “35 ISAF Supply Trucks.”

<sup>31</sup> World Bank, “Country Data – Afghanistan,” (2014), available at: <http://data.worldbank.org/country/afghanistan>

that is attracting mostly younger men, age did not appear to pose much of a deterrence for recruitment.

Findings also showed that the overwhelming majority of drivers (86%) were Pashtuns, while the second largest ethnic group was Tajiks (8%). These figures are not that surprising as Kandahar is one of the areas where Pashtuns are the dominant ethnic group, while Pashtuns and Tajiks also represent the two largest ethnic groups in the country. These figures become more interesting, however, when connected with the findings about the province of origin of the drivers, which showed that they come from 30 of the country's 34 provinces. Although 58% of them were from Kandahar Province, the remaining 42% came from 29 provinces. This is a significant finding as it shows that although the truck drivers were significantly homogeneous in terms of their ethnicity, their place of origin made them considerably more diverse. That diversity was also present when it came to the Pashtun tribes to which the drivers belong, with findings showing that more than a dozen of them were represented by the group.

Beyond the demographical insights, the study also produced useful significant findings in terms of the motivations and threat perceptions of the Afghan truck drivers. Specifically, the study found that lack of formal education, scarcity of jobs, and an otherwise unattainable salary offered by trucking companies, were the main motivators for the Afghan men to get and keep these jobs. These factors seem to trump any security and safety concerns that came with the job, as findings show that the drivers have acute awareness and clear understanding of the dangers and risks associated with their job. The same factors also seem to negate—or at least keep at bay—all the frustrations and resentment they may have against NATO forces as a result of what they describe as “culturally insensitive” personal security searches.

Finally, the study found that in addition to the resentment over their treatment by ISAF soldiers there is also bitterness over the lack of provision from NATO to provide them with any protection after troops depart at the end of 2014—the kind of protection (e.g. visas) that would be offered to locally hired translators/interpreters. Similar resentment was also voiced over the lack of plan for jobs creation after NATO leaves the country. These insights provide a nuanced understanding that can assist policymakers and military strategists who in the future will be involved in drafting and formulating plans for similar contingency operations.

The findings provide a significant first step in the development of greater understanding of in four major areas: a) establishing a background on one of the highest at-risk groups among Host Country Nationals, b) establishing a baseline understanding of their motivations and threat/risk perceptions of such a group, c) identifying theoretical frameworks that can provide platforms for further research into this area, and d) informing formulation of future policy in relation to Host Country Nationals and in particular the highest at-risk groups in a counterinsurgency environment.

The findings certainly allow for insights into the first two areas, but most importantly one can now identify potential indicators—and thus possible theoretical frameworks—that can be of great use in the development of this research area. Specifically, one indicator that is worth examining is “Risk Perception.” Although the current study did not employ a specific theoretical framework as it was designed as an exploratory study and aimed at informing specific key information requirements from the commanders on the ground, the data generated from it suggest that *Prospect Theory* could be a helpful framework. Although the data from the current study do not provide support for the specific theory as it goes against its *certainty effect* factor, this could very well be an outlier case and as such we deem that is certainly worth exploring further.

Another indicator that was identified and shows very promising signs in terms of prediction is “Motivation.” One theoretical framework that we believe can be used to explore this indicator further is *Protection Motivation Theory*. As with the previous theoretical framework, the findings of the study do not provide much support for it either. On the contrary, the findings show that although the *perceived severity* of the threat and the *perceived probability* of the occurrence were verified at very high levels, the decision of the Afghan truck drivers did result in them seeking to protect themselves. This could very well be the result of an outlier case, or it could be linked to the *efficacy* factor in relation to a recommended preventive behavior.

The last area of contribution is that in the formulation of future policy in respect with formulation of future policy in relation to Host Country Nationals and in particular the highest at-risk groups. Both policymakers and military strategists who will be involved in drafting and formulating plans for future counterinsurgency operations can benefit from the findings of this study. Melshen, in his 2007 counterinsurgency study, argued that “the search for a perfect counterinsurgency model or template that can be imposed as a

universal model in counterinsurgency effort is a futile effort.”<sup>32</sup> He stressed that “strategists of insurgency warfare are well aware of the fact that what worked in one insurgency might not work in another.”<sup>33</sup> As such, he noted that “many questions should be raised by counterinsurgency leadership when initiating a counterinsurgency campaign,”<sup>34</sup> including what considerations were taken by commanders in previous counterinsurgency campaigns.

This study certainly is the direct product of such questioning. In order for studies like this one to inform a grand counterinsurgency strategy, however, they need to be replicated across the commands. Such studies need to be carried out at the very early stages of a campaign and be repeated at various iterations to detect changes over time, as well as any impact from the resulting changes in the strategy. The need for this kind of scholarly and methodologically rigorous work that aims to inform strategists and commanders on the ground is reflected in the evolved U.S. counterinsurgency doctrine.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, according to Melshen, “insurgency and counterinsurgency will remain the hallmark of the twenty-first century.”<sup>36</sup> If that is proven to be the case, hopefully Host Country Nationals will not be an afterthought in the formulation of the next counterinsurgency strategy. Although this study was conducted in direct response to a regional commander’s information requirements, this did not occur until almost the end of Operation Enduring Freedom. This is a decade too late and as such negated any meaningful response to the information gathered. Information of this nature needs to be collected early, across time and place (throughout the theater of operation) if it is to be considered for any meaningful population-centric counterinsurgency plans.

As with any study, especially for those conducted in a conflict zone, there are certain limitations to the findings. The interviews were conducted by U.S. Army civilians, and although not part of the uniformed military, any association with the NATO forces may have been an influencer. All interviews were conducted at entry control points on a NATO military base in order to ensure the safety of all the parties involved, as well as to serve as a natural setting where truck drivers gather as part of their job routine. Still, the fact that they had just undergone what they describe as culturally insensitive personal security searches may have also been an influencer. The hazardous

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<sup>32</sup> Melshen, “Mapping out a Counterinsurgency,” p.668.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p.667.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Martin G. Clemis, “Crafting Non-Kinetic Warfare: The Academic-Military Nexus in US Counterinsurgency Doctrine,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 20:1 (2009): 160-184.

<sup>36</sup> Melshen, “Mapping out a Counterinsurgency,” p. 666.

and unpredictable security environment on the ground also resulted to variations in sampling for some of the questions, thus limiting any stronger correlations. The only way to confirm the age of drivers is from their *tazkera* (identity document), which lists the date of birth. Still, although an official government-issued document, that date of birth is often based on a guess by those issuing the document. As such, the age data are only as accurate as the *tazkera* of each driver.

Regardless of those limitations, the study offers rare insights into the demographics, motivations and threat perceptions of Afghan truck drivers—one of the highest at-risk groups of Host Country Nationals working for foreign military forces in their country. The findings can provide a source for further research into this largely overlooked group of Host Country Nationals in conflict zones, and as such enhance our understanding about them.