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*PRODUCER: David Lewis*

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#### ACTUALITY INSIDE HELICOPTER

CLARK: I'm travelling in a United States military helicopter. It's the first flight of the day out to Zabal, one of the most insecure parts of southern Afghanistan.

#### ACTUALITY OF GUNFIRE

CLARK: That was the sound of one of the gunners on board firing into the desert sand below, to test his gun. The military risk attack on the road and can only travel in heavily armoured convoys or by air. Four years ago, the Americans claimed victory over the Taliban, but in the last year, the fighting has intensified, producing the worst casualty figures since 2001.

The United States is now reducing its troop strength in Afghanistan. NATO and the British are moving into the south. Tonight File on 4 travels into the heart of the insurgency. We hear from a Taliban fighter and from civilians, who say daily life is more dangerous than ever.

#### SIGNATURE TUNE

## ACTUALITY AS TANKER IS PULLED FROM ROAD

CLARK: We're on the main north-south highway in Afghanistan, which links the capital, Kabul, with the country's second city, Kandahar. The sounds you can hear are attempts to pull the charred remains of a fuel truck off the road. It's a dangerous job, because the tyres are still burning. Late yesterday, the truck was hit by a rocket – presumably fired by the Taliban. As for the driver, well, he's disappeared. It's feared he was abducted. The attack took place just twenty miles from the nearest American base.

## ACTUALITY OF ARMY RADIO

CLARK: Troops from the Afghan National Army – or ANA - have fanned out across the desert in case of ambush attempts. One man who was on the scene just after the attack happened is Arshad. He was a passenger in a shared taxi.

ARSHAD: I saw the black smoke in the sky. I thought it was just cloud. Suddenly somewhere a car stopped because the highway police had pointed to drivers to stop the taxi, and the police said to us that the Taliban had attacked a fuel tanker and there was a big fire lighting up the desert. So it was a view which was telling us that it was a big crime and especially the people were telling us that the Taliban had been taking away the driver and that they might have killed him. So the security was not good, it was getting dark, the route is not safe.

CLARK: Arshad said everyone in the taxi was scared in case they were stopped as dusk was falling at an illegal checkpoint. The Taliban's reputation for tough justice meted out to those who don't match their vision of Islamic law is still fearsome.

ARSHAD: I'm a young man and I have shaved my beard. Maybe the Taliban will ... and then they will tell me why you have shaved your beard, as they never allow anyone to shave their beard. They might kill me or maybe they might abduct me. Who knows, who knows?

## ACTUALITY IN ZABUL

CLARK: Here in Zabul, a group of men are playing volleyball in the late afternoon sunshine. I haven't seen a single Zabuli woman. This is one of the ultra-conservative, Pashtun provinces of southern Afghanistan, which formed the Taliban's natural heartland when they were in power. Since 2002, it's also proved ideal territory for guerrilla warfare. There are high mountains in the north of the province where villages are isolated and linked to the centre by paths or rough tracks. In the east, the Red Mountains straddle the international border. Over on the Pakistan side are the tribal territories, frequently mentioned as a possible hide-out for Osama Bin Laden and his Arab fighters and noted for their Taliban-friendly tribes.

## ACTUALITY IN US OPERATIONS ROOM

MAN: King Six Two, Rock Three ... over.

CLARK: Here in the US operations room in the American base which overlooks the provincial capital, Qalat, senior staff are meeting for their daily briefing. On another hill, the Afghan National Army has its base, in an ancient fort which the locals say was built by Alexander the Great over two thousand years ago.

MAN: Some reporting, concerning Qalat district, in the case of twelve ACM under the leadership of militia people, are planning to conduct operations along Highway One against Afghan government forces, between Qalat and the Shajor district. These personnel ... AK47s and RPGs ...

CLARK: For the last year, the US infantry battalion, which is deployed in Zabul, has been following a strategy of taking the fight to the enemy, of determined aggression against what they call the ACM – Anti-Coalition Militias. Captain George Hughbanks says the attack on the fuel tanker is a familiar tactic.

HUGHBANKS: Causing chaos is the number one goal of the insurgency. The events surrounding the attack is that an illegal checkpoint was established, stopped the fuel truck in question, and then the Anti Coalition Militias, the ACM elements destroyed the truck. These commanders will take their group and they



O'HARA: I mean, we've been here for four years, okay, and we decided back in April that we were going to go after the enemy in the areas that they thought were their safe havens. So yes, incidents have picked up, but they've been mainly as our direction leads us to the enemy, into his staging area. Every instance where the enemy attacks us force on force always ends in the same result, that they basically have their butts handed to them, and that's not going to change.

#### ACTUALITY OF MAN SINGING

CLARK: Here in the middle of Qalat city, a man sings a lament for the martyrs of the civil war. Locals say the bazaar is busier than it was a year ago, which indicates that security has improved – although outside the provincial capital, they say, this is still a dangerous province.

While I've been embedded with the Americans, I've also been trying to set up interviews with their enemy. Trying to report on a war like this one is always difficult. Access to western and Afghan government forces is easy, of course, but hearing from the Taliban is rare. Taliban fighters fear betrayal to the Coalition. And even though the leadership has said it welcomes journalists, this is such a murky insurgency that, as a reporter, you still fear walking into a trap – basically you fear kidnap or worse. Even so, trying to speak to the Taliban feels important in terms of understanding why this war is still going on. I've managed to arrange to meet a fighter from this province, working through a series of intermediaries, we're meeting in a safe house. I've agreed not to reveal his identity or location.

FIGHTER (VIA INTERPRETER): Three years ago the Taliban came to me and said that there was a Jihad against the Americans. They told me that money was available and that I would be able to look after my family. They gave me a salary, new clothes, shoes, a motorbike and a Kalashnikov rifle.

CLARK: The fighter says he's 28 although, as with most Afghans who've lived a hard life, he could be ten years older. He's a small, wiry man, with the look of someone who didn't get enough nourishment as a child. It's a familiar type – he looks like many of the soldiers that I used to see when the Taliban were in power. But in those days, this man says, he fled to Pakistan to escape conscription. He



## EXCERPT FROM AL-QAEDA RECRUITMENT DVD

CLARK: Religious, patriotic songs are the soundtrack to this Taliban propaganda DVD. It shows fighters training in an area which could be anywhere along the Afghan-Pakistan border. It's all in Arabic - which makes me think it's aimed at raising funds or recruiting Jihadis from the Middle East. But these DVDs also serve other purposes – to inspire Afghans to join the insurgency and to strike fear into those who might oppose the Taliban. In another DVD, this time in the Pashtu language, a man accused of spying is shown being beheaded.

## ACTUALITY IN CAR

CLARK: I'm in a taxi driving into Kandahar, the main city in the south of Afghanistan. Every minute or so, the driver shows me the site of a recent bombing. The Coalition, the Afghan National Army, police, schools, even mosques have been targeted. Most feared is a new tactic - borrowed, it seems, from Iraq – the suicide bomb.

MAN (VIA INTERPRETER): There was so much blood, blood everywhere. We'd had food prepared and all the dishes were contaminated with blood. I started to wash the mosque down, but the foreigners arrived and stopped me.

CLARK: Last May, this man's uncle was assassinated. Like many of my interviewees, he did not want his name broadcast. His uncle was a leading pro-government mullah. When people gathered at the dead man's mosque to mourn, a suicide bomber struck.

MAN (VIA INTERPRETER): I was out of the mosque when the attack happened and I rushed there when I heard the explosion. Twenty-five people were killed and fifty were injured. From my family, my uncles and cousins, we lost fifteen people. My uncle was a knowledgeable man, a man of religion, a mullah and the head of the society of clerics in Kandahar. Everyone loved him. In the past in the civil war, men of religion were never attacked. I'm now the Imam of the mosque, but people are too frightened to come and pray there. I say to my neighbours, come and pray in the mosque, but they say no.

CLARK: There's a lot of fear now in Kandahar city. No-one knows where the next bomb might go off. Even children aren't safe.

#### ACTUALITY OF SCHOOL BELL

CLARK: This girls' school was also bombed last year. It was accused of teaching Christianity. No-one was hurt, but the school has lost some pupils, mainly teenagers, for whom it's still controversial to get an education.

#### ACTUALITY OF LESSON

CLARK: These are extra classes, put on during the winter holidays. Such is the demand for education here. Speaking to the teachers, you really get a sense that this is also one of the frontlines in the war.

TEACHER (VIA INTERPRETER): I came to the school on the day of the bombing. I was so frightened. And we were really unhappy, because our school is a house of knowledge.

CLARK: Have you been threatened?

TEACHER (VIA INTERPRETER): They have threatened us and they have dropped leaflets, saying, "Stop teaching, we know where you live, we'll attack your homes, burn your homes." But in the end, it's all become normal. Every day, there are explosions every day. I just get on and teach. I will never give up. I want to develop my country and help these little girls. The enemies of Afghanistan, especially the Taliban and especially our neighbours, Pakistan and Iran, don't want us to get on, but I pray to God that we will develop and we will catch them up.

CLARK: The Taliban fighter we spoke to said that most of his fighting had been with a rifle and RPGs. He didn't know how to lay bombs, he said, but one of his comrades had become an explosives expert.

FIGHTER (VIA INTERPRETER): My mate laid the mine. He was a local man who attended specialist training in Pakistan. He said he was trained by Pakistanis from the Punjab and Arabs. Our group started laying bombs after he came back from there.

CLARK: And if you wanted to get promoted, if you wanted to become an explosives expert, would they pay you more?

FIGHTER (VIA INTERPRETER): There are incentives payments. If you blast the Americans, you get paid more than 20,000 Rupees. That's 10,000 paid to the one who laid the bomb and 10,000 for the sentry – to congratulate them that they have done a good job.

CLARK: Have you killed any Americans?

FIGHTER: No.

CLARK: Do you know any other groups who've managed to get the reward for killing Americans?

FIGHTER (VIA INTERPRETER): Yes, I know a commander and twice he has got the bonus.

CLARK: You said you were fighting a Jihad against the Americans, but actually many of the targets were Afghans and you might have killed Afghan civilians in some of those attacks. Did that not concern you?

FIGHTER (VIA INTERPRETER): The people we were fighting were people who had taken a stand with the Americans or the government, and the government is associated with the Americans. So they were fair targets.

CLARK: If civilians die in a Jihad or if they are targeted in a Jihad, under Islamic law is that permissible or is it forbidden?

FIGHTER (VIA INTERPRETER): We started a fight against Americans, when innocent people get killed, how should we know whether it is permitted or forbidden?

CLARK: Targeting civilians is a sign of weakness, insists the Coalition, it shows that the insurgents are resorting to soft targets because they can't confront the military. The governor of Kandahar, Asadullah Khalid, blames foreign hands for the bombings.

GOVERNOR: This Taliban, all of them are living in Pakistan, and we arrested two weeks ago three Pakistanis which they came for suicide, and they accept this. They told us they are Pakistani and they came from Karachi. And when we arrest this network we find out the last attacks in ... Kabul, Kandahar, most of them are done by Pakistanis.

CLARK: Can you make the border stronger?

GOVERNOR: You know also after this thirty years war, we just start to train police and also our Afghan National Army, and Pakistan is the country which they are a part of alliance against terrorism, and they have strong army, strong police and they always promise us to take care of the borders. And I hope one day they will close the border for Taliban, for terrorists. The problem is coming from Pakistan, it is not a secret anymore.

CLARK: Among diplomats, there's also concern that Pakistan could be doing more, although they recognise that putting too much pressure on President Musharraf could just exacerbate the situation. The European Union's Special Envoy to Afghanistan is Fransesc Vendrell.

VENDRELL: Pakistan is a problem regarding the insurgency. I think, seen from here at least, we believe that Pakistan could do more to prevent the Taliban infiltration. It's true that Pakistan is in no position to prevent all border crossing, but we are worried when we hear that senior Taliban figures appear to be able to move around the border provinces without much difficulty.

CLARK: What could be done?

VENDRELL: This is something that I much prefer to talk to the Pakistanis about than to discuss it with you.

CLARK: The Pakistan government always denies that the insurgency is getting any support from its side of the border – and indeed, points to assassination attempts made on its senior officials, including President Musharraf, by Al-Qaeda allies in Pakistan. It also points to bloody battles that the army has fought against pro-Taliban elements in some of the tribal areas. And whatever the exact truth of the matter, it would be wrong to think that all insecurity in Afghanistan can be blamed entirely on foreign meddling. This is a multi-faceted war and some responsibility lies much closer to home.

#### ACTUALITY OF MUSIC

CLARK: Helmand is the largest province in Afghanistan. In the south is desert and the Pakistan border. In the north, a mountain chain runs through to Kandahar, Urozgan and Zabul provinces. Isolated villages dot the mountain valleys. And through the centre flows the mighty Helmand River, irrigating the farms of the river valley. This is one of the most fertile provinces in Afghanistan, but in recent years, the people have seen darker times.

ELDER (VIA INTERPRETER): In Helmand, there is not a single good human being in the police service. When the Taliban took power here, the big commanders ran away to Pakistan. Then, when the Taliban fell, they came back. They collected their soldiers together. They have lots of guns.

CLARK: I'm sitting with an elder from Helmand province, where the British army is now beginning to deploy. I'm really pleased to be speaking to him. During this trip to Afghanistan, many Helmandis have told me about the abuses they or their relatives have suffered at the hands of local police or provincial officials, but persuading people to give an interview has been extraordinarily difficult. I haven't encountered this level of fear since trying to report on abuses under the Taliban. The elder is clearly terrified, he is constantly wringing his hands as he speaks.

ELDER (VIA INTERPRETER): Under the Taliban, there was no crime or killing – security was good. If someone wanted to travel, it was safe. Not like now. Lots of people in Helmand really want the Taliban to come back and it's not because they're religious. It's because there are so many problems nowadays.



CLARK: Have the Americans done anything in terms of trying to help with these problems, because they've had a military presence there since the fall of the Taliban?

SADHAT (VIA INTERPRETER): The thing is, if there is any attack, the police always arrest someone. They want to keep the Americans happy. They are the important people.

CLARK: It's becomes evident, speaking to people from Helmand that the crimes of the Afghan officials has also tainted how people view the American troops - and foreign soldiers in general. Astonishingly, the abuses of the Helmand administration have been known for years, but the men who took power in the province in 2001 were left to rule until very recently. Some key officials have now been replaced. It's widely believed here that the change was demanded by the British before they agreed to deploy. Even so, at the district level, reform of corrupt officials has still to be embarked upon. File on 4 has seen a classified document prepared by the UN and the Coalition which assesses key provincial officials in the starkest of terms. It describes one man who's just been replaced is described as:

READER IN STUDIO: A drug trafficker from a prestigious commander family, reputedly illiterate, supported by Hamed Karzai and Ahmad Wali Karzai.

CLARK: In other words, the man had good political links with the Afghan president and Mr Karzai's brother, who now heads the provincial assembly in neighbouring Kandahar province. Another former senior official is described as:

READER IN STUDIO: An ex-Mujahadeen commander. He's been heavily involved in criminal activities, extortion, opium smuggling and is completely illiterate. He has abused his power.

CLARK: What this document makes clear is that the south of Afghanistan has been plagued by corrupt senior officials since the fall of the Taliban. That includes Zabul province, until a year ago, Helmand until the recent changes and Urozgan where the Dutch are about to deploy. Far from being protected by the authorities, Afghan

CLARK cont: civilians have suffered rule by a predatory state. So why has it taken so long for these officials to be removed from power? The United States ambassador is Ronald Newman.

It seems to be that the governors themselves and their close team – police, intelligence, army – are crucial for what happens in a province. And, up until recently, the governors in the south have had a very poor record. But yet they've been there for the last four years. Is that something that you regret now, that there's only just improvements coming online?

NEWMAN: Well, diplomats are always cautious about talking about things like regrets, but that we have now better governors, I think, in Kandahar, in Zabul, apparently a very active new governor in Helmand, this is clearly important. I think it's also important to recognise, without letting it be an excuse, that in the aftermath of the war, there is a very thin bench from which to find good people, but it is equally true that when governors are poor or not up to the job, that hurts the central government, and it has to deal with that.

CLARK: We know from speaking to people from the UN and seeing documents that the last four years they've been trying to get the governor of Helmand changed, and yet that hasn't happened.

NEWMAN: Well I've only been here six months out of that four years, and I'm very happy that he's gone.

CLARK: But he should have gone a lot earlier.

NEWMAN: I don't have any particular reason to argue with you about that, but I've got so much to do facing forward to try to help this province and other provinces move forward, we're going to do everything we can to support them.

#### ACTUALITY OF POLICE ESCORT

CLARK: Travelling as a foreigner across the south of Afghanistan today requires armed police escorts, like this one, even on the main roads. It's difficult to imagine it now, but in the months following the fall of the Taliban, security



CLARK: British soldiers are now arriving in force and setting up their bases. Before, there were just two hundred US soldiers and three hundred soldiers from the Afghan National Army – or ANA – in Helmand. By June, there will be three thousand British soldiers and three thousand ANA. That's important. The ANA is popular – it's widely seen as a non-sectarian, non-corrupt force. And crucially, in Helmand, the British now have a newly appointed governor, with a clean reputation to work with. The British commander, Colonel Gordon Messenger, will have the forces to conduct a very different war than the Americans.

MESSENGER: Over there you'll see the two headquarters we're building for what's going to be the sort of UK headquarters. This tent here is where we've been based for the last few months.

CLARK: So this is the ops headquarters.

MESSENGER: It looks very much like a military headquarters, but we've had representatives from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and from the Post Conflict Reconstruction Unit here since October, and we've been putting together the UK plan, which is by no means a military plan. It encapsulates the way that the military is going to be working with the governance and with the development agendas that the UK are so keen to support the Afghan government on.

CLARK: Is that unique, in your experience, that Foreign Office and development people have been in at the start on the planning of a military deployment?

MESSENGER: I think we've learned lessons from previous deployment. You can't just have the military going off and doing their thing. You can't just have the Foreign and Commonwealth Office going and doing theirs. You need to have a sort of joined-up approach and that's very much at the heart of it.

CLARK: The British army has a very good reputation elsewhere in Afghanistan. When they established ISAF in Kabul in 2002, and when they moved into the north in 2003, they were seen as carrying out intelligent peace support

CLARK cont: work. But Helmand is a much more difficult place to work in. British troops won't just be facing insurgency and an alienated population. This province is at the centre of Afghanistan's drugs trade. Last year, it produced a fifth of the heroin arriving on Britain's streets – a quarter of the total Afghan opium harvest. Early indications are that this year's crop will be even larger. Plus, the main smuggling route for opium nationally goes through Helmand to the border. The big dealers, it's believed, have connections right to the heart of the Afghan state.

QADERI: My job is dangerous and I can be targeted any time. I'll have to be sitting in a car with bodyguards, and even moving in a car it should be totally tinted, dark vehicles, and another dark vehicle should be following me with bodyguards. That's my life and I cannot walk openly.

CLARK: Habibullah Qaderi is the Minister for counter-narcotics. Reducing opium production in Helmand is a huge challenge. We're told that many of the provincial administration are involved in the drug trafficking. Is that true?

QADERI: I think there are indications, because otherwise such, in a big way, the smuggling happening in these provinces would never happen if they were not with them.

CLARK: Do you see the issue of opium as fundamental to the security in the south of Afghanistan?

QADERI: Yes, narcotics brings criminal economy to the country, it brings corruption, it brings insecurity, and this year there were leaflets distributed in the name of the Taliban, could be the drug smugglers also, all those people who are not growing, they would be killed, and those who are growing, they would be protected. That's the kind of evidence that the two hands will be joining together – and that is a big threat as far as security is concerned for Afghanistan. The insurgents can better operate with the narcotics money and similarly the drug smugglers can operate nicely where there is insecurity in an area, so they are interrelated.

CLARK: All across the south, a green haze is now covering the fields – new poppy plants just pushing up through the soil. In Helmand, as one man put it, everyone grows poppy – or smuggles poppy. This is a province where farmers are menaced by drought, insecurity and debt, and opium poppy is the one crop which is low risk. Farmers like this one fear eradication.

FARMER (VIA INTERPRETER): I can make a good income from poppy when the price is high. I know it is a bad drug but what can I do? If the world wants to stop poppy, it has to help the farmers, help us get a higher price for wheat or cattle. If we could get money for growing vegetables, we wouldn't grow poppy.

CLARK: What will happen if they stop you growing poppy and they don't provide an alternative income?

FARMER (VIA INTERPRETER): People will have to sell their land, or there is another option, to get a gun and fire it against the people who stopped them growing the poppy.

CLARK: If there is an eradication campaign and it's successful and it coincides with the arrival of the British army, you will be associated with it, and as a large part of the population of Helmand depend on poppy, you may well get a backlash.

MESSENGER: Yes, I'm not sure that we will be associated with it. I think that the eradication efforts in Helmand and elsewhere will be Afghan-led. It will be Afghans that do it. I'm not as convinced as you that we will be associated with that backlash.

CLARK: We spoke to one farmer who said, you know, he's never fought in his life, but he will take up a Kalashnikov if he can't feed his family because of poppy eradication.

MESSENGER: I've heard that many times. We'll wait and see what happens, but I'm not as convinced that the reaction will be quite so polarised. Yes, of course we might take casualties, but I can guarantee we will have done everything we can to avoid it.

SIGNATURE TUNE