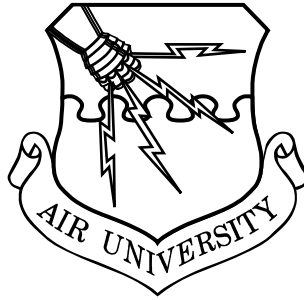


No Moment of Victory

The NATO Training Mission
in Afghanistan, 2009–2011

Martin Loicano
Craig C. Felker





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Air University Press
Academic Services
Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama

Air University Press

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600 Chennault Circle, Building 1405

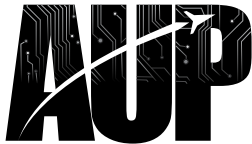
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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Felker, Craig C., 1959– author. | Loicano, Martin, 1974– author. | Air University (U.S.). Press, issuing body.
Title: No moment of victory : the NATO training mission in Afghanistan, 2009–2011 / Craig C. Felker, Martin Loicano.
Other titles: NATO training mission in Afghanistan, 2009–2011
Description: [1st]. | Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama : Air University Press, 2021. | “Published by Air University Press in May 2021”—Title page verso. | Includes bibliographical references and index. | Summary: “No Moment of Victory examines NATO coalition efforts to build Afghan Army and police forces with the objective of transitioning the war to Afghan control. The NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan (NTM-A) grew from a handful of senior officers and enlisted personnel to over 6,000 coalition members training Afghans across the country. Yet there was also a deep historical underpinning to the command’s programs and processes. This book examines the influence of Cold War modernization theory on NTM-A from 2009 to 2011 and offers a cautionary account of the limits of Western military practices and culture in security force assistance”—Provided by publisher.

Identifiers: LCCN 2021016858 (print) | LCCN 2021016859 (ebook) | ISBN 9781585663095 (paperback) | ISBN 9781585663095 (Adobe PDF)

Subjects: LCSH: NTM-A. | Afghanistan. National Security Forces. | Military missions. | National security—Afghanistan—International cooperation. | Police training—Afghanistan—International cooperation. | Soldiers—Training of—Afghanistan—International cooperation. | Military assistance, American—Afghanistan. | Military assistance, European—Afghanistan. | Afghan War, 2001– | Afghanistan—Armed Forces—Officials and employees—Training of—International cooperation.

Classification: LCC UA16 .F45 2021 (print) | LCC UA16 (ebook) | DDC 355.032581—dc23 | SUDOC D 301.26/6:N 76
LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2021016858>
LC ebook record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2021016859>

Published by Air University Press in September 2021

Cover photo: Afghan National Army counter-improvised explosive device training, Kabul Military Training Center. Courtesy of Craig C. Felker. Photo modified by Air University Press to preserve anonymity.

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This book and other Air University Press publications are available electronically at the AU Press website: <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/AUPress>.

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About the Authors

Dr. Martin Loicano served as chief historian, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE). In that capacity, he advised the SHAPE commander and also was part of the SHAPE Strategic Planning Group. Previously, he was an associate professor in the Department of Strategy at the Air War College (AWC). Prior to joining the AWC faculty, Dr. Loicano served with the NATO Training Mission–Afghanistan from 2010 to 2012. He has taught at several universities in the Gulf South region as well as in Southeast Asia and was a Fulbright fellow in Vietnam. He holds a PhD in history from Cornell University, specializing in Cold War conflicts, Southeast Asia, and China.

Dr. Craig C. “C. C.” Felker is a retired Navy captain and author of *Testing American Sea Power: U.S. Navy Strategic Exercises, 1923–1940*. He received his PhD from Duke University in 2004 and afterward served as a permanent military professor in the History Department of the United States Naval Academy, chairing the department from 2014 to 2016. He is currently the executive director of the Society for Military History.

Acknowledgments

As this book nears the light of day, we have been at war in Afghanistan almost 20 years. Nearly 2,000 Americans have been killed in combat, with another 20,000 wounded in action. An accurate accounting of the monetary cost of this war will perhaps never be determined, but reliable estimates settle around the \$2 trillion mark.

Historians are charged with analyzing the past to make sense of the present. This project was a bit different; we were recording and assessing events in real time. But the research and analytical means we used were no different than digging into archives to understand and explain American efforts to build and train the Army of the Republic of Vietnam in the 1960s. We were living in the moment, and our archive was the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Training Mission–Afghanistan. And like scholars in archives, we failed to achieve perfect clarity from our research. But we did discover enough evidence to argue a reasonable thesis, which perhaps in time may add to the body of work and provide some important context on America’s endless war.

Together, we spent a little over two years in Afghanistan, a special kind of “archive.” The book is the product of our efforts, but there were many other hands in the project. We would be remiss not to recognize the support of the professionals at Air University Press (AUP) and their contribution to the book. The manuscript was literally dead in the water, having inexplicably languished with an academic press for several years, when we extricated ourselves from the contract and provided a copy to AUP director and managing editor Dr. Ernest “Doc Rock” Rockwell. We were under contract within a month. “Doc” turned over our manuscript to editor Jeanne Shamburger, who for the ensuing years tirelessly worked with us (and in the process worked us tirelessly) turning the manuscript into a monograph worth publishing. We also thank the rest of the team that brought this book to fruition: Nedra O. Looney, Daniel L. Armstrong, and Carolyn Broadnax Underwood. The book went through a seamless transition when “Doc Rock” became the editor of the *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs* and *Journal of European, Middle Eastern, and African Affairs* and turned over the project to Dr. Chris Rein, who adroitly maneuvered the manuscript through the final bureaucratic hurdles. Finally, we are extremely grateful to Hyla Pearson, chief of

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Security and Policy Review at Air University Public Affairs, now retired, who reviewed this manuscript—twice—as well as many of the documents cited in the book.

We also recognize and thank the men and women, uniformed and civilian, of the NATO Training Mission–Afghanistan. What began as a handful of senior officers, civilians, and senior enlisted personnel grew within two years to a command comprising over 6,000 personnel from nearly 50 nations. Lt Gen William Caldwell’s vision and drive were instrumental to this extraordinary achievement. But it was also due to the herculean efforts of the men and women assigned to NTM-A, both uniformed and civilian, who dedicated themselves to the mission of building Afghan Army and police forces. The repercussions associated with seeing Afghan problems through a Western lens are, as we argue, a reflection of Western history and not an indictment of the mission’s efforts. In fact, we were fortunate to have worked with many healthy skeptics (and you know who you are) who provided highly valuable perspectives that helped to inform the central argument in this book. Ours is but one of thousands of narratives of NTM-A. If nothing else, perhaps this book will inspire those stories to be published as well. They are all significant to the fabric of history.

Finally, this book could not have come to completion without the love and support of our wives, children, and families. Research in a combat theater presented unique challenges and at times a measurable level of danger. But our efforts “over there” were no more important than those of our wives and families, who shouldered burdens on the home front, kept our spirits up, and endured our yearlong deployments. This book is your book as well.

C. C. FELKER

MARTIN LOICANO

Introduction

Do not try to do too much with your own hands. Better the Arabs do it tolerably than that you do it perfectly. It is their war, and you are to help them, not to win it for them. Actually, also, under the very odd conditions of Arabia, your practical work will not be as good as, perhaps, you think it is.

—T. E. Lawrence

In November 2009, Lt Gen William B. Caldwell IV, US Army, and a small group of officers arrived in Afghanistan to expand the existing US Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan (CSTC-A) organization into a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) command. The purpose of this reorganization was “to unify both NATO and U.S. forces previously operating under separate command relationship lines (Directorate for Afghan National Army Training and Equipment [NATO]) and Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan [US] conducting advisory roles within the Afghan National Security Forces [ANSF]) throughout Afghanistan.”¹ Over the ensuing two years, the staff grew to over 6,000 military personnel drawn from 37 nations. The command was instrumental in developing an industrial-scale recruit, train, and assign program for the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP). With an operating budget averaging approximately \$9 billion a year, NATO Training Mission–Afghanistan (NTM-A) was able to expand the ANSF from around 110,000 soldiers and police to a total force of 309,000 today—a force that was set to grow to 352,000 by 2012. The effort demonstrated the operational excellence of the US-led coalition in Afghanistan. But underlying that success was the inability of that same coalition to break from its Western-centric traditions to develop an effective strategic plan to develop sustainable, effective Afghan security forces.

Foreign policy author Ahmed Rashid aptly summarizes the nature of the problem in 2009 in *Descent into Chaos*: “At stake in Afghanistan is not just the future of Pres. Hamid Karzai and the Afghan people yearning for stability, development, and education but also the entire global alliance that is trying to keep Afghanistan together. At stake are the futures of the United Nations, . . . [NATO], the European Union, and of course America’s own power and prestige.”² Actions on

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both the Afghan and NATO sides were based on contemporary factors, but they also continued the longer-term trends of Afghanistan's interaction with foreign powers and the checkered history of previous Western security force assistance operations.

NTM-A—and more broadly the international coalition in Afghanistan—was trying to implement massive changes to the way Afghans organized themselves and to their society, whether it realized it or not. Robert Egnell, a Georgetown University professor and senior fellow at the Center for Security Studies, notes that once again in post-2001 Afghanistan, “Western counter-insurgents should also acknowledge that they are not the defenders of the status quo but often the opposite—they are agents of change and thereby also sources of crisis in societal legitimacy.” He further observes that “struggling to win the support of the local population while at the same time forcing modernization makes for a difficult balancing act and may create inherent contradictions.”³ Additionally, international personnel failed to recognize that, “as Francis Fukuyama argues, outsiders have a limited ability to shape local societies and improve institutional capacity.” The political scientist and economist asserts, “Most outsiders fail to realize that there is no optimal form of state organization and that there are not always clear-cut ‘best practices’ to solve public administration problems.”⁴ Despite its best intentions, NTM-A was an outsider in a broader international effort of outsiders aiming to shape the Afghan government and security forces to suit Western standards and biases.

What follows is a critical examination of the coalition effort to build and develop the ANSF, to include discussion of the limitations of that effort, both internal to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) coalition and between Afghans and their international partners. While the great majority of those who served at NTM-A worked long hours and performed admirably under dangerous conditions, this book concludes that the overall effort suffered from several significant shortcomings. The first two chapters provide the historical context of US and international interactions with Afghans in the post-2001 period. Chapter one considers the Afghan experience in the country's previous relationships with foreigners who sought to shape Afghan security forces as well as the traditions and events that undergirded the ways Afghan forces developed before 2001. The second chapter examines two related precedents for NTM-A operations: the US security assistance and advisory programs in Korea and Viet-

nam and the organizations that preceded NTM-A in post-Taliban Afghanistan. These precedents heavily influenced the strategic and operational environment in which the NTM-A, ISAF, and ANSF tried to provide security for Afghanistan. The remaining chapters consider the first two years of the NATO effort to support the Afghan National Army, Afghan National Police, and the Ministries of Defense and Interior.

The book is a collaborative effort. As command historians, our days were spent in nearly every meeting that involved the commanding general. General Caldwell provided us access to every meeting and briefing on his schedule, as did many other senior leaders at the headquarters. We participated in preparatory sessions and briefings to senior military and political leaders, congressional delegations, updates to the ISAF commander, daily ISAF staff meetings, video teleconferences with the National Security Council, and meetings (*shuras*, in Dari) with the ministers of defense and interior. Additionally, we attended all internal NTM-A meetings and briefings, such as weekly “deep dives” given by NTM-A deputy commanders responsible for the ANA, ANP, Afghan Air Force (AAF), and Programs (Logistics); strategy sessions; and meetings called by the commanding general on specific issues relating to ANSF development. We also collected all documents associated with these meetings and conducted interviews with NTM-A personnel and senior Afghan leaders, including the ministers of defense and interior. We conducted site visits to ANSF facilities across Afghanistan, Afghan government offices, and international conferences on the war in Afghanistan. Consequently, and to his credit, the commanding general’s emphasis on transparency meant that all documents produced by the command and used in this book were unclassified, which provided the materials forming the basis of chapters three through nine.

Working so closely with senior NTM-A leadership proved instrumental to understanding the complicated nature of the mission and provided the necessary documentation to adequately explain how the organization worked in its first two years of existence. From the vantage point of the NTM-A commander, we were fortunate to be able to witness the war in Afghanistan from the strategic level through the lens of Afghan security force development as it nested in the broader international strategy. By 2012, soldiers and police trained in 70 training centers located in 30 of 34 Afghan provinces. The NTM-A, or more specifically, CSTC-A (the US command element of NTM-A),

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spent billions fielding these forces with the most modern weapons available while trying to temper acquisitions within the boundaries of what the Afghans could afford and maintain on their own. For example, at one point the ANA received its first M1117 Guardian armored support vehicles (at around a million dollars per vehicle), and the AAF was due to acquire a propeller-driven close support aircraft. Contemporaneously, NTM-A resisted persistent Afghan demands for M1 Abrams main battle tanks and F-16 Fighting Falcon fighter aircraft.

These accomplishments, while impressive, failed to fully explain how the command operated during its first two years. At the operational level, the NTM-A narrative was complicated. Thus, in its strategic communications, the command often reduced its messages to easy-to-remember phrases or along alliterative lines. For example, acquisition for the ANSF had to be “capable, affordable, and sustainable.” Similarly, the command referred to “literacy, leadership, and losses” when addressing the major challenges facing the ANSF. By summer 2011, the evidence indicated that the same factors that made NTM-A’s mission possible also proved to be the greatest impediments to the command. The four factors that both propelled and hindered NTM-A’s mission—which constitute central themes to this work—were modernization, money, messaging, and mission.

The historical context for this book goes back nearly a century. Afghan police and soldiers have benefited from foreign aid and advisors since the first decade of the twentieth century. Over the twentieth century, Afghans gathered many preconceptions and hard-earned lessons about partnership with powerful allies, especially regarding security force development. One lesson was that foreigners always had ideas about what Afghans should do to create security in their country—ideas that only occasionally overlapped with Afghan ideas, traditions, and politico-military frameworks. In fact, despite the best intentions, ISAF’s actions could be interpreted as anywhere from hostile to simply ignorant of local realities by Afghans. This mindset ties into modernization—the first of the four factors.

One of those ideas that dominated security force assistance to Afghanistan had roots that went back over 50 years. As the Cold War began heating up in the late 1950s, American social scientists developed what they believed to be a solution that would achieve the ends of diplomat and historian George Kennan’s containment strategy. The answer lay in the employment of American engineering expertise

and development aid to third world countries—assistance that would accelerate them into modernity and beyond the reach of communism. Employing empirically driven studies buttressed by polling data and variance testing, leading academics including Walt Rostow, Lucian Pye, and Lincoln Gordon argued that the world's lagging societies could be driven to modernity in the US image. Over the ensuing decades, modernization theory manifested itself in projects like the Helmand River irrigation project in Afghanistan; organizations such as the Alliance for Progress to identify and fund projects; and the Peace Corps, which would provide American know-how to see these projects through.⁵

While well intentioned, modernization theory suffered from systemic flaws that limited its success with those nation-states it was intended to help. The first was the rather condescending implication of collecting poor countries into a kettle called the “third world.” Second, and more problematic, was the general lack of understanding of the customs, traditions, and histories of the countries identified as candidates for modernization. This view should not have been that surprising, given that the theorists themselves looked nothing like their intended test subjects. What has been surprising is the endurance of development assistance models based on modernist assumptions long after these concepts have been shown to possess limited value.

Third world political elites were more than happy to take development aid, only to use it to support the patronage networks that allowed them to remain in power and to pursue their own desired programs. Development projects never quite achieved their desired end state. They were plagued by the inherent suspicion of indigenous peoples to the flood of engineers, business people, and intellectuals whose ways threatened local traditions of living.⁶ Interjections of foreign cash flows often disrupted existing economic patterns and created a privileged class of people who became dependent on aid. Even the Peace Corps failed to completely realize its dream, as the army of college-educated volunteers was more likely to come from the ranks of the humanities and social sciences than the technical disciplines needed to build developing economies and infrastructure. The theory proved no more effective when applied in a wartime setting.

In the early 1960s, the war in South Vietnam appeared to be the perfect environment for implementing modernization theory as a means to separate the Vietcong from their means of support in the countryside. However, the modernizers who attempted to reengineer

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Vietnamese villages into strategic hamlets quickly discovered that those societies were not as malleable as the theory presumed.

As has been the case in post-2001 Afghanistan, the enemy proved resilient and also benefited from extensive foreign aid of its own. Impatient and often uncomprehending US leaders failed to support a viable political alternative to Vietnamese communism and introduced a highly kinetic war effort more harmful than helpful to its Vietnamese allies. The US effort in Vietnam was based on the belief that the US leadership—while largely ignorant of Vietnam in every sense—still knew best what should happen in Vietnam and how South Vietnam should be defended. The US also believed that its forces would be able to defeat Vietnamese communism with South Vietnamese forces acting only in support.

By the mid-1970s, modernization theory suffered from not only its failures abroad but also the uncomfortable reality that America in the 1970s had many of the problems the modernizers were trying to solve in the third world. Racial conflict, poverty, a failed war, and political corruption rendered the theory unsuitable as policy. Yet less than two decades later, it would rise again, first as the US embarked on nation building in Panama and then in 2001, after the September 11 attacks incited the Bush administration to “accelerate” history to remove terrorist safe havens. As Nils Gilman points out, “Somehow the discourse on modernization continued the comeback it had begun with the end of the cold war. Except now the renewed discourse of modernity, instead of representing conservative self-congratulation, became the position of liberal internationalists who hoped to add some carrots to the bag of sticks that the Bush regime presented as its main approach for dealing with the post-9-11 world.”⁷

The same spirit animated NTM-A operations from 2009 to 2012. Western leaders continued to believe that solutions for Afghanistan should be based on a model wherein Afghans learned and copied Western methods and institutions. Thus, following the ouster of the Taliban, which took only a few months, a postwar reconstruction campaign followed. It was supposed to be “smooth, rapid, and cheap” and allow US forces to “ensure security, transfer authority, establish stable, market-driven growth, and then quickly depart, all in a few short months.”⁸

Two kinds of operations rested at the center of the US-led international effort in Afghanistan—counterinsurgency (COIN) and security force assistance. US leaders vigorously pursued a population-centric

COIN model, with the aim of winning over the population of Afghanistan on behalf of Afghan forces they had yet to build. In both lines of operations, international leaders formed plans according to their own preferences, with little consultation with the Afghans they were there to help. As Egnell has argued convincingly, in population-centered COIN operations, “A traditional principle and catchphrase in counter-insurgency theory is the importance of winning the ‘hearts and minds’ of the local population in order to increase the legitimacy of the host nation authorities and to ‘drain the sea in which the insurgents swim.’ . . . Without the support of the local population, the aims of the campaign—whatever they may be—will not be achieved.” Egnell further notes that “theoretically the hearts and minds approach is rooted in modernization theory and a normative Western approach to legitimacy that fails to live up to the expectations of the local population.”⁹ The fundamental problem that underlay ISAF and NTM-A operations was the perception that foreign forces knew best what should be done in Afghanistan—and how. However, in the words of journalist Edward Girardet, who has studied and worked in Afghanistan for much of his professional life, “Not unlike their Red Army counterparts during the 1980s, the Americans and their military allies are increasingly perceived by ordinary Afghans as an unwelcome foreign occupation force. Their behavior and lack of cultural awareness often emerge as affronts to Afghan customs and their sense of independence.”¹⁰

If there is an advantage to being present when history is going on, even if that means working in a combat zone, it is having your thesis supported by the actual actors. When the commanding general exclaimed at a staff deep dive that “we’re creating an army in our own image,” we concluded that we had a lock on at least this part of the thesis. But there is more to the story. The ANA is the latest attempt at modernization theory in action. Its organization, training, equipment, and doctrine represent the best that the West, and in particular the United States Army, has to offer in the way of security force assistance. To its credit, and unlike its predecessor organizations during the Cold War, NTM-A recognized that there was not an American inside every Afghan. The problem was that the realization did not prevent the command from attempting to jam an American inside an Afghan. Despite the passage of over 50 years since US military personnel began to advise in Vietnam, the approach remained fundamentally the same. Success would be measured by how closely Af-

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ghans copied US methods rather than by supporting Afghans in developing their own methods to solve their problems.

By the end of NTM-A's second year as an organization, assessments regarding the effectiveness of the ANA remained mixed. The army recruited 6,000–7,000 prospective soldiers per month. The training program included basic warrior training and branch school training for soldiers heading to specialty missions such as artillery and engineering. A nine-week course at the Consolidated Fielding Center provided training at the company and battalion levels. The Afghan Air Force (organizationally part of the Afghan Army, although it controls its own air operations) had begun the transition from flight training outside the country to standing up an indigenous pilot training program at Shindand Air Base in western Afghanistan. Yet the inclination to modernize the ANA met its share of difficulties. As it turns out, the Afghans had a say. Attrition was perhaps the most vexing challenge facing the ANA. With monthly attrition at about 2.4 percent, the ANA was bleeding close to 30 percent of the force in a year—at a cost of approximately \$250 million. Despite NTM-A's best efforts to identify the causes, Afghan leaders demonstrated little concern to address them, such as implementing a rotation program for units to cycle them out of combat for leave and rest. Afghan leaders also failed to exhibit the organizational skills to match their persistent demands for more sophisticated weapons. For example, Minister of Defense Abdul Rahim Wardak repeatedly requested advanced aircraft such as F-16s, but his soldiers could not even keep far simpler Mi-17 helicopters in service. Despite NTM-A efforts to develop a coherent command and control system, Wardak's air commanders too often ignored the Western model, ordering air operations from their cell phones.

A second major issue lay in logistics. NTM-A designed a digitally based logistics tracking system to move supplies and parts from a central depot in Kabul to regional supply facilities. The difficulty, though, was trying to implement such a system with a largely illiterate army, additionally challenged by a tenuous power grid, a fragmented and poorly constructed road network, and sparse internet connectivity. Even with a robust literacy program, the ANA remained reliant on coalition mentors and contractors for some time.

Training a competent police force presented a different though no less vexing problem. Police development lagged the ANA by approximately two years, a consequence of the coalition's failure to develop a

coherent training program early in the war.¹¹ To address the deficit, NTM-A had to create the necessary training infrastructure to build the ANP up to its authorized ceiling of 157,000 personnel. It also had to develop a means to identify and train those patrolmen who had been recruited and sent to assignments with absolutely no training. Consequently, the nature of the threat—as first defined by the commander of ISAF and US Forces–Afghanistan, Lt Gen Stanley McChrystal, US Army—also informed NTM-A programs, prioritizing COIN-based training ahead of civil policing.¹² The command also found itself confounded by leadership within the Ministry of Interior, whose personnel reporting and assigning process placed police officers into positions with almost no regard for rank. Finally, critical reports from the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and nongovernmental organizations in summer 2011 pointed out that the development of a competent police force dedicated to the rule of law was in a nascent and tenuous state.

NTM-A made some headway to address many of these deficiencies. It expanded basic police training to include human rights topics, developed standardized police training programs, and increased the number of professional international police officers in training and advising positions. Consequently, establishing a police force that was accountable to Afghan citizens, behaved within the confines of the rule of law, and could be seen as acceptable to the international community remained a work in progress. Adding to the difficulty was establishing a legitimate rule of law and an effective, humane prison system. Both issues were largely outside NTM-A's area of responsibility yet instrumental to a functioning police force. Vastly different conceptions of what constituted an effective justice system created a gulf between Afghans and their international partners. As a result, and as in so many other areas, international plans and procedures were pursued with little connection to local leaders' concepts or traditions.

Of even greater concern was the timeline for eliminating the private security companies (PSC) providing perimeter protection for virtually all coalition bases, UN compounds, and embassies along with security for truck convoys supplying all these facilities. President Karzai abolished the PSCs but subsequently provided the coalition a one-year bridging strategy to begin transition to the Afghan Public Protection Force (APPF), a state-owned enterprise that in theory would replace the existing companies. The problem, though, was that the Afghans did virtually nothing to develop the business

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model for the enterprise. Nor did they move very quickly to establish the necessary organization and training facilities. Perhaps the intent of the Afghans all along was to force the ISAF to take the lead on building the APPF, which it grudgingly began to do by the end of 2011 or risk having to protect bases and convoys with coalition forces. An emerging associated problem, however, was how the US-led and manned joint program executive office could maneuver its way through the legal entanglements of a Department of Defense (DOD) organization complicit in establishing a foreign, government-owned, and for-profit company.

No amount of development or modernization, however, would have been possible without money—the second of the four factors. Funding was the fuel for ANSF development, and for its first two years, NTM-A enjoyed funding levels making it the DOD's most expensive program. NTM-A's budget grew from \$9.2 billion in fiscal year (FY) 2009 to \$12.8 billion in FY 2012. These funds paid for virtually every aspect of ANSF development, from infrastructure to equipment to salaries.¹³ The command was initially confident that it would continue to receive generous levels of funding well beyond 2012. But the political debate in the United States over deficit spending—and its contribution to the spiraling debt—placed the DOD and NTM-A squarely in the sights of budget hawks. By late spring 2011, confidence had waned to the point that the commanding general felt compelled to return approximately \$1.6 billion of FY 2012 money, with the hope that the act would deter additional cuts. NTM-A also sought to find cost efficiencies, an examination that revealed excess equipment and ammunition to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars in Afghan Army inventories. Funding constraints also threatened the planned growth and sustainment of a 352,000-man ANSF. The issue effectively consumed much of the leadership's time and efforts in the second half of 2011 in an attempt to stave off what was increasingly becoming inevitable.¹⁴

Messaging constituted the third factor that both benefited and impeded the command. DOD Joint Publication 1-02 defines the phrase *strategic communication* as “focused United States Government efforts to understand and engage key audiences to create, strengthen, or preserve conditions favorable for the advancement of United States Government interests, policies, and objectives through the use of coordinated programs, plans, themes, messages, and products synchronized with the actions of all instruments of national power.”¹⁵

Unlike public affairs, which aims to convey service-oriented human interest stories for public consumption, strategic communications develops focused narratives delivered to specific audiences that can either assist or potentially derail DOD policies and programs. Why the services felt compelled to establish high-end communications policies is unclear. But the concept seems to have arisen around 2006, about the time that the momentum in Iraq and Afghanistan shifted to the insurgents.¹⁶

NTM-A had a robust strategic communications program. Serving under General Caldwell was an Army lieutenant colonel with extensive strategic communications experience who identified target audiences and shaped the command's message. The general also used his commander's action group (CAG), which ordinarily functioned as a staff think tank, to craft the message and develop briefings to reinforce it. The medium for delivering the message was the command briefing. The briefing was a series of PowerPoint slides outlining areas such as ANSF growth, officer and noncommissioned officer growth, and literacy training and providing quality metrics such as weapons qualification. These briefings focused on supposedly measurable indicators, conveying the sense that the command had far more reliable information about ground conditions than it actually did. With many personnel operating only from the headquarters, the strategic messages often failed to capture the full situation.

For instance, in the first half of 2011, one central command message was that behind the surge of coalition forces in 2010 was a more critical surge of Afghan forces—trained and equipped to assume the lead for security by the end of 2014. The command delivered the message of “the Afghan surge” to key audiences, including visiting congressional delegations, coalition nation diplomats, senior US and international military officers, civilian leaders in the DOD, members of the National Security Council, think tanks, and military lobbying organizations. The underlying message was that transition—and the associated withdrawal of coalition forces from Afghanistan—depended on continuing substantial levels of personnel and monetary support to the training mission.

It turned out that the perceived resonance of the message was illusory. The promise of an Afghan surge seemed to resonate early in the year. But the reason was less a consequence of the message's validity than that NTM-A's messaging strategy went largely unchallenged. That situation began to change in the spring as other messages came

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to the forefront that competed with the command's strategic communications plan. The debate in the United States over deficit spending and the spiraling national debt increasingly took aim at the billions of dollars being spent in Afghanistan—a position supported by damning internal government reports from the Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction. The sluggish response from administration efforts to reverse the economic downturn exacerbated an interesting paradox on American support for the war. Despite a public that was largely uninformed on the war for most of its 10 years, the debate on the economy seemed to have the indirect effect of increasingly diminished public support for the continued American presence in Afghanistan.

On 22 June 2011, President Barack Obama outlined his plans for the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan, sending a message that all but drowned out NTM-A's strategic communications plan. The decision to remove 10,000 troops by the end of 2011, with the remainder of the surge forces out by summer 2012, certainly stunned senior military commanders who were confident that the majority of the surge forces would be fighting through 2012. While the president's motivation for the dramatic withdrawal might be ambiguous, the implication of his decision was quite clear. And while NTM-A's institutional transition plan might have once appeared sound, the president's speech implied that the pace of transition would accelerate beyond previously assumed timelines. The command's mission statement envisioned transition being completed "by the end of 2014," with the Afghans having "taken the lead" for their own security. President Obama's words, however, reflected that this timeline was no longer germane. "By 2014," President Obama noted early in the speech, "this process of transition will be complete, and the Afghan people will be responsible for their own security."¹⁷

The command's messaging simply could not compete with the president's explicit and implicit messages. Although comprising less than 3 percent of the coalition presence in Afghanistan, NTM-A did not remain immune to the surge recovery. The command lost 539 American personnel by the end of December 2011, with additional losses certain to be included in the second recovery of 23,000 Americans by October 2012. The loss of \$1.6 billion from the FY 2012 budget presaged more austere out-year budgets than the command had planned for earlier in 2011. The ANSF would be permitted to grow to 352,000 soldiers and police, but these Afghan forces would begin

systematic reductions soon after transition as Afghanistan could not afford them. Finally, while NTM-A leadership had envisioned a full three years to achieve the transition of security lead, the president's implied message was that NTM-A would no longer determine the pace of security transition.

These delays, along with the impending budget cuts, surge recovery personnel reductions, and departures of key members of Caldwell's staff, had a stagnating effect on the mission—the fourth major factor in the book. Caldwell and a few key leaders entered Afghanistan in November with the mission to build a capable ANSF that would be transitioned over to the Afghans by the end of 2014. Aided by substantial budgets and personnel contributions from NATO and the international community, Caldwell and his staff were well on their way to accomplishing the first half of the mission. While the training programs produced ample numbers of Afghan trainers, many of whom were overseeing day-to-day training responsibilities, the command made little headway toward transitioning training facilities or ministerial departments to Afghan lead. By late summer 2011, the staff was in a virtual state of suspended animation. Training programs continued, but productivity was slowed by the month-long Ramadan period, when training was severely curtailed, and the subsequent Eid al-Fitr celebration for which training stopped altogether. It was as if the command had lost traction, with senior staff increasingly transfixed on a change of command that continued to move to the right, with the strain clearly apparent on Caldwell.

In his two years as commander NTM-A, Lieutenant General Caldwell built an industrial recruit-train-assign-equip process in Afghanistan and demonstrated the diplomatic acumen to convince the international community to commit to developing a credible ANSF. And yet, while the foundation of the ANSF was firming, the road to transition was far from assured. Attrition in the ANSF, particularly in the army, remained an intractable problem, bleeding hundreds of millions of dollars and losing trained personnel at high rates. Attrition could lead to even more dangerous conditions if these men found their way to insurgent groups, making an already bad problem even worse. Despite NTM-A efforts to screen incoming Afghan soldiers and police officers, “green on blue” attacks persisted. And there were simply not enough educated and competent Afghans to meet the logistics, maintenance, engineering, and other technical requirements of the ANA and ANP. For the same reason, the Afghan Air

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Force lagged far behind the other services in terms of development. And with surge recovery gaining momentum, there was no telling how many American service personnel the command might lose.

One thing that loomed as certain, though, was that transition would be complete in 2014. And so, when Lt Gen Dan Bolger, US Army, assumed command in November 2011, he immediately began to direct NTM-A into the second phase of its mission. This execution phase would be marked by an emphasis on keeping expectations within the practical ability of the Afghans to meet them. “Throughout,” Bolger wrote, “we’ll seek to see the Afghan National Security Forces as they are: operating forces, generating forces, and the Ministries.” Bolger’s emphasis would be to prepare the Afghans at the small-unit level, believing that the war was being fought and would be won at the battalion level and below. Accordingly, he outlined three guiding principles for the command. The first was that all NTM-A personnel were combat advisors, and all had a responsibility to help the Afghans fight and win. Second, Bolger emphasized the basics, which would endure changing circumstances. Perhaps more importantly, sticking to the basics would provide a deterrent from making things too complicated. Finally, the new commanding general emphasized the importance of setting the example and the human side of leadership.¹⁸

Along with the new guidance came a significant reorganization of the command to meet Bolger’s objectives. Bolger dissolved the CAG and removed strategic communications from the command’s communications organization. Bolger also dramatically changed the role of the regional support commands (RSC). He removed the ambiguity that existed between the RSCs, deputy commanders, and the headquarters by formally recognizing the regional commanders within an advise-and-assist brigade commander construct. As part of the equivalent of a brigade combat team, RSC commanders would now have command over all training elements and personnel within their regions. The second revision consolidated the headquarters support directorates under two separate two-star deputies. A newly created deputy commander for operations would lead the “advise” effort and oversee all aspects of ANSF development, including the regional support commands, as well as the 13th Expeditionary Sustainment Brigade—brought in to oversee the development of ANSF logistics. A second two-star general would assume responsibility for the “assist” mission, including acquisition programs, international engagement,

finance, and the Joint Program Executive Office for the APPF—the replacement organization for the banned PSCs.

The new commander's priorities and staff reorganization reflected the acknowledgment that although a transition end state provided some certainty, the near future was less clear. No one could predict that the pace of transition would permit the flexibility to plan out to the end of 2014. In fact, press reports noted that the Obama administration was considering a change in strategy that would accelerate the shift from combat to advise-and-assist operations.¹⁹ To accommodate that shift, though, would require a commensurate acceleration in the development of the ANSF. General Bolger appeared ready to transform the command to deal with uncertainty by using the worst-case scenario as the baseline. The imperative of time finally came to the forefront of the NTM-A mission. At stake was the difference between "Vietnamization" of the ANSF or a substantive transition to an Afghan security lead that would endure after the departure of coalition forces. For this effort to succeed, it would have to differ from prior US-led efforts in an important way: at the end of the day, the ANSF had to be sustainable and effective using only internal resources.

We draw three preliminary conclusions from the first two years of NTM-A. The first is that US policy makers should think through the implications of war with and against people whose cultures, traditions, customs, and histories are completely alien to the West. Modeling the ANSF more closely after Bangladeshi versus German forces might have alleviated much of the frustration and friction in dealing with Afghan military elites, who were more than happy to accept US and coalition support, albeit on their terms.

The second conclusion deals with the necessity to have a standing organization dealing specifically with security force assistance. NTM-A was established in an ad hoc fashion—its senior leaders drawn principally from the Army's Training and Doctrine Command at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. The command continued to grow while simultaneously building Afghan capacity to recruit, train, and sustain its forces. Such a force would be far better suited to developing local partners on a realistic schedule to achieve realistic end states. The US Army recently established security force assistance brigades, specialized units whose mission is to advise, assist, and support the development and training of partner nation armed forces.

NATO and the international community joined in the effort, although many of the participants added national caveats restricting

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their participation in certain areas or missions. Would a formally established force, prepared to deploy to provide necessary training assistance, have avoided the challenges that NTM-A experienced? Perhaps. Yet the problems associated with establishing such a force, as well as finding enduring commitments of people and funding from cash-strapped nations, make any such undertaking highly problematic, if at all possible.

The final conclusion has to do with the nature of war. Anyone who believes that war can be fought in isolation has simply failed to seriously pay attention to the history of what has become America's longest war. Many senior leaders in NTM-A were convinced that the command would endure well beyond the 2014 transition deadline and would be funded appropriately to ensure that the ANSF was ready to take the lead for its security and sustain itself beyond 2014. What the staff soon realized, however, was that NTM-A was neither autonomous nor in control of its destiny. The Afghans intruded on the command's sense of reality. Messaging went awry or became lost in a morass of competing messages. More powerful political, economic, and social forces—having little or nothing to do with the war in Afghanistan—increasingly shaped the future of the command. General Bolger either intuitively sensed that a new reality was necessary or received direct guidance from on high. In any case, NTM-A would fold itself into the larger campaign plan. The Afghans would either come along willingly or be kicked to transition.

The purpose of this book is to portray the role that NTM-A played in the war in Afghanistan and explain the achievements and difficulties associated with developing the Afghan Army and police forces. Though not central to the work, the narrative will also add to the debate on the application of COIN theory to the Afghan war. Our skepticism was informed from two observations. The first was that very little tacit evidence emerged that validated the COIN manual's observations and recommendations. What empiricism existed in daily briefings usually took the form of numbers of insurgents killed and captured, drawing on various sources with sometimes dubious provenance. But evidence of providing enduring security outside of combat was lacking. Frankly, the exact dimensions of a "security bubble" in Afghanistan proved no clearer than those of an "ink blot" during the Vietnam War.²⁰ To no small degree, this dissonance grew from the reality that "no central government in Afghan history has ever directly governed the regions, mainly because of the tribal and

religious resistance to central government authority.”²¹ As they always had, Afghans resisted a system that gathered too much power in one place or in the hands of a single ethnic group.

NTM-A faced similar challenges to its guiding principles between 2009 and 2011. Many were outside the scope of the command’s capability to influence, but a good many more were well within the boundaries of NTM-A’s responsibilities. Cultural, historical, and strategic issues limited the effectiveness of the command’s efforts in its first two years of operations. Like their predecessors in other wars, international staffers in Afghanistan were hardworking and well-intentioned people. They cared about helping Afghans have a better future but often did not understand how to do so. As Afghanistan expert Sarah Chayes observes, in Afghanistan “it was hard for military commanders to take accurate stock of the impact their relationships with Afghan counterparts, military and civilian, might have on security and good governance. Officers contracted for work and supplies, delivered development resources through local agents, purchased intelligence and gravel and gasoline—without thinking through the potentially distorting impact of these arrangements.”²² The international coalition, including NTM-A, worked with Afghan leaders who had been burned once too often by foreigners to trust them and then sought to convince these same leaders to accept that the ISAF knew better than they did how to secure their country. This same impatience and overconfidence had animated US wars in Iraq and Vietnam.

However, this approach, firmly rooted in modernist assumptions, could not change Afghanistan in ways that the ISAF hoped it could. Undeterred by this fact, the coalition continued to pursue changes to Afghan security forces and society despite the US-dominated coalition being, in journalist Rajiv Chandrasekaran’s words, “unable to tell friend from foe.” Nonetheless, “the Americans opted to do more of the governing themselves. That required legions of civilians who knew how to run a country.”²³ Few such people were forthcoming or had the expertise to guide officials in a predominantly Muslim country. NTM-A was fundamentally constrained by these problems in its first two years. The command was unable to get the right number of the right people to offer suitable assistance to Afghan leaders, who in turn “after three decades of war, were smart, discriminating, and wary survivors. They had to be. And after years of unmet expectations, even the most hopeful had become cynics.”²⁴ In his memoir,

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General McChrystal singles out why Afghans remained cynics after 2001: “Since . . . 2001, Coalition forces had rarely invited any substantive planning or execution by Afghan forces when conducting military operations in Afghanistan.”²⁵ For NTM-A to succeed, it would have to find ways to cooperate productively with Afghan security forces to develop solutions that both sides could accept. How well it did and did not achieve this almost herculean task is the subject of this book.

Notes

(All notes appear in shortened form. For full details, see the appropriate entry in the bibliography.)

For NTM-A historical documents cited, contact the US Army Center of Military History, Fort Lesley J. McNair, Washington, DC.

1. Headquarters International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), Commander ISAF’s Initial Assessment, 30 August 2009, B-1.
2. Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, xxxix.
3. Egnell, “Winning ‘Hearts and Minds?’” 295.
4. Jones and Muñoz, *Afghanistan’s Local War*, 8.
5. Latham, *Modernization as Ideology*; and Chandrasekaran, “In Afghanistan.”
6. Chandrasekaran, “In Afghanistan.” The Helmand River irrigation project, for example, failed to achieve the goals of its American sponsors. “The valley,” Chandrasekaran reports, “never became Afghanistan’s breadbasket, (although it did become the world’s largest grower of opium-producing poppies). There are no factories, co-ed schools or community centers. A concert in Lashkar Gah earlier this year [2011] featuring female singers without headscarves led to the firing of the deputy governor of Helmand province.”
7. Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future*, ix.
8. Latham, *Right Kind of Revolution*, 186–91, 201–4.
9. Egnell, “Winning ‘Hearts and Minds?’” 282–83.
10. Girardet, *Killing the Cranes*, 3.
11. Responsibility for police development originally went to the Germans in 2002. One year later, the program was transferred to the US Department of State’s Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement, which had even fewer resources to devote to the ANP. Transfer of the responsibility to the DOD in 2005 alleviated the resource issues. In the interim, thousands of Afghan policemen had entered the force with no training whatsoever.
12. Headquarters ISAF, COMISAF Initial Assessment, 30 August 2009, 2–4.
13. Three funding sources support ANSF development. The Afghan Security Forces Fund (ASFF) provides for equipment and sustainment for the ANA and ANP as well as salaries for the ANA. The United States is the sole source for this funding. Police salaries are paid by an internationally funded Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan (LOTFA), of which the United States is the majority donor. The NATO Trust Fund is a donor-based source and the smallest of the three. The United States contributes approximately 93 percent of the total amount of money for ANSF development.

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20. Krulak, "New Kind of War," 345–67.
21. Peter Tomsen, *Wars of Afghanistan*, 46.
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Chapter 1

Afghan Forces in History: 1900–2001

Martin Loicano

Early twenty-first-century Afghan armed forces perpetuate centuries-old trends, resulting in a curious mixture of dependence on foreign aid and independence from central authority. This chapter aims to provide an overview of relevant information drawn from Afghan security forces' history rather than a comprehensive history of those forces. The NATO Training Mission–Afghanistan's (NTM-A) work with contemporary Afghan security forces is in many ways the latest episode in a longer history of Afghan leaders' use of foreign assistance to further ends that may or may not conform to international partners' intentions. The current effort also reflects the long-term tendency of Western powers to operate within the confines of modernization theory when offering support to less developed partners. International security force assistance in the post-2001 period must be understood in the context of the history of Afghanistan and Western security force assistance missions.

The historical roles of Afghan armed forces in politics and society have heavily influenced the current character of Afghan forces and the nature of interaction between Afghans and the international community. Problems dating back generations continued to shape Afghan politics in the post-2001 era. For instance, a May 2010 International Crisis Group report notes, "From the late 1920s to the early 1970s, national security agendas were determined by internal struggles for power among Afghan elites, the leveraging of external military aid to gain or retain power, and conflict with neighboring states over disputed borders."¹ For Afghanistan to develop a national army, it would have to address the history of its previous armies and find a way to overcome traditional problems: politically and ethnically motivated internal factionalism, corruption, and conscious disunity.

Afghanistan's long martial tradition is similar to other countries that have played historical roles as buffer states among more powerful neighbors. While Afghans have proved capable of raising forces to repel invaders, militia and local force alliances with the central government were transitory and tenuous. National-scale efforts typically took the form of temporary levies by the monarch, who offered com-

pensation to local leaders in exchange for lending their forces to a larger effort. As a result, tribalism and localized affinities remained a stronger force in the military than did nationalism. The Afghan government's current international partners have sought to create a centralized, nationalized military and police force for Afghanistan. This organizational scheme fails to conform to the contours of Afghan history and cultural practices. Swedish defense scholar Robert Egnell has astutely observed that "every change in the direction of our perception of a legitimate system may in fact be the opposite in the eyes of the local population, or at least in the eyes of the local leaders with stakes to lose."²

NTM-A's mission placed the organization at odds with Afghans' strong preference for local security forces. It also faced numerous internal problems brought from International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) coalition nations. Afghan military and policing precedents were largely discouraging. The Afghan police and army had sometimes openly fought each other for influence. For centuries, centralized government forces had proven incapable of supplanting the powerful local security institutions that underpinned stability in Afghanistan. As has been the case in the present international intervention, much of Afghan history was a tale of conflicts for influence and power that placed Afghans on all sides of multilateral conflicts.

Internal political instability has fundamentally underpinned tensions among different groups in Afghanistan, and it also defined the role of the Afghan Army in the state. As indicated in a report commissioned by the European Union (EU), "since the Afghan Army's inception it has almost never fought for the preservation of Afghanistan's borders, but was used almost exclusively to subdue revolts against the government inside Afghanistan's borders."³ The same EU report calls attention to the fact that "Afghanistan never knew a real civilian police service, subordinate to authorized democratically elected powers and neither does it now."⁴ This statement captures the essence of today's problems—the international community views the introduction of nationalized police as a desirable and laudable end state, but many Afghans do not. Afghanistan has been most stable when central government forces have had only a limited role in most of the country. Instead, security has primarily been locally organized and oriented according to priorities that were only sometimes concordant with central government concerns.

These two trends continue to heavily impact the composition and character of contemporary Afghan forces. Furthermore, Afghanistan's few brief successes in creating forces loyal to a central government depended on foreign aid. In 1904 Habibullah Khan, the emir of Afghanistan, created the Royal Military College. As part of his modernization efforts, "he accepted foreign military advice, and in 1907 the school's commandant was a Turkish colonel." Having first provided substantial aid in the 1960s, Turkey continues to be prominent in Afghan military development.⁵ Afghan Army reform expanded in 1929 under King Mohammad Nadir Shah, a career soldier assassinated in 1933. Yet a coherent, truly national force had never emerged. Instead, a slight trend began toward exertion of central power over the provinces. It was military power, not national sentiment, that drove Kabul's modest rise over its rivals. For example, the Afghan Air Force—created in 1924 with two purchased British aircraft—donated Soviet aircraft and hired German pilots who "helped put down a rebellion."⁶ Technology was pivotal to this shift, and in successive generations, foreign aid was critical in funding this political realignment. According to former minister of interior Ali Jalali, in the 1930s, "the introduction of modern weapons into the army—particularly combat aircraft, armored vehicles, artillery, and automatic weapons—brought a landmark shift in the correlation of forces between the center and the tribal areas."⁷

Jalali's claim requires several caveats. First, King Abdur Rahman Khan deployed Pashtun settlers around Afghanistan to enforce his reign locally.⁸ However, Rahman's successors discovered that militias were not effective at enforcing taxation on agriculture; they instead "took on a life of their own."⁹ Militias, as had always been the case in Afghanistan, continued to resist central control. In part because of this fact, the trend toward centralization of security forces continued for some time but was never complete, and militias retained their fundamental role. Additionally, only foreign aid made modernization of the Royal Afghan Armed Forces possible; Germany, Turkey, the Soviet Union, Great Britain, and others funded the Afghan Army and police and provided trainers and technical expertise. Of note for the ISAF is that beyond the urban political elite, many Afghans did not want any such forces or assistance.

Afghan security forces grew in size and sophistication during the rule of Habibullah Khan, eldest son of Abdur Rahman Khan. In addition to an army modernization program, the Afghan Ministry of

Interior (MOI) was instituted in 1910 and further built up through 1919.¹⁰ Military modernization became prominent in the first decade of the twentieth century and continued on an expanded scale from 1919 to 1929 under Amanullah Khan, sovereign of Afghanistan. By 1933 the country had a “modern army of 70,000 soldiers, with professional officer education and a noncommissioned officer corps.”¹¹ Despite these reforms, however, the army never took on the mantle of a national army. Instead, royal forces kept internal order and mediated tribal disputes rather than securing Afghanistan’s borders from external threats.

Though Nadir Shah and his successors ruled over a period of relative peace and prosperity, regular army forces proved insufficient for securing the country. Kabul’s rulers reverted to sponsoring local forces in hopes of keeping order while they continued to build regular army forces to protect the state from rebellion. Stability resulted from Kabul’s policy of supporting local customs and traditional law rather than attempting to enforce national policies.¹² Militias provided security with some modest help from Afghan police officers.

While Afghanistan has a lengthy history of police forces dating back to the late nineteenth century, none of the historic models proved truly effective. A 2009 EU-sponsored report relays that “Afghanistan never knew a real civilian Police service, subordinate to authorized democratically elected powers.”¹³ The same report highlights that municipalities had long paid for a small police force to secure town markets. In the mid-nineteenth century, for instance, Kandahar employed “two officers, four NCOs [noncommissioned officers] and 31 patrolmen for what was then the largest or second-largest city of the realm.”¹⁴ Until 1929 central authority mainly posted small garrisons on highways and other places to ensure that the central government could gather taxes.¹⁵ National police formally appeared on the *tashkil* (the Afghan version of a table of organization and equipment) in 1935, but they were scarce and limited primarily to urban areas.

Like the Royal Army, these policemen employed imported equipment and trained under foreign advisors. In 1935 the police training school opened in Kabul; this “Academy for Police and Gendarmerie” sent its graduates to “garrison small outposts of Government to project state power into rural areas.”¹⁶ German trainers remained at the academy until 1941 when Afghan leaders sent them home under Allied pressure. However, after World War II, German trainers returned

to Kabul to oversee officer education—a role they continued to play through 2012. However, the officers produced under German police tutelage did not succeed in replacing traditional *arbakai* and other locally raised security forces. The complexity of reconciling Afghan traditions with Western norms of civilian policing was one reason these officers did not have a larger role in the royal era.

Afghan cultural values clashed with Western policing concepts in some ways, especially in southern Afghanistan where the *Pashtunwali* code—a behavioral code prescribing protection of guests and revenge for slights—held sway. The Afghan culture's clan-based society and proclivity for vendettas made Western-style policing difficult. Afghan honor codes, tribal and subtribal structures, patron-client chains, and a society structured around family ties created loyalties and rationales that made enforcing objective concepts of law nearly impossible. Arrests, investigations, and punishments were challenging to obtain in a society where individuals were part of tribal collectives. Informal settlements between the criminal and the victim's social network transpired through local, traditional means rather than through a centrally based impartial justice system. Any effort to shift Afghan culture to employ a Western model of policing and law enforcement required extensive resources and patience. For most of the twentieth century, a police force trained in Kabul existed primarily on paper. Only officers attended the professional academy in the capital while patrolmen were untrained—a system that persisted well into 2009–10.

As for the Afghan Army, its role remained protection of the regime in Kabul. Afghanistan entered a prolonged period of instability when the last king, Zahir Shah, and his politically powerful cousin, Mohammad Daoud, took power as sovereign and prime minister, respectively. Army modernization had reached a point where the Royal Army was a significant, but not dominant, political force in Afghanistan. Daoud developed his power base within the Afghan Army. According to former US envoy to Afghanistan Peter Tomsen, Daoud was an authoritarian, career military officer whose patronage meant that many in the Army owed him for their positions and status.¹⁷

Consequently, Daoud tended to rely on military solutions and support to achieve his aims. Though a champion of modernization in all sectors, Daoud pushed a comprehensive program to further modernize royal Afghan forces and sought foreign aid to achieve this end. He sought US aid unsuccessfully, as US leaders found that “Daoud's

strong stance on the Pashtunistan issue would have embarrassed the American government.¹⁷ In place of the US, Daoud reached a military aid agreement with the Soviet Union in August 1956. Afghanistan received \$25 million in jets, tanks, and weapons at a substantial discount, resulting in a new air force with 100 aircraft and an armored force with over 100 tanks.¹⁸ Military partnership with the US was limited to a few hundred Afghans studying at US military schools between 1958 and 1978.¹⁹ However, on the whole, reliance on foreign military aid and advisors grew under Daoud's leadership.

When Daoud fell to a communist takeover in April 1978, Afghan government forces consisted of approximately three armored divisions with a total of 570 tanks (mainly Soviet T-55s), eight infantry divisions, two mountain infantry brigades, one artillery brigade, three separate artillery regiments, a palace guard regiment, two commando regiments, and a parachute battalion. With Soviet aid, the air force had also modernized—flying Soviet bloc aircraft, including Czech-made Aero L-39 Albatros jet trainer aircraft.²⁰ Lastly, Daoud-era security forces included a national police with limited reach and only 50,000 officers.

Afghan security forces relied heavily on Soviet aid through the 1970s, and dependence on these resources grew heavily. From spare parts to doctrine and leadership, Afghan forces required Soviet help to function.²¹ Under Daoud's leadership, however, the central government echoed another Afghan tradition—local elites managed rural security. Afghan police stopped at the village gates, where local forces took over.²² Afghan police performed mainly a counterinsurgent mission aimed at keeping national stability and preserving Daoud's power.

The Daoud era ended with a powerful lesson for today's Afghan leaders; dependence on Soviet aid resulted in a takeover when Daoud failed to comply sufficiently with Soviet political aims. This event has led Afghans to be highly suspicious of subsequent foreign partners. Foreign aid was essential to Afghan military forces but proved a double-edged sword. Aid packages had to be sustained to keep equipment functional. Likewise, weapons systems required long-term care and feeding that Afghan government revenue and Afghan technicians could not adequately provide. Contemporary Afghan leaders could not fail to notice the risks of heavy dependency on foreign allies.

The Soviet Era: 1979–92

Few events have shaped Afghan society as profoundly as the 1979 Soviet invasion and the decade-long war that followed it. Historian Richard Stewart states, “The Soviet invasion and contested occupation from 1979 to 1989 destroyed what political and economic structures were in place. This struggle left an estimated 1.3 million Afghans dead or missing and created approximately 5.5 million refugees.”²³ Afghans once again found themselves in varying degrees of resistance to or dependence on a foreign power.

The Soviet-sponsored armed forces of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA) left behind a legacy of men, equipment, and installations that both facilitated and hampered the development of the Afghan National Army (ANA) of the 2000s. The DRA Army consisted of four Army corps divided into 13 divisions and 22 brigades, with an additional 40 separate regiments. These forces included air defense, artillery, armor, commando, and border guard units. On paper, the army had as many as 150,000 men, but corruption, absences without leave, and desertions meant that the actual strength was rarely half the number on the manning document or *tashkil*. Army ranks were filled by conscripts via a national draft; however, many units in the late 1970s and early 1980s were little more than paper divisions. Approximately 30 percent of the DRA Army volunteered for service, providing a more reliable source of men for “junior commanders and specialists.”²⁴ Senior leaders rarely changed, but the ranks were largely a constant turnstile of draftees who often fled at the earliest opportunity.

Afghan police forces grew substantially in the DRA as the Soviets and their Afghan proxies sought to supplant traditional local security forces with centrally controlled police trained by Warsaw Pact advisors. As opposition to DRA rule and the 1979 Soviet invasion mushroomed, Afghan police grew to around 200,000 in terms of strength on paper. They were heavily armed and tasked to conduct counterinsurgency (COIN) missions against the Afghan opposition to communist rule.²⁵ Most of these men served in the Sarandoy (Defenders of the Revolution), a paramilitary police service with heavy equipment and a COIN mission set. This police arm was established under Daoud and grew tenfold in the DRA era when “the general ineffectiveness and unreliability of the Afghan army led the Kabul regime to organize a number of paramilitary internal security forces.”²⁶ The

Sarandoy and its frequent rivals in the Khadamat-e Etela'at-e Dawlati (KhAD)—the Afghan version of the Soviet Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti (KGB) security agency—also protected the regime in Kabul from both mujahideen rebels and factional threats from within the regime.

The Soviet-backed communist government led by Babrak Karmal officially created the KhAD on 10 January 1980, and the organization grew steadily to between 15,000 and 30,000 personnel at its peak (60,000 and 90,000 when agents and informers are included), with about 1,000 operating in any particular province at a given time. These numbers included a countercoup division to offset potential Afghan Army or Sarandoy attempts to seize control in Kabul.²⁷ In 1986 the KhAD was elevated to a national ministry and renamed the Ministry for State Security (Wezarat-e Amniyat-e Dowlati or WAD). Richard Nyrop and Donald Seekins indicate that after a few years, the KhAD earned a “fearsome reputation as the eyes, ears, and scourge of the regime” and used its considerable influence as “the bulwark of ‘official’ Islam,” mainly to shore up popular support for the government.²⁸

KhAD actions also hurt the DRA's reputation. According to author Robert Kaplan, US Department of State officials believed that the KhAD “was the largest known sponsor of terrorism in the world.”²⁹ Afghan civilians and foreign citizens were targeted; the KhAD abused and imprisoned thousands of Afghan men, women, and children.³⁰ As a result, many Afghans learned to fear and hate Kabul's security forces—a legacy that still colors how people in Afghanistan view their government and its police forces.

Civilian policing—itself a foreign concept to most Afghans—was a secondary mission at best for the Sarandoy and local forces. Most Afghan police pursued seemingly unsuitable pseudo military missions. According to Nyrop and Seekins, during the DRA era, regular police acted alongside militia to perform static guarding and some patrolling of government installations while taking only a small role in COIN operations.³¹ Once again, Afghan police and local forces were used to protect a regime rather than to create order and the rule of law for the Afghan people. DRA leaders and their Soviet minders were also trying to force the Afghan police into whole new functions previously conducted by traditional local forces and the Afghan Army, particularly COIN and village security.

In this era, the Afghan police and army alike suffered from crippling attrition rates. DRA Army leaders even went so far as to maintain

control of weapons because their conscript soldiers viewed “weapons as a ticket to good treatment and enrollment in the ranks of the *mujahideen*.”³² Twelve percent of Afghan policemen left the ranks annually while many more simply did not come to work. Then, as now, Afghanistan had serious problems with “ghost police,” men who were paid to serve but instead split their pay with a commander and failed to serve. A 2009 EU-commissioned report on Afghan police forces states that around 40 percent of police were absent from duty during the Soviet era. All told, only about 96,000 police of 240,000 showed up for work at the height of the DRA era.³³

Conscripting independent-minded Afghans hostile to the foreign communist cause and central government in general proved an elusive goal. Since the first large-scale effort launched in 1941, drafts by the central government revealed the limitations of central governmental power in Afghanistan.³⁴ For example, one draft campaign in 1980 achieved only 875 inductions of a 59,000-man target.³⁵ Desertions, ghost soldiers on the rolls, and the inability to draft adequate numbers meant that the DRA Army was chronically understrength and suffered from poor morale. The social gap between officer and enlisted members was a particular problem. Officers frequently mistreated soldiers and continued to employ corporal punishment. They sometimes lived in Kabul and often returned home, leaving their units to fight on their own. Officer training was reduced to three years from four before the 1979 war, but in reality it could be condensed to as short as 90 days. Soldier training was designed for three to four months but in practice was reduced—sometimes to just seven days.³⁶ Although DRA forces were lacking in training, they benefited from significant Soviet funding.

Based on Afghan traditions and successful experience using local forces in Central Asia in the 1920s, Soviet leaders and their Afghan proxies increasingly relied on territorial and regional forces to provide security. All told, they drew around 100,000 men into DRA militias and local security forces.³⁷ Nationalizing the army gradually gave way to regionally recruited forces that filled in static defense roles—especially keeping the roads open and, later, conducting some patrolling and ambushes.³⁸ By 1984 local forces were officially designated as the territorial forces of the DRA, but in reality they were sometimes at odds with DRA regulars. Though defections to and from the *mujahideen* were frequent, high pay and other incentives

prompted men to serve in local DRA units that took on an increasing share of military operations as time passed.³⁹

Militias in Afghanistan

Traditionally, local forces provided security in rural Afghanistan and performed many justice functions. Local elites raised various types of militia forces for different purposes, yet all had one thing in common—they were selected and controlled locally. Even when serving a central government’s purposes, Afghan fighters were generally local security forces rather than standardized nationally controlled forces.

Political scientists Seth Jones and Arturo Muñoz delineate five primary forms of local security forces from the past that have carried through to today’s Afghan society. The first, the *tsalweshtai*, is a guard force comprising groups of about 40 men from one tribe gathered for a specific purpose, such as protecting a valley from raiding. These groups can also be formed for larger purposes such as “warfare, jihad, or even self-help projects” as a *chalweshtai*, organized at the behest of a *shura* or jirga consultative council.⁴⁰ A third type is an *arbakai*, a community police force that implements the decisions of a local jirga and has immunity from it. Many Afghans refer to today’s Afghan Local Police (ALP) forces as the *arbakai*, bringing numerous unintended connotations to Afghan perceptions of this force.

A fourth type of local security force Afghans employ is the *chaghās*, described as “a group of fighters raised spontaneously within a specific village facing a bandit raid, robbery, livestock rustling, or similar offense.” The last general type of local Afghan force is the *lashkar*, a small to very large force drawn from a single *qawm* (a social group governed by a *shura* or jirga) and “often used for offensive purposes.”⁴¹ Notably, Afghan Taliban groups use methods that draw heavily on these last two traditions.

In the 1980s, Soviet leadership employed numerous local forces under Afghan MOI leadership and validated them with Afghan elders through jirgas.⁴² Employing culturally legitimate means such as a jirga was a sound policy. However, unless the government in Kabul has legitimacy and strikes a suitable balance of power between the central and local forces, success in Afghanistan remains elusive. Furthermore, warlords continue to be an obstacle to a sustainable formula for

security in Afghanistan. During the Soviet occupation, the mujahideen period (1992–96), and the post-2001 era, warlords have complicated interaction between local elders, local forces, and the seemingly ever-changing regimes in Kabul and their various foreign backers. Warlords have functioned as rival claimants to power in most regions and have played a shifting and dangerous role in the balance of forces between the government and insurgents. Weak central authority, outside interference, and ambitious plans for nation building and nationalized security forces have impeded successive efforts to build a strong, stable Afghanistan.

By 1986 militiamen consumed the lion's share of military payments and earned more than three times the salary of a comparable civilian worker and significantly more than a regular DRA soldier. When the militia's leaders worked closely with the administration, the results could be promising. One such instance is Gen Abdul Rashid Dostum's 53rd Division of the DRA Army, which began as a militia with Dostum a local warlord. The 53rd evolved into the hardest-fighting unit of the DRA armed forces and served successfully as their mobile strategic reserve.⁴³

Dostum's close relationship with the administration was the exception rather than the rule. Many militias had lukewarm or no loyalty to Kabul and simply defended themselves against any encroaching force. Some militias took government pay but operated according to local political concerns, even when it meant opposing government efforts. Additionally, recruits often preferred militia service to regular army duty far from home. They also favored the less formal arrangements found in militia units relative to the discipline of service in the regular forces.⁴⁴

During the DRA era, Afghan armed forces and police struggled with numerous problems that hinted at the challenges faced by NATO forces in Afghanistan. By the mid-1980s, DRA regular forces were in disastrous condition with high desertion rates and exceedingly low morale. Analyst David Isby estimates that the Afghan Army turned over 10,000 men per year for a 25 percent annual attrition rate.⁴⁵

Furthermore, Soviet advisors essentially took control of DRA forces. According to Nyrop and Seekins, they made military decisions from the tactical unit level all the way up to the MOI.⁴⁶ The provision of sophisticated equipment that Afghans could not maintain themselves and overbearing foreign advisors who dictated to Afghans ensured the failure of the DRA's forces after Soviet withdrawal.

This oppressive environment also discouraged Afghans from developing indigenous leadership skills and experience. Further, they learned to manipulate foreign allies to their advantage and to work with them on only a superficial level. Aspects of this pattern remain evident today. Now, as then, dependence on foreign military aid continues to prevent the development of sustainable Afghan security forces.

The Soviet Union provided its Afghan supporters with more than \$1.25 billion in military aid from 1955 to 1987 and continued thereafter. The 40th Soviet Army also fought in Afghanistan at a cost of roughly \$5 billion a year. Materiel support for DRA forces was equally impressive: the armed forces boasted around 800 tanks, 1,500 armored vehicles, 2,600 pieces of artillery, 300 aircraft, and 13,000 trucks—along with small arms, bases, equipment, and ammunition.⁴⁷ Many of these weapons were the latest versions available (in contrast to the older weapons supplied to the modern Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police [ANP]). Soviet military aid continued after 1989 and included more than 500 SCUD missiles, 380 tanks, 54 military airplanes, 865 armored personnel carriers, 680 anti-aircraft guns, 150 R-17 rocket launchers, and thousands of tons of fuel.⁴⁸ Likewise, Peter Tomsen has noted that as the Soviets withdrew, they left behind Soviet technicians to operate the SCUD systems and some MIG-27 fighters.⁴⁹ Soviet aid also allowed DRA president Mohammad Najibullah to maintain 450,000 forces in 1990.⁵⁰

These Soviet decisions enabled the Najibullah government to stand for an additional three years but also put Afghan limitations on display. While these weapons systems gave the DRA Army substantial mobility and firepower, in the absence of Soviet support, equipment broke down frequently because the Afghan Army lacked the specialists needed to maintain these weapons and the related infrastructure. Broadly speaking, the DRA armed forces were poorly trained and motivated and were never structured adequately to conduct prolonged independent operations with organic logistics capabilities. Additionally, DRA attrition continued at high levels until the regime's and Najibullah's demise in 1992. The Soviet experience also reminded Afghans that foreign powers were willing to provide substantial amounts of arms and aid as long as Afghanistan held their interest but would depart at some point—leaving a country full of weapons and problems behind them. Today's Afghan leadership reveals its painful awareness of this pattern in the hoarded stocks of internationally donated arms and equipment found throughout the country.

History has taught Afghans to think about the next war even as they fight the current one. It has also taught them not to depend on foreign allies in the long term.

The Mujahideen

The opposition to the DRA, the mujahideen, organized their force structure around clan networks, patron-client chains, and ethnic groups rather than rigid professional standards and policies. Early in the communist era in Afghanistan, DRA soldiers began to resist communist indoctrination and defect to the insurgents. By 1979 entire units mutinied and defected to join the insurgents. An entire DRA brigade rose up against the regime in Konar in August 1979, for instance—a precedent that creates concern among today’s Afghan leaders.⁵¹ In another related precedent to today’s security challenges, journalist Edward Girardet, a career observer of Afghanistan, has noted that the mujahideen leaders urged some who wanted to defect to stay in the DRA ranks to compromise those units and provide intelligence.⁵²

Like the DRA, the mujahideen relied on foreign aid: the United States and Saudi Arabia led a broad effort to supply them with aid and arms. Aid packages grew from \$250 million in 1984, to \$470 million in 1986, and \$610 million in 1987. Some 60,000 tons of weapons were sent to the mujahideen annually, principally through the Pakistani Directorate for Inter-Services Intelligence.⁵³ Pakistan generally allotted all aid it received for the mujahideen to Islamist parties: Hisb-e-Islami (HeI) under Gulbuddin Hekmatyar; Jamiat-e-Islami (JeI), a Tajik-dominated group; Ittihad-i-Islami, led by Abdul Rasoul Sayyaf and strongly linked to Saudi Wahhabists; the Yunus Khalis–led faction of HeI, many of whom were later Taliban; Harakat-e-Islami under Nabi Mohammad, many of whom also later joined the Taliban; the Afghan National Liberation Front under Sibghatullah Mujadadi; and the Mahaz-i-Milli Islami e Afghanistan (Royalist National Islamic Front of Afghanistan) under Pir Sayyid Ahmed Gailani.⁵⁴ Foreign aid empowered mujahideen leaders to a degree that drove infighting after the DRA fell. Scholar Antonio Giustozzi indicates that a number of Afghan leaders became warlords with power “resembling that of a feudal lord.”⁵⁵

In the early 1990s, mujahideen infighting perpetuated weak and incompetent governance, which in turn meant poor government

revenues. Security forces were reduced as a direct result of the civil war and the damage it did to the Afghan state. One lesson of this era went unnoticed: the mujahideen government that conquered Kabul in 1992 made “a key step that contributed to the emergence of warlordism and to the onset of the civil war . . . [which was] Minister of Defense [Ahmad Shah] Massoud’s decision de facto to abandon the armed forces inherited from Najibullah.”⁵⁶

Security Forces under the Taliban

During the civil war among independent mujahideen factions and the subsequent period of Taliban rule (1992–2001), Afghanistan had no functioning national civilian police force and only a small, dysfunctional army and air force. Kabul reduced the police *tashkil* to 80,000 in the early 1990s. This figure declined steadily to as low as 10,000 under Taliban rule.⁵⁷ In 1996 the KhAD was disbanded, and the newly created Amr Bei Maruf wa Nai Az Munkar (Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice) enforced a strict version of sharia or Islamic law based on the Koran.⁵⁸ The Taliban summarily dismissed the former police; many spent the Taliban period unemployed or left Afghanistan to avoid Taliban vengeance.

The Taliban’s policing effort consisted largely of corporal punishment, and executions became commonplace in areas controlled by the Taliban, which, according to Girardet, “as an organized body . . . existed at the provincial level since the late 1980s.”⁵⁹ In most areas warlord militias or traditional local forces took the place of police. All in all, Afghanistan spent most of the 1990s and 2000s with no functional national police service. Under the Taliban, Afghanistan fielded only four partially functioning army corps in Kabul, Paktia, Herat, and Kandahar along with a single armored brigade in the capital. In the post-2001 era, Taliban-era veterans willing to change sides did play a small role in the new ANA, though under heavy suspicion from the coalition and new Afghan officials. Their small numbers meant that the post-Taliban armed forces relied mainly on fragments of long-disbanded DRA forces, guerrilla fighters from the mujahideen, and young recruits with little or no education.

Building a New Security Force in Post-Taliban Afghanistan

After US forces and the Northern Alliance quickly drove the Taliban out of power, the overall situation in late 2001 was defined by disorder and tension. The new government in Kabul chose to build a new ANA and ANP from the ground up. As former minister of interior Ali Jalali conveyed, this reconstruction of the national army was to be the fourth in 150 years of Afghan history.⁶⁰ The disparate elements that became the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) leadership brought both tremendous fighting experience and past burdens along with them. They also brought a tradition of shifting loyalties that could easily destroy the fragile alliance if the Taliban were not decisively defeated. Factionalism became prominent in the days following the Taliban's ouster. For example, 90 of the first 100 generals appointed in the Afghan military forces held allegiance to Shura-e Nazar, the leadership council created by Massoud in 1984.⁶¹ Any effort toward developing a professional, competent Afghan security force would have to overcome strong traditions of regionalism and long-standing internal rivalries. The new Afghan leaders had also learned that foreign aid was valuable but that, in the end, foreigners usually abandoned Afghanistan at some point.

The contemporary ANSF began on 1 December 2001 when then-interim president Hamid Karzai issued a decree forming the ANA as an all-volunteer force capped at 70,000—the same number of forces the Royal Afghan Army had in 1933.⁶² The international role began on 5 December 2001 when international and Afghan leaders crafted the Bonn Agreement. It envisioned a strong central government with national reach and power, in contrast to the usual model of successful government that balanced local and central interests found in Afghan history. The alliance was formally documented as United Nations Security Council Resolution 1386, released on 21 December 2001. Led by chairman Karzai, the Afghan delegation at the Bonn Conference formally requested “the assistance of the international community in helping the new Afghan authorities in the establishment and training of new Afghan security and armed forces.”⁶³ With this request, the ANA and ANP were born from a mismatched collection of militias, former Royal Afghan Army veterans, former DRA forces, fighters from the Northern Alliance (formally the *Jabha-ye Mutahid-e Islami*

bara-e Nejat-e Afghanistan [United Islamic Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan]), and others.⁶⁴

The ANA officially began in May 2002 when the 209th Falcon Corps' first units commenced training in and around Mazar-e-Sharif. Soon afterward, training programs expanded to include the Herat-based 207th Victory Corps and the Kabul-based 201st First Corps—which had the ANA's only mechanized unit—in September and November 2002, respectively. The remaining two ANA corps appeared in 2003; the 205th Hero Corps in Kandahar City opened for training in June 2003 while the 203rd Thunder Corps commenced training in September 2003. The final ANA corps, the 215th Corps in southwest Afghanistan, came much later—taking the field for the first time in 2010. In a conscious effort to create distance from the Northern Alliance's Afghan Military Forces and other predecessor forces, the ANA consisted entirely of newly constituted units and structures. Only the Afghan Air Corps continued to operate as it had in the Soviet era through Taliban rule. After coalition retesting, the ANA's small fleet of Soviet-made An-26 Curl and An-32 Cline fixed-wing transport aircraft and Mi-17 Hip and Mi-35 Hind rotary-wing aircraft resumed operation in early 2002. Fewer than a dozen aircraft were operational at any time nationwide.

The new partnership was far from equal since President Karzai and his cabinet had little role in decision-making. As Peter Tomsen observed, “On settling into the presidential palace in January 2002, Karzai found that he exercised no real control over military affairs. Nor did his defense ministers. . . . U.S. military commanders decided operational matters.”⁶⁵ One potentially valid reason for doing so was the international community's desire for centralized, professional security forces. But this structure could not be easily imposed on a military whose history ran counter to Western notions of military professionalism.

Afghan leaders who were former mujahideen made for charismatic leaders and good fighters but often made poor administrators and professionals. On the positive side, mujahideen veterans also possessed extensive knowledge of Afghan guerilla warfare, the structure and tactics of decentralized insurgent networks, and the political dimension of warfare. Accordingly, former mujahideen fighters provided the new Afghan Army and police with valuable insight into Taliban guerrilla tactics. However, mujahideen networks organized themselves around social groups, and status came from the ability to

garner resources and bravery in battle. According to Kaplan, the mujahideen “suffered from the classic weakness of many guerrilla movements: they could defend their homes and make life miserable for the invader” but could not provide effective governance to ensure the security and prosperity of the Afghan people.⁶⁶

As a result, many officers for the new Afghan Army under President Karzai came from the ranks of the former Royal Army or the Soviet-sponsored armies of the 1970s and 1980s. These officers faced challenges to their legitimacy since they had been out of the military for so long—decades in some cases. Further, they were the products of a Soviet-based training system that was heavy on political training and ill-suited for the COIN fight at hand. Nevertheless, if these two groups could combine their strengths, they had all the skills to create a new army for Afghanistan—one that might operate professionally and possess a deep understanding of its enemies’ methods.

The militia and regional forces of the Soviet era were another source of older recruits into the ANSF but also produced rival leaders such as Dostum, who pursued their own agendas. DRA regular forces strongly shaped the structure of the ANSF. However, former militias were “serious threats . . . that still existed outside the control of the ATA [Afghan Transitional Authority]” in 2003 and for several years afterwards.⁶⁷ With militia leaders and warlords empowered by US cash and support in 2001–03, national forces struggled to maintain authority. ANA development was further complicated by the presence of a significant proportion of former mujahideen in its ranks.

The New Afghan National Police

The new ANP force, delineated at the International Conference on Afghanistan in December 2001, purposefully moved away from Soviet-era models and toward a Western-style civilian police force. At the April 2002 international donor meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, the initial ANP strength target was established at 62,000—a number viewed as the maximum sustainable force for Afghanistan. The ATA and Germany agreed on a force composed of 44,300 uniformed police, 12,000 border police, 3,400 highway police, and 2,300 counternarcotics police. The characteristics of the ANP took on a decidedly Western bent, suggesting a strong international influence at the time as well as a lack of viable Afghan models. According to policing

expert Robert Perito, Germany sought to build an ANP that was ethnically representative, trained in contemporary policing methods including Western human rights standards, and “capable of operating in a democratic society.”⁶⁸ This endeavor faced challenging obstacles in the form of illiteracy, a dysfunctional and undemocratic society, and endemic corruption.

Afghan police in the 1970s and 1980s had been dominated by state security police and gendarmes, whose expansive mission sets focused on COIN. By contrast, the new ANP would center on the Afghan Uniformed Police (AUP). The AUP was assigned to police districts as well as provincial and regional commands and “premised on police mobile and foot patrols, crime prevention, traffic duties and general policing.” These efforts would “allow the AUP to maintain a deterrent and reassurance presence throughout [its area of responsibility], to spread the rule of law throughout the district, and to provide a response capability to police and security-related incidents.”⁶⁹ Rather than controlling the population and scrutinizing political loyalties like the Taliban or DRA police, the new ANP was meant to follow a Western “protect and serve” policing model. However, civilian policing in Afghanistan often foundered on aspects of Afghan culture. In a kinship-based tribal society, vendettas and political calculations interfered with abstract notions of the rule of law. The problem was particularly acute in Pashtun areas in the south where policing came into direct conflict with the *Pashtunwali* tradition. Arresting a suspect could be at loggerheads with a police officer’s tribal or social obligations or could lead to a vendetta on the part of the suspect’s family network. Tribal society and Western-style policing proved highly difficult to blend in Afghanistan.

Counterterrorist and counternarcotics police played integral roles alongside the uniformed police. These units, along with specialized investigative units, were slow to build given the high literacy and education requirements in a predominantly illiterate country. ANP planning at the Office of Security Cooperation–Afghanistan (the US Defense Department’s training organization inside Afghanistan) incorporated skilled specialists to serve as investigators, forensics experts, and other higher-end police such as counterintelligence operatives. While the high educational standards for recruits and the difficulty of obtaining experienced trainers proved to be obstacles, training such police laid the foundation for a full security transition in the future. Early in the coalition partnership, customs police and

then the Army Border Guard were realigned under the Ministry of Interior and became part of the ANP.

The Afghan police expanded dramatically in 2006 when the Afghan National Civil Order Police (ANCOP) and the short-lived Afghan National Auxiliary Police (ANAP) joined the ranks of the ANP. The ANCOP was designed to be the elite force of the ANP. Rank-and-file ANCOP personnel were noncommissioned officers and paid accordingly to cement their elite status. They took on most of the difficult police missions and a substantial part of the combat role against heavily armed insurgents. Perhaps most important, the ANCOP looked remarkably like the Sarandoy formed by President Daoud in the late 1970s. In form and function, the ANCOP was familiar—centrally controlled, elite, and small. It was also not intended to supplant traditional local security forces—but the ANAP was.

The ANAP received formal approval in September 2006 with a plan for 11,271 men to serve in 124 districts across 21 provinces. After five days of classroom training and five days of range training, ANAP recruits were issued a uniform and AK-47 by the MOI and assumed their duties in high-risk areas.⁷⁰ ANAP members received the same \$70 monthly salary as their AUP counterparts. The program met with difficulties from the outset. For example, an International Crisis Group report revealed that one in three ANAP trainees in southern Afghanistan “were never seen again after they had been given a gun, uniform, and this brief training.”⁷¹ Though labeled a community policing element, these poorly trained militia elements were in reality used as a COIN force or as static security elements. In most cases, ANAP training merely gave legitimate status to existing militias of varying quality, loyalty, and character. Something the ANAP never tried to do, and which was perhaps most essential, was to base its structure on local traditions for village security.

At times, ANAP and other forces controlled by Kabul operated in tension with internationally backed militia elements outside President Karzai’s control. US sponsorship of militias from 2001 through 2003 created a confusing and complex legacy that impacted efforts to employ local forces. The ANAP program, disbanded in late 2008, worsened the ANP’s reputation for corruption and appeared to legitimize predatory behavior by putting some men of questionable character in the uniform of the central government. With the introduction of the Afghan Local Police program under the sponsorship of the US and UK in 2010–11, this pattern resurfaced. The ANAP

program also undercut existing ANP programs by creating an easier path to the same salary and benefits as ordinary patrolmen—a startling repetition of Soviet-era militia programs. In the words of another International Crisis Group report, the ANAP undermined “attempts to professionalise the service, marginalising trained officers.”⁷² The ANAP also required additional trainers and resources that were hard to come by in 2006. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the ANAP tried to shift the generation and control of local security forces from local elites to the central government—a direct contradiction of earlier successful efforts in Afghanistan. Programs like the ANAP that tried to overcome traditions and impose central authority in the villages were spectacularly unsuccessful. The communist era in Afghanistan and the Afghan governments that followed it fragmented and factionalized Afghanistan. Early internationally backed endeavors failed to alter this pattern. Instead, by supporting both central forces and warlord militias, these efforts made conditions even more difficult for rural Afghans, whose support may well determine Afghanistan’s future. For NTM-A’s purposes, it was essential to recognize that local forces needed to conform to accepted cultural practices to succeed. These forces also had to be seen as organically chosen community servants rather than as hired militia who fought for the highest bidder (or worse yet, a foreign power against Afghans) as some more prominent militias did during the Soviet occupation.

In the twentieth century, Afghans had received substantial British, German, Turkish, Indian, Soviet, Pakistani, and American aid and assistance at different times. That aid came and went as external political events drove changes to foreign powers’ policy toward Afghanistan. These outside events had less effect inside Afghanistan where elites used foreign aid as a means to perpetuate factional power struggles. Foreign arms and force structures were employed as means for political competition. Whether police against army, KhAD against Sarandoy, or local versus central forces, Afghans consistently pursued competing agendas rather than a single national project. As NTM-A came into being in 2009, the new organization would face challenges and obstacles with a firm basis in Afghanistan’s historical relationship with foreign partners and in the fractured history of armed forces and police. NTM-A leadership was up against not only the rapidly ticking clock of international political will but also a century of internal Afghan politics and factional rivalries operating behind the facade of national armed forces.

Notes

(All notes appear in shortened form. For full details, see the appropriate entry in the bibliography.)

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Chapter 2

Advising Precedents and the NATO Training Mission–Afghanistan

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For years, we dwelled on the limitations of the Afghans. We should have focused on ours.

—Rajiv Chandrasekaran

Shortly after US and coalition forces ousted the Taliban in late 2001, rebuilding Afghan security forces became a focus of the US mission. American and international trainers and advisors brought a wide array of technical expertise and skill to that mission. They also came with cultural baggage and no few biases about how Afghanistan should be built and how Afghans might secure their country and people. That mission continued through 2013. Mixed results highlighted the capabilities and limitations of a US-led approach to building security forces in a poor, war-torn country with a complex, dynamic human environment and a history of stubborn self-sufficiency as the basis of society. American advisors for the most part continued to urge Afghans to accept a financially unsustainable, technologically centered, modernist paradigm of warfare. Much as the current Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) reflect the accretion of the Afghan past, so does the international effort to aid and develop Afghan forces reflect Western military history's perceived lessons. However, the latter also demonstrates the glaring absence of other lessons not learned in previous conflicts.

Though often forgotten, military advising and security assistance were as much a part of the Western military tradition as conventional operations. The French provided critical aid to America's Continental Army during the Revolutionary War in the form of instructors and advisors. During the nineteenth century, countries employed individual advisors like American adventurer Frederick Townsend Ward who counseled the Qing imperial army in China in the 1860s. Military forces from the United Kingdom and France mentored and directly supervised indigenous forces in their colonies around the world from the seventeenth century well into the twentieth. The

Indian Army is a notable example of successful Western mentorship in the nineteenth century. As for the United States, it had a long history of providing security assistance in a counterinsurgency (COIN) environment.¹

Predecessors

US military advising efforts and security assistance packages grew in scale during the twentieth century. The United States sent a training mission to Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists (Kuomintang) in China in the 1930s; the US Army alone sent nearly 5,000 men by late 1944. The US commander in China during the latter part of World War II, Army general Albert C. Wedemeyer (a protégé of Gen George Marshall), stated that he "believed that retaining these advisors after 1945 could have saved China."² This sentiment captures a view found in historical US advising operations—that US officers are better suited than local personnel to achieve success in war.

Even larger advising missions were sent to Korea and Vietnam in the 1950s as well as lengthy missions to Colombia and El Salvador through the 1980s and 1990s. Alongside numerous smaller military assistance advisory group (MAAG) missions worldwide, US forces have advised local security forces across the full spectrum of conflict. Each successive advisory campaign presented new challenges and revealed enduring problems and limitations of programs to develop allied security forces. In the process, a considerable body of corporate knowledge on military advising accumulated but was rarely used until recent years. The nine years of advisory programs in Afghanistan from 2002 to 2011 have revealed both the limitations and possibilities of US military support campaigns. Many of these shortcomings and successes can be traced to historical precedents for the NATO Training Mission–Afghanistan (NTM-A) and Combined Security Training Command–Afghanistan (CSTC-A) and to the cultural assumptions behind these missions. Particularly, there is the notion that Western technology and concepts will improve Afghan forces' ability to protect their people from insurgency.

Much like Afghan forces in late 2001, Republic of Korea Army (ROKA) units went into combat with just days of training. US advisors who spoke little or no Korean, knew little of the culture, and were junior in rank to their counterparts had to help the ROKA sur-

vive a full-scale conventional assault. Operations in Afghanistan in the 2000s seemed simple by contrast.

American advisors and trainers performed well overall and validated the Korean Military Advisory Group (KMAG) concept; over time, Republic of Korea (ROK) forces' performance improved significantly.³ One recent study singles out the "technical and tactical proficiency and professionalism" of US advisors as a key to the survival of ROK armed forces.⁴ However, the American military establishment in Korea set an unfortunate pattern that has yet to be resolved. Advisory duty was slighted and lagged far behind combat duty in resource allocation and perceived status within US forces.

Additionally, American military advisors in the Korean War and in Spanish-speaking countries—such as Colombia, El Salvador, Panama, and Mexico—relied on translators, creating additional obstacles to effective advising. To guarantee effective working relationships, advisors had to win over their counterparts and the interpreters. While experts continue to debate the proper degree of cultural and linguistic preparation for advisors and trainers, some degree of expertise is essential to building rapport with local counterparts.

The Vietnam War serves as the most frequent comparison for critics of the contemporary war in Afghanistan. In terms of the US-led effort to train and advise Republic of Vietnam (RVN) security forces, many lessons are salient for current train-and-advise operations. However, comparisons between the two conflicts require careful scrutiny to prevent drawing superficial, if beguiling, lessons. On the whole, the two efforts have more differences than similarities. Yet enough is similar to introduce lessons that contemporary US forces have learned—as well as a good many that should have been learned, but have not. Security assistance began in Vietnam in 1950 with the MAAG's establishment under Brig Gen Francis Brink, US Army. Security assistance programs concluded abruptly with the RVN's defeat on 30 April 1975 but had dropped off precipitously in 1972 when US forces largely withdrew from Vietnam. The length and scale of US advise-and-train programs in Vietnam created a depth and breadth of experiences offering important lessons for today's partners with the ANSF.⁵

American advisors joined French troops in Vietnam in September 1950, marking the beginning of the largest training and advisory campaign in US history. The effort would continue in some form through 1975 when the Defense Attaché Office closed its doors while

the South Vietnamese capital fell. The Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), grew to 11,596 personnel in late 1968, with US advisors assuming diverse roles.⁶ They were involved with all South Vietnamese training institutions, took the field with South Vietnamese armed forces down to the company level, and served with government offices at the provincial and district levels. At its peak, US military advisor strength was equivalent to a full US division (roughly 15,000) but utilized nearly seven divisions' worth of officers and non-commissioned officers (NCO). This approach meant that appreciably fewer officers could be available for service in US units in combat. This same difficult choice faced International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) coalition leaders in the 2000s. Combat operations and advisory duty competed for finite resources and personnel. Advisory missions placed extraordinary demands on military leadership during the Vietnam War and continued to do so in the recent campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan.

A strong belief in a managerial, bureaucratic war built on advanced military technology heavily marked the 25-year history of US advising and security assistance in Vietnam. Most US personnel believed in the universal efficacy of US systems and methods. The problem in this case was the Vietnamese people themselves; if they could be brought to accept and adopt US methods and machines, they would succeed. This view was unrealistic given the nature of Vietnamese society; amount of funding US leaders put toward training, advising, and related aspects of nation building; and numerous shortcomings of the advisors and trainers themselves. Former RVN Air Force general, premier, and longtime vice president Nguyen Cao Ky called the US military advisory program "a lamentable disaster that contributed largely to the eventual debacle in Vietnam."⁷

The troop rotation policy is another facet of the US advisory personnel system in the Vietnam era that created instability and fractured relationships with partners. RVN military leaders believed that advisors' six-month tours hurt unit effectiveness and "disturbed the atmosphere of the unit."⁸ Short tours with Vietnamese partners led to a phenomenon Vietnam veteran Ron Boyd labeled as being "one year's experience twenty times."⁹ RVN leaders were alarmed that senior Vietnamese officers typically worked with between 20 and 30 individual advisors during the war.¹⁰ Further complicating matters, Vietnamese interpreters generally facilitated communication; yet one

study discovered that “few Vietnamese interpreters . . . knew over 500 English words.”¹¹

In terms of doctrine and force organization, US leaders planned for a modernized force where US advisors urged their Vietnamese partners to employ “the costly American style, which was impossibly expensive for the RVN after American dollars dried up in the 1970s.”¹² What the United States left behind as it departed in 1973 was an unsustainable RVN armed force that could not hope to execute operations as designed. Second-team personnel—and too few of even these—and inadequate fiscal resources characterized the effort to build RVN military forces.

RVN leaders were in a constant state of confusion and uncertainty about US intentions and funding. Army general Cao Văn Viên declared that the RVN Joint General Staff he headed for nearly a decade was continually unaware of the amount and type of aid it would receive from the US annually, making force planning almost impossible.¹³ Simply put, the United States denied RVN leaders the opportunity to take a prime role in planning and prosecuting a war that was fundamentally theirs. When the US chose to abandon the RVN to its fate in 1975, it proved to future US allies that partnering with the world’s most powerful nation could be a dangerous proposition. In Vietnam, the United States seized the lead role in the belief that its allies were incapable of prosecuting a combined conventional and COIN campaign among the Vietnamese population. Despite having virtually no knowledge of Vietnam, US leadership tried to solve complex problems facing the RVN with a blunt instrument of power. The plan did not call for concentrating on building RVN forces because the United States believed that its troops would destroy the enemy, leaving only the cleanup of guerrilla forces to the RVN’s armed forces.¹⁴

Lessons Not Learned

Much as the United States failed to effectively build RVN conventional forces, it approached the equally vital police development effort in the same haphazard, often misguided manner—a problem mirrored in contemporary Afghanistan. As both wars included a significant element of COIN and nation building, police forces played a critical role in any positive outcome. US assistance to its allies in the realm of policing has proven perhaps even more problematic. In

COIN, police development programs can be a highly valuable means of restricting and containing insurgents while winning goodwill with the local people. Such programs can be an insurmountable obstacle to building trust between a central government and its people. Security and stability in smaller villages and remote areas were the best available means to restrict insurgent sanctuaries and limit insurgent support. This reality meant that just as in Vietnam, civilian police in Afghanistan had to be a primary line of effort for US advisors and training programs. In both cases, the United States financed expensive but highly problematic programs to build and improve police forces. Key American leaders such as Walt Rostow and Roger Hilsman (both senior advisors to presidents in the Vietnam era) viewed police “as *representatives* of the state (emphasis in original).” Thus, in their view, “the security forces (particularly the police) would serve as a visible sign of the state’s presence and its concern for the well-being of its people.” However, political analyst William Rosenau notes that “energizing the bureaucracy to embrace police and paramilitary assistance as a key component of counter-insurgency proved to be a major challenge.”¹⁵ Ultimately, despite their stated importance, police forces never received the funds and suitable advisors necessary to effectively fulfill this envisioned role.

Military programming has always been, and remains, the most familiar task for US personnel sent abroad to advise and train a US ally. Ironically, the confidence that US junior partners have in US military doctrine, force structure, and technologically driven conduct of war has proven equally as problematic as US unfamiliarity and inexperience with building police forces. US advisors have mostly behaved in ways that demonstrate excessive belief in the suitability of US war-fighting practices for allies in need of development—regardless of actual needs and circumstances.

Assessments and measures is another area where US advisory efforts seem to remain largely unchanged since the Vietnam War. Belief in managerial, bureaucratic means of evaluation resulted in purportedly objective, statistical measurements for abstract, subjective criteria such as a unit’s effectiveness and the degree to which a village was in government hands. MACV assessments tried to capture complicated events and effects with multiple-choice questionnaires and percentiles. For instance, the System for Evaluating the Effectiveness of RVN Armed Forces (SEER) “merely led advisers like Major Paul Kennedy Jr. to spend ‘about three hours’ on a ‘multiple guess type report.’”¹⁶

What accumulated was data laden with flaws and biases that did not and could not capture conditions on the ground. However, it made for neat, appealing packages of information that satisfied the hunger of US officials for reference points meeting their desires and expectations for progress.

Though many lessons were learned about advising and training in Vietnam, the ultimate defeat of South Vietnam meant that few of these lessons survived to help inform early coalition efforts in Afghanistan. In both cases, US allies had not benefited to the maximum degree possible. Cultural divides, poor knowledge of allies' conditions and requirements, and an inability to assess the problem at hand at the strategic level rendered US assistance considerably less effective. In Vietnam, US programs to advise, assist, and train RVN forces produced an unsustainable, mismatched force technically and organizationally inferior to its enemy.

Collectively, American efforts in Korea and Vietnam illustrate the validity of advisory missions within limitations. Success or failure depended on whether, from the outset, allied leaders had a strong voice in the fight and allied forces had an important stake in it (regardless of their capability level). The outcome also hinged on whether the US-led security force assistance program was appropriately manned and funded. Above all, allied forces had to be viewed as the long-term solution to a country's security problems from the initiation of a partnership with the US. They also had to be treated as such in overall coalition strategy, resource allocation, and operational planning. Advisory efforts were only as good as the number and quality of people involved. These endeavors could not be expected to fully succeed without experienced, culturally aware personnel with the needed ranks and experience and who remained on duty for longer than the usual tours. While the Korean and Vietnam Wars exemplify the beneficial impact that US military advisors could have on developing partner forces, they also highlight the immense challenges inherent in getting US military leadership to prioritize the advise-and-train line of effort.¹⁷ Had twenty-first-century US leaders drawn on the full repertoire of institutional knowledge the US military and government built over the course of the Vietnam War, they may have avoided many tactical and strategic failures. Ultimately, a degree of learning occurred, with some historical lessons informing operations in NTM-A.

Afghanistan Training Mission: The Lead-Up to NTM-A

Operations in post-2001 Afghanistan served as a mirror that showed what the US Defense Department and its international partners had and had not learned. Both the weight of history and the nature of operations in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2009 brought strong influence to bear on the NTM-A, formed in late 2009. Like its predecessors in Vietnam, Korea, and elsewhere, the US training mission that began in Afghanistan in 2002 faced monumental challenges with only meager resources to resolve them. Afghans and Americans found each other difficult to understand and trust in many instances. Moreover, Afghan human capital was not easily shoehorned into the modernist, professionalized military model that the US-led coalition envisioned.

Meanwhile, as coalition goals continued to evolve from the “small footprint” model employed in the months after 9/11, international personnel and fiscal resource requirements for the training command continued to grow. Policy makers in world capitals shared the vision for Afghan forces to take the lead, but until 2009, nations failed to align adequate resources with that vision. The story of the training mission from 2002 to 2007 is one of limited successes in an environment characterized by scarcity. Resources were misappropriated either for the war in Iraq or, more often, for fielding US and other international forces in Afghanistan rather than for building Afghan capacity. The mission also repeated many mistakes from previous US-led training commands and security assistance programs: the effort in Afghanistan was couched firmly in modernist assumptions about the universality of US tactics, doctrine, and force composition. Like preceding conflicts, US advising programs quickly took a backseat to US direct military action.

Brig Gen David Kratzer, US Army, was designated the first commander of the US training mission to the Afghan Army in February 2002. The new command, the Office of Military Cooperation–Afghanistan (OMC-A), formally stood up on 17 May 2002. In addition to his role as OMC-A commander, General Kratzer commanded the Coalition Joint Civil-Military Operations Task Force. This decision meant that one general officer in Kabul handled civil affairs, humanitarian assistance coordination, and the training mission. At the

time, the Afghanistan National Army (ANA) training effort belonged to the United States while police training fell to Germany, which had trained Afghan police in some form from 1935 to 1979.

Accordingly, the German Police Project Office was created, and 40 German *Polizei* were assigned to the police academy in Kabul to restore instruction and resume a training regimen. At the same time, Japan led an effort to demobilize militias and fold them into the ANA when possible. As part of the United Nations Development Programme in Afghanistan, the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) project also offered alternative job training to militiamen unwilling to join the ANA. DDR further became a source for weapons in the early years of the ANSF.¹⁸ DDR continued through June 2006 and disbanded, having disarmed only 62,000 people. Nations with bilateral agreements with the Afghan government often failed to coordinate these programs with the prevailing NATO and UN plan. ANA training programs stood out for being more focused and coherent as the United States took a leading role in their development. The US received some early assistance from European partners while it organized its training and advising program.

Over time, ANA programs outpaced all other rebuilding efforts. This success was possible because the United States enjoyed unity of effort and clear command and control relationships. These aspects were absent in the multinational efforts in DDR and the police and judicial sectors where bilateral arrangements complicated the work of the lead nations. Additionally, US trainers and advisors understood the tasks associated with building conventional armed forces better than they did the complex web of missions that fell to Afghanistan's national police and justice system.

Initial army training efforts led by the United Kingdom generated the first four ANA NCO cohorts and later the first ANA battalion on 23 July 2002. From the outset, the newly formed OMC-A was an international effort. A second battalion, trained by French officers, joined these first 350 Afghan soldiers before US special forces assumed responsibility for ANA training in late July. ISAF's commitment in early 2002 took the form of a 600-man presidential guard unit. At the time, the DDR program and international donations provided the ANA with antiquated Warsaw Pact small arms and crew-served weapons. These weapons were of varying quality; some were almost unserviceable whereas others were in good order. While the US Congress executed the funding procedures for the Afghan Army

en route to becoming the largest financial donor to the ANSF, France funded the first two ANA battalions. Both battalions reflected problems that plagued the ANA for years to come: heavy attrition and absences without leave (AWOL), illiteracy, and even trouble screening out underage recruits. Force development in 2002–03 also faced internal political obstacles, and observers from the West described the foundling ANA as “plagued by delays, desertions and political interference from Afghan defense officials.”¹⁹ As in the past, Western assistance to an ally began on a small scale and increased gradually, resulting in a loss of an initial surge of Afghan goodwill toward the coalition.

In summer 2002, the 1st Battalion, 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne), began 10-week training courses for ANA infantry battalions and border guard battalions with some success. Attrition was a problem from the beginning. Misrepresentations during the recruiting process led some trainees to leave as soon as they learned more about the actual ANA program. A US Army spokesman, Sgt Don Dees, noted, “Some of the recruits were outright swindled to get here. They were under the impression they would be making several times more a month than they actually are. . . . They thought they would be taken to the US for training, that they’d be taught to speak English, that they’d be taught to read and write. And these are not part of the program, yet.”²⁰ Another pattern was set in this early period—operational pressure and political forces prevented ANA training from being comprehensive or long enough to prepare soldiers for the complex security operations they were to undertake with coalition help. The newly formed ANA faced a chaotic security environment, evidenced by the public assassination of Vice President Abdul Qadir on 6 July 2002.

Heavy criticism of Afghan forces began early in the ANA’s development. Negative reports on Afghan forces appeared within six months of coalition training efforts. The new ANSF would have to overcome not only insurgents but also the skepticism of the international community about its legitimacy and sincerity. Unlike in the Soviet era, the new ANA and Afghan National Police (ANP) would have to succeed in battle and provide compelling evidence of that success. Fickle publics in Western capitals along with seasoned and sometimes cynical journalists from abroad would scrutinize the ANSF in ways that were impossible in the Soviet era. Though coalition forces were generally

comfortable with the role of the international press, Afghan leaders were ill-prepared for such interaction.

Some issues raised in the media in the first year of the coalition war effort persisted through the years to come. Afghan-born scholar Amin Saikal argued that the hope with which many Afghans met the Taliban's ouster quickly subsided in the face of wrongheaded policies, and optimistic views rapidly disappeared. The country was unstable, insecure, corrupt; lacked governance; and was subject to interference by neighboring states—collectively facilitating a rapidly growing narcotics trade.²¹ Ethnic tensions and desertions hampered force development. Low wages and an officer corps that did not reflect the ethnic makeup of the troops led to attrition of roughly a third of new recruits.²² Ethnic balancing policies called attention to the large numbers of Tajiks joining the army and police and dominating the officer corps. Concurrently, Pashtuns joined in inadequate numbers, which meant an overrepresentation of the Northern Alliance in the new armed forces. Perhaps most importantly, ethnic balance was a concept imposed on the ANSF by its international partners rather than a locally generated idea. Within a modernist paradigm, it made perfect sense. Yet within the Afghan context of 2002–03, the policy was why some Afghans left the ANA and others never cared to join.

An initial surge of Pashtuns from the south joining the army slowed to a trickle as they perceived discrimination in the army and saw few officers with their ethnic background. One study found that Pashtuns viewed the new Afghan Army as a means for Tajiks to dominate the Pashtuns.²³ Policy correctives alone could not change the fact that few Pashtuns in the south had any interest in joining the ANSF. Afghan Army and police forces fell under constant and intense scrutiny for their inability to provide better security, corruption, potential ties to the opium trade, and any number of other charges. The ANSF may or may not have been worse than other forces in the region, but they were certainly under more scrutiny than any other force in that part of the world. The ANA needed more international help at this critical formative stage to learn how to provide security and operate under international scrutiny.

As time passed, the scale of effort required to create a secure Afghanistan grew. This happened in no small part because the coalition brought inadequate resources to bear in the early part of the campaign. Another key reason was the way coalition operations fed the insurgency. Outsiders were prone to error in Afghanistan's complex

society, especially when technical means of destruction were applied in place of adequate ground forces with a local knowledge—read Afghans. Peter Marsden, who worked in Afghanistan from 1989 to 2005, found that NATO and US troops conducting population-centric COIN or counterterrorist operations in Afghanistan employed search tactics that insulted Afghan elders and women. Meanwhile, international airstrikes resulted in an alarming number of civilian casualties.²⁴ Under these circumstances, it is difficult to see how foreign troops could replace locally generated Afghan forces. The overall chaotic environment, high attrition rates, and traditional problems of ethnic factionalism and illiteracy hampered the quality of Afghan forces in 2002–03, leading to a US decision in September 2003 to rebuild the Afghan Army from the ground up.²⁵ With concurrence from Afghan president Hamid Karzai's administration, the ANA became the main effort, and the Afghan Military Forces (AMF) were entirely disbanded in an attempt to address their wanting professionalism and integrity.

Expanding the Afghanistan National Army under OMC-A, 2002–05

To build a professional military as swiftly as possible, OMC-A's training program centered on the newly reopened Kabul Military Training Center (KMTC). Over \$4 million of the \$147 million OMC-A budget for 2002 went to refurbishing the KMTC to train soldiers of the nascent ANA.²⁶ Trainers followed soon after. In a pattern that would repeat itself over the years to come, the arrival of a unit from the US Army enabled ANA training to continue and expand in the absence of a broader international commitment. US units rotated in and out at six-month or one-year intervals to continue ANA training. However, this schedule also meant that the training effort lacked continuity over the years and suffered from the same learning cycle hampering training efforts in Vietnam 40 years earlier. As new trainers arrived annually or semiannually, they replaced those who had been gaining proficiency in training Afghan soldiers.

Further, short tours enabled recalcitrant Afghan officers to wait out trainers who drove them to make improvements they were not ready to accept. Coalition personnel rotations gave bad actors in the ANA experience in manipulating their less jaded coalition partners.

On the whole though, ANA units made good improvement when they had enough trainers on the ground. The concept of international security assistance in Afghanistan was valid but required more resources, the right personnel, and longer tours to provide continuity on the coalition side. The model also required far greater Afghan participation to succeed; no strategy predicated on replicating Western forces and doctrine could work for the ANSF. It drew on different traditions and possessed different human capital.

Leading factors in the quality of security forces for Afghanistan were the number and types of trainers and advisors provided by the international community. While international forces grew in Afghanistan (US forces grew to 19,000 in 2005 from just 5,000 in 2002), most operated to directly influence security conditions rather than training or partnering with Afghan forces.²⁷ During the same period, the ISAF formally stood up (August 2003) and began providing security in Kabul. Over time, ISAF forces expanded to perform the same role across Afghanistan, with the intent that Afghan forces would be grown to take their place. However, international forces operated with inertia, and they continued to gravitate away from advising and toward security operations well into 2009. One reason was the shift in strategy ordered by Lt Gen David Barno, US Army, in 2003. At that time, the emphasis on building Afghan institutions gave way to COIN operations to be led and even dominated by ISAF and US forces.²⁸

Whereas many of the tasks associated with building police forces were far removed from core Department of Defense (DOD) competencies, ANA programs had more familiar objectives. US military personnel had a wealth of experience in doctrine, tactics, and procedures that could transfer to ANA units. Other elements of the ANA's fight were beyond US experience, such as the complexity of Afghanistan's political and social situation and the motives for Afghan actions. Though some Western powers—especially Germany and England—had more experience working in Afghanistan, the United States sent most of the troops that conducted kinetic operations against the Taliban and the advise-and-train mission. For instance, in February 2010, US forces constituted 47,085 of 85,795 personnel on the ISAF manning document.²⁹

ANA training programs also changed in 2003; a new organization, Task Force (TF) Phoenix, stood up that spring. On request of the commanding general, Maj Gen Karl Eikenberry, US Army, OMC-A received the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division

(2/10), from the United States Army to serve as the core training element for the ANA. The standup of Combined Forces Command–Afghanistan under General Barno in October 2003 strengthened the voice in Washington for US Army elements in Afghanistan, helping General Eikenberry obtain the necessary trainers. But even stronger voices in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) soon altered plans to resource OMC-A.

After some elements were assigned elsewhere and the brigade headquarters was strengthened, a total of around 1,000 soldiers arrived to serve in TF Phoenix. These soldiers filled the embedded training teams (ETT) and mobile training teams that made training the ANA possible. The US Army National Guard began to supply TF Phoenix's trainers soon thereafter, as the 2/10 was tasked with service in OIF. The first unit to arrive was the 45th Brigade, Oklahoma National Guard. This substantial gain in the training element facilitated the implementation of ETTs for fielded ANA units and provided institutional trainers at the KMTC. Yet, as in earlier conflicts, the best US frontline units went elsewhere, leaving the National Guard to cover the training mission. These Soldiers were older and, in many cases, had less combat experience than their active-duty counterparts. Accordingly, the ANA made slow progress as its troops began to take on a security operations role.³⁰

By the time Maj Gen Craig Weston, USAF, replaced Major General Eikenberry in 2004, the ANA and OMC-A could demonstrate real changes on the ground. In addition to reopening the KMTC and rebuilding ANA barracks for the Central Corps, OMC-A renewed professional education for ANA officers. A military academy and secondary school had served the Royal Afghan Army and the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan's army for decades. However, these institutions had fallen into disuse under the mujahideen and Taliban. With assistance from a team from the United States Military Academy (USMA) at West Point, the National Military Academy of Afghanistan (NMAA) was reinstated and invigorated with a new curriculum based on West Point's educational model.³¹ The military high school also reopened its doors around this time. In early 2004, Lt Col Donna Brazil, Col Barry Shoop, and Maj William Caruso—all US Army officers from the USMA—deployed to Afghanistan to oversee the NMAA project. The first class of cadets began basic training in early 2005. This project was a key step toward professionalizing the ANA officer corps. However, with a lengthy four-year program and limited train-

ing seats, the academy could not solve the grave officer shortage. The ANA required additional sources for officers. Officer quality and quantity became increasingly important as the ANA expanded the number and scale of its field operations.

For the first two years, the ANA operated almost exclusively in the Kabul area before expanding to other provinces in 2004. At that time, the ANA had grown to nearly 20 battalions and proved capable of conducting security operations that were unconceivable just three years earlier. However, the ANA depended heavily on coalition support units as it was composed almost entirely of combat forces at that time. ANA units in the Central Corps now helped secure the capital region. Other ANA battalions took part in suppressing Taliban remnants in southern and eastern Afghanistan as part of Operation Mountain Storm, launched on 12 March 2004. ANA units also assisted in quelling battles between Ismail Khan's and Amanullah Khan's personal militias in Herat in August 2004.³² The operation was successful and marked a distinct contrast with a similar event in 2002 when the same two leaders had fought each other in Herat. US forces and airpower were required to end those hostilities.

General Barno praised OMC-A for "significant success stories" with the ANA and Ministry of Defense (MOD) in 2003–05, especially in the areas of ethnic balance and promotion by merit. He further noted that the ANA and MOD had become model institutions and were among the "most reformed bodies of the Afghan Government" and "sources of national pride."³³ In three years of operations, OMC-A trained 24,300 ANA soldiers in addition to performing the civil affairs mission.³⁴ OMC-A also exerted considerable energies supporting the ANSF in Afghanistan's constitutional *loya jirga* (grand national council) in January 2004 and the nation's first presidential election on 9 October 2004. The ANSF proved to be up to the tremendous challenge of securing polling sites across the country without major incident. Such operations were unthinkable just a few short years prior when the ANA fielded only a few battalions of dubious quality. Though the ANSF was still a small force, OMC-A trainers and advisors and their Afghan partners had successfully stood up national armed forces and police where there had been none. They trained those forces to a standard and provided basic facilities for training and housing the ANSF in several regions of the country. OMC-A's work reflected the hard work ethic and technical excellence of US forces in building and operating organizations. However, at the

strategic level of the war, Afghan forces still had many problems—some stemming from the nature of the US/ISAF approach. OMC-A operations were under-resourced and guided by the sometimes inaccurate principle that foreign advisors and trainers knew what Afghan forces should look like, how to build them, and how to employ them.

OMC-A's tenure came to a close on 12 July 2005 when Maj Gen John Brennan, USAF, took command of the newly formed Office of Security Cooperation–Afghanistan (OSC-A). Brennan had also commanded OMC-A for its final five months of operations. His continued leadership of the training command provided vital continuity as he also added new duties to its mission set. The training commander had focused his energies on designing programs for the Afghan police through OMC-A's last months. OSC-A's mission included a role in the complex effort to build the Afghan police—along with the contract management agency, the US Department of State's (DOS) Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL). General Brennan carefully prepared to sell the new US role to the ISAF and especially to the police lead nation, Germany. Having divested itself of OMC-A's humanitarian and civil affairs tasks, the new command operated with a highly focused mandate to train Afghan security forces. Yet the ANP had already fallen years behind the ANA and would require monumental effort to ever get on track.

Office of Security Cooperation–Afghanistan, 2005–07

July 2005 was a watershed for the training effort in more ways than one. After four years of management by Germany and the DOS, Combined Forces Command–Afghanistan (CFC-A) took nominal control of the program to train the ANP. OSC-A would work closely with the INL, which maintained contract management authority to provide civilian police mentors. Overly complex administration and too many stakeholders hampered Afghan police development and prevented the emergence of coherent training programs. The police effort in Afghanistan reflected not only decades of historical problems within the Afghan police forces but also tremendous flaws in coalition advisory and development programs. Much as had been the case in Vietnam many years earlier, US military institutions were poorly prepared for building national police forces in Afghanistan.

OSC-A also benefited from a revised command structure under which the training mission was able to concentrate its efforts. A new superior headquarters, CFC-A, under Lieutenant General Eikenberry enabled overall command and control in theater. General Eikenberry's role as CFC-A commander provided General Brennan with an immediate superior whose prior experience included command of the OMC-A and, thereby, a keen understanding of the ANSF and its challenges. The OSC-A remained a US command with an international staff serving under US general officers. France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Romania supported the OSC-A by sending a smattering of trainers and advisors who served alongside the US military and contractors.

The international community's decision at Bonn, Germany, to opt for "minimal international oversight and material assistance" in Afghanistan precluded substantial training programs for the ANP and created a dearth of knowledge about Afghan operations.³⁵ Concurrently, many nations became stakeholders in the police project, but they made only minimal contributions to the Ministry of Interior (MOI) and ANP. The combination of many stakeholders and insufficient personnel led to an incoherent, inadequate police program that worked poorly and lacked coordination. A strange mix of a strong international interest in shaping the police program and a lack of will to put resources behind that interest left the ANP and MOI in a state of confusion. They grew increasingly uninterested in international advice as a result.

International forces tended toward assuming roles they were comfortable with and felt capable of influencing. Advising, especially for police, was foreign territory for most NATO militaries. The largest contributing nation, the United States, had no national gendarmerie to draw on for overseas deployments and instead sought advisors for the Afghan police from some 20,000 local police forces across the US—a cause of varied quality and performance by these same trainers.³⁶ Nonetheless, by 2005, the United States had taken control of the police development effort in Afghanistan.

To that point, international neglect and insufficient resources translated to a police force that remained incapable of conducting its basic mission, which was perhaps the greatest obstacle to building good governance. In the first few years after the Taliban fell, goodwill between the people of Afghanistan and the Karzai government was strong. By 2005, that goodwill was rapidly dissipating, and an effective

police force was the key to reversing this impending disaster. For the ANP to succeed, it would have to overcome a long history of limited and poor policing in Afghanistan. The international community had to overcome its internal obstacles and contradictions and substantially increase its scale of effort to create a functional security assistance program in Afghanistan.

The first four years of US-led efforts in Afghanistan illustrated the shortcomings of international programs and Afghan human capital. Poorly resourced and undermanned international efforts were highly unlikely to overcome strong Afghan resistance to nationalized security forces. Neither could such efforts stir up loyalty for a regime in Kabul relying on international troops to preserve its power. The ISAF was animated by a sense of the need to make Afghan leaders buy into a US model for Afghan security institutions based on nationalized, professional, and well-equipped forces as a means to restore security and order to a country facing an insurgency of several thousand full-time Taliban fighters. The ANA project had proven the more successful of the two main security efforts. Yet even that effort reflected the unsuitability of the ISAF approach with 2005 desertion rates hovering around 30 percent. As late as 2009, reenlistment rates were only around 50 percent, and 10 percent of the ANA troops were AWOL at any given time.³⁷

There were many reasons—internal and external—why Afghan forces were off to a troubled start. Numerous problems that could be traced back to US challenges in Vietnam were embedded within ISAF programs for the ANA and ANP. The assistance effort needed more people, the right personnel with the right skill sets for some tasks, and a change in the mindset of relying on modernization theory-based planning for Afghan forces. More than 50 years after US advisors started going to Vietnam to provide advice and support—and despite the lessons learned in doing so—too many US military personnel still believed they knew best what Afghan leaders needed to do and how they needed to do it. In one case, General Eikenberry, who later served as US ambassador to Afghanistan, “in a meeting with Afghan Minister of Defense Abdul Rahim Wardak in 2005 . . . capped a testy conversation by saying, ‘Minister Wardak, I know your army better than you do.’”³⁸ International officials had, from the outset, usurped strategic planning from the Afghans, who often found themselves informed of ISAF or US military actions only after the fact. In the period when international neglect allowed the Taliban to

reemerge as a major threat to Afghan security (2005–06), international forces increased only their direct role in operations while relegating building Afghan forces to a secondary task at best. Much as had been the case in Vietnam, the predictable result was a flawed force structure filled with poorly performing recruits who showed little interest in a war that was supposed to be theirs.

The ANP was especially troubled, but the international community had few appropriate resources on hand to do anything about it. Germany had proven it was unable to produce sufficient numbers of trainers and advisors to help reform the police, while the ANP budget was also far short of minimum requirements. When it fell to the newly organized CSTC-A to try to remedy the problems caused by decades of war in Afghanistan and international neglect since 2001, only the United States attempted to furnish the resources necessary to correct them. However, as CSTC-A commander Maj Gen Robert Durbin, US Army, stated to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in June 2006, no US government agency had the experience, personnel, and skills to help build another country's police force.³⁹ Despite the absence of the necessary assistance personnel and funding, the international community pressed on with its effort to help guide the Afghan police and justice sector to some sort of functional level of performance. Perhaps more dangerously, it continued to push for reforms to make the Afghan police look more like a Western police force than like precedents from Afghan history. From a historical perspective, locally generated forces proved more acceptable and effective in most areas.

When General Durbin became CSTC-A commander, he set out to assess Afghan forces in his first weeks in command in January 2006. On arrival, Durbin “found the police in terrible shape . . . and that the wrong trainers were in place.” Nonetheless, Durbin “honestly believed [he] could change the police force in a few months. . . . After a number of months, however, [he] began to realize that it would take over a decade. The amount of institutional change needed was immense.”⁴⁰ Furthermore, the US-led approach to building Afghan police was not just underfunded but also pushed for changes unlikely to achieve the desired results. Noted defense critic Anthony Cordesman concludes that the ISAF's under-resourced police development program based on German policing concepts clashed with Afghan requirements and culture. The next version of the police mentoring mission was led by the US State Department, which failed to align

Afghan police capabilities with the growing insurgency across Afghanistan as of 2005.⁴¹ In addition to issues with the suitability of the international police program, Afghans themselves increased the problems the ANP faced by abusing international aid. While serving alongside forces in southern Afghanistan, Canadian historian Sean Maloney found that ANP corruption was endemic in areas where Canadian forces operated and was tied to ANP units not receiving the pay the international community had sent.⁴² Enemies of the Afghan government found useful fodder for propaganda in the incompetence and criminality prevalent among the ANP. Taliban leader Mullah Omar exploited ANP corruption to his advantage, calling attention to the problem. He stated, “If the police of a state consist of people who are immoral and irreligious, who are drug addicts and whom their families turn away, how can they protect the property, dignity, and honour of the people?”⁴³

Complex factors aligned for the Afghan police to reach a point where they had become part of the problem in Afghanistan rather than the solution. Resources were clearly one main reason, as many in the ANP resorted to corruption because they were either underpaid or unpaid. Though the international community (mainly the United States) provided \$16.6 billion between 2002 and 2008 to train and equip the ANP, many of the police who had been trained left the force after a short time—in part because of economic hardship.⁴⁴ Nearly 150,000 individuals had received short training courses to become Afghan police since 2002. However, only 90,000 ANP were in service (nominally) in mid-2009, with most having received no training whatsoever.⁴⁵ Attrition and corruption remained the core problems facing the ANP as late as the end of 2009. For too long, people with the wrong experience for the task and little knowledge of Afghans or Afghanistan had tried to train and organize the ANP to secure the Afghan people where they lived.

A concerning problem with the Afghan police was the insufficiency of international efforts to assist them. Even when the international community offered policing experts, they were slow to arrive. For example, although the European Union established its policing advisory mission to Afghanistan in June 2007, only 225 of the allotted 400 staff were serving inside Afghanistan as late as 2009, and others took frequent vacations or leaves of absence.⁴⁶ To help them solve the complex, challenging problems they faced in building forces, Afghanistan’s police needed thousands of advisors with the requisite

experience. For at least the first seven years of the effort, however, the ANP could not get them. US Army general Stanley McChrystal's 2009 initial assessment report aptly summarizes the state of affairs with the ANP after more than seven years of international help: "Due to a lack of overall strategic coherence and insufficient resources, the ANP has not been organized, trained, and equipped to operate effectively as a counter-insurgency force." The report also notes the absence of international police trainers to implement the programs the international community had developed.⁴⁷ A European Commission-sponsored report found that the ANP lacked sufficient equipment and that what it did have was more suitable for an army than a civilian police force. Police facilities and infrastructure were also found to be "archaic."⁴⁸ Though the United States had spent well over \$100 billion in Afghanistan annually by 2009, Afghan forces remained impoverished and without even basic equipment and training in many instances. Despite the hard work of many to assist the Afghan police between 2002 and 2009, the simple fact remained: the overall effort was inadequate—and somewhat aimless.

Another issue during this time was that the prosecution of COIN by international forces remained contentious and contested inside Afghanistan and abroad. ISAF leaders regarded the Afghan government as a chief obstacle to the COIN campaign's progress. General McChrystal's initial assessment highlighted the role of the Afghan government in winning the population's support but did not spare criticism for ISAF actions. The report indicated that "the weakness of state institutions, malign actions of power brokers, widespread corruption and abuse of power by various officials, and ISAF's own errors have given Afghans little reason to support their government."⁴⁹ It further identified cautious ISAF tactics as a source of failure: "Pre-occupied with protection of our own forces, we have operated in a manner that distances us—physically and psychologically—from the people we seek to protect."⁵⁰ These concepts represented a shift in the right direction but did not complete the line of reasoning that should have led to a concerted push to help Afghan forces develop. Continuing ISAF kinetic operations alienated the Afghan people as an inevitable consequence of a foreign military presence using force.

A New Direction—General McChrystal Takes Charge, 2009

The new ISAF commander quickly made some changes—such as revising what munitions NATO forces could use out of legitimate concern for Afghan civilians and the impact of collateral damage. Other changes would take far longer to implement for reasons not always clear. Though partnering had been essential to building South Korean forces and the best RVN units had fought with US partners in Vietnam, Afghan units found themselves without US partners in most cases. General McChrystal's initial assessment noted that partnering concepts had not even been finalized until 2008—more than five years into the international effort.⁵¹ However, in the same interval, US combat forces had increased significantly—the ISAF continued to try to do the Afghans' job for them instead of building Afghan forces and then giving them a major stake in the fight. ANA units remained a mere adjunct to ISAF efforts.

Programs to assist the ANSF foundered on the political power structure in Afghanistan in the post-2001 period. The fight against the Taliban insurgency—concentrated in southern and eastern Afghanistan and begun in 2005—only escalated over time. In General McChrystal's view, the ANSF remained too small in 2009 to fight the insurgency then present—and extensively expanding the ANA and ANP was the proposed solution. For the ISAF, rapid expansion of the Afghan forces translated into the requirements “to provide enhanced partnering, mentoring and enabling capabilities until parallel capabilities are developed within the ANSF.”⁵² While the assessment was fundamentally correct, the course of events under McChrystal's year in command proved the difficulty of pursuing this ambitious strategy with limited means at a time when political support for the war remained low.

Notes

(All notes appear in shortened form. For full details, see the appropriate entry in the bibliography.)

For NTM-A historical documents cited, contact the US Army Center of Military History, Fort Lesley J. McNair, Washington, DC.

1. Wuestner, *Building Partner/Security Force Capacity Assistance*, 3–4.
2. Wuestner, 5.
3. Sawyer, *Military Advisors in Korea*, 188.

4. Gibby, *Will to Win*, 276.

5. For example, Afghanistan experts Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason note that in both wars advising had the lowest priority for the US Army:

The U.S. military advisory effort was the absolute lowest priority for personnel assignment within the U.S. Army. Since May 2002, the fill-rate for ANA [Afghan National Army] embedded trainers has averaged around 50 percent of identified billets, and most of them have been pulled from noncombat specialties (like medical or logistics) to undergo remedial combat skills training at Fort Riley [Kansas] themselves before being sent to teach combat skills to the ANA. Most importantly, the ANA and the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) both became psychologically crippled by years of watching from the back seat as the Americans took charge of the war, and neither army learned to operate on its own or ever developed the ability to supply itself or hold the gains U.S. troops achieved.

Johnson and Mason, “Refighting the Last War,” 6. Johnson and Mason’s observations capture a fundamental lesson of all US advise-and-train missions—these programs do not garner sufficient or suitable personnel and resources to facilitate mission success.

6. Clarke, *Advice and Support*, 30.

7. Ky, *Twenty Years and Twenty Days*, 125.

8. Truong, *RVNAF and US Operational Cooperation*, 170.

9. Boyd, interview.

10. Vien et al., *U.S. Adviser*, 72.

11. Gibson, *Perfect War*, 308.

12. Vien and Khuyen, *Reflections on the Vietnam War*, 166.

13. Vien and Khuyen, 166.

14. Gen Creighton Abrams, US Army, commander in Vietnam from 1968 to 1972, stated as much in a briefing to Amb. Lawrence E. Walsh on 2 May 1969: “In designing their forces, we’ve tried to design them to deal with insurgency, and *not* with an NVA force of the magnitude and kind that is present at the moment in and around South Vietnam. And that’s the way this has been designed, that’s the way it’s been funded and so on. In other words, the thrust of this whole thing has *counted* on, I would say, negotiating the North Vietnamese out of South Vietnam. That’s the kind of thing that has been visualized here” (emphasis in original).” Sorley, *Vietnam Chronicles: The Abrams Tapes*, 184.

15. Rosenau, *US Internal Security Assistance to South Vietnam*, 141.

16. Clarke, *Advice and Support*, 325.

17. Ramsay, *Advising Indigenous Forces*, 102.

18. Wright et al., *A Different Kind of War*, 198–99.

19. Constable, “An Army in Progress, A01.”

20. “First Battalion of Afghanistan Army to Be Deployed,” Voice of America.

21. Saikal, *Modern Afghanistan*, 243.

22. Manuel and Singer, “New Model Afghan Army.”

23. Johnson, *Afghan Way of War*, 276.

24. Marsden, *Afghanistan*, 109.

25. International Crisis Group, *Force in Fragments*, 8.

26. NTM-A, “CJ7 Strategic-Level Questions,” slide 6.

27. O’Hanlon and Sherjan, *Toughing It Out in Afghanistan*, 23.

28. Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, 140–42.

29. NATO Headquarters Media Operations Center–Afghanistan, “International Security Assistance Force.”

30. Kelly, Bensahel, and Olikier, *Security Force Assistance in Afghanistan*, 34.
31. Wright et al., *Different Kind of War*, 301.
32. Wright et al., 72.
33. Barno, "Fighting 'The Other War,'" 38.
34. Rice, "Afghanistan Unit Takes on New Mission."
35. Perito, *Where Is the Lone Ranger?*, 290.
36. Perito, 120.
37. Johnson and Mason, "Refighting the Last War," 8.
38. Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, 168.
39. Jones, 170.
40. Jones, 169.
41. Cordesman, "Afghanistan and the Uncertain Metrics of Progress."
42. Maloney, *Fighting for Afghanistan*, 38.
43. International Crisis Group, "Policing in Afghanistan."
44. Chilton, Schiewek, and Bremmers, *Appropriate Size of the Afghan National Police Force*, 37.
45. Chilton, Schiewek, and Bremmers, 51.
46. Chilton, Schiewek, and Bremmers, 56.
47. McChrystal to Gates, memorandum, G-2.
48. Chilton, Schiewek, and Bremmers, *Appropriate Size of the Afghan National Police Force*, 60.
49. McChrystal, "Commander's Initial Assessment," 2-4.
50. McChrystal, 1-2.
51. McChrystal, A-2.
52. McChrystal, G-1.

Chapter 3

NATO Training Mission–Afghanistan November 2009–April 2010 Building the Plane While Flying It

Martin Loicano

In its first six months of operations, NATO Training Mission–Afghanistan (NTM-A) worked to continue institutional development for the Afghan Ministries of Defense and Interior, train and field Afghan police and soldiers, and modernize Afghan National Security Forces' (ANSF) equipment and processes.¹ NTM-A staff worked long hours to offer training courses, rapidly expand ANSF training infrastructure, and accelerate equipping the growing volume of recruits suddenly joining the army and police. The NTM-A strategy, a subset of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) strategy, was designed to maximize the flow of ANSF units to support counterinsurgency (COIN) operations as rapidly as possible. Tensions grew within coalition commands as NTM-A emphasized building sustainable ANSF forces for the long term while the ISAF and ISAF Joint Command (IJC) emphasized the fight at hand. The ISAF and IJC wanted to win enough gains for sustaining the international political will to support the war in Afghanistan. International personnel on the ground were increasing, but ISAF commander Gen Stanley McChrystal, US Army, still regarded them as insufficient. For NTM-A, many more trainers and advisors were needed to support the planned development model for the ANSF, which aimed to professionalize and modernize the Afghan National Police (ANP) and Afghan National Army (ANA) according to thoroughly Western designs.

During this time, NTM-A's leadership employed a somewhat controversial strategic communications program to encourage higher headquarters and the international leadership to provide more trainers and advisors to the training command. Simple messages were necessary to attract the attention of busy senior leaders, but often NTM-A's strategic communications products oversimplified complex security issues. Afghan leaders were in contact with NTM-A leaders on a more or less regular basis, but their voices played little role in shaping ANSF force development. The war in

Afghanistan in late 2009 and early 2010 was characterized by ISAF leadership pursuing a COIN-driven campaign plan that proved unsuitable in many ways. From the NTM-A point of view, one of the greatest errors was the pursuit of immediate gains instead of building ANSF capacity to replace ISAF forces that could not remain in the country indefinitely.

Nonetheless, all the ISAF leadership shared the modernist assumption that it knew the right way to secure Afghanistan. ISAF headquarters, IJC, and NTM-A planned strategy and operations with only minimal participation from Afghans in late 2009. Seven years into the international effort, international partners continued to pursue complex strategies on behalf of the Afghans without providing the appropriate resources to enable these huge shifts away from the Afghan model of security forces (as outlined in the first chapter). Despite the glaring material and conceptual limitations of such an approach, “for, with, and by” remained the guiding principle of international actions in Afghanistan. Even with these limitations, the new NATO training command’s early history showed that ISAF forces were hardworking and capable of producing remarkable achievements at the operational level. What NTM-A set out to do in late 2009 was to immediately increase the numbers of ANSF units available for operations and ensure that these forces had some basic level of training. From November 2009 through April 2010, NTM-A succeeded admirably at the operational level. However, it proved unable to shift the international strategy to a direction that would align with Afghan government interests and cultural traditions in ways that could produce sustainable, effective Afghan security forces and institutions.

On 21 November 2009, Lt Gen William B. Caldwell IV, US Army, formally assumed command of NTM-A. General Caldwell also took on US Army major general Richard P. Formica’s role as commander of the Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan (CSTC-A), a US Army command. Like his predecessors at the training command, General Formica’s performance earned him an additional star and another command.² Unlike his predecessors, he did not have to operate in the shadow of larger operations in Iraq, for which funding and troop levels were declining quickly. Formica operated with a comparatively robust organization (see fig. 3-1).

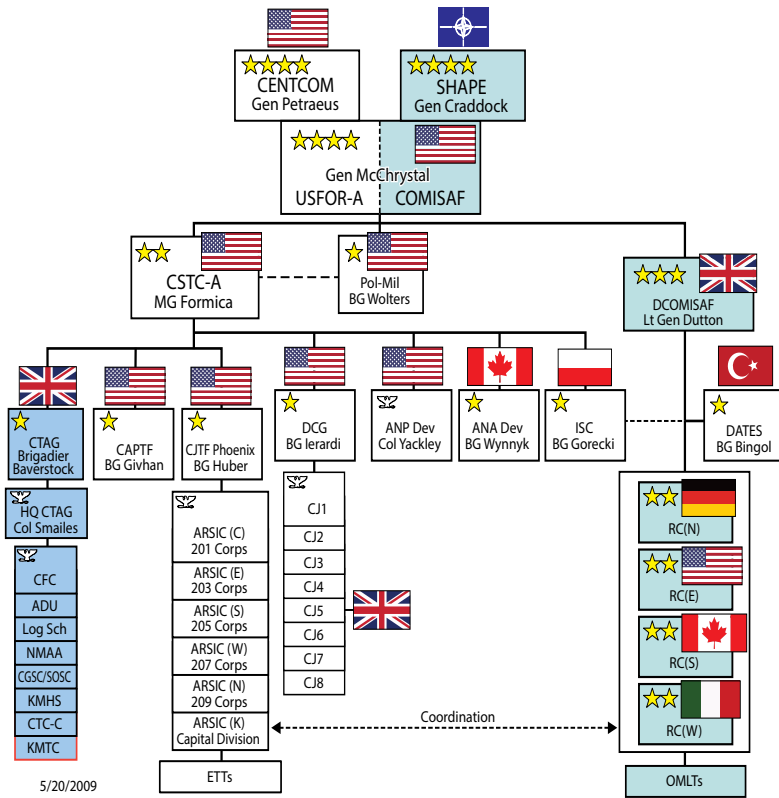


Figure 3-1. Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan organizational structure in 2009. (Daniel Harmuth, “Project Management in Action in Afghanistan,” published on SlideShare, 2 December 2010, <https://www.slideshare.net>.)

The new CSTC-A commander, Caldwell, supervised a significantly larger budget (which had to be overseen by a US command) provided by the US Congress and conducted the effort to lead ministry development programs for the Afghan Ministries of Defense and Interior.³ NATO had not acquired ministerial development duties because of German and French opposition to the proposal, so CSTC-A retained that mission. The addition of a NATO three-star headquarters also represented an increasing emphasis on the training command as the key to ultimate security transition—at least at the senior levels of

planning. One fundamental change was to increase and upgrade the force structure at NTM-A. As the above organizational chart depicts, additional general officers and staff elements were brought in to increase partnering opportunities at the highest levels. Two deputy commanders were appointed at the two-star level—one each for ANP and ANA development—with two one-stars serving each deputy as senior mentors to top Afghan security officials. NTM-A also added a two-star Senior Executive Service (SES) civilian, Dr. Jack Kem, as the immediate deputy to General Caldwell. All in all, NTM-A boasted a much increased number of general officers and, later, of SES civilians as well.

However, assertions by senior political leaders in Brussels and Washington about the importance of ANSF development proved difficult to translate into needed personnel at the staff level. Additionally, the new levels of financial resources were not necessarily sufficient to overcome nearly a decade of inadequate international effort in Afghanistan and an increasingly alienated Afghan population. The new training commander in Afghanistan benefited from the strongest international mandate and support since the 2001 invasion.⁴

Whether or not the training command would succeed depended to no small degree on the actions of the commanding general. In this case, the selection had promise—General Caldwell gained considerable experience with managing training and education programs as the Combined Arms Center (CAC) commander at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. As CAC commander he directed US Army leader development, professional military and civilian education, and institutional and unit training and authored US Army doctrine.⁵ This focus on institutional development writ large transferred directly to the work at hand at NTM-A. General Caldwell also possessed the added dimension of having been Gen David Petraeus's spokesperson at Multi-National Force–Iraq (MNF-I) for more than a year through June 2007—the height of that war.⁶ This experience was valuable since the NATO training command required interaction with media outlets worldwide and frequent meetings with senior international and Afghan political leaders. The NTM-A commander also benefited from experience building police capacity in Haiti in 1994–95. Police experience proved essential, as ANP development was a top command priority in 2009–10. From the ISAF vantage point, General Caldwell's résumé made him well qualified for the complex blend of training,

diplomacy, communications, operations, and frenetic work pace needed to create the conditions for success at NTM-A.

For their part, Afghan security institutions lacked the systems to perform the clear, hold, and build phases of the COIN campaign plan agreed on by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) and ISAF. High AWOL rates in ANA and ANP units reflected a poor commitment to that approach among rank-and-file Afghans. A lack of total commitment to building Afghan forces appeared on both sides; in late 2009 and throughout 2010, the lack of trainers for the ANSF was a major impediment precluding the growth of quality Afghan security forces. A December 2009 report from the US Department of Defense (DOD) Office of Inspector General notes, “There have been insufficient personnel assigned against the ANSF train and equip mission since its inception.”⁷ In recognition of the inadequacy of earlier efforts, NATO countries began a dialogue on the alliance’s role in the training mission over the spring of 2009.

International Leaders Create and Fill NTM-A, Spring 2009

Prompted in part by President Barack H. Obama’s push for wider participation, NATO heads of state and government announced the creation of the NTM-A at the Strasbourg-Kehl Summit on 4 April 2009. The NATO North Atlantic Council formalized the new command on 12 June 2009 “to oversee higher level training for the ANA and for development of the ANP. CSTC-A and NTM-A will coexist as a single HQ with fully integrated staff sections under a dual-hatted commander.”⁸ A second new headquarters assumed the task of directing the COIN campaign and many elements of ANSF development. The IJC took control of mentoring teams for the ANA and ANP (through operational mentor and liaison teams [OMLT] and police operational mentoring and liaison teams [POMLT], respectively) and all field partnering operations. This division of labor was intended to allow NTM-A “to focus on ANSF institution-building, force generation, force sustainment, and leader development.”⁹ From 2009 to 2011, this arrangement often led to nonproductive tension between these two new three-star NATO commands. Competition for resources and contrasting approaches to the war often absorbed time and effort at these two headquarters.

In late 2009 the US-led international effort to train the ANA and ANP remained the subject of strong criticism. CSTC-A still struggled to train and build Afghan forces with its insufficient personnel levels. It had a base budget of \$5.6 billion but nowhere near enough trainers and advisors to effectively support ANSF development. In June 2009, only 2,097 of 5,688 required personnel for embedded training teams (ETT), police mentoring teams, and OMLTs were present for duty. RAND Corporation research showed that OMLTs and their US equivalent, ETTs, had been far short of manning goals since 2007.¹⁰ This shortage meant that the ANSF operated without international advice and oversight in far too many cases to ever achieve the stated aims of modernizing and professionalizing (in the Western model) the ANSF. From the coalition point of view, advisor shortages left the ISAF incapable of obtaining vital information about the ANSF. In other cases, empty trainer billets slowed or stopped training altogether. As late as November 2009, as few as 25 percent of assigned military personnel were on the ground serving with the training mission elements.¹¹

IJC and ISAF manning levels hovered above 90 percent while NTM-A struggled to reach 50 percent until early 2010.¹² Instead of working to build ANSF capacity or improve training programs, NTM-A staff had to spend substantial time urging NATO and partner nations to send people for empty billets. The personnel shortage also strained NTM-A's relations with the IJC—after 190 personnel were tabbed to move from that command to NTM-A.¹³ The decision to reduce the total number of forces in the US surge in 2009, along with the slow intake of NATO allied troops, drove intense competition for resources among the IJC, NTM-A, and ISAF headquarters. NTM-A's leaders and staff actively engaged in driving US and NATO personnel requests forward.

The consequences of the trainer shortfall were serious. One Associated Press report from Lashkar Gah, Helmand Province, found that “the training effort has been drastically slowed by rampant corruption, widespread illiteracy, vanishing supplies, lack of discipline and the added burden of unifying a force made up of a patchwork of often hostile ethnic groups.”¹⁴ Afghanistan's problems seemed beyond the reach of the training mission to solve. Prior missions across the twentieth century showed that the degree of wholesale cultural change required for the ANSF to succeed was beyond the means of a military advisory program. CSTC-A/NTM-A and the ISAF would have to

conduct their efforts as part of a far larger, fully integrated civil-military reform program to build an Afghan government with a fully functioning justice system and security sector. For any such program to succeed, Afghan leaders would have to play a crucial—and unprecedented in the post-2001 era—role in its development and implementation. However, without the right number and quality of personnel, the international community could not hope to help build a viable security force or an effective government in Afghanistan.

Competing for Resources, Early 2010

By early 2010, NTM-A headquarters was still at odds with its superior and sister commands over two core issues: personnel allotment and institutional capacity building versus rapid employment of maximum forces even at the cost of quality.¹⁵ The communications strategy NTM-A developed was in part a product of disagreements between ISAF commands about the best use of personnel. The distribution of international forces in Afghanistan in early 2010 underlined ISAF priorities: approximately 133,500 international troops were in country, yet NTM-A worked with no more than half of its required military personnel for ANSF training and development.¹⁶ As the lead for ANSF training, General Caldwell argued that NTM-A could not function without additional personnel. The IJC, with support from the ISAF, believed that the Taliban needed to be “disrupted” by ISAF forces before ANSF development could begin in earnest.¹⁷ Ultimately the United States made offers of whole unit solutions for NTM-A, which could help—but only to a point. NTM-A needed the right people with the right capabilities and experience to train ANSF, not whole units with many personnel who could contribute minimally if at all. Around 350 members of a US infantry battalion are privates or specialists with limited experience and skills to share with Afghan trainees. Accordingly, General Caldwell and his staff determined that they needed to actively engage NATO and partner nations to seek out the trainers institutional solutions had failed to provide. However, the IJC and ISAF often took issue with the NTM-A communications plan and its objectives.

The tension between IJC and NTM-A was rarely productive in 2009–10. It was a direct product of perceptions about the importance of the current operations versus institution building for the long

term. The IJC position had its merits and supporters, as did NTM-A's. In the end, it was clear that the force management cap not only caused much of the tension (as did the international community's inability to generate enough trainers) but also provided an impetus for the ISAF and subordinate commands to make efficient use of their resources. Yet it remained that the designated "strategic main effort," requiring only 3 percent of ISAF forces, either would not or could not be fully resourced.¹⁸ The decision originated directly with General McChrystal, who decided that NTM-A could wait but also that IJC needed all available resources immediately to produce the kinds of results the US public could easily acknowledge.¹⁹ ISAF's position rested on the belief that only victory in southern Afghanistan could buy the time required to build Afghan forces. This operational bias had precedents in Iraq in 2004 and campaigns stretching back to the Korean and Vietnam Wars.

An early dispute between NTM-A and IJC revolved around more than the number of urgent vacancies on the training staff. After Task Force Phoenix joined IJC in October 2009, CSTC-A strength dropped to below 33 percent overall.²⁰ Critical positions were unfilled—even the sole deputy commander job at CSTC-A was vacant as of late September. The Afghan regional security integration commands had been reduced to as few as 10 people and were incapable of performing their mission.²¹ Dozens of essential staff billets remained open with no expectation of being filled in the near term.

One challenge was that the highly skilled people the training command needed were hard to get into the theater—international fighting forces or support troops were easier to obtain. Additionally, many partner nations had smaller military and police forces to draw on, and only a fraction of those personnel were willing to deploy and spoke enough English to serve in a NATO billet in Afghanistan. In the case of the Afghan police, countries with large gendarmeries were the best source for trainers and advisors, but these countries were slow to offer people to go to Afghanistan. International personnel were also allocated unevenly when they did arrive, at times because of national caveats restricting where and how they could be used.²² Above all, the number of skilled, experienced people on the ground was insufficient for the complex set of civil-military problems at hand.

The US Department of State (DOS), United Nations, and other key civilian agencies assisting Afghanistan were even more overwhelmed and had far fewer people than needed to uphold the civilian side of

the international nation-building program underway in Afghanistan. The DOS had only 320 personnel in the entire country in January 2009.²³ Furthermore, the scale of the challenges the coalition faced had no model for success. The international-Afghan partnership had to overcome years of inadequate, misguided efforts to achieve the monumental task of putting the Karzai administration and its armed forces on sound footing. International political will did not match the high financial and personnel demands for nation building in Afghanistan, and at the same time, the approach to security force assistance remained thoroughly modernist in its assumptions. War studies researcher Sten Rynning points out that in Afghanistan, “NATO’s leadership was too focused on liberal convictions in the abstract and too unaware of campaign consequences.”²⁴ Lofty ideas about nation building, democratization, and institution building in Afghanistan had yielded little fruit as of late 2009, largely because Afghans had been relegated to observer status in many cases, and international resources were too small to matter in others. As the training effort entered its eighth year, this legacy of prolonged neglect affected every aspect of the CSTC-A mission. For most of the post-2001 effort, insufficient funding had been an underlying obstacle to ANSF development.

The Main Effort?

Funding for Afghan and Iraqi force development revealed a wide disparity prior to 2007, when funding for the ANSF increased substantially to \$7.4 billion. However, Afghan forces received just \$0.3, \$1.3, and \$1.9 billion for 2004, 2005, and 2006, respectively, with Iraqi forces receiving \$13.7 billion in the same period. US funding in 2008 was once again greater for Iraqi forces despite the substantial domestic wealth of Iraq compared to Afghanistan—\$3 billion in security assistance funding for Iraq but only \$2.8 billion for Afghanistan. ANSF development lagged well into 2009 as a result of years of low prioritization of Operation Enduring Freedom.²⁵ Because of this neglect and other internal factors discussed in chapters one and two, Afghan forces were in distress in late 2009. General McChrystal summarized the state of the ANSF at that time in his memoir, *My Share of the Task*:

In combat, the performance of Afghan National Army units had shown promise, but the dominance of former Northern Alliance leaders, corruption, and uneven leadership continued to hobble their development. . . .

The police were far behind, almost depressingly so. They had received little international attention since 9/11, and despite [Interior] Minister Hanif Atmar's energetic efforts, they lacked training and leadership and suffered from chronic corruption and drug use. By nature, police are far harder to build than armies. Their decentralized employment disperses them in small elements that are vulnerable to improper pressure and corruption. It also makes small-unit leadership critical, something that in Afghanistan was weak.²⁶

The poor reputation of Afghan forces was an impediment to and a symptom of inadequate financial support from 2001 to 2006. In 2005, funding for the ANSF was barely half of what mujahideen forces received from the United States some 20 years before but came with far more interference in how Afghan troops were designed and operated.²⁷ ANSF funding also paled beside the cost of US operations in Afghanistan—more than \$57 billion from 2001 to 2006 alone. By 2009, US forces consumed \$8–\$10 billion monthly or roughly the same amount provided for the ANSF between 2002 and 2009.²⁸ ANSF funding was simply inadequate to correct the myriad of problems that prevented Afghans from taking control of security in their country. Additional money was needed to hire enough trainers, pay adequate salaries to retain Afghan security force personnel, and maintain adequate facilities and equipment so the ANSF could perform its job.

General Formica, the outgoing CSTC-A commander, summarized the impact of inadequate resourcing to the US Congress in late 2009: “We have had a ‘Culture of Poverty’ that has hung over our entire experience in Afghanistan. It is not just that this is the 4th or 5th poorest country in the world, but it is in our approach to what we do—the result of a long-standing shortage of resources. This is endemic to the entire operation. When I was in Iraq in 2004, if we needed something, we got it. But in Afghanistan we have had to figure out how to do without it.”²⁹ If the strategic plan for Afghanistan was to make Afghan forces a carbon copy of Western forces, its implementation should have translated into the massive sums of money necessary to do so. However, having long been the secondary effort in the global war on terrorism, Afghanistan's security forces showed only marginal progress. Afghan forces were simply far from ready to take the lead in security operations—they could not supply themselves, provide their own combat support, or sustain themselves in the field.

Spreading the Message: General Caldwell Appeals for Resources

Even before he formally assumed command, General Caldwell began to inform key decision makers of the imperative to resource NTM-A. In a meeting on 6 November 2009, the new training commander told his superiors that the training mission needed to add more general officers. It also needed substantially more personnel across the board. Concurring with Caldwell's initial assessment were meeting attendees Michèle Flournoy, the US undersecretary of defense for policy, and Richard Holbrooke, the US special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan. These leaders became key supporters of NTM-A from this early point, though Holbrooke made clear that Afghan attrition, illiteracy, and drug use were obstacles that would hamper the training effort until rectified.³⁰ This meeting illustrated the new approach under General Caldwell, who would make a point of identifying and actively engaging principal leaders and stakeholders. He briefed them on training mission requirements to secure personnel for enacting reforms he saw as vital to ANSF development.

The deliberations and visits associated with the process of seeking trainers consumed much of the NTM-A commander's and deputy commanders' time. From preparing PowerPoint briefings to traveling to different countries searching for trainers and advisors, NTM-A leaders and staff made these strategic communications efforts a high priority. These efforts cut into time that might have been spent working with senior ANSF leaders. In some cases, time spent with international leaders failed to produce results beyond sympathy and goodwill. As late as February 2010, six months after NTM-A stood up—and more than a year since NATO created it—only 1,810 of 4,083 required trainers had arrived.³¹

As in prior years, the US Army stepped in to help the training command avert disaster. In December 2009, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates committed the 2nd Battalion, 22nd Infantry Regiment (2/22), to NTM-A.³² As part of the US Army's 10th Mountain Division, the 2/22 took part in many combat missions in Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom. This experience gave its personnel the credibility and knowledge to perform the ANA training mission

at a higher level than the National Guard units that preceded them. Since 2005 the DOD had denied repeated requests for regular Army units to replace the National Guard in training the ANA. Combined Forces Command–Afghanistan commander Lt Gen Karl Eikenberry, US Army, had frequently asked for a regular Army unit like the 2/22, but his appeals fell on deaf ears. DOD leaders were focused on Iraq. Successive CSTC-A commanders also sought more regular Army trainers for the ANA without success through 2009.³³ A new US emphasis on Afghanistan allowed ANA training to continue, but this solution was not ideal, institutional, or sustainable. It rested on the commitment of a single nation, while many others failed to provide the requisite trainers to keep the ANA growing. Perhaps most worrisome of all was the continued effort to train Afghans to fight according to Western-developed COIN tactics. This approach remained fundamentally unsuitable for Afghans, who resented central government intrusions and preferred locally generated forces. Afghans needed a stronger voice in the discussion of what their forces should look like and how they should operate, but neither Afghan leaders nor ISAF leadership seemed ready to make that happen in 2009–10.

Nonetheless, without the 2/22, NTM-A would have been unable to continue ANA training. The way this solution came about suggested that the coalition's efforts in Afghanistan still worked on an ad hoc basis. This episode also highlighted the severity of the problems the training command faced after seven years of under-resourcing. In late 2009, nine years into the effort, only a last-minute bridging solution from the US allowed ANSF training to continue. Had the US been unwilling or unable to provide additional trainers, no other nation stood ready to send any in their place. This situation revealed the limitations of the international commitment to ANSF development. Afghanistan's international partners had been willing to plan for operations in Afghanistan but proved themselves far less inclined to live up to the lofty aims of the Bonn Conference in 2002.

The Price of Shortfalls: Contractors in the Gaps

US contractors filled key advisor and trainer positions and provided logistics support, financial and personnel management, and a wide range of life-support tasks for the ANSF. In many cases, unless contractors filled billets at the training mission, no one would. NTM-A

awarded these contracts periodically, often every three years, continually reviewing and revising them within contract limitations. However, these mechanisms failed to keep pace with accelerated ANSF growth and rapid changes on the battlefield. Worse yet, most major contracts consistently fell into protests adjudicated by the US Government Accountability Office (GAO). Protests allowed the incumbent company to retain valuable contracts until the GAO resolved them. As a result, contract protests became a *de facto* way for companies to make more money.³⁴

The two largest contracts at NTM-A were the Ministry of Interior (MOI) contract for police training and the Ministry of Defense (MOD) contract for trainers and advisors. In 2009–10 both major contracts were affected by protests. On 19 December 2009, DynCorp International filed a protest against the awarding of the new police contract won by Military Professional Resources Incorporated (MPRI).³⁵ MPRI likewise protested the awarding of the MOD contract to DynCorp. The end result was lost time, money, and effectiveness for NTM-A. Every protest resulted in a minimum 100-day delay while the GAO assessed the validity of the complaint.³⁶ This process sapped tremendous resources from an already understaffed programs team. In most cases, these disputes dragged on for a year or more.

Even under the best circumstances, contractors providing a new function took four to six months to arrive for duty. Contracting procedures also prevented CSTC-A from reaching out to select DOD civilians with ideal and unique skill sets to serve with the training mission. All work done outside military channels had to be conducted by firms selected by competitive contract—the very same onerous process that negatively impacted NTM-A's ability to do its mission. In a meeting with Gen James Mattis, US Marine Corps, on 27 February, General Caldwell stated plainly that NTM-A was “operating under strength today because we depend on contractors.”³⁷ Contractors simply took too long to deploy to be the optimal solution to rapidly changing personnel requirements dictated by the nature of the ongoing COIN campaign. Additionally, many of them lacked the requisite skills to perform their duties effectively—especially when it came to working with the ANP.

Through spring 2010, the police training contract migrating from the State Department to the Defense Department remained an obstacle to progress at the MOI. Nearly 10 years into the international training effort, Afghan police development programs still lacked a

clear chain of command and functional policy controls. Bureaucracy and interagency turf wars interfered with improving the ANP for a decade—and it showed. Police contract squabbles also consumed much of the program team's efforts. Unlike the relatively simple contract for the MOD, the MOI contract management functions remained with the State Department. The complex transfer to DOD management and control involved not only the DOS but also the undersecretary of defense for policy—and even the secretary of defense. This meant that revising the Ministry of Interior contract to meet ANP and MOI requirements was complicated. Because only incremental changes were possible in the MOI contract, MOI training and other services fell prey to what Army colonel (now retired major general) John Ferrari, deputy commander for programs, called “disruptive change.”³⁸ Rather than planning for real ANSF needs based on field conditions, the programs staff had to curtail timetables to accommodate lengthy delays inherent to the contracting process. The US contracting system was simply the wrong mechanism to address rapidly changing battlefield requirements, but no other option existed in 2010.

There were also difficulties inherent to integrating growing international contributions to NTM-A. Each contributing nation had its own working style, customs, and notion of how to solve the problems at hand. Internal coordination became somewhat more complicated as a result, though overall, the added staffing and diverse approaches drove NTM-A to unprecedented success. On a more practical level, language and cultural barriers at the international command generated a slight degree of drag on operations as the command took on new partner nations and more personnel from existing partner nations. English competence varied widely among the international staff, which could slow or limit work output at times.³⁹ However, some nations adhered strictly to English language standards for NTM-A personnel—a requirement that seriously limited the pool of qualified people in those countries.

Additionally, access to classified networks remained a persistent challenge for international staff. Most traffic stayed on US-only computer systems, making work difficult for NATO and partner staff. For example, Brig Gen Ryszard Wisniewski, Polish Army, deputy commanding general for international security cooperation when NTM-A stood up, had to depend on his US executive officer to access the calendars of other general officers at the command. He could not

even view his own schedule, as it was kept on a network he was not privy to as a Polish officer.⁴⁰ The number of national computer networks involved with ISAF operations compounded such problems. Since few networks could talk to each other, information about the command was scattered across various systems that other national staff could not access. Over the course of 2010, the new Afghan Mission Network mitigated some of these challenges, but not all of ISAF's contributing nations had access.⁴¹

After seven years as a US-led command, the training command infrastructure was not yet fully capable of integrating a steadily growing number of international staff members. Nevertheless, the command spent considerable time urging partner nations to send more staff. The perceived shortage of personnel at NTM-A (and IJC) resulted from a troop-intensive COIN approach to the war and a limited number of troops sent in response to General McChrystal's request for more forces in late 2009.

Counterinsurgency at the Forefront

The ISAF emphasis on population-centric COIN required coalition personnel to spend the lion's share of their time on complex relationship-building activities with the population and even on economic development and civilian infrastructure. As COIN theorist David Galula argues, "The crux of the problem for the counterinsurgent is how to keep an area clean so that the counterinsurgent forces will be free to operate elsewhere."⁴² These activities were almost impossible to conduct without a thorough knowledge of local circumstances that foreigners were highly unlikely to achieve. Afghans were simply irrevocably suspicious of foreigners and their intentions. In the words of scholar and former Afghan minister of interior Najibullah Lafraie, Afghanistan "has been subjected to many foreign invasions throughout its long history. The Russian invasion is not even a generation old, and still fresh in the memory of many Afghans. The British invasion may be more than 100 years in the past, but certainly not forgotten. With such a collective memory, it is easy for the people to see even 'benign' interventions as gross aggression."⁴³ Each rotation of foreign forces serving in Afghanistan reached entirely different conclusions about local conditions and players in its areas of operations. The approach had become one where ISAF forces operated in Afghan

villages in a confused attempt to drive out the Taliban and build good relations with the Afghan peoples on behalf of the Afghan government and security forces. The resulting divergence among ends, ways, and means in Afghanistan in 2009–10 has been aptly described as a situation where “once again, an operational and tactical military approach was driving intervention strategy.”⁴⁴

Pushing ISAF troops into villages failed to address the need for a fully developed knowledge of local conditions. As mentioned by American journalist Edward Girardet, “a key drawback to this approach [COIN] is that many foreign military personnel come across as naïve with little understanding of the often complex tribal dynamics that exist in Afghanistan.”⁴⁵ For example, in Uruzgan, Australian forces flew warlord Matiullah Khan’s senior fighters to Australia for training after the preceding Dutch units had refused to work with him “because of his links with murder and extortion.”⁴⁶ For their part, many Afghans saw only foreign invaders when they saw ISAF troops in their villages. In the words of one Kandahari farmer, Nazar Mohammad, “It’s very obvious. Right now, we see foreigners with tanks driving through our fields. They destroy people’s orchards. . . . They break through walls and just drive across. When they take up positions like this, nobody can cooperate with them.”⁴⁷

Resistance to foreign troops performing COIN operations rose to the top in Afghanistan. A senior US military official told journalist Rajiv Chandrasekaran that Afghan president “[Hamid] Karzai [was] sending us a message. . . . And that message is: [sic] I don’t believe in counterinsurgency. . . . The Americans ignored Karzai. McChrystal and his bosses were not willing to give up on COIN, even if the leader of the sovereign nation in which they were fighting has clearly done so.”⁴⁸ The international approach to security operations shared ideology with the US war in Vietnam. Robert Egnell, currently vice-chancellor of Swedish Defence University, concludes that in contemporary Afghanistan, “theoretically the ‘hearts and minds’ approach is rooted in modernization theory and a normative Western approach to legitimacy that fails to live up to the expectations of the local population.”⁴⁹ Afghans were far better culturally suited to conduct COIN if that route had to be pursued. Still, nearly a decade of under-resourcing and sending too few advisors with the right skills had left the effort to build Afghan forces in bad shape in terms of technical ability and tactics. COIN operations required large numbers of foreign troops. However, international forces were difficult to obtain and expensive,

costing at least 10 times more per man than for Afghan forces.⁵⁰ Had these moneys been spent instead on plans to build Afghan forces with extensive input from the Afghan leadership, the rush to throw together forces between 2010 and 2014 might have been avoided. Sufficient Afghan forces might have been available to send into villages where foreign troops could only create difficulties.

Even as the new command went to work with increased levels of political and financial support from the international coalition, it faced an unprecedented degree of urgency. NTM-A operated in a high-stakes environment wherein it had to prepare the ANSF for the impending security transition scheduled to begin in summer 2011. Amb. Richard Holbrooke bluntly told General Caldwell on 6 November, “You have the job that will determine the future of the United States in Afghanistan.”⁵¹ Only the ANSF could secure Afghanistan in the long term, and Afghan forces needed substantial assistance from NTM-A to be able to show enough progress to retain international support during a worldwide recession. Additionally, this approach required that highly skeptical Afghan leaders be convinced that NTM-A and ISAF programs would benefit them and prevent them from just waiting out the end of another of the long line of foreign interventions in Afghanistan.

NATO Training Mission–Afghanistan: Goals in the First Year

General Caldwell’s initial command guidance reflected a new approach built on the work General Formica and his team had begun. In November 2009, the training command faced intense criticism for its previous efforts along with a troubled ANSF unable to execute its basic mission for want of capability and motivation. General Caldwell soon shifted his focus from the details of daily operations to an intensive communication strategy aimed at improving NTM-A resources in the short term. As a part of the commander’s emphasis on “informing and educating” stakeholders and the international public, NTM-A adopted the guiding “3xT” principle: teaming, transparency, and transition. NTM-A personnel were instructed to be “active communicators,” problem solvers, innovative and creative, and “culturally attuned.”⁵² These concepts sounded like the right way to do business,

but how these tasks would be done remained unclear. Events of the year that followed served as the measure of this early guidance.

With 49 nations holding some stake in NTM-A in 2009–10, the training commander in Afghanistan had to execute many of the same tasks that had defined one of America's most famous generals, Dwight D. Eisenhower, in his role as Supreme Allied Commander Europe: "Partly politics, partly public speaking, partly essay-writing, partly social contact."⁵³ Though some critics found fault with General Caldwell's frequent interaction with the media, his job was—by necessity—part diplomat. The commander spent no less than 70 percent of his time actively seeking personnel for NTM-A during his first six months in command. While the new commander did not view strategic communications as a panacea, he did believe it could help NTM-A further its mission and remained committed to a strong strategic communications program throughout his time at NTM-A. The rationale behind this emphasis on communications was multifaceted. First and foremost, communicating the command's shortfalls and the impact of low manning might lead to additional resourcing. Second, the emphasis on internal reporting and information dissemination came directly from the highest levels of leadership. Early in his administration, President Barack Obama told his senior staff in a meeting on the war in Afghanistan that he was "a big believer in continually updating our analysis and relying on a constant feedback loop."⁵⁴ When US staff officers in Kabul worked until early in the morning on briefings, they were not simply arranging data on slides but implementing guidance from their commander in chief. Third, in many instances, information about what the training command did was sorely lacking and led to misunderstandings inside and outside Afghanistan. With so many nations taking part in NTM-A—and other nations interested in the training mission's activities—an essential part of the mission was to ensure that stakeholders and other nations made their decisions based on accurate, updated information. In some past instances, poor communications led to poor relationships, thus hampering what should have been coordinated efforts to aid and assist ANSF. General Caldwell's communications strategy aimed to clarify the training command's current state and requirements for international stakeholders.

NTM-A's commander believed that strategic communication was the best method to redress the poor coordination that existed in the winter of 2009. Police programming suffered the most from a lack of

functional coordination. Only days before General Caldwell took command, the international effort was criticized for its lack of coordination. Piotr Krawczyk, a security expert and former deputy head of the Polish embassy in Kabul, observed a “complete lack of coordination between the E.U. institutions in Afghanistan and . . . the United Nations and NATO.”⁵⁵ NTM-A now sought out organizations such as the European Union Police Mission in Afghanistan (EUPOL Afghanistan) and worked to create better communication with nations, such as Germany, that assisted the ANP on a bilateral basis. The effort paid dividends quickly as the European Gendarmerie Force’s (EGF) contingent in Afghanistan formally joined NTM-A in December 2009.⁵⁶ However, better communications could not entirely bridge differing visions of how to best support Afghan forces. In the end, the effectiveness of the ANSF served as the single most important measure of NTM-A’s success or failure in 2009–10.

Early in General Caldwell’s tenure at NTM-A, changes were emplaced that resulted in improvements in the size and performance of the ANA and ANP. At the end of NTM-A’s first 90 days, the staff had been reorganized and strengthened and significant programming changes implemented or initiated across the board. NTM-A and ISAF leaders worked with their international stakeholders and the MOI and MOD to request additional ANSF growth. In January 2010, the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board (JCMB) approved the new end-strength goal of 245,000 forces by October 2010. JCMB members also endorsed a 305,000 (171,000 ANA and 134,000 ANP) end strength by October 2011.⁵⁷ These new goals required corresponding training capacity increases that translated into demanding infrastructure and trainer requirements for NTM-A. The stronger ANSF presence could enable gradual security transition, but it also meant accelerated growth paths for the ANA and ANP and corresponding rapid growth in MOI and MOD capacity to build and employ the larger force.

On the other hand, as scholars Alex Marshall and Tim Bird rightly argue, “for any military organization, a swift increase in manpower very rarely translates into an equivalent increase in real capacity or professionalism.”⁵⁸ Acceleration also made modernizing the ANSF’s equipment and doctrine even more difficult. Instead of focusing on basic skills, however, the emphasis in 2010 was building supporting units and logistics elements and adding more heavy equipment to the ANA. Furthermore, by advocating for these new force levels, General

Caldwell accepted considerable risk. The challenge would be whether he and his staff could support this pace of ANSF growth—given persistent high attrition rates—and still produce the quality necessary to enable transition. This decision was bold in light of the fact that ANSF strength had been declining in the latter months of 2009. AWOL rates persisted at unacceptably high rates as well, though the number of personnel reporting to ANA and ANP units remained uncertain in the absence of coalition personnel to observe them.⁵⁹

When NTM-A began operations in its new role as the designated strategic main effort, the international contribution consisted of a handful of personnel scattered across the command. The Italian gendarmerie, the Carabinieri, for example, served at the police training compound at Adraskan in Herat Province.⁶⁰ One hundred fifteen international trainers would eventually be on the ground, with another 499 on the way.⁶¹ This growth was the most visible example of the new command climate at NTM-A and resulted in by far the largest number of international trainers to ever take part in the Afghanistan mission. The headquarters at Camp Eggers in Kabul was energized by new faces arriving daily. While building on the accomplishments of those who came before, NTM-A under General Caldwell benefited from the renewed international emphasis on operations in Afghanistan. However, more international participants meant more complications.

Capt Mark Hagerott, US Navy, headed the commander's action group during the first six months of NTM-A operations. He attended the commander's meetings and worked alongside General Caldwell to bring in personnel for the numerous empty billets at the training mission. In an interview with the NTM-A historian, Hagerott stated that coalition leaders seemed not to recognize how important the training command was to ISAF's strategy. He further remarked, "It was really surprising how much energy General Caldwell had to expend to get the manning he needed to support the mission."⁶² Combined Training Advisory Group-Army (CTAG-A) commander Brigadier Simon Levey, British Army, called General Caldwell's success in obtaining trainers the "single most significant act that happened at NTM-A in my view." Levey went on to note the effort "was not easy. It was quite clear to me that he was fighting people all the time to get manpower; the doors were closed, and he opened them."⁶³ Other key staff members perceived the same initial resistance to staffing NTM-A. General Caldwell proved able to urge coalition nations to increase their contributions—but only to a point. NTM-A grew

but never approached 100 percent manning, especially on the Combined Joint Statement of Requirements (CJSOR) and Crisis Establishment international manning documents. In many cases, hard work produced ad hoc solutions, often through US sourcing. Nevertheless, long-term personnel fixes for the training command remained elusive. Problems in securing trainers also characterized earlier international efforts to build forces in developing countries in a wartime environment.

General Caldwell made his case to General McChrystal, Secretary Gates, and Adm Michael Mullen, US Navy, in quick succession. It was a December 2009 briefing to Admiral Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, that broke open the obstacles to additional manning. Staff augmentation was just one area where the command moved forward in early 2010. Afghan Army and police recruitment skyrocketed in December 2009. Many observers believed that President Obama's West Point speech on 1 December—announcing plans to shift security operations to Afghan control to allow the ISAF to depart—forced Afghan leaders to accept that US forces were not in their country indefinitely.⁶⁴ Another critical factor was introducing pay raises for ANA and ANP personnel and equalizing pay between the two services. This impetus and a new stronger international emphasis on Afghanistan showed results over time. ANSF recruiting and training capacity made tremendous strides forward. The Afghan minister of defense, Gen Rahim Abdul Wardak, moved forward with a sense of urgency and mobilized his personal networks to produce huge numbers of recruits every month in 2010. In November 2009, only 2,300 ANA recruits were generated along with 2,706 ANP recruits. One month later, 8,766 recruits entered the ANSF. A new high of 12,398 recruits joined the ANSF in April 2010.⁶⁵ Pay reform programs and other factors combined to ensure a steady flow of ANSF recruits in 2010. In turn, training facility capacity and instructional programs had to be modified to meet this new level of demand, as existing training facilities could not accommodate this increased flow of recruits.

The fundamental dilemma in Afghanistan was that no amount of coalition operations could enable full security transition in the long run. For the campaign to be a lasting success, ANSF units would have to be the ones to secure their country. Adding strength to the training mission also acted as a force multiplier—though coalition troops were superior in quality, just a few dozen additional trainers could help produce hundreds of basic Afghan soldiers or policemen in a

short time. These new ANA and ANP personnel could then participate in coalition COIN operations. Their superior ability to interact with the population would be an incalculable advantage over their international allies. However, for ANSF units to provide security alone, they needed competent leaders and support units with adequate technical skills. Unlike basic recruits, these more advanced soldiers and policemen took time to build—and the clock was ticking. Any additional delay translated to the continuation of the infantry-centric ANSF model adopted in 2006–07. That kind of force could operate *alongside* coalition forces but was *fully dependent* on the coalition for even basic combat support. General Caldwell argued that qualitative improvements and leadership development could not be delayed any further if the July 2011 date for transition to ANSF-led operations—agreed upon at the January 2010 International Conference on Afghanistan in London—would be any more than a date on the wall.⁶⁶

Mixed Results: The Afghan National Army in Early 2010

The results of NTM-A operations in the first six months were decidedly mixed, as demonstrated in the major operation of early 2010: Operation Moshtarak (Together) in southern Afghanistan. The ISAF strategy called for disrupting Taliban and other insurgent forces as the first course of action and building self-sustaining Afghan forces afterward. This combination of factors was part of why NTM-A struggled for personnel while the operational command manning level hovered over 90 percent. As Operation Moshtarak garnered the lion's share of ISAF resources in early 2010, training manning levels suffered even as ISAF briefs called NTM-A the “strategic main effort.”⁶⁷ These priorities led to what Captain Hagerott called “stonewalling” NTM-A requests for forces.⁶⁸ Coalition leaders agreed on the security transition strategy, but views diverged markedly on how to achieve the desired conditions to begin the process. General McChrystal decided in favor of increasing the operational tempo in 2009–10 at the expense of institution building for the ANSF.

Moshtarak formed the centerpiece of the ISAF plan in 2010. Perhaps the most astonishing thing about the operation was that it was the first time a coalition commander had sought the Afghan president's approval before a mission launch. On 21 January, General

McChrystal sought President Karzai's support for Moshtarak, prompting Karzai to respond, "General McChrystal, you'll have to forgive me. I've never been asked to approve this kind of operation before."⁶⁹ Karzai approved the operation after a short deliberation, and the operation began on 13 February, with the aim of injecting a GIROA presence into the central Helmand Province. The second phase of the plan expanded operations into Kandahar city—the historical capital city of Afghanistan and birthplace of the Taliban movement—and surrounding areas.⁷⁰ Shaping, clearing, and holding operations conducted in conjunction with Afghan forces sought to provide security to a degree where the Afghan government could execute the initial District Delivery Program. This program was a wide-ranging civil governance effort intended to win public support through delivering effective public services and initiating economic development programs.⁷¹ Electrical projects, cellular phone networks, and road improvements were some examples of these efforts. In essence, this program encapsulated the modernist assumptions that underlay the international strategy in Afghanistan. That is, professionalization along with material modernization and kinetic operations conducted by international personnel would be the panacea for the country. The belief was that this approach would convince Afghans to support the Karzai government and its global partners against the Taliban and improve the lives of ordinary Afghans by providing them adequate security.

General McChrystal visited NTM-A on 26 February, shortly after Moshtarak began. The ISAF commander stressed a sense of urgency and the importance of ongoing operations, asserting, "If we don't win the current fight, there won't be any fight tomorrow."⁷² He urged NTM-A to produce significant successes in the short term and clearly resisted efforts to discuss longer-term plans. As had been the case in private deliberations, General McChrystal pushed the training command to maximize output and work to produce ANSF personnel who were "good enough" for the fight at hand.⁷³ NTM-A's plans to begin ANSF professionalization were at odds with the ISAF commander's wish for maximum immediate growth. Rapidly producing Afghan infantry and patrol officers had the advantage of getting more Afghans into the fight at hand. However, increasing these forces without taking the time to train them—along with NCOs and officers—to the maximum extent meant that ANSF attrition and other problems would persist. General McChrystal asked a poignant question at the

conclusion of his visit—one that animated NTM-A efforts for the remainder of 2010: “What would you do if we couldn’t go home until we win?”⁷⁴ From the training command’s vantage, to win meant increasing ANSF quantity and quality simultaneously. It also meant driving the Afghan leadership to make its force look and behave more like carbon copies of ISAF forces. Coalition assistance to the ANA had proved the most successful aspect of this effort—ISAF and US personnel were most familiar with military advising tasks, and Afghans were accustomed to fielding a substantial army.

In November 2009 and beyond, the ANA was the most reputable Afghan government institution. Polling in the Asia Foundation’s 2009 report *Afghanistan in 2009: A Survey of the Afghan People* showed that most Afghans regarded its army as a positive force in their society. Nine out of ten Afghans surveyed agreed that the ANA was “honest and fair” with the people, while 87 percent believed that the ANA contributed positively to security. The same survey, however, showed less confidence in ANA professionalism and training—slightly more than half the respondents concurred that the ANA was “unprofessional and poorly trained.”⁷⁵ Agreeing with this perception was NTM-A’s deputy commanding general, Maj Gen David Hogg, US Army. When he took command in mid-2009, he discovered that ANA training had almost no training standards. Trainers were in short supply by year’s end, and the trainer-to-trainee ratio averaged one to 79.⁷⁶ To complete basic training, an ANA recruit had to show up on only the first and last day of the training course; that Afghan Army officers tolerated this practice suggested they placed little importance on the basic training program. The intent was that once recruits were brought in and mixed proportionately to “ethnically balance” a unit, they would complete an eight-week training course and then be assigned as a unit to one of the five Afghan Army corps.

After only a few months, the NTM-A team and its Afghan partners had made wholesale changes that laid a foundation for a professional army for Afghanistan. And while some aspects of Western tactics were inappropriate in Afghanistan, some training outcomes—such as good marksmanship, basic hygiene, basic equipment maintenance, and physical fitness—entirely benefited the ANA. On the other hand, COIN operation tactics and uses of supporting weapons—such as recoilless rifles, air strikes, and heavy machine guns—were examples of tasks that did not suit conditions or stated objectives (nation building,

for instance) in Afghanistan, where good relations with the people were more important than tactical success.⁷⁷

Individual rifle marksmanship was a critical skill for an infantry soldier anywhere. However, in Afghanistan, firefights frequently occurred in or around populated areas, making accurate fire even more essential. In June 2009, only 16 percent of ANA recruits qualified on their weapons. By late 2009, the figure had climbed to 35 percent—a solid improvement, but one that still reflected CSTC-A's inadequate resourcing.⁷⁸ NTM-A headquarters made ANA marksmanship a priority and implemented changes to the marksmanship program during the command's first few weeks of operations. A series of appeals led the US Army to lend its marksmanship team to NTM-A. The team, which included US Olympic competitors, was the best the Army had to offer. It arrived on 11 December 2009 and immediately revamped ANA marksmanship training.⁷⁹

The marksmanship team's training programs were based on US Army training programs and produced dramatic results. By the end of 2010, ANA rifle marksmanship qualification rates consistently hovered around 95 percent at ANA training centers across the country.⁸⁰ These results indicated the impact of having people with the right experience and skills to support ANSF development. They also reflected a continued high level of performance at the operational level when suitable coalition personnel worked toward a goal with tangible benefits for the Afghans. NTM-A and ANSF personnel showed what could be accomplished at the tactical and operational levels. However, unless the overall strategy for Afghanistan was revamped to align with Afghanistan's long-term challenges and resources, operational excellence at NTM-A would fail to enable lasting improvements overall.

However, the short term *did* matter with regard to sustaining political support for the war and reducing collateral damage caused by armed, untrained Afghans. The rapid improvements in marksmanship through ANA training showed that the same potential was attainable for certain technical areas. That effort also illustrated the rapidity with which NTM-A trainers could produce effective programs when resourced with the right people. The high degree of professionalism and remarkable work ethic of most coalition personnel could produce dramatic results for some tasks but still not necessarily improve security overall. Until Afghans planned, executed, and provided security in ways that ordinary Afghans throughout the country regarded as ap-

propriate and effective, no degree of tactical improvements could make Afghanistan safer. In the end, technical and process improvements meant little unless they supported programs and built forces that Afghan leaders viewed as necessary. Another example of a few capable advisors making a notable difference was the training programs at the National Military Academy of Afghanistan (NMAA).

NTM-A Army team members stepped in and helped take on one of the ANA and MOD's biggest problems—corruption. On 22 February 2010, a group of new ANA officers received their first assignments. This process had historically been chaotic and plagued by nepotism and corruption. The 212 new officers were graduates of the NMAA, a four-year academy with a long history that taught a rigorous curriculum modeled on the US Military Academy at West Point. These young officers were in high demand, and many came from privileged backgrounds that had allowed them to stay in Kabul or other less volatile areas. Many NMAA graduates roamed the halls of the security ministries while few served in the difficult fight in Regional Command–South and Regional Command–Southwest. In 2010, NMAA graduates received their assignments using a lottery system developed by NTM-A advisors at the academy and members of the army team.⁸¹

The lottery for the 212 graduates' assignments took place with high-ranking ANA officers and NTM-A's General Hogg present. To further ensure transparency and prevent corruption, the lottery ceremony appeared live on Afghan television. Each graduating cadet drew a tile and read his assignment out loud. A reviewing party of ANA and ISAF officers recorded and certified the assignment. As the four-hour lottery drew to a close, the new officers were equitably assigned to units across Afghanistan. A fair share of officers received assignments to the 205th and 215th Corps, where Operation Moshtarak was underway.⁸² This small success story was a microcosm of General Caldwell's strategy for NTM-A and the ANSF. The lottery process introduced an impartial, professional assignment system to an army that had struggled with favoritism for decades. The media presence helped ensure accountability, and NTM-A participation helped guarantee a legitimate process took place.

Afghan leaders privately welcomed the lottery process and insisted on a coalition presence to relieve the intense pressure they faced to alter assignments for political or other nefarious reasons. NTM-A staff followed up on lottery results several months later and found

only three officers who had their assignments altered; these officers were promptly sent to their original duty stations.⁸³ From the NTM-A viewpoint, the NMAA lottery was a small step toward professionalization. It was a real success for NTM-A and the ANA leadership working together and revealed the degree of progress that could be achieved by minor changes and just a few capable advisors. The lottery helped fill vital gaps in leadership in the field simply by interjecting a fair assignment process and following through with it. When enough advisors were in place to work alongside Afghans and provide oversight, tangible changes were possible. However, the lottery also flew in the face of the ways Afghans preferred to do business. What US officers saw as nepotism, Afghans often saw as a reasonable way of filling vacancies and setting up young relatives or protégés for success. While this practice could lead to a lack of professionalism, it could also perform the important role of shoring up government support and tying at least some Afghan networks to the success of the ANSF. Even if one cedes the NMAA lottery program as a good step toward impartial and professional young officers for the ANA, it remained a top-end program. The real concern was at the rank-and-file level, where most ANA recruits were faced with more immediate factors than a biased selection system. However, in the end, the NMAA lottery implementation was another example of a creative and rapidly implemented program guided to fruition very quickly by NTM-A advisors.

More broadly, ANA top-end programming served as an objective for ANSF programs across the board and showed how far most aspects of ANA development still had to go. Most ANA units comprised illiterate men with a few months of training and were short of officers and NCOs—with the notable exception of elite ANA units. In particular, the ANA commando program was a remarkable example of success. The Afghan Army's elite commando program began in 2007. Over the course of three years of operations, commando units demonstrated that Afghan soldiers could perform air assaults, offensive operations, and night operations and seize multiple objectives simultaneously. Their basic training included conducting "cordon and search [operations], a raid, an ambush, reconnaissance operations, close quarters combat, target interdiction, and search and attack missions."⁸⁴ These diverse skills prepared the ANA commandos to act as the first troops on the ground in a variety of critical situations. The commandos built up a strong record in combat for clear-

cut reasons: better training, equipment, and personnel policies than other ANSF units. In late 2009 and early 2010, commando attrition was nearly zero—usually under 1.4 percent—even as commandos spearheaded Operation Moshtarak in Marjah.⁸⁵ Despite frequent, difficult combat missions, commandos stayed with their units for multiple tours. Elite status and self-selection played roles, but in the end, it was good programming that sustained the high quality and high retention in the ANA commando battalions.

Early in his command, General Caldwell seized onto the ANA commandos as an example of what could be done with the ANSF under ideal conditions. The commandos benefited from the “Three Ps”: pay, partnering, and predictability. As the ANA equivalent to US Army Rangers, commandos formed the “tip of the spear” for the ANSF. Higher pay was the first factor in the high retention and morale levels that characterized the commandos. Second, commando units operated with elite field advisors from the ISAF Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command–Afghanistan. US special forces in particular were vital in instructing the commando training cadre, which in turn trained its soldiers continually. Commando retention remained the highest in the ANSF month after month—a powerful endorsement of ISAF partnering programs.⁸⁶ Likewise, ANSF units with no ISAF partner, such as the Afghan National Civil Order Police (ANCOP), continually posted the worst retention rates—73 percent as of February 2010 for the Afghan solar year ending 20 March 2010, with some ANCOP units well over 100 percent attrition in a year.⁸⁷

The third and final part of the commandos’ formula for success was predictability. In late 2009, the vast majority of ANSF units fielded for the duration of the conflict. Unit rotations and leave were almost nonexistent. ANA and ANP members fought until they chose to desert their units, completed their time in service, or were killed or wounded. By contrast, commando battalions operated on an operational deployment cycle. Commandos conducted operations for six weeks in the green phase, stood down for six weeks of leave in the red phase, and entered refresher training in the amber phase. The operational cycle was the final piece of the puzzle for commando success. This model had been formulated through a joint CSTC-A and ISAF effort when the first training classes began in late 2006.

In 2010, NTM-A leadership expended considerable effort implementing operational deployment cycles, leaves, and unit rotations for

the ANSF at large. The case for implementing these measures was compelling but ended up being the principal source of friction with the IJC and ISAF in 2010. Any lasting improvement to the regular ANA required extensive coalition observation and oversight, which was obstructed in part by resource and personnel disputes between coalition commands. Though in the final analysis Afghan leadership alone could guarantee ANSF success, in the short term, coalition partnering was the essential enabler for ANA and ANP progress.

Shoulder to Shoulder? Partnering in 2010

History shows that coalition forces were most skilled at building elite forces with capabilities like their own. Building rank-and-file ANA soldiers was different and required resources and trainers on a larger scale. Trainers had proved elusive to secure in meaningful numbers, and the funds necessary to upgrade ANA line unit benefits and equipment to commando levels were not available or sustainable. Accordingly, the training command had to find a way to build a successful ANA that did not depend on the superior recruits, equipment, and programming that defined the ANA commandos' elite status. Most Afghans did not match the commandos' enthusiasm for service in the ANSF. Most did not have ISAF partner units while many had no advisors at all. As a result, oversight functions, the capacity to assess ANSF units, and basic performance of ANA and ANP duties suffered along with the Afghan people who lacked protection from insurgents and criminals. And while premium equipment, rotational cycles, and pay may not have been possible in 2009–10, it remains difficult to understand why the ISAF chose to put ANSF development at a lower priority for personnel than continued ISAF COIN operations.

Although General McChrystal made partnering a high priority in late 2009, he also indicated that progress in that area had been painfully slow prior to his assumption of command. His initial assessment noted, "Partnering continues to evolve. Efforts to formalize the partnership between ISAF and ANSF can be traced to June 2008. It took until Nov 2008 to develop the framework for the plan and issue the fragmentary order (FRAGO) directing this effort."⁸⁸ Until 2009, international efforts to develop the ANSF through mentoring, training, and equipping were insufficient to match the resurgent Taliban and its affiliates. Shortly after his arrival as ISAF commander in 2009,

General McChrystal increased emphasis on building the capability of the ANSF, including the concept of “embedded partnering.”⁸⁹ However, the state of partnering in late 2009 was poor. In his memoirs, General McChrystal remarks, “Partnering with Afghan Security Forces was episodic at best. In most places, ISAF and the Afghan National Security Forces operated separately. ISAF units would sometimes ask for a few Afghan National Army soldiers to ‘put an Afghan face’ on a mission.”⁹⁰ Even after McChrystal took command, progress in finding partner units and field mentoring teams remained slow.

In theory, partner units played a critical role in ANSF development from the time an Afghan Army recruit entered unit training and an Afghan joined a fielded police unit. In theory, partners from IJC joined the ANA as they began collective training to help the new battalion improve its operational capabilities. IJC personnel also were slated to fill the validation training teams (VTT), which evaluated the new unit’s performance in unit testing before being fielded. Few ANA battalions went through the Consolidated Fielding Center with a full partner team in place. ANA history shows a powerful correlation between ANA unit performance and a full team of ISAF partners in place, on time, with the right ranks and skills. However, IJC either lacked the personnel or chose not to prioritize VTTs and other training teams. Inadequate international personnel contributions to OMLTs and POMLTs were much of the reason IJC failed to resource partnering for ANA battalions at the Consolidated Fielding Center. Most fielded ANA units eventually had some kind of partner, yet their performance suffered from not having fully staffed partner units earlier in their development. Well into 2010, the majority of ANP units had no partner units at all. In March 2010, ISAF was short 40 OMLTs and 168 POMLTs, a deficit of 8,300 personnel.⁹¹ Each absent team equated to an Afghan unit with no partner, which in turn meant that coalition leaders had no reliable source of information on those units’ activities.

Partners from the IJC also provided oversight and in the case of untrained ANP units were the only examples that Afghan forces had. This relationship meant that ANP quality and performance were directly tied to the presence of an ISAF partner to teach ANP forces the basics of COIN operations. Additionally, without fielded ISAF units supervising the ANP, NTM-A and other coalition commands suffered from a pervasive lack of knowledge of ANP capability. At the current stage of ANSF development, coalition advisors were the only

sure way to generate accurate information about what, if anything, a given ANSF unit was doing at any given time. The results of Operation Moshtarak (the major ISAF and ANSF operation in southern Afghanistan in 2010) in Helmand Province suggested the need for ISAF to put more effort into partnering with and carefully observing ANSF operations.

Operation Moshtarak

Over time, Moshtarak was to shift from the “clear” phase of COIN (removing enemy forces from an area) to a “hold” phase (controlling newly taken territory and denying the enemy the ability to return) conducted primarily by ANSF forces. The particulars of the operation validated parts of the ISAF approach but also prompted justified criticism of other aspects of ISAF efforts in Afghanistan. NTM-A supported the operation by training and deploying ANA and ANP units to serve in both the clear and hold phases of the operation. NTM-A assisted in providing equipment and individual and unit training to ANA commandos, ANA infantry battalions, and even some ANA combat support units. Additionally, an ANCOP battalion was specially organized and trained and was put through ANCOP’s first-ever consolidated unit training and fielding process for service in Moshtarak. NTM-A provided sufficient advisors and trainers to enable rapid production and equipping of ANSF units in remarkable numbers. Still, the quality and performance of these forces remained subject to traditional problems that marked Afghan forces’ history and the ISAF approach to the ANSF’s role and composition.

ISAF and US military leaders praised and highlighted the performance of ANSF units and leadership whenever possible. In a congressional hearing in Washington held a few days into Moshtarak, Lt Gen John Paxton, US Marine Corps, then the director of operations for the Joint Staff (General McChrystal’s former stomping grounds), testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee. He painted an encouraging and positive picture of Afghan contributions to Moshtarak. General Paxton’s testimony clearly reflected ISAF leadership’s views: “The operation being executed, as noted by Senator Levin, Moshtarak, which means ‘together,’ is an accurate description of how the operation was planned and, most importantly, how it’s being conducted today. Operation Moshtarak is the first operation in

Afghanistan where coalition planning has been fully integrated with our Afghan partners from the very start.”⁹² This statement brings to light a couple of important points. First, it is truly troubling that after more than seven years, coalition leaders integrated Afghans into the planning process. And second, even the stated role seen here remains controversial.

On the one hand, ISAF leadership and some scholars argue that the Afghan role was substantial, but some firsthand observers make strong cases to the contrary. Military analyst and retired British Army brigadier Ben Barry writes that later phases of Moshtarak followed “set-piece orders by Afghan . . . commanders” and observes that “the better ANA units and formations proved themselves capable of taking the lead in operations against insurgents.”⁹³ Barry’s views dovetail well with official statements, both seeming to confirm a significant new ANSF role in operations that began with General McChrystal’s decision to seek authorization to launch Moshtarak. However, field reports from coalition personnel and observers in southern Afghanistan suggest that there was another side to the story.

Rajiv Chandrasekaran, whose work on Iraq has garnered myriad awards, spent time on the ground during Moshtarak. His interviews and observations paint a more accurate and troubling picture of the ANA and ANP in early 2010:

I soon observed that shaking down residents for bread was the most innocuous of the Afghan National Army’s sins. U.S. commanders and Afghan Defense Ministry officials in Kabul claimed that Afghan officers were helping to plan day-to-day operations and leading the fight. It was a lie. The ANA battalion attached to the 1/6 marines had just finished its basic training, and its men, most of whom were illiterate, lacked the skills to organize even the simplest missions. They could not read maps or understand that one platoon needed to hang back and provide cover for their buddies searching homes. They had been trained to use their U.S.-issued M-16 rifles, but when it came time to fire, none of them bothered to take aim using his weapon’s sights. They simply shot in the general direction of the insurgents[,] . . . and they usually unleashed a torrent of bullets that depleted their ammunition clips. In the first few days, the only people that ANA soldiers shot were themselves. . . . When the Marines and the Afghans bedded down in homes for the night, the Afghans grabbed the rooms, leaving the Americans to sleep in freezing courtyards. Once inside, the Afghans smoked so much hashish and marijuana that intoxicating clouds wafted into the night air.⁹⁴

ANA units involved in the operation demonstrated the limits of NTM-A’s influence. Trainers and advisors could build, train, and

equip ANA and ANP units to take part in operations. They could not, however, change the attitudes and interests of their Afghan partners in short training courses. Nor could NTM-A training and assistance operations substitute for Afghan forces committed to a national project that included defeating the Taliban. In the words of President Obama, “It’s not enough to have trainers if the Afghans don’t know why they’re fighting. They need to be invested in success.”⁹⁵ Ironically enough, it had been the same president who elected to send less than the 40,000 forces General McChrystal had requested. This, in turn, ensured that ANSF personnel often did not know *why* they were fighting, lacked trainers, and frequently—thusly—did not know *how* to fight.

NTM-A efforts to develop ANA leaders had clearly not achieved the desired result—committed professional military leaders with the requisite skills to lead their men in complex COIN operations. Instead, Chandrasekaran saw ANA officers whose view reflected a sense of elitism with strong roots in the armed forces of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan era. One US Marine unit fighting in Moshtarak was paired with an ANA company led by a captain who Chandrasekaran noted “wasn’t planning to head out with his men, as the Marine captain would. Being an officer in the ANA had its privileges, and staying safe on the base was chief among them.”⁹⁶

NTM-A (and predecessor organization) efforts to impose a Western model of professionalism onto a hierarchical society with strong traditions of its own appeared to be falling short of their goals. Afghans would continue to draw strongly on their previous interactions with foreign powers in their country and on their own sense of how leaders and rank-and-file soldiers interacted. Moshtarak showed the state of the ANA in early 2010. When carefully selected ANA units could not control desertion or drug use or encourage leaders to join their troops for operations, the broader ANA project had to be called into question. One thing was evident: the international approach to ANSF force development was not progressing sufficiently toward a place where the ISAF could withdraw and expect the Karzai government to handle its problems alone.

The Afghan National Police in Crisis

ANP units, even the elite ANCOP, appeared to have even more serious problems than their army counterparts. Afghan police forces

supplied for service in Moshtarak had even greater challenges. Chandrasekaran was appalled to find that “at least the ANA limited their greed to bread. Members of a national paramilitary police battalion brought in to operate checkpoints and guard the main bazaar helped themselves to the contents of shuttered stores: food, soft drinks, cigarettes, blocks of opium. They were so rapacious that [US Marine Corps brigadier general Larry] Nicholson, who had pleaded with Kabul for more police before the operation, sent them away once he received reports of their misdeeds.”⁹⁷ These offenses were exceptionally distressing because the force in question was the ANCOP—the elite gendarmes whom the NTM-A placed so much emphasis on improving. The reasons for ANP and ANA failures in Operation Moshtarak were numerous, and no few were outside the responsibilities of both the NTM-A and ISAF. However, several of these factors fell squarely in the lap of the ISAF and its subordinate commands.

First, the ISAF had refused to align its personnel in ways that allowed international personnel to conduct effective monitoring and oversight of ANSF forces in action or static duty. Having not received all the forces deemed necessary, General McChrystal had determined that the disruption of the Taliban and associated forces took precedence over building the ANSF. Training billets and partner units suffered as a direct result. A second and related problem was the continued adherence to thoroughly modernist paradigms of force development, security assistance, and assessment. Afghan recruits and leaders alike were poorly prepared to operate a Western-style security apparatus with sophisticated equipment and systems. Had more coalition personnel been present to observe the actual level of Afghan competence, this situation may have been more conspicuous to international decision makers who continued to see ANSF development as a way out of Afghanistan.

For instance, after conducting a field study of ISAF assessments, Naval War College professor Stephen Downes-Martin identified six discrete problems with ISAF assessment programs: overoptimism, metrics collection, junk arithmetic, simplistic color coding, logic failures, and “distrust generated by poor assessment practice.”⁹⁸ Downes-Martin posited that flawed assessments led the press to dismiss military appraisals of the war and seek contradictory accounts from other sources. By and large, journalists produced critical reports of Afghan forces in 2009 and 2010, but the most pressing problem related to assessments was the inadequacy of information circulating through the ISAF. Led by a push from General Caldwell, NTM-A sought to turn

around assessments of the training base in 2010. It also reached out to the IJC to try to gain access to critical data from the field. In the end, however, one fundamental problem was a shortage of personnel to conduct the assessments, especially in the field—where 182 additional POMLTs were required in early 2010.⁹⁹

Building institutions and professionalizing the ANSF required extensive feedback from the fielded force. A lack of reliable data from the field remained one of the biggest problems in Afghanistan since the beginning of the US campaign there in 2001. Defense critic Anthony Cordesman, widely regarded as a top expert on coalition operations in Afghanistan, suggests in a 2012 report that in the ISAF campaign in Afghanistan, “far too much of current official reporting is a repetition of the Vietnam follies.” Specifically, he refers to “unsubstantiated claims of progress, success, and victory that ignore the real problems in the field, and are contradicted by most unclassified media reporting.”¹⁰⁰ IJC forces were concentrated in the southern and eastern parts of Afghanistan and controlled the bulk of the more than 119,000 ISAF forces in country. Over 80,000 served with IJC in Regional Command–South and Regional Command–East, yet field data was scarce.¹⁰¹ The aforementioned poor cooperation and coordination between IJC and NTM-A left the training command largely blind to field conditions, which rendered refining the training program and professional leadership development exceedingly difficult. The ANSF Development Assistance Bureau (ADAB), formerly Task Force Phoenix, was responsible for generating and sharing field data.

Survey Says: The Trouble with Data in 2010

Under Brig Gen Jonathan E. Farnham, an artillery officer from the Vermont National Guard, the ADAB was widely regarded as ineffective. The data it generated was full of fundamental errors about issues such as the size of the ANSF, which was readily available in a more accurate form via NTM-A. The ADAB produced charts, slides, and graphs in abundance—often at the behest of senior leaders—but little in the way of accurate and usable information. ADAB assessment proved unreliable and incomplete. As for NTM-A, it had few people in the field—excepting the overwhelmed regional support team staff—and was not tasked with the mission of assessing the fielded force. In the end, neither NTM-A nor IJC had accurate and complete

data on the state of the fielded force or the number of ANSF on duty and their activities on any given day. This lack of data fundamentally damaged the training command's ability to identify and address ANSF problems.

The ISAF needed to know a great deal more about the ANSF, and more broadly about the war, but prioritized operations when allocating forces. Until the coalition could accurately assess the nature of obstacles to ANSF progress, the security transition in 2014 was unlikely—if not impossible. Another problem was longer term. As had been the case since Vietnam, US forces insisted on hammering complexity into misleading, incomplete statistical measures that obscured the reality in the field. In a 2012 House Armed Services Committee hearing, Cordesman remarked on the consistency of inaccurate assessments from war to war. He stated, “No one should approach the challenges of creating effective Afghan security forces and creating the right assessment process and metrics without remembering our failure in Vietnam and in Iraq. . . . We consistently exaggerated the progress being made in developing the forces in each country, and we made constant changes to our goals for force size, structure, and funding. Every year was the first year in Vietnam and Iraq, and, in many ways, every year is the first year in Afghanistan.”¹⁰²

Not only did the capability milestone rating system's set of box checks not capture the nature of operations in Afghanistan, no other similar system could achieve results that were meaningfully better. In the “high-context” culture of Afghanistan, only Afghans with local knowledge could truly measure and comprehend events as they took place. The COIN approach required sophisticated human intelligence that foreign forces could not gather in order to succeed, yet the ISAF chose to emphasize ISAF operations over ANSF force development in 2009–10. It also required somewhere between 580,000 and 750,000 troops to achieve the ratio of security forces personnel prescribed by the COIN manual.¹⁰³ Far fewer were available in terms of ANSF forces and international partners to work with and supervise them. The ISAF need to measure in ways that appeared to support progress and that were readily digestible obscured the fact that, for the most part, coalition personnel did not know what was actually happening in Afghanistan. This situation rendered the guiding concept of “for, with, and by” the ANSF a fallacy.

The ANSF lacked the literate personnel, communications systems, and, in some cases, integrity to assess themselves honestly. The Korean

and Vietnam Wars demonstrated that partnering was difficult but indispensable in building local forces. Security force assistance required patience, an extensive resource base, and the full participation of the developing allied leadership and rank and file. For the overall effort in Afghanistan to succeed, coalition nations needed to supply sufficient forces to serve as partners for *all* ANSF units in the field. Unit integration, which had been so important in Korea, was never seriously considered in Vietnam. It was in Afghanistan, but only as one of many competing priorities for coalition personnel. Until partner units can provide regular oversight and complete information on the ANSF, training programs and international assessments of the viability of strategy in Afghanistan will fail to match reality from the field. The ANP was the biggest obstacle to security and good government in Afghanistan in 2010 and, unsurprisingly, the area about whose operations coalition leaders knew the least.

Afghan National Police Lags behind Afghan National Army

ISAF COIN strategy depended heavily on the police to hold and secure areas even though the ANP was a broken institution. General McChrystal plainly stated, “We have a systemic flaw in ANP that is profound—we need profound change to deal with it.”¹⁰⁴ Longtime Afghanistan observer Edward Girardet found that the police force was “poorly paid and often illiterate, [and] the police barely command respect among ordinary Afghans. The overwhelming majority have no understanding of the rule of law and regularly abuse it. Numerous police supplement their salaries by levying ‘fines’ or operating protection rackets. They also steal fruit and vegetables from farmers.”¹⁰⁵ The training command headquarters shared this view and had been working to make major corrections to the police program since the summer of 2009. NTM-A strengthened its police support staff in an effort to finally bring order to the international effort to assist the ANP.

In the summer of 2009, General Formica ordered a study on ANSF pay reform. ANA and ANP attrition rates were unacceptably high, and pay had been identified as a primary contributing factor.¹⁰⁶ The experienced US Army colonel in charge of the effort laid out a series of courses of action that developed into reform programs in late 2009.

General Formica conferred with his Afghan partners at the MOI and MOD to refine the pay reform proposal. Minister of Defense Wardak argued that ANA members deserved more pay since they served far from home under combat conditions, but ultimately CSTC-A settled on equal pay for junior ANA and ANP members. With incentives, entry-level soldiers and policemen earned \$240 per month in dangerous areas. The new pay scale roughly tripled pay for rank-and-file police.¹⁰⁷ Pay had been set at levels that allowed ANSF members to provide basic necessities for their families. The new pay scale also approximated reported pay for Taliban fighters and provided follow-on incentives for time in service and increases at each additional rank.

By the time General Formica left command, he had secured approval for the pay measure through the MOI, MOD, and ISAF, and the US government had agreed to pay a large portion of the cost for 2010. General Caldwell and his team quickly implemented the reform package, and ANSF members saw the raise in their monthly paychecks in January 2010. Additionally, ANSF recruiters pitching new pay rates saw monthly totals spike immediately. Now that national service no longer equated to poverty, many young Afghans elected to join the ranks of the ANA and ANP.¹⁰⁸ With the pay raise announced, ANA recruiting spiked from 2,300 in November 2009 to 5,638 in December and 7,403 in January 2010. ANP numbers were more static, but ANP growth was also notable—from 2,706 to 3,128 recruits in the first month after the pay raise.¹⁰⁹

Recruits were now generally available in more than adequate numbers, but the ANA outperformed the ANP in this area as well. ANP numbers were much improved in spring 2010. However, the Afghan Border Police still lacked recruits, and the ANCOP recruiting numbers—though strong—did not match the heavy attrition levels at the fielded units. The absence of a training command and a recruiting command was one reason ANP and MOI efforts trailed their ANA and MOD counterparts. Personnel systems across the ANP were absent, corrupt, or broken after years of neglect and under-resourcing. The NTM-A police team moved forward with varied initiatives to address personnel accountability, recruiting, and vetting and to expand and improve training.¹¹⁰ Collectively, the NTM-A program sought to improve the quality of the individual policeman from intake to retirement and to grow real capacity in the MOI. The first step was building the training architecture to enhance the experience of ANP personnel from their initial recruitment onward.

Advisors assisted MOI leaders in designing recruiting and training commands modeled on parallel ANA institutions. These new commands were the next stage in a process to professionalize the entire personnel process for the ANP. The first step occurred in mid-2009 when CSTC-A staff and MOI leaders planned and executed the personnel asset inventory. Iris scans and fingerprints were enrolled in an electronic database available to ANP and ISAF personnel for future cross-checking. Each new recruit also underwent medical screening and required two references from village elders to join the police. Growing strength at NTM-A helped add rigor to these processes as personnel became available to provide oversight and thereby quality control for the ANP as the new training program went into place.

Technicians gradually enrolled existing police and all new recruits in a database with their personal data along with conducting drug screenings.¹¹¹ Despite frequent allegations that the ANP was rife with drug users, testing assisted by ISAF personnel returned positive results averaging 14 percent. Around eight in ten positive results were for tetrahydrocannabinol—the principal psychoactive constituent of cannabis—while the remainder came from opium, cocaine, and other hard drugs. While drug use was a serious concern, drug testing revealed that it was concentrated in the south and was not as widespread as some had alleged. With screening in place, ANP positive rates declined to around 8 percent over the course of 2010, and a good number of recruits had been turned away for drug use.¹¹² Recruits were also cross-referenced against existing criminal databases. Individuals with a potential connection to criminal behavior faced investigation. In total, around 6 percent of recruits were refused admission to the ANP for failing the vetting process. Positive drug tests prevented recruits from joining the ANP, while existing police might be treated for narcotics use.¹¹³ These new processes produced better-quality recruits for the ANP. Biometric data collection also had the benefit of helping track existing police to prevent “ghost soldiers” appearing on the rolls. For the first time, ANSF and ISAF leaders had a reliable record of who was sent to a given unit. However, because biometric data did not enable regular force tracking in the field, data on fielded ANSF units depended mainly on the IJC and NTM-A reporting data collected in other ways. Additionally, ANP and ANA units gathered and counted forces differently. Collectively, accurate and consistent data on fielded ANSF units remained elusive.¹¹⁴ In the short term, the inclusion of biometric data collection was a step in

the right direction. In the longer view, it was another program Afghans could not sustain without continued coalition support, aid, and oversight.

ANP basic training was made mandatory in early 2010. NTM-A focused its energies on ensuring that recruits attended basic training before joining a fielded ANP unit. The concept was first advanced in August 2009 by the CSTC-A ANP force integration director, a highly experienced US Army colonel. The new recruit-train-assign model for the ANP took almost a year to integrate into police training. Like so many other areas, ending the recruit-assign model required adequate supervision from the training command and IJC. Coalition commands focused most of their resources on filling in capability gaps that the ANSF could not fulfill. However, ISAF personnel could not provide a substitute for committed Afghan leadership in the war.

At the MOI, only Maj Gen Gul Nabi Ahmadzai, head of the ministry's Training and Education Department, and a few dedicated staff demonstrated a serious commitment to ensuring that recruits were trained. Though many other people appeared on the *tashkil* (manning document) for the training office, few could be found working while others were difficult to find at all. As an institution, the MOI lacked the capability and the will to correct this grave deficiency in late 2009. Coalition personnel levels and the problems inherent to the US contracting process made oversight highly difficult. However, as vetted and better-quality ANP recruits began to enter basic training as a standard procedure, police performance also gradually improved.

Mandatory ANP training translated into additional infrastructure and trainer requirements. NTM-A engineers and the programs team added regional police training centers to accommodate larger training classes. General Caldwell aggressively sought additional police trainers—with modest but significant results. NTM-A trainers were joined by additional Carabinieri and a contingent of 100 US Marines to train ANSF in southern Afghanistan.¹¹⁵ New trainers from other nations slowly joined NTM-A in ones and twos, leaving the command several hundred trainers short well into 2010. The Combined Training Advisory Group–Police (CTAG-P) condensed the police basic training course into six weeks to maximize the efficiency of trainers on hand. The instructional hours (265) remained the same as the previous eight-week course, with less downtime between lessons.

Compared to previous efforts, ensuring that recruits received basic training was a watershed. By late spring 2010, NTM-A initiatives

translated into better recruits who were better trained than their predecessors. New police recruits trained in Kabul's central training center and regional training centers in Herat, Gardez, Mazar-e Sharif, and Kandahar. With transportation hard to find, police trained in regional centers took the field more quickly than police shipped to Kabul and back for training. Additionally, training in their native region was an incentive for Afghans, who tended not to travel. The main reason training capacity had to grow was that numerous operations underway put intense pressure on NTM-A and the MOI to produce the maximum number of police as quickly as possible. NTM-A was caught between superior headquarters demanding that quantity come first and international visitors arguing for longer, better-quality police training.

Critics and well-meaning outsiders often urged NTM-A to add weeks or even months to police training. However, superiors pressured the training command to produce ANP for the fight at hand. Moreover, the truth was that more Western-style training aimed at imparting rule-of-law policing skills to Afghans who did not draw on the same traditions was unlikely to succeed. What Afghans living in villages across the country expected was what they had accepted in previous generations—"defensive, village-level policing forces under the control of local shuras and jirgas, which are consultative councils."¹¹⁶

With police facing steady insurgent attacks, they needed basic skills training immediately to improve attrition rates and learn self-defense tactics. Civilian policing was required in the long run, yet security conditions did not accommodate the time for these skills to be developed in the short term. Also, any such model needed to be based firmly in Afghan traditions, not in imported concepts of policing. NTM-A's new program of instruction for the six-week course straddled the difference and taught the ANP to survive in the field with "green training" and to conduct basic police duties with "blue training." The new course provided the ANP not only with basic skills for arresting suspects and performing searches but also with practical firearms training and counter-ambush tactics. CTAG-P developed the revised course after consultations with ANP personnel in the field and police leaders to better respond to the ANP's needs.¹¹⁷

Simple, realistic exercises and repetitive drills replaced earlier efforts more similar to Western police training for compelling reasons. Operating in remote areas in small numbers, ANP members were the "soft target" insurgents preferred. They also lacked the educational

background to benefit from classroom study. The revised basic course introduced recruits to a variety of subjects. Basic police subjects followed classes on hygiene, ethics, and the Afghan constitution. Recruits then moved on to learn techniques covering arrests, prisoner handling, and first responder responsibilities. This part of the course could be readily learned through hands-on experience, but other police training topics were more difficult to impart to illiterate recruits. Traffic laws, criminal procedure code, penal code, human rights doctrine, and inspecting official documents (such as identification cards) all fell into this category.¹¹⁸

Investigative skills were also limited by the recruits' low average education level. For this reason, trainers designed most of the other police training and all of the "green" or tactical combat training to be learned by emulation. Basic training courses also incorporated hands-on experiential learning in place of classroom and textbook study to ensure that a lack of literacy did not prevent recruits from learning. Police tasks such as riot control and manning checkpoints exemplified the sort of training that could be learned by rote without the benefit of written lessons. Recruits completed 40 hours of fire-arms training. They spent even more time on tactical training: enemy tactics, small unit tactics, group field exercises, and improvised explosive device awareness and procedures rounded out ANP basic training. Recruits also completed a two-hour exam at the end of their training to measure course results and effectiveness. These practical, survival-focused lessons collectively formed a much-improved training course that met real-world needs of new Afghan policemen. Most important, the newly revised curriculum had become a firm requirement for recruits before they began policing.

Thus, NTM-A engineers and police team members spent substantial time creating a national police training system and infrastructure that produced a wide range of specialists. Logisticians, human resources experts, explosive ordinance disposal technicians, drivers, medics, and many more supporting elements required training programs, facilities, and equipment. Much of this equipment and infrastructure was far beyond the Afghan forces' ability to sustain and maintain. The ANP also required standardized programs of instruction for use by each of the international entities doing training. Since some entities, such as the German Police Project Team (GPPT), were legally unable to work under military command, CTAG-P aimed only to secure cooperation with other police training entities on the

training package. These changes were costly and time-consuming and represented yet another attempt to drive Afghan security forces to look and behave more like Western forces.

Therefore, the curriculum development process was another part of professionalizing the ANP in early 2010. Once Italian Carabinieri brigadier general Carmelo Burgio, commander, CTAG-P, and his counterparts at the GPPT, EUPOL, and other smaller agencies had set a curriculum, they were able to focus their energies on training and revising the program in response to feedback from fielded police. Additional courses were developed, and critical institutions like the new EUPOL-sponsored Police Staff College formed a coherent professional education system designed to offer the ANP career-long development opportunities.

Though it took months of hard effort, the NTM-A police team gradually broke down barriers among different agencies supporting the ANP. However painfully, competition became coordination as it became clear that NTM-A was willing to listen and benefit from the expertise of other ANP and MOI partners. If the police reform effort was to be based on Western policing concepts, internal international coordination was the first critical task to achieving any meaningful results. Collectively, these efforts at NTM-A laid a foundation for police training that would extend well beyond 2014, should the international community decide to pay for it. This long-term vision also caused some difficulties; NTM-A was planning on a five-year horizon even though the White House and US Congress funded and adjusted plans for the war in Afghanistan on an annual basis. The NTM-A plan was sound, but the political foundation it rested on was subject to change.

This program was unusually successful for several reasons. First was the presence of General Burgio, whose expertise and experience gave him a deep understanding of counterterrorism, counternarcotics, and combating organized crime. Second was the recognition of Afghan human capital's limitations—the new program of instruction was based largely on the premise that most of the young recruits were illiterate and needed basic skills in using weapons and equipment to perform basic patrolling. Burgio was willing to meet the Afghan recruits where they were. He built training programs around a learning model based on imitation and repetition of simple, fundamental tasks. Lastly, General Burgio correctly believed that many of the ANP's problems would take a generation or longer to solve and that

international advice must be based on this reality.¹¹⁹ Training for the ANP was more cognizant of its limitations than in previous years—the focus was on simple tasks and training Afghan trainers whenever possible.

Building a Tail for the Afghan National Police

Specialists and support elements would theoretically allow the ANP to become a self-sustaining force. However, Afghanistan may not need such high-end equipment and functions to defend against an insurgency once it was responsible for the country's security. Furthermore, these troops took time to build and required much more training and education to adequately perform their duties. In 2010, it remained unclear whether Afghanistan required a professionalized Westernized military to defeat the Taliban when locally generated forces would suffice. For years, the ISAF provided logistics, transport, and supply to ANSF. Much as had been the case in Vietnam, Afghan forces became accustomed to these dependencies and came to rely on this assistance. The new NTM-A plans required the ANA and ANP and their associated ministries to gradually assume all support functions. They could not do so fully for many years to come. Professionalization was a massive undertaking that committed the coalition and US Congress to funding and training the ANSF far beyond the withdrawal of ISAF forces from combat. Security assistance would be required well through 2016, if not longer, as the Afghans built up their government revenues and economic capacity.

Additionally, coalition trainers and security assistance staff would be required even after other international forces withdrew. Both of these assumptions translated into an appreciable degree of risk that the international community may opt out of providing one or both of these enduring requirements. This potential should have suggested the ineffectiveness of the overall approach.

However, the alternative was worse. Without their own enablers, Afghan forces would simply dissipate after the ISAF drawdown. This conundrum was the core dilemma for NTM-A and, indeed, for the coalition nations as a whole. How much money and time were required to prepare the ANSF to provide security to the Afghan people? And did the international community have the political will to sustain the cost during a global recession? Vitality, how could ANSF leaders

find the motivation to end corruption in order to satisfy international requirements and thereby perpetuate aid packages? How could they generate competent professional security forces based on a Western model in a country that did not necessarily desire such forces? Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, what could be done to secure Afghanistan in the wake of a COIN campaign that may have done as much harm as good? ANSF forces were at the center of all of these questions.

In short, the ANP and MOI were making changes with NTM-A support in early 2010. A great deal of work remained before the police were going to play any meaningful role in securing Afghanistan and introducing the rule of law; however, international support remained contingent on the ability to do so. Problems and potential existed side by side in the Afghan police and at the MOI. Some individual leaders were both effective and corrupt. Some ANP units were effective but possessed dubious loyalty to the government. However, the ANP remained a nationally controlled and distributed force that employed the “ethnic mixer” approach of placing ANP personnel in units proportionally based on national representation quotas rather than on local ethnic mixes, resulting in a number of predictable problems.

NATO Training Mission–Afghanistan at Six Months: A Mixed Bag

NTM-A’s efforts in the first six months had one thing in common, with few exceptions. They were predicated on a model of operations whereby coalition personnel identified requirements and desired improvements and then developed solutions to be “sold” to the Afghans. Their efforts also shared a high level of operational performance—what the command set out to do, it did well. However, at the strategic level, where NTM-A had little input, the international effort was floundering. Rather than conducting joint problem assessment and strategic planning, the ISAF and its subordinate commands continued to operate on the flawed “for, with, and by” model. Afghans would have to secure their country in the near future, yet for a decade, foreign leaders with little understanding of how that country operated had told them how to do it. ISAF and senior political leaders globally, most often in the United States, continued to try to make the Afghans more like themselves in the ways they governed and provided security to their people. The ISAF clung to a faulty operational

design and the wrong method—COIN—even as these decisions flew in the face of T. E. Lawrence’s oft-referenced advice to let the Afghans “do it tolerably” rather than internationals completing actions “perfectly.”¹²⁰ International leadership needed to draw on the Korean War model that gave Koreans a significant role whether US leaders judged them ready or not. As Afghan minister of defense Wardak was fond of telling new coalition officers, the ANA “may be beggars, but we must have our dignity.”¹²¹ Lawrence further advised to remember that when partnering with less developed partners, “it is their war, and you are to help them, not to win it for them.”¹²²

No amount of international staff operational efficiency, coalition advice and support, or international leadership and planning on behalf of Afghan leaders could ever substitute for Afghans conducting operations and organizing forces in ways that made sense to them and respected their traditions. NTM-A could offer technical assistance to enable the Afghans. However, operating on their behalf could only lead to a repetition of the experience in Vietnam decades before: dependent and often corrupt Vietnamese forces were in no small part a product of the coalition approach there. For Afghan forces to prosper and gain needed experience, NTM-A and the ISAF needed to allow them to start fighting their war in their way with the ISAF as an enabler rather than a substitute. A first step would be to identify how the ISAF could help the Afghans according to reality in the field and respond to the enemy that ANSF units actually faced. After the first six months of operations, NTM-A still sought to find ways to achieve these critical ends.

Notes

(All notes appear in shortened form. For full details, see the appropriate entry in the bibliography.)

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Chapter 4

“No Trainers, No Transition” August–November 2010

Martin Loicano

Though the overall international strategy in Afghanistan remained convoluted at best, NATO Training Mission–Afghanistan (NTM-A) continued to exhibit excellence at the operational level in mid-2010. By June 2010, many negative statistical trends in the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) had been stopped or reversed. Overall ANSF numbers reached nearly 236,000.¹ However, tensions in the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) remained high. Throughout the spring and summer of 2010, operational requirements put steady pressure on the training base to rapidly produce ANSF units. Without adequate training time, ANSF personnel were not prepared for their future full responsibility for the war in Afghanistan or, in many cases, the immediate mission at hand. More people on the ground allowed Lt Gen William B. Caldwell IV, US Army, to address issues beyond bringing more people to NTM-A. Training command personnel worked toward the commander’s four stated priorities: “Professionalization of the ANSF, Perception of the ANSF, Growth of the ANSF, and Transition to the ANSF.”² Strategic communications and messaging still consumed extensive work hours across the staff.

In late 2010, NTM-A had to begin to focus on building combat support units, training leaders, and developing Afghan trainers to take on NTM-A’s role in the long term. General Caldwell’s watchwords during this period were *simple* and *sustainable*. The command aimed its efforts toward building the capacity of Afghans to train and educate themselves under coalition oversight. NTM-A trainers and contractors were urged to “work themselves out of a job” by training Afghan instructors in this period. The Afghan National Police (ANP) remained NTM-A’s top priority and biggest challenge in the second half of 2010. The training mission struggled to get its message out in the face of dated but resilient media portrayals of ANSF training as flawed and inadequate. The latter half of 2010 simultaneously demonstrated operational-level excellence at NTM-A and the limits of the ability of foreign trainers and advisors to impact ANSF development and the overall security situation in Afghanistan.

Resource and personnel limitations at NTM-A combined with an unsuitable modernist approach undermined some of the hard work by international personnel to produce the desired effects over the long term. As with previous wars described in earlier chapters, Afghan leaders viewed foreign partners with skepticism. NTM-A trainers and advisors were subject to the cultural and organizational limitations of the services from which they originated. This chapter overviews operational-level achievements in late 2010 and examines key episodes representative of broader shortcomings of the international approach in Afghanistan.

Oversight of ANSF operations increased to a degree that revealed additional concerns, but not to a point where NTM-A could entirely understand what its Afghan counterparts were doing and why. Events of late 2010 illustrated NTM-A's competencies and limitations. While the command had a better grasp of its challenges, the nature of the ANSF development program and the modernist assumptions that underlay it remained the same. NTM-A continued to manifest the limits of the international partnership in Afghanistan, what coalition intervention could do on behalf of Afghans, and—perhaps least noticed of all—what the NTM-A and ISAF *should* do for and with the Afghans.

At first glance, NTM-A's accomplishments in 2009–10 were remarkable for both the growth of ANSF forces and the number of initiatives executed. As NTM-A entered the fall of 2010, the ANSF and NTM-A grew markedly. The Afghan National Police reached a reported strength of 115,525 in July 2010, exceeding the growth target by nearly 11,000.³ By August 2010, ANP strength surpassed the October 2010 goal of 109,000. By the beginning of December, NTM-A and its Afghan partners had trained over 34,000 ANP and nearly 17,000 Afghan Uniformed Police (AUP), over 6,500 Afghan Border Police (ABP), 4,000 Afghan National Civil Order Police (ANCOP), and over 7,000 support and enabler personnel for the year.⁴

The Afghan Army grew by 42 percent, or 41,153 personnel, between November 2009 and November 2010. On the first day of 2010, Afghan National Army (ANA) strength was 100,131; six months later, over 130,000 Afghan soldiers served their country. This 22 percent net growth in the ANA put the army substantially ahead of the joint Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) and coalition growth goals. ANA recruits increased from 2,996 in November 2009 to 8,569 in April 2010. Even in the summer when

accession was traditionally low, recruits continued to join the ANA in unprecedented numbers—increased pay and incentives seemed to be working.⁵ These recruits also received better training than their predecessors. More NTM-A trainers and advisors on duty translated into a larger training output and a wide range of new courses for the ANSF. Other focus areas showed similar growth in scale: ANSF literacy classes now reached more than 28,000 soldiers and policemen. Another command priority, contract management oversight, increased from 50 percent at the beginning of the year to 80 percent by 1 August due to more international manning.⁶

NTM-A advisors partnered with Ministry of Defense (MOD) and Ministry of Interior (MOI) leaders to enact new policies in 2009–10. They implemented pay increases for the ANA and ANP in late 2009, and NTM-A manning levels now allowed advisors to guide the passage of fundamental personnel policies. Both ministries generated a respective Inherent Law for Officers and Noncommissioned Officers (ILON). These ILO decrees outlined “the legal procedures for retirement, pension, and other personnel actions.”⁷ In essence, ILO allowed the ministries to remove older, ineffective leaders to make way for a new generation of leaders, many of whom had coalition training of some kind. Additional personnel policies were installed for rotation and leave. ANP development was transformed by the recruit-train-assign policy requiring ANP members to complete basic training before joining the fielded force. Collectively, these new policies created the opportunity for a merit-based, professional personnel system. This system was only as good as the integrity with which it was employed. Given the state of ANSF leadership in 2010, coalition advisors would also have to remain in place to implement and oversee these new policies.

Getting the Plane in the Air: The Afghan Air Force in 2010

One pivotal change was the creation of a separate air service in mid-2010. The Afghan Air Force (AAF), formerly the Afghan National Army Air Corps, expanded its capabilities in areas like operations, personnel, staff processes, and aircraft inventory. Over the course of 2010, the AAF grew from 2,797 to 4,020 personnel, expanded from 42 to 50 aircraft, and added nine new mission sets. The

50 aircraft included 27 Mi-17 helicopters, famous for their reliability and being designed specifically for use in Afghanistan.⁸ This purchase was an important recognition of the need to choose the best equipment for the Afghan environment regardless of the country of manufacture. The Mi-17 was also selected because Afghans knew the airframe and could maintain its simpler design. The AAF also added several more Western-built C-27A transport aircraft to its fleet in winter 2010, including VIP transports and cargo lift aircraft.⁹ Growth in the AAF's strength and capabilities allowed it to improve its support to the GIRoA, ISAF, fielded ANSF, and even to neighboring countries. These technical achievements were in no small part the result of the work of NTM-A's expert trainers and advisors, who in turn arrived in greater numbers as NTM-A leaders spent considerable time appealing for additional personnel.

Just Keep Talking: Communications and Personnel in 2010

NTM-A leadership elected to perpetuate its communications strategy to keep partner nations aware of the training command's needs. Communications efforts also highlighted command successes to show that sending trainers was a worthwhile investment for international leaders seeking to help end the war in Afghanistan. Despite these efforts, international personnel levels at NTM-A continued to lag behind those in other ISAF commands. As of 26 June 2010, NTM-A was manned at only 61 percent—although it was the highest percentage to date and a remarkable improvement from just 25 percent in November 2009.¹⁰ However, the command was rank heavy, with dozens of full colonels and better than a dozen general officers and senior civilian leaders. After months of conscious effort to improve personnel levels, NTM-A reached 78 percent manning by the end of 2010. In May 2010, 13 partner nations had contributed just 387 personnel to the training effort. However, non-US personnel increased from just over 30 in late 2009 to more than 800 by late summer 2010. Further, NTM-A still lacked 1,436 NATO trainers in August 2010.¹¹

Monetary contributions to NTM-A were similarly underwhelming. In fiscal year 2010, international partners donated equipment, infrastructure, and money to the ANSF totaling over 228 million in US dollars.¹² Notable donations included \$78 million from the Fed-

eral Republic of Germany for construction of the Logistics and Engineering Schools in Mazar-e-Sharif, \$40 million from Australia to the NATO ANSF trust fund, and Spanish funding for completion of a forward operating base construction project in Qala-e-Naw in Badghis Province.¹³

Along with funding, people remained a pressing priority at NTM-A. In September 2010, the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers, Europe (SHAPE) hosted the ISAF Force Generation Conference in conjunction with the release of the Combined Joint Statement of Requirements (CJSOR), version 10. At the conference, “in-place trainers and pledges increased by 18 percent and 34 percent, respectively, which decreased the remaining shortage of trainers by 35 percent.”¹⁴ Fifteen nations confirmed pledges of approximately 600 trainers at this conference, and by 30 September, they generated 757 trainers toward the international target number. The command’s trainer shortfall now stood at 1,441 personnel after including US contributions. Eleven nations confirmed pledges for another 104 new trainers in November 2010 when SHAPE conducted the Global Force Generation Conference, reducing the shortfall to 770.¹⁵ However, trainers did not effect change until they hit the ground in Afghanistan, which rarely occurred on time. Meanwhile, the NTM-A’s army, police, air, medical, engineering, and logistics training advisory groups documented deficiencies in training and oversight programs that required updates to the next NATO CJSOR revision.

Forty-nine nations provided some form of support to the training command, with 26 providing troops and three more adding troops in 2011.¹⁶ This modest growth resulted from a coordinated effort by NATO, SHAPE, the US government, the US European Command, the ISAF, and NTM-A to fill trainer and advisor requirements. In late 2010, NTM-A was still short 920 trainers when the total CJSOR trainer requirement for NTM-A had grown to nearly 2,800.¹⁷ The persistent shortfall highlighted the considerable work that NTM-A faced in its second year, but international personnel levels suggested that General Caldwell’s intensive approach to communications yielded noticeable, if insufficient, numerical results. The inability to generate the desired number of trainers and advisors affected the command in every aspect of its operations.

US contractors and temporarily assigned US military units mitigated this shortfall somewhat, but the availability and quality of trainers—especially in the police program—restricted ANSF development. For

example, in August the Programs Team hired more than a hundred police mentors for the regional commands, as CJSOR efforts failed to produce suitable military and police personnel. Short-term US military personnel filled other critical gaps. However, these figures did not account for Canada's announcement to transition its forces from combat operations to training and development efforts by summer 2011. Each vacant NATO billet was filled by either a contractor at extravagant cost or simply went unfilled—a shortfall making NTM-A's ambitious plan to build the ANSF into a self-sustaining, professional organization less likely to transpire.

Changes and Growth on the Police Team

Besides persistent personnel shortages, NTM-A experienced a large turnover of key personnel. For example, August to December 2010 was a period of pronounced change for the NTM-A Police Team. For the Canadian Armed Forces, Maj Gen Stuart Beare replaced Maj Gen Michael Ward; for the US Army, Brig Gen Jefforey Smith replaced Brig Gen Anne MacDonald; and for the Italian Carabinieri, Brig Gen Sebastiano Comitini replaced Brig Gen Carmelo Burgio.¹⁸ Many Afghan leaders also moved once Gen Bismillah Khan Mohammadi came in to replace Minister of Interior Mohammad Haneef Atmar.¹⁹ Wide-ranging programming changes accompanied these personnel moves.

More Afghan police were on station, with more training than any previous Afghan police force. New policies implemented in the latter half of 2010 dramatically altered force structure and ministerial systems alike. Collectively, changes made to the ministry created conditions for the Afghan leadership to play a more prominent role in security operations in a professional and accountable manner. However, the MOI and ANP still required extensive coalition oversight, mentoring, and resources to preserve gains and to continue developing self-sufficiency. The need for trainers and advisors was particularly pressing if NTM-A was to succeed in pushing the huge degree of change that its programs entailed on often unwilling Afghan partners. Afghan traditions of local security and nepotistic tribal practices were frequently at odds with Western-style military professionalization that lay at the heart of NTM-A programs.

Specialized courses were one example of the attempt to professionalize and Westernize Afghan forces. NTM-A initiated new classes including the Team Leaders' Course (a course for first-time leaders with a small team), ANCOP Kandak Command and Staff Course, ANCOP Company Commander's Course, and Provincial and Zone Commanders' Seminars. While the courses made sense in terms of professionalization according to the NTM-A approach, obtaining suitably literate recruits for these courses was difficult. Further, convincing Afghan leaders to release potential students from the fielded force remained a challenge, signaling that Afghans did not value complicated training as highly as did international actors in Afghanistan. However, better training became possible with increasing numbers of civilian police experts at NTM-A, particularly from Canada, in the last quarter of 2010. As Italy, France, Romania, the United States, Canada, and Jordan provided additional trainers, a shift to emphasize train-the-trainer programs became possible so that Afghans could direct training themselves. Nevertheless, the need for more NTM-A personnel still led to uneven oversight and advising for the MOI and ANP.

New ANP policies passed in the fall and winter of 2010, creating positive incentives for police members to stay in the ranks and to see policing as a career path. For example, policies for awards and recognition, pay and incentive, and leave and pass encouraged existing police members to stay in service while attracting new policemen to the force. These measures sought to improve police retention rates and reduce attrition but required a fully developed tracking system and coalition supervision to ensure their integrity. This formula had proven successful with ANP pay and electronic transfer efforts that along with these many new policies reformed the nature of ANP service—at least on paper.²⁰ A series of seminars on personnel, logistics, and gender issues and provincial police commanders' conferences were held with only limited advisor support.²¹

The Afghan National Police General Training Command (ANPGTC) finally gained a commander in September. The delay had occurred because ministry leaders could not agree on a suitable choice. Capable commanders were available, but the decision was a political one and dragged on until a compromise put Maj Gen Ghulam Patang at the head of the ANPGTC—despite his being an obvious choice in March when the debate began. Afghan leaders pursued decisions and used their political capital to benefit and advance members of their

personal networks instead of making merit-based personnel selections. The ANPGTC case was typical internal politics at the MOI where decisions were often made for reasons outside the knowledge of coalition personnel. NTM-A simply did not have enough personnel or local knowledge to traverse the maze of its counterparts' convoluted motivations.

One attempt to improve the lack of mutual understanding and coordinated efforts was the creation of the Ministry of Interior Coordination Cell (MICC) in October 2010.²² A wide spectrum of international partners stepped forward to assist the Afghan police but without functional coordination with their peer agencies. The European Police (EUPOL), the European Gendarmerie Force, the United Nations, a slew of bilateral arrangements, nongovernmental organizations, and NTM-A/CSTC-A all sought to help the Afghans build a viable ministry and police force. These efforts had been theoretically coordinated through the International Police Cooperation Board, but a lack of practical results demonstrated the inefficacy of that body. On 18 October 2010, the MICC stood up to strengthen coordination mechanisms under the direction of Ministry of Interior officials. The new group aimed to combine the efforts of the MOI's international partners (including NTM-A, EUPOL, the German Police Project Team, and UNAMA, among others) in Afghanistan and to give Afghans a stronger hand in guiding ANP reform and development. The MICC had its work cut out as the ANP had many pressing concerns in late 2010.

Filling the Afghan National Police Ranks

With few literate or experienced recruits coming in, the ANP structure was proving difficult to fill. Field grade and noncommissioned officer gaps continued to grow as ANP strength increased toward the internationally approved goal of 134,000 for late 2011.²³ Despite the Afghans having no entrenched tradition of an NCO corps, the NTM-A and ISAF continued to urge a rapid integration of NCOs to replicate the span of control and unit structure found in US units. However, without more trainers, only basic trainees could be produced at the rate required to meet the internationally agreed-on ANP growth path. Consequently, ANP training courses for officers were simultaneously shortened and expanded.

ANP officer training decreased from three years to six months while field promotions and training abroad helped close the gap. For instance, Afghan police officers started training in Turkey, furthering a long-standing historical relationship between the Afghan police and Turkey. The six-month course produced better than 3,000 officers but did so at the expense of curriculum and training quality.²⁴ New police members with little training and no experience often fell under the influence of older, untrained, and corrupt fellow police. For the police program as a whole to succeed, the large shortfalls in institutional trainers and police operational mentoring and liaison teams (POMLT) had to be filled to ensure a degree of oversight that might check the influence of corrupt or untrained policemen. The quantity and quality of MOI and ANP leadership continued to impair ANP professional development throughout 2010. This shortage of Afghan officer and NCO recruits never led NTM-A to seriously question the planned force structure.

The interests of Afghans were somewhat different. It was difficult for Afghans to be overly invested in a force structure they knew that they could not sustain and a training program that did not suit their preference for a more informal organization. Many Afghans preferred diverse local solutions to counter the Taliban rather than strong nationalized forces. As noted scholar Thomas Barfield states, “The desire to establish strong state institutions, by foreign armies coming into Afghanistan and Afghan regimes in Kabul, should be evaluated in light of a second lesson from Afghan history: Strong centralization of power in Kabul creates a backlash against any government there because it ignores the historic ability of people to govern themselves. By the time governments in Kabul recognize the need for a more nuanced approach to governance, the political situation is often too dire to retrieve.”²⁵ The high degree of change necessary to convince Afghan leaders to create a more Westernized, professionalized force structure put substantial onus on NTM-A personnel to demonstrate how their concepts were in Afghan interests. Bringing in trainers with critical skill sets and appropriate expertise was one way to achieve this challenging task. Police experts were one category critical to NTM-A success.

Experienced international police forces with paramilitary skills made better trainers in part because they understood the high-pressure security environment Afghan police faced more so than did the retired, small-town US police composing most of the contractor staff. In late

2010, larger numbers of Italian, French, Romanian, Jordanian, and other international police trainers delivered improved training courses at more than 40 training sites across Afghanistan. NTM-A continued to employ around 3,000 expensive and sometimes unqualified contractors in place of military and police billets unfilled by coalition nations or with requirements unsuited to military personnel. In a resource-constrained environment, the sums saved by replacing contractors with serving gendarmes were notable. For instance, Romania provided NTM-A with some 60 (paramilitary police) trainers in late 2010 at a cost of \$2 million for one year. This same sum would pay for the salaries of eight US contractors for one year.²⁶ Contractors also operated under restrictive statements of work that could not be modified rapidly enough to meet operational requirements. Serving military and police members could be more flexible than contractors in performing their duties. They could make changes to curriculum, training schedules, or working hours immediately per command requirements versus forcing them through the convoluted contracting system the United States employed.

Also mitigating NTM-A trainer shortcomings were the expansion of the German Police Project Team (from 70 to 200 by early 2011) and the EUPOL Afghanistan mission, along with much improved cooperation under the leadership of General Beare, NTM-A's new deputy commander for the Afghan National Police.²⁷ For the first time in the post-2001 era, most of the ANP had some type of formal training. NTM-A staff contributed to training over 34,000 ANP by the end of 2010.²⁸ Cooperation between NTM-A and the German police mission at Regional Command–North and at the Afghan National Police Academy improved markedly with the introduction of a team of German Police Project Team (GPPT) liaison officers led by a *Polizei* colonel. General Beare made a point of including EUPOL and GPPT personnel and ANSF leaders to a greater extent at key NTM-A meetings. Overall, more and better police advisors and trainers were in place at the end of 2010 than at any other time since the international intervention in Afghanistan began in 2001. Though at times fragile, improvements in many areas could be found as a result of NTM-A efforts at the MOI and with the ANP in 2009–10.

Afghan National Army Growth Continues

NTM-A's Afghan National Army and Ministry of Defense programs realized similar results in the second half of 2010. From an

organizational standpoint, the General Staff and MOD demonstrated growing capabilities. In August the active duty service obligation policy was completed, establishing service requirements of 10 years for officers, five years for NCOs, and three years for enlisted members. The policy was years in the making. Along with the inherent law that outlined conditions for ANA retirements, this policy represented a substantial step toward NTM-A's concept for ANSF professionalization. ANA and MOD staff also bolstered professional education with leadership seminars, workshops, and conferences. These meetings helped begin professionalization of the ANA leadership. For example, the General Staff vice chief, Lt Gen Mohammad Akram (a former governor of Kandahar), and the General Staff chief logistician (G4), Lt Gen Yosufzai Azizuddin, led a two-day logistics conference. The event included representatives from all supply depots, corps G4s, and brigade G4s with coalition partners. Afghan leaders briefed on decrees, supply processes, training plans, the opening of the logistics school, and authorized stockage lists. These efforts showed that a few Afghan leaders were willing to employ methods their advisors suggested and thereby effect change on lower levels. Generally, however, only places with sufficient numbers of ISAF observers complied with recommended changes to existing practices. Another challenge was finding enough educated personnel to introduce bookkeeping and other logistics controls below the national command level. Demand for literate recruits (constituting only about 14 percent of new recruits) increased in late 2010 when NTM-A increased the sophistication of ANA training courses.²⁹

Ten ANA branch schools were developed and opened: the infantry, artillery, signals, military police, legal, logistics, intelligence, finance, human resources, and religious and cultural affairs schools were all operational by the first day of 2011. Training capacity rose exponentially in 2010. NCO training seats expanded from 900 to 2,900 while officer training courses added more than 600 slots. The availability of specialized training courses paralleled this growth. For example, driver training increased by 50 percent, and 10 ANA branch schools opened in 2010. Over 3,700 students were enrolled in courses at the branch schools by year's end. Support and logistics units were also in training in large numbers. At the end of 2010, six ANA combat support services battalions had completed training, and more courses were underway.³⁰ These gains comprised the first small step toward independent ANA operations, but it is important to note that

these initiatives required coalition advisors to be present. As NTM-A had minimal personnel throughout 2010, any changes made to ANSF operations were uneven and fragile. Furthermore, infrastructure growth and more advanced training courses required a disproportionate share of NTM-A efforts. The Afghan National Security University and National Police Training Center were underway by year's end along with many smaller facilities, totaling \$2.2 billion in construction.³¹ This construction was possible due to the growth of NTM-A's engineering staff from 30 to over 100 in the same period. Similar growth occurred in each staff section as manpower was added, but most of these people conducted internal processes rather than field advising. This allotment of personnel led to a dilemma where field-level realities seldom percolated up to the vast majority of NTM-A personnel who worked and stayed in the "Kabubble," as the Afghan capital came to be known.

Rapid ANA numerical growth masked serious problems in the ANSF and with the development plan NTM-A pursued. Rank-and-file increases in the ANA aggravated a long-standing issue—insufficient leaders down to the squad level. On 1 April 2010, the Afghan National Army needed more officers and NCOs than ever. A deficit of 4,122 officers and 13,160 NCOs hampered all efforts to increase the army's quality. As the ANA continued to grow toward the stated goal of 171,600 by November 2011, the shortage grew commensurately without suitable mitigation strategies in place. The consequences of the ANSF officer and NCO deficit were grave, prompting NTM-A and the MOD to develop a series of measures to quickly fill the gap.

New ANA leaders came from the One Uniform (1U) "shake and bake" course at the ANA training base at Darulaman. After a successful first class, the 1U course was expanded to include the Turkish training facility at Camp Ghazi to increase production. Camp Ghazi's combined Turkish Army and ANA training cadre offered some of the best basic training courses for the ANA previous to taking on the 1U course in summer 2010. Additional ANA NCOs were trained abroad in this period. A few hundred former mujahideen joined the ranks as graduates of the Mujahideen Integration Course (MIC) in Regional Command–South. However, the numbers coming out of the 1U courses, MIC, and National Military Academy were insufficient to close the growing NCO and officer deficit. Training alone could only do so much to shift Afghan actions toward coalition ideas of how operations should be conducted. Many Afghans had been fighting for

decades and had strong opinions of their own about how to conduct military operations.

Often, ANA and ANP professionalization directly contradicted how Afghans had traditionally operated. For example, Captain Iqbal, an ANA company commander serving in the 205th Corps during Operation Moshtarak, did not join his troops on patrol. This habit was common among officers, who believed that “being an officer in the ANA had its privileges and staying safe on the base was chief among them.” Likewise, the troops serving under that 205th commander noted that while they hated the Taliban, they “joined the ANA only because [they] couldn’t find other work,” said Amir Shah, a 21-year-old Uzbek from Balkh Province. He was the sole source of income for his family and “couldn’t afford to get killed.”³² Without adequate leaders and a force organization that suited Afghan customs, ANA attrition would stay high.

Afghan MOD leaders retained the highly centralized form of decision-making they had learned under Soviet tutelage, which better suited their tribal and patron-client network form of organization. NTM-A and Afghan leaders alike recognized the need for clear policies and guidance to define the roles and responsibilities of the ANA’s leaders, but Afghans also wanted to retain their traditional relationships and ways of doing business. A joint team including Canadian brigadier general David Neasmith, the new NTM-A assistant commanding general for Army development, and his ANA partners Maj Gen Payenda Mohammad Nazim and Maj Gen Habib Hisari updated and refined Decree 5001, the charter for roles and responsibilities of the MOD and General Staff. As of late 2010, Decree 5001 was unsigned after more than four years of effort by coalition leaders. It was finally signed on 29 March 2011. Decree 467, describing MOD and ANA organization and functions, was also signed in October 2010 after a strong push from NTM-A leaders.³³ NTM-A leaders were instrumental as well in pushing forward the Inherent Law for Officers and NCOs. In June 2010 the Afghan Parliament signed this landmark law into effect, which on paper cleared the way for a new generation of ANA leaders to take the helm. Although in many cases NTM-A’s plans for developing the ANSF made perfect sense, NATO nations failed to provide the resources, personnel, or long-term political commitment to oversee the generational change needed to accomplish these plans. As journalist Douglas Wissing observes, highly capable people went to Afghanistan, “patriots in the best sense

of the word—[but] they were operating in a dysfunctional, self-aggrandizing system that demanded short-term results in a war with generational timelines.”³⁴

Familiar Territory: Building the Afghan Air Force in 2010

In the smaller, elite units such as the AAF, NTM-A could enable more rapid change in terms of technical prowess because fewer advisors were required, and the tasks were familiar to international air force personnel. NTM-A's air advisors received a new commander and a new name in fall 2010. Brig Gen David Allvin replaced newly promoted Maj Gen Michael Boera as NTM-A's deputy commander-air and USAF's 438th Wing commander.³⁵ The Combined Airpower Transition Force was redesignated the NATO Air Training Command-Afghanistan (NATC-A) in September, concurrent with General Allvin's assumption of command. NATC-A maintained steady but gradual progress in developing the AAF and the smaller Ministry of Interior Air Interdiction Unit (AIU) over the latter half of 2010. As these forces were just a fraction of the size of the ANP and ANA and advisors were available on a proportionately larger scale, NTM-A had a greater ability to influence and observe its Afghan counterparts. With advisor support, a number of technical milestones were achieved.

In the second half of 2010, AAF Mi-17 crews flew the first operational sling load mission, the first full-scale combat search and rescue exercise, and the first scheduled MEDEVAC mission between Kandahar and Kabul. This last mission inaugurated preplanned, regularly scheduled MEDEVAC missions beginning in September.³⁶ At the AAF wing in Kandahar, an all-AAF An-32 crew conducted the weekly MEDEVAC missions. One month later, AAF MEDEVACs in Kandahar transported 40 ANSF personnel, 10 accident and emergency patients, and one high-risk patient. NATC-A advisors noted that the team performed extremely well and “met USAF standards” for patient care. These accomplishments, as well as the knowledge of them, resulted directly from the presence of NTM-A advisors.³⁷

AAF flight and ground crews likewise made advances in this period. Two AAF pilots and two loadmasters earned certification for unsupervised operations in mid-September—the first all-Afghan C-27 crew to do so. Soon after, 21 Kabul-based AAF C-27 maintainers

earned their skill certificates. AIU helicopters supported security operations for the July Kabul conference. The AAF employed both Mi-17 and Mi-35 helicopters around the clock, with additional quick reaction forces on standby for the Kabul conference and the 18 September parliamentary elections. The AAF flew hundreds of sorties supporting the parliamentary elections that insurgents had hoped to disrupt. It moved in excess of 67,000 kg of supplies and some 390 personnel to enable the election to take place.³⁸

AAF humanitarian missions also continued in the summer and fall of 2010. These operations demonstrated how NTM-A advisors could further technical progress without disrupting how Afghans chose to use their improving skills and resources. Afghan crews regularly provided disaster relief to Afghan citizens. In August, over two days of sustained operations, two AAF Mi-17 helicopters rescued more than 2,000 Afghans from flooded areas near Jalalabad in Nangarhar Province.³⁹ Moreover, Afghanistan extended a helping hand to its neighbors to the east when severe floods struck in September. Despite a strained relationship between the two countries, the AAF dispatched four Mi-17s to Pakistan for four weeks to assist flood victims. These aircraft flew more than 400 missions, including 120 rescue missions that delivered nearly 2,000 people to safety. AAF flyers moved 188 tons of supplies to the victims, such as critically needed medicines and flour to feed hundreds of thousands of people.⁴⁰ However, the AAF relief mission in Pakistan drew allegations of impropriety that confirmed the need for ISAF oversight for the foreseeable future.

Coalition personnel would have to remain in place for years to come to ensure that these gains endured. Nonetheless, encouraging mileposts were passed late in the year. AAF crews also provided frequent emergency resupply to ANSF units and remote villages across Afghanistan. At the same time, AAF flights transported Afghanistan's leaders throughout the region. These missions highlighted growing AAF capability and the willingness to take on more complex assignments with demonstrable success. Most of those involved were younger personnel trained by NATC-A and its predecessors. Despite the improvements of the AAF in many areas, it was subject to a growing generational divide between older Soviet-trained personnel and the new generation of Western-trained pilots and supporting personnel. These two groups differed in their views on Afghanistan's future and what constituted corruption along with their experiences and education.

Afghan airpower faced many hurdles to achieving self-sufficient operations. Command and control procedures remained a persistent, serious challenge to AAF professionalization and development because AAF leaders were prone to command by cellular phone. These devices were easily monitored by the enemy and unreliable. Major leadership deficiencies and inadequate communications networks and equipment affected all aspects of air operations. Unclear lines of command and interference from ANA corps commanders were perhaps the most pervasive obstacles to effective use of AAF assets—NTM-A and Afghan concepts for using air forces quite simply conflicted. Afghan leaders employed their assets according to their own priorities and perceived requirements in ways regarded by the ISAF as unprofessional and unacceptable. This situation led to a steady stream of missions conducted on the orders of local commanders, overtaxing limited AAF resources.

Predictable operations were hampered by demands from corps commanders and by the AAF's unwillingness or inability to refuse demands for air missions from other leaders. In some ways, AAF operations reflected a peculiar problem of the ANSF—national leaders in Kabul had only limited control of field operations. ANA corps commanders' diversion of AAF assets threatened key tasks such as support to the September parliamentary elections. The NTM-A and ISAF Joint Command (IJC) had to pressure AAF leadership and corps commanders to keep elections on track, as AAF assets were needed to transport election materials and officials. However, examples of misallocated aircraft persisted in air advisor reports through the summer and fall.

Haphazard command and control arrangements were the culprit in each instance. Afghan leaders conducted their command and control by cell phone, which was insecure and left leaders unaccountable for the use of expensive internationally provided aircraft since no official flight records would exist.⁴¹ In other cases, poor leadership led to even greater risk, such as in November when a non-mission-capable aircraft was released for flight over the NATC-A advisor's objections. Superior officers had pressured the aviation maintenance commander to release the aircraft; the incident was more troubling as it was the third such occurrence in four days. Afghanistan's small fleet of aircraft would not outlast ISAF's departure by long under such poor operating conditions.⁴² Additionally, only the advisor's presence alerted NTM-A to this problem and similar situations. Coalition

oversight was the key to knowledge about field conditions, which allowed NTM-A to adjust its efforts to match the actual level of problems found in the ANSF.

The Afghan Air Force faced repeated allegations and reports of such incidents. Reports alleged that rank and equipment were for sale in the AAF, as were rides on AAF planes and helicopters for anyone who paid well enough. In one instance, an AAF An-32 crew transiting to Kandahar elected to bring eight passengers onto their aircraft, bumping eight ANSF passengers who were properly manifested and screened. Witnesses reported that the crew received money from these passengers. In response, NATC-A temporarily restricted fuel delivery to the AAF due to inappropriate passenger loading operations and other suspected corrupt practices. Deliveries resumed 24 hours later after AAF leadership took corrective action. This episode encapsulates the immediate value of coalition oversight of ANSF operations but also illustrates the limits of cooperation. In this case, NTM-A effectively had to resort to punitive actions against its partner. The larger problem was the international haste to change Afghan behavior and to urge Afghans to replicate Western bureaucratic methods and security force structures rapidly. Focusing on these problems also distracted effort from addressing even more distressing allegations of drug-running and other crime occurring in the AAF.⁴³ Building an effective AAF was a generation-long task, but coalition leaders urged Afghans to make changes immediately.

Infrastructure Growth in 2010

ANSF infrastructure development formed another notable example of how urgency and an essentially modernist agenda combined to rush the ISAF-GIRoA partnership to failure. Statistically, ANSF infrastructure development excelled in the last quarter of 2010, as it was an area that required little Afghan participation. NTM-A staff, led by the combined Joint Engineer section, designed and directed the construction of temporary ANA and ANP regional training centers in all six military regions. NTM-A staff also designed and contracted for other major projects in 2009–10. By year's end, NTM-A constructed five ANA forward supply depots, four of seven ANP regional logistics centers, and 18 of 34 ANP provincial supply points.⁴⁴ ANSF leaders guided site selection and helped hash out convoluted land

ownership. Other aspects of construction, design, contracting, and quality control fell within internal coalition channels. The ANSF infrastructure build also stumbled due to frequent protests in the fall and summer. Major logistics facilities, barracks, and operating bases all waited on Government Accountability Office resolution to continue. The regional military training centers at Gardez and Gamberi sat idle after protests were filed in the fall.⁴⁵

The NTM-A Programs Team (responsible for financial affairs, contracting, and the like) executed \$1.3B of construction projects for Army bases and police stations in conjunction with NTM-A and US Forces–Afghanistan (USFOR-A) engineers.⁴⁶ Afghan Army garrisons increased from 43 to 48, and police headquarters grew from 62 to 151 stations.⁴⁷ NTM-A also expanded the number of intensive care units for the ANSF from one to five and built five Army forward supply depots and four regional police logistics centers. Supply and connectivity improved substantially in the middle months of 2010—NTM-A fielded more than 46,000 pieces of communications equipment (including over 25,000 radios) and increased the number of sites connected to the network by 280 percent.⁴⁸ This new infrastructure and equipment led to an improved supply and distribution system and enhanced command and control. Infrastructure and equipment processes depended on coalition support and extensive NTM-A oversight; otherwise, Afghan facilities suffered from theft and poor maintenance.

Still Work to Do: Problems with the Program

Inadequate coalition oversight from 2001 well into 2009 contributed to rife corruption in the ANSF. Another problem was that Afghans could not maintain their newly built facilities. These projects were more expensive, sophisticated, and permanent than Afghan forces required. ANSF units needed to respond to insurgent operations, not hunker down in static positions. Although Afghan security forces needed facilities, they could have built more traditional facilities themselves at much lower cost and made these funds available for other activities. However, NTM-A continued to build facilities with the kinds of labor and contract vehicles the US government required. Afghans were not viewed as sufficiently trusted to take funds from their international partners and spend them on facilities as intended. NTM-A staff employed coalition building methods and regulations

in a sincere effort to reduce corruption and fraud. Despite these earnest efforts, this program was one of many indications that the partnership between Afghans and international staff had an overtone of mutual suspicion and mistrust.

In another example of excess caution, NTM-A proved unable to integrate Afghans into the staff or even get Afghan visitors on camp. The problem was equally bad at ISAF and IJC headquarters. When still in command, Gen Stanley McChrystal was shocked to find that “after years of hearing that we were partners with Afghans, and my recent renewal of that promise, the senior Afghan planner couldn’t enter a base in his own country—one that had been an Afghan military club at the beginning of his career.”⁴⁹ Gen Sher Mohammad Karimi, the Afghan general in question, later became the ANA’s chief of staff. How could international personnel expect General Karimi or any Afghan leader to find their partnership credible when not even permitted to enter coalition facilities? Few Afghans could meet coalition standards for a security clearance. Many did not even know their year of birth, let alone have a government-issued birth certificate or other government documents to facilitate a US or NATO security investigation. This problem was related to Afghanistan’s war-torn past. Few Afghans possessed reliable documentation and other supporting evidence for a coalition clearance. Without such authorization, Afghan personnel could not access computer networks or some NTM-A meetings. Most of NTM-A’s work was conducted at the unclassified level, but getting ANSF officers onto even the unclassified US network was difficult. For these and other reasons, only a handful of ANSF personnel served on NTM-A’s staff in 2010 despite General Caldwell’s wishes to bring more ANSF staff on board.

Even when suitable Afghan officers were found, limited office space at NTM-A headquarters made incorporating ANSF officers difficult. For example, NTM-A included two one-star billets for Afghan assistant commanding generals (ACG) for transition—one each for the NTM-A Army and police staffs. For much of 2010, one or both of the billets were vacant. When the ANA did provide an officer to serve as an ACG, Col Mohammad Najaf Aman, he found himself crammed into an office with two contracted interpreters in the Police Development Department. This choice reflected poorly on NTM-A, as Colonel Aman was one of the ANA’s most promising officers. NTM-A’s other ACGs worked in spacious individual offices. Colonel Aman was also a trusted member of General Mohammadi’s inner

circle and the younger brother of Mohammad Younis Qanooni, speaker of the Wolesi Jirga (Afghanistan's lower house).⁵⁰

The ACG for transition often found himself sitting on the sidelines at meetings where US officers lower in the command structure joined the commander and VIP guests at the head table. Seemingly minor in some ways, this seating arrangement symbolized NTM-A and ANSF relations. In short, NTM-A did not offer ANSF members on staff suitable diplomatic trappings or include them in substantial discussions for planning in most instances. Staff officers lower in the NTM-A structure did maintain coordination with their counterparts, but this trend broke down at higher levels. Although Colonel Aman was popular with the NTM-A staff and invited to many important meetings, his second-class working quarters were emblematic of a failure to treat Afghans of senior rank and responsibility as equals.

By early May, Minister of Interior Atmar suggested in a meeting with General Caldwell that Afghanistan may need to seek aid from neighboring nations (hinting at Iran and Pakistan) if the United States was not ready to support Afghanistan's security requests. In the same meeting on 2 May, Minister Atmar also indicated that it might be time for Karzai to enter discussions with "those who are destroying Afghanistan." His remark was directed toward Pakistan and the Taliban, as many Afghans believed the Taliban relied on Pakistani leadership and aid. He also expressed constant frustration with coalition leaders telling him what to do and not listening to his opinions. Unable to achieve MOI aims through simple negotiations, the minister resorted to stronger tactics, indicating how weak the MOI's leverage on the coalition had become.⁵¹ ISAF mentored the MOI for years in an effort to get Afghan leaders to make decisions, but when Atmar did so for the ANP, IJC and NTM-A leaders and their priorities often overrode his efforts to lead the ministry. Minister Atmar sometimes led in ways that confused or even alarmed his partners, but he tried to take control and make his own decisions. By frustrating some of Atmar's initiatives, coalition leaders weakened his position within the GIRoA and made it harder for him to make changes at the ministry.

President Karzai accepted Minister Atmar's resignation in the wake of the Afghanistan National Consultative Peace Jirga in June. For the Taliban, the jirga was an irresistible target to invalidate ANSF competence. In the grand scheme, the resulting attacks were minor, but their political significance was enough to drive Minister Atmar to resign. Deputy Minister Munir Mangal filled in while a new minister

was identified, providing a degree of continuity at the MOI. Early in June, rumors circulated about the name of the next minister of interior. Speculation gave way to certainty the third week of June, when General Mohammadi, ANA chief of staff, was formally nominated to the Wolesi Jirga (the lower house of the Afghan National Assembly) on the 28th. General Mohammadi was by all accounts a charismatic, confident leader who was especially well liked by the rank and file. Mohammadi's NTM-A advisor in 2009–10, a highly experienced US Army colonel, described him as being “difficult[,] . . . mercurial and petulant, unpredictable, capricious, arbitrary, but charismatic and decisive.”⁵² President Karzai's choice had been difficult, and the ensuing consequences were both positive and negative.

Another Job for General Mohammadi

Minister Mohammadi laid out a plan based on six priorities: “training and education, leadership, fighting corruption, promoting living conditions and working conditions, review and reform of *tashkil*, and development of a recognition and discipline system.”⁵³ He was an action-oriented leader, not a bureaucratic manager. He also spoke less fluent English than many other Afghan leaders and as a result was heard less often. Whatever else he might do, General Mohammadi was going to expeditiously change the MOI's working style. He was determined to end the era of lengthy deliberations and seemingly endless working groups. Mohammadi was a prototypical Afghan leader—he led by example and personal charisma, methods he honed as a young officer fighting under Ahmad Shah Massoud.

By the end of 2010, Minister Mohammadi had reassigned or removed three of four deputy ministers, the police academy commander, the MOI director of intelligence, the ANCOP commander, the general director for counternarcotics, and many provincial and district police chiefs. He also managed to enact retirement policies and forced the retirement of 57 generals from a bloated command structure.⁵⁴ (This move could alternately be viewed as 57 new posts to fill with men loyal to the new minister.) Few of the leaders the minister removed actually left the MOI and ANP. Instead, they were moved to other positions, and almost none were prosecuted for corruption—in part because the Afghan justice system was itself too corrupt to function properly. For the MOI to operate with integrity, it required a functioning justice sector with credibility among the Afghan people.

Long-Term Solutions?

In early 2010, coalition leaders appeared to ignore T. E. Lawrence's famed dictum from his "Twenty-seven Articles": "Do not try to do too much with your own hands. Better the Arabs do it tolerably than that you do it perfectly. It is their war, and you are to help them, not to win it for them. Actually, also, under the very odd conditions of Arabia, your practical work will not be as good as, perhaps, you think it is."⁵⁵ The core problem was the same as for US officers serving in Vietnam and Iraq—short tours, low cultural understanding of the people with whom they worked, and an impatience to produce rapid accomplishments before international political will gave out. Secondly, coalition personnel found it difficult to embrace the fact that Afghans had to take charge of efforts and do things in ways they understood and accepted rather than adopt coalition ideas wholesale. Afghans could neither accept the timetable for these ideas nor afford to sustain more than a small fraction of the force structure being foisted on them. Lawrence's admonition from 1917 was possibly even more relevant to ISAF efforts in 2010. For Hanif Atmar, time had proved to be short indeed; President Karzai accepted his resignation on 6 June 2010. More leadership and programmatic changes were not far behind for the Afghan police.

In a surprising decision, President Karzai banned private security companies (PSC) on August 17th "to protect Afghan life and property" and "avoid corruption, security irregularities and the misuse of military weapons, ammunition and uniforms by the private security companies which have caused tragic incidents."⁵⁶ In July, President Karzai had ordered the MOI to organize village militias. The new Afghan Local Police (ALP) was, in the words of the new ISAF commander, "a community watch with AK-47s."⁵⁷ On the surface, the decree eliminated a long-standing problem; warlords often acted as recruiters and power brokers to generate the men needed for these companies. However, warlords were often in the pay of international leaders. A US Senate Committee on Armed Services inquiry conducted in late 2010 found that "Afghan warlords and strongmen operating as force providers to private security contractors have acted against U.S. and Afghan government interests." The inquiry report further noted that "U.S government contracts for private security services are undermining the Afghan government's ability to retain members of the Afghan National Security Forces by recruiting men

with Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police experience and by offering higher pay.⁵⁸ While US concurrence was evidence that President Karzai made his decision for good reasons, it meant more work for the ISAF and potentially stretched ISAF and ANSF forces even further.

The Afghan presidential decree affected NTM-A in several ways. First and foremost, PSC personnel secured construction sites as well as NTM-A headquarters. Second, they provided convoy security for goods and equipment moving from central facilities to fielded ANSF units and training centers. Additionally, NTM-A shared responsibility for replacing the more than 26,000 contracted security guards operating in Afghanistan with Afghan police and soldiers.⁵⁹ NTM-A staff would also integrate any Afghan PSC workers who accepted President Karzai's offer to join the ANP. Few were likely to accept the offer given the much lower pay and possibility of serving in remote units with inadequate leaders.

Filling gaps created by the president's decree was one of several unplanned major tasks that fell into NTM-A's area of responsibility in late 2010. The rapid formation of the ALP and expansion of the ANP Provincial Response Companies (PRC) late in the summer required particular attention in late 2010. These new units needed equipment, which in the case of the PRCs included extensive heavy equipment and vehicles. Additionally, the ALP strength objective was raised from 10,000 to 30,000, translating into additional equipment and trainer requirements.⁶⁰ NTM-A had its hands full already with building the planned 305,000-man ANSF by 2011. Now, like other ISAF commands, it had to realign its efforts to accommodate these new programs—driven largely by political leaders in coalition capitols.

Another reason the Afghan-international partnership had not come to full fruition was internal dissent between the ISAF and its subordinate commands. Though in most ways international forces worked well together, at times a perception of limited resources led to inevitable friction between commands. These tensions spilled over to color ISAF relations with the ANSF. Discussions in mid-2010 centered on the Afghan National Civil Order Police—sometimes called the Afghan Gendarmerie—the most elite but most troubled ANP force. Despite receiving better training and equipment than other ANP, total ANCOP attrition for 2009 was over 70 percent. ANCOP NCO attrition was even higher at 82 percent (all ANCOP in the ranks were NCOs or officers).⁶¹ A wide-ranging mission set and heavy rate

of operations dampened morale and drove attrition to unacceptable levels. Even with higher recruiting rates and expanded training capacity, the ANCOP could have ceased to exist as a force in 2010 without conspicuously improved retention rates. High attrition rates meant that ANCOP cost the coalition far more than other ANSF forces. It sapped training capacity, equipment, and administrative costs far out of proportion to its force size.

Concurrently, ANCOP units were in high demand. IJC requirements to support operations in Helmand and Kandahar rose steadily even as ANCOP unit strength declined daily from overuse. By mid-April, ANCOP's 20 battalions averaged 50 percent strength, with only three at over 66 percent—two located in relatively calm Kabul.⁶² The ANCOP was a force in trouble, but some coalition leaders were unaware of the problem while the rest could not agree on either the causes or the solution. Some ISAF leaders suggested the possibility that ANCOP development was a wasted effort and argued to disband it.

Analysis made one thing clear—unless ANCOP attrition could be brought below 50 percent annually, the force was no longer viable. Discussions at the staff level throughout March proved unfruitful. In early April, the ANCOP—and more broadly, ANP structure and strength—consumed considerable leaders' time. General Caldwell, IJC commander Gen David Rodriguez, General McChrystal, and Minister Atmar all spent months on ANP issues without any clear resolution. Concerns about the state of the ANP increased in the White House as well. An NTM-A briefing to US senator Lindsay Graham on 8 April 2010 showed that even highly knowledgeable senior leaders had not been made aware of the perilous state of affairs for the ANCOP.⁶³ Internally, even the ISAF chief of operations, Maj Gen William Mayville, US Army, appeared not to grasp the degree of the crisis as he sought to employ ANCOP *kandaks* (Army battalion equivalent) so under strength they could not form a single company (*coy*). One ANCOP *kandak* had just nine men left by this time.⁶⁴ Others existed only on paper. The situation demanded immediate action and at the same time put a spotlight on the extent of dysfunction of coalition cooperation and information sharing. Attrition rates stayed unacceptably high throughout 2010, yet even General Petraeus singled out ANCOP as “an example of what right looks like” as late as December 2010.⁶⁵

NTM-A and Afghan leaders took time to publicly demonstrate their support for ANCOP by making personal appearances in front of *kandaks* deploying to operations in the south. These ceremonies were unusual demonstrations of high command support to rank-and-file Afghan policemen. For example, on 23 April ANCOP commander Maj Gen Ameen Sharif and Deputy Minister of Interior Mangal were among the Afghan dignitaries who spoke at a send-off for the 1/1 ANCOP battalion. General Ward gave a well-received address to the 1/1 in Dari.⁶⁶ Ward's speech was an important data point that suggested NTM-A leaders were making a stronger effort to reach out to their Afghan partners.⁶⁷ The ceremony followed days of preparation for the 1/1; each man was fully equipped and briefed on the new pay scale. The men were also informed of the length of their deployment to the south in advance, something that had not happened before. The ANCOP usually took indefinite missions that drove rising attrition over time. The 1/1 was also inspected and validated firsthand by NTM-A's General MacDonald and the ANP's Brig Gen Timur Shah. Preparing the 1/1 had been successful but difficult and labor intensive. This episode played directly into the broader coalition disagreements about how to best develop and use the ANCOP. The debate that ensued fell along familiar lines. The IJC identified partnering as the best solution for ANCOP's problems while NTM-A advocated implementing an operational deployment cycle (ODC).

With steadily rising requests for the ANCOP and more operations slated for later in the year, NTM-A felt that more delays to revamping the ANCOP might completely destroy the force before it could be improved. For its part, IJC sought to maximize ANSF forces for Operations Moshtarak and Hamkari. It believed failure in these efforts might lose the war, and success would serve as a loud demonstration to the international community that the ANSF was capable. IJC leaders, such as the deputy chief of staff for plans and projects—Brig Gen Steven Bowes, Canadian Army—agreed that the ANCOP was broken. Regardless, they contended that leave and other efforts to reduce operational tempo had to wait because of operational demands.

In a 10 April meeting with Generals Caldwell and Ward, Bowes argued for delaying the launch of the planned operational deployment cycle to somewhere in later 2010. He further restated the IJC view of ANCOP problems: partnering, food, and quality-of-life improvements would do more to turn the ANCOP around than any other measure. IJC leadership was convinced that partnering was by

far the most integral measure to improving ANCOP attrition rates. In closing, General Bowes rested on the statement that “everyone has six months to convince the President [of the United States] that things can be turned around.”⁶⁸ This sense of urgency drove IJC and ISAF planners to seek immediate, demonstrable results before the December 2010 strategic review in Washington. In the end, the December review proved to be anticlimactic. The president was unlikely to back off of a strategy he supported consistently since his election. The ISAF perception of urgency for immediate success in the south in 2010 drove an emphasis on numbers at the expense of better training. Reflecting the view of ISAF leaders and sympathetic observers of the war, Brookings Institution foreign policy expert Michael O’Hanlon stated, “Perhaps the best way to sum up the situation is to say that the Afghanistan mission is a race against time.”⁶⁹

In the end, operational imperatives won out—the ANCOP continued with a high operational tempo, high attrition rates, and no ODC at year’s end. Pay raises, limited unit rotations, the addition of some IJC partners for ANCOP units, and a range of partial measures reduced attrition slightly. However, the attrition rate remained over 50 percent at the end of 2010.⁷⁰ Prolonged discussions between the IJC, Headquarters ISAF, and NTM-A had not managed to produce functional cooperation or agreement on ways to salvage the ANCOP. In part, the MOI’s failure to take a clear, strong position on the issue made resolution more difficult.

Recruiting was another effort that MOI officials, the IJC, and NTM-A seemed not to cooperate fully on in the first half of 2010. Afghan leaders also exploited perceived gaps between ISAF leaders, much as had been the case when the Soviets were Afghanistan’s main partner. Afghan leaders did not necessarily share their true intentions with their ISAF partners. As scholar Robert Johnson notes, “The Afghans have frequently been confronted with adversaries who are equally difficult to trust and who often possessed greater military power. Wit and cunning were needed to survive such encounters. Lying during negotiations to outmanoeuvre a foreigner or a rival, *al-Taqiyya*, was admired if it was successful.”⁷¹ Much as was the case in many Afghan villages where ISAF counterinsurgency (COIN) forces tried to untangle complex situations mired in Afghan history, ISAF leaders in Kabul partnered with Afghan leaders whose motives and intentions were often obscured.

The ANCOP issue also suggested that Minister Atmar—whose leadership remained highly centralized (a method he learned under Soviet tutelage as a young officer in the Khadamat-e Etela'at-e Dawlati [KHAD] or Afghan's secret police, the State Information Agency)—may have been simply encouraging IJC and NTM-A to bicker by adopting different positions at different times. The ANCOP debate also clearly frustrated Minister Atmar at a time when he felt that coalition partners were obstructing his priorities and leadership with their own plans and priorities. The minister wanted to use additional ANCOP personnel to boost security in Kabul during the peace jirga planned for 24 May, the Kabul conference planned for the summer, and elections in the fall. However, MOI allotment of forces and ISAF prioritization did not fully align. The failure to achieve joint planning, even within the coalition, put stress on the alliance and allowed the enemy to gain ground even as the clock ticked toward full security transition in 2014.

Multiple meetings between MOI and coalition partners on ANP force structure and ANCOP planning left the minister with the sense that his views had little to do with ANP design and employment. Much of this feeling of powerlessness had to do with nearly 8,000 ANP members whom Minister Atmar wanted to integrate into his manning document or *tashkil*. In reality, force structure often proved to be the outcome of prolonged and painful negotiations between the NTM-A, international Joint Cooperation and Monitoring Board, IJC, ISAF, and MOI.

In spring 2010, Minister Atmar took the position that literacy requirements for the ANCOP could be lowered or eliminated to rapidly expand the recruiting base, enabling the rapid growth sought by IJC and NTM-A. Later events revealed that most existing ANCOP members were not up to literacy standards themselves, but the standards remained in place that spring. Likewise, the minister was frustrated at the way IJC's requests for additional ANCOP troops superseded his desire to incorporate the large number of off-*tashkil* police he had discovered. Furthermore, the minister's desire for one ANP training center per province and his plans for 400 Afghan police training teams also failed to materialize in the absence of coalition support. When an Afghan leader tried to take control and lead, he found himself stymied by his international partners in many instances.

As for the ANCOP, a big part of the problem went unaddressed—its members continued to leave the force in large numbers because

they found steady, better-paying jobs with PSCs closer to home. Many found jobs with a PSC that held a valuable contract to provide security services for coalition bases. ANCOP members received the highest wages when they joined a PSC, making them highly likely to take this option at some point. Former police and soldiers even stood watch over the compound at NTM-A headquarters after leaving the ranks of the ANSF. Many more operated with convoy security firms or static security companies that protected sites where ANSF facilities were under construction. In such cases, poor coalition planning drove high attrition rates that other coalition leaders sought to reduce. ISAF commands were undercutting their efforts to build professional security forces by inadvertently hiring away the best-educated people to work for them. Part of the challenge of stemming the flow of highly trained Afghans to the PSCs was that the coalition lacked eyes in the field to determine how often this practice occurred. Incomplete knowledge of PSCs was emblematic of a larger concern—throughout 2010, NTM-A programming suffered from a lack of knowledge of field conditions.

The Problem with Partnering

Partnering was supposed to address this issue. However, as of April 2010, per the DOD 1230 report, IJC was short 40 ANA and 108 ANP field mentoring teams (operational mentoring and liaison teams [OMLT] and POMLTs). Thus, a sizeable portion of the ANSF operated without coalition partners. These shortages in institutional trainers and field mentors threatened the very core of ISAF strategy in 2010. The same April Defense Department report to the US Congress explicitly linked partnering to success: “Operational cohesion is a principal tenet of the campaign design. It is gained by building relationships with Afghans and partnering at all levels within the ANSF with a focus on achieving local solutions.”⁷² However, inadequate international contributions and insufficient prioritization of training and partnering efforts translated into poor relationships in some parts of Afghanistan, “drive-by” partnering in some, and no partnering at all in others. Earlier US-led efforts in Korea and Vietnam demonstrated the significant correlation between partnering and force development. Unless ANSF units had full and effective partner units, they

would not develop in ways coalition personnel sought and continue to exploit limited coalition oversight for reasons of their own.

Many OMLTs and POMLTs operated under strength when any team was present at all, making field advising even more difficult. In terms of ANSF assessment, most POMLTs were usually around 90 percent manned by US personnel, so military personnel rather than international police continued ANP development after basic training. These US personnel served well as a temporary solution, but the ANP needed policing experts in its midst to develop more than basic tactical skills. Nations with large paramilitary police forces did not send sufficient people to fill this vital gap, even in cases where they were promised—as France’s president Nicolas Sarkozy had in late 2009. Only a handful of the hundreds expected arrived before 2011.⁷³ In instances where the ANP had soldiers as field mentors or no mentors were present, coalition leaders based their assessments on data that the ANSF provided

The Afghan Uniformed Police had no NTM-A advisors despite being by far the largest Afghan police force and the most critical to the hold and build phases of the COIN campaign. Similarly, the nascent Afghan National Police General Training Command worked without NTM-A advisor support, as there were not enough personnel to go around. In terms of partnering with fielded ANP units, IJC provided roughly half of ANP units with partners of varying quality. Meanwhile, the Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command–Afghanistan partnered with some ANCOP *kandaks* and the first ALP units. In some cases only drive-by intermittent partners were available, producing negligible effects at best. Previous conflicts such as the Vietnam and Korean Wars, along with the history of the war in Afghanistan, showed that nothing short of enduring and committed partner units drove ANSF development in directions the ISAF desired.

The Afghan National Army: Hope for Afghanistan?

While the Afghan National Police continued to manifest more problems than solutions, the Afghan National Army was regarded as one of the country’s few effective and respected institutions. However, allegations of corruption and incompetence contributed to the reassignment of numerous ANA officers in 2010. Anti-corruption

efforts took on a noticeably more serious tone in late 2010. For example, First Deputy Minister of Defense Enayatullah Nazari launched a substantial anti-corruption campaign soon after taking office.⁷⁴ Nazari's commitment was apparent in his decision in September to order the demolition of homes illegally built on MOD land.

More investigations were launched to determine the legal standing of other construction projects. The new deputy minister actively prosecuted allegations of corruption and ordered an audit of the MOD comptroller's office and 67 investigations of official fraud, waste, and abuse. This encouraging start ended poorly in 2012 when Nazari himself was accused of corruption and removed as acting minister of defense—an indication of how pervasive corruption was in a country destroyed by decades of war.⁷⁵ His early steps represented a meaningful start against the decades-old problem of corruption and influence peddling within the Afghan Army. However, until the justice sector reformed to the point where it could take on government-wide corruption, the army's gains in this area had limited effect. Even those working against corruption could end up caught up in it over time. In 2010, there was a real concern that anti-corruption efforts came too late to reverse growing public mistrust of the Karzai government and ISAF institutions. Nonetheless, Deputy Minister Nazari's efforts constituted a pivotal shift toward accountability and away from tribal and clique-driven internal ANA politics. However, this shift was almost entirely dependent on Nazari's personality and was unlikely to continue without him or ISAF advisors to oversee such changes. From NTM-A's point of view, the core problem with the ANA and MOD remained the obstacles to professionalization and specialization.

For example, ANA and ANP ethnic composition continued to be a controversial subject both inside and outside Afghanistan. For several years, the coalition had urged Afghans to intake recruits nationally and put them through an "ethnic mixer" to blend ethnic groups proportionally based on Afghanistan's most recent census (1979). This approach was yet another way that international desires contradicted the traditions of Afghan forces, which were often organized along ethnic lines—especially at local levels. The shortage of Pashtun recruits from the south was one of the most frequent lines of inquiry from official visitors to NTM-A. Only 3 percent of the ANA and slightly less of the ANP were ethnic Pashtuns from the south, though Pashtuns from other areas made the overall balance close to ANSF goals.⁷⁶ NTM-A's best estimate determined that 10 percent of the

ANSF from southern Pashtun regions would be fully representative. The ANSF's inability to recruit in the Taliban's strongest area of support was of primary concern throughout 2010. Journalists invariably asked for the newest figures on recruiting from the unstable, violent southern provinces of Afghanistan. The NTM-A and MOD had long ago identified the shortage of southerners in the ranks but had yet to find an effective solution to the problem. A renewed effort began toward the end of 2010, and the first recruiting effort in early October produced 236 ANA recruits from 337 candidates.⁷⁷

In mid-August the ANA chief of staff, General Karimi, approved the "Return to Protect Your Home" recruiting initiative aimed at solving the issue with southern Pashtuns. This program aligned recruiting efforts with special training courses being automatically stationed in the south. On 21 September, Minister Wardak deployed a MOD recruiting delegation to the southern provinces, led by a delegation of southern Pashtun officers chaired by Major General Farak.⁷⁸ As a recruiting incentive, initial enlistments were offered with guaranteed placement in either of the two southern-based corps (215th or 205th). Normally, ANA recruits were organized nationally and deployed according to a fielding plan regardless of the recruit's place of origin.

The first two months of these incentive programs produced 430 recruits—a stark increase over the two preceding months, which generated only 108 recruits. Although southern Pashtun representation required further effort, initial results were encouraging; overall, the ANA continued to reflect the ethnic balance of the country. Not unlike the gender-based initiatives internationalists pressed on Afghan leaders, this effort produced small results at a high cost. While Pashtuns needed to buy into the post-2001 national project for it to succeed, their integration into national forces was not enough to overcome Pashtun preferences for village militias (*arbakai*). Further, international pressures could not overcome the perception held by southern Pashtuns of the ANA as "a Tajik-Afghan militia designed to oppress them."⁷⁹ Once again, international plans and Afghan traditions came into conflict. The coalition's desire to produce results combined with ignorance of Afghan realities was part of the reason ethnic composition and force structure of the ANSF became sources of tension between international personnel and Afghans.

Seeing Things for the First Time

When oversight was possible, new problems were discovered along with nuances to previously reported concerns. For instance, some ANSF units that seemed to have pay problems instead had literacy problems. Troops who could not read or write relied on literate colleagues to access their pay, which could lead to corruption in the pay system. Widespread illiteracy also created situations such as the ANA and ANP being unaware that they had an electronic bank account and received their pay as scheduled. Pay inspections continued through the fall and winter. Results validated the fundamental success of NTM-A's electronic pay initiative from 2009. The pay system appeared fundamentally sound, and pay teams discovered only minor problems in pay distribution and execution. Most police and army personnel received their proper pay each month more or less on time. Electronic funds transfer (EFT) pay programs also made it more difficult for officers to skim their troops' pay as they had under the previous cash payment system.⁸⁰ In other cases, expanding NTM-A's oversight capabilities allowed the command to find previously unnoticed ANSF problems.

The NTM-A mission was to prepare nineteenth-century Afghan recruits to serve in a security force based on twenty-first-century doctrine and equipment. Yet problems abounded in areas requiring highly skilled Afghan personnel. For example, NTM-A's medical staff, headed by a USAF colonel, comprehensively examined the ANSF medical system in late 2010. They discovered critical information that redefined the nature of ANSF problems. A study of ANSF casualties revealed that 19 of 20 Afghans fell into the category of disease and nonbattle injuries.⁸¹ In 2010, the ANA had 821 casualties while the ANP had 569 casualties.⁸² These statistics indicated that ANSF forces had two distinct but equally important shortcomings: they failed to maintain hygiene and public health standards, and their battle casualty rate reflected only limited participation in the war. The high disease rates reflected the poor state of ANSF health care services and, more broadly, decades of underdevelopment in Afghanistan. Economic conditions and medical care for most Afghans, including the ANSF, were reminiscent of nineteenth-century conditions in Europe and the United States. For the same reason, the ANSF casualty rates were similar to those of the Crimean War, when 80 percent of soldier deaths were due to disease or inadequate medical services.⁸³

Despite billions of dollars in coalition aid, by and large, Afghanistan was a nineteenth-century country with elements of the twenty-first interspersed.

Economic conditions and poverty accounted for high ANSF disease rates, but the larger issue of ANSF participation in combat remained to be understood. Medical Training Advisory Group (MTAG) staff further discovered that many Afghans working as interpreters in the medical system were physicians. These doctors had ended their medical careers for better-paying jobs as ISAF interpreters. At the same time, Afghan military and police hospitals and clinics suffered from a serious shortage of physicians. These problems reiterated the criticality of building support forces for the ANSF and monitoring their performance once in place. If the disease rate could be reduced, overall ANSF personnel rates would improve correspondingly and relieve pressure on recruiting and training. The first step was training and deploying more medical staff.

International medical training capacity was grown considerably in late 2010 to improve care in the field. By November 2010, the ANSF could train more nurses and physician assistants along with some 2,000 combat medics per year.⁸⁴ However, Afghan personnel systems could not yet track medical course graduates. Consequently, NTM-A personnel had to provide supervision, or course graduates frequently deserted and sought private sector work. NTM-A oversight also revealed millions of dollars in missing equipment and medicines and widespread, often brutal patient neglect at the National Military Hospital (NMH) in Kabul and other ANSF medical facilities.⁸⁵ Rampant corruption in the Afghan surgeon general's office further hampered the ability to grow organic medical capabilities for the ANSF.⁸⁶

As NTM-A gained resources during 2010, adequate manning levels led to the discovery of many new challenges and problems. For example, as the MTAG finally began to receive personnel, it became clear that the NMH in Kabul was in a state of crisis. NMH inspections revealed a wide swath of pressing concerns: endemic corruption, poor sanitation, patient neglect, and lack of leadership were commonplace. The mission as a whole was endangered by rampant corruption in the ANA medical leadership. At a 2012 congressional investigation into hospital mismanagement, a retired US Army colonel stated,

One Afghan general told me that corruption and its effects on the building of Afghan Security Forces is like the United States trying to fetch water from a well using a bucket that has no bottom. The fundamental cause of the waste of funds with the ANA medical system is a lack of leadership and accountability on the part of the Afghans. These men look like generals, colonels and doctors to us and many speak English well. Many are capable of callous greed and indifference to the well-being of fellow humans. The same applies to the Afghan leaders and officers in other sections and units of the Afghan Security Forces. They are not leaders in the sense that we think of officers. They steal their soldiers' pay, medicine, food, fuel, bullets and blankets and sell them on the black market—even to the Taliban who might shoot their undersupplied subordinates.⁸⁷

On 15 December, numerous long overdue reforms took effect at the Afghan National Military Hospital. The ANA surgeon general was removed along with 21 other senior staff officers. Defense Minister Wardak also ordered the implementation of new policies to enforce patient care and medical staff standards of performance. One week later, the MOD promulgated the "Patient Bill of Rights," establishing standards of care for the frequency of doctor and nurse visits; cleanliness of facilities; and availability of free medicines, clean linens, and fresh fruit and vegetables. Another new policy delineated work hours and responsibilities of medical staff members and assigned the ANA and MOD inspectors general the responsibility of NMH oversight.

The changes at NMH illustrated the ministry's responsiveness to unacceptable conditions within the ANA, but only when NTM-A advisors called attention to them. ISAF oversight of ANSF leadership was the best and perhaps only certain way to effect the changes the international community desired. It was also essential that NTM-A be of one mind about taking serious corrective action. By the end of the year, NTM-A encouraged Minister Wardak to implement needed remediation on a meaningful scale. The MOD took control of medical supplies and moved them under ANA logistics, where NTM-A advisors helped oversee integrity in the supply process. Previously, the ANA surgeon general's office handled medical supplies, and irregularities and corruption were commonplace. After the change, medical logistics and supply occurred in a more accountable, predictable manner. All this progress, however, was only the beginning of a story that later led to a US congressional inquiry revealing that NTM-A leadership itself had failed to address the problems in the medical system appropriately.⁸⁸ In this case, Afghan Army corruption was real, but some coalition leaders were too concerned about the dam-

age the story might do to the overall effort in Afghanistan when it became known in Washington.

Also troubling was that the ANA surgeon general, the fast-talking Maj Gen Ahmad Zia Yaftali, did not face prosecution or investigation for the variety of illegal and immoral acts transpiring under his leadership. In the end, he was reassigned and promoted to lieutenant general. The same problem of reshuffling leaders accused of corruption that had undermined the legitimacy of the Republic of Vietnam government in Saigon 40 years before now threatened to alienate the Afghan population irrevocably in 2010. At the MOI, Deputy Minister Haidar Basir and others accused of major corruption were moved rather than prosecuted in fall 2010. NTM-A oversight helped identify problems and scandals, but the limits of the Afghan-ISAF partnership prevented real and lasting changes to Afghan leadership.⁸⁹ Afghan corruption and coalition urgency sometimes produced poor results.

NTM-A's pay reform efforts for the ANSF also demonstrated the limits of cooperation and Afghanistan's desire and capacity to change in ways sought by the international coalition. Pay reform encountered obstacles in the form of rural areas having limited banking access and largely depending on a single banking company. That company, Kabul Bank, was the subject of a major investigation in 2010. Ultimately, it discovered roughly one billion dollars were missing and illegal insider loans.⁹⁰ NTM-A had initiatives underway to partner with additional banks, as NTM-A leaders expressed concern about overreliance on a single banking partner. However, Kabul Bank's activities demonstrated the difficulty of finding reliable Afghan partners to implement ANSF programs. Many senior officials and President Karzai's eldest brother, Mahmoud, were major investors in the bank. Senior Afghan leaders appeared to be exploiting international support for enterprises like Kabul Bank for personal gain. The same kinds of graft and misappropriation of property were concerns in the ANSF.

Equipment accountability came to the forefront in late 2010 amid press allegations of thousands of lost ANSF weapons. For example, a September 2010 *Stars and Stripes* article declared, "A massive hunt is on for tens of thousands of rifles, machine guns and rocket-propelled grenade launchers that the U.S. government procured for the Afghan National Police."⁹¹ While NTM-A had allotted some personnel to conduct weapons accountability, increased attention on stewardship and accountability in late 2010 translated into more staff working on

equipment monitoring. Additional teams from NTM-A spent extensive time conducting equipment accountability missions for existing units even as they equipped new ones coming out of the training pipeline. Increased accountability was possible because the training command was growing.

Higher manning levels (around 75 percent in late fall) allowed NTM-A to reestablish a logistics mobile training team on 1 November. The teams taught basic logistics and accountability systems—including upward reporting procedures with a Form 14 (the main form used to move equipment and supplies at the security ministries) expert from Logistics Command. They helped facilitate better integration between coalition and Afghan logistics personnel at the national level. With ANA and ANP logistics and combat support units training in large numbers for the first time, ANSF logistics systems were a main effort at NTM-A in late 2010. The hard part was convincing Afghan leaders of the value of accountability.⁹² Collectively, these initiatives helped lay a foundation for the overall ANSF logistics build in 2011 and advanced ANSF accountability and ownership of equipment and facilities. These were key steps on the path to ANSF professionalization; however, this foundation was only going to be as good as Afghan partners chose to make it. For some, it was a direct challenge to their ability to operate patronage networks by deciding themselves who got resources. These changes again illustrated that NTM-A personnel could execute at the operational level with remarkable effectiveness. Planned programs could be implemented quickly but were only as imperative as Afghans allowed, and they were effective only as long as coalition oversight persisted. Without partners, ANSF members lapsed back into their preferred methods and habits in short order.

Even the true number of ANSF forces serving at any time was a mystery to international personnel. The ISAF and ANSF lacked the capacity to accurately track Afghan losses; the real number of ANSF forces in the field on any given day was anyone's guess. Some soldiers and police struck deals with commanders and did not actually show up for work, while others died or deserted but remained on the rolls. When coalition and Afghan personnel combined to assess the personnel situation, even the official figures from the latter months of 2010 were disconcerting. High attrition rates continued to exceed the established goal of 1.4 percent. ANSF attrition from December 2009 to December 2010 was alarming: 32 percent for the army and 23 per-

cent for the police.⁹³ For example, the ANA posted attrition at 2.8 percent in October 2010. Analysis indicated, however, that attrition was no longer an institutional problem but particular to specific units and corps. Afghan forces did not appear to want to get into the fight ISAF had planned for them. In August, attrition at the 205th Corps, where operations were more deadly, exceeded 9 percent while the ANA as a whole attrited at 2.4 percent.⁹⁴ Historically, a simple force structure had allowed Afghans to replenish their forces when necessary. However, NTM-A's planned force structure was complex and required Afghan personnel who elected to stay in uniform for a career and develop professional skills. This kind of development needed careful coalition support and oversight, as it was both complicated and a direct challenge to the Afghan status quo. Yet even when NTM-A could put people into advisory billets and establish some degree of oversight of ANSF programs, there were stark limits to how much change and how many initiatives Afghans would accept.

Gold-Plating the Afghan Air Force

Afghanistan's national army and police units could be generated and trained to a basic standard in a matter of months. However, Afghan Air Force personnel required specialized technical expertise that mandate years of training and a highly educated recruiting base difficult to locate in war-torn Afghanistan. At the Afghan air school in Kabul (Pohantoon-e-Hawayee), NTM-A mentors from the 738th Air Expeditionary Advisor Wing built the educational foundation for a self-sustaining AAF. Trainees studied math, social sciences, English, literacy, science, and management and leadership skills to prepare them for an air force career. The AAF educational model also built on broader ANA training. For example, unlike previous years, AAF NMAA and Officer Candidate School (OCS) students; medical trainees; and graduates of the Sergeants Major Academy, 1 Uniform course (a 20-week course for direct-entry new officers and 12-week courses for direct-entry NCOs), 1st Sergeant course, and the Afghan Command and Staff College completed much of their studies in mainstream ANA training centers and schools. They attended a top-off AAF course afterward and then received their AAF assignments. This process maximized use of existing facilities and expedited development of skilled personnel for the AAF.

The first class of top-off students arrived at the air school in January from the Kabul Military Training Center (KMTC) and immediately entered a demanding, structured four-week course and a three-month literacy program for those who required it. However, like ANSF medical personnel, graduates of AAF programs were likely suspects for departure to higher-paying jobs outside the ANSF. The ISAF was spending large sums to train a few Afghan airmen who might or might not remain in service. At the same time, Afghan forces required some degree of sophisticated support units and combat enablers, like their small air force, to provide even a basic level of governance and security. As with medical training, finding enough recruits who could meet the academic requirements for air force service was a persistent problem in 2010.

The number of pilots was a principal limiting factor for AAF growth, as each pilot needed years of training and a good educational foundation on which to build. From 2002 to 2010, 45 Afghan pilots completed training courses in the United States; another 23 failed their training, mainly because of inadequate English language skills. By 2017 that number had reached 152 total Afghan pilot trainees, of whom 56 went AWOL.⁹⁵ In recognition of the importance of mastering English (the international aviation language), the NTM-A air team and AAF jointly developed the Thunder Lab program. This English-language immersion facility provided a critical bridge for Afghan pilot trainees between conventional English training in Afghanistan and entry to courses in US schools.⁹⁶ In November 2010, AAF lieutenants from Thunder Lab attending the Defense Language Institute in San Antonio proved the value of the immersion approach. These Afghan trainees all achieved the minimum English Comprehension Language (ECL) score for USAF fixed-wing pilot training in only two months—a remarkable improvement over the previous average of 14 months.⁹⁷ A merit-based selection process for students was the main reason behind this accomplishment. Previously, students for pilot training were selected through personal relationships, and in some cases, cadets paid for the privilege. In other instances, coalition prerogatives drove recruiting and trainee selection, such as when five female AAF lieutenants matriculated in October.⁹⁸ These pilots were one product of a concerted international push to include Afghan women in the ANSF—a popular view in the West but far less so with Afghans.

Gender Initiatives in the Afghan National Security Forces in 2010

Gender initiatives had been a part of the international program in Afghanistan for years, often in the face of strong resistance from Afghan leaders and the rank and file. For its part, NTM-A tried to increase the number of women in the ANSF in 2010.⁹⁹ NTM-A police trainers also incorporated gender issue training into police courses. They hired trainers and built facilities to achieve this aim, with only negligible results. The women's ANP training center in Jalalabad, for example, opened in December 2009 and produced a graduating class of seven women in May 2010 at a cost of several million dollars. By July 2013, the force of 157,000 ANP included only 1,551 females.¹⁰⁰ Similarly, after months of work, NTM-A advisors helped the ANA launch its first women's officer training class. More than half the women left the course before the final group of 23 graduated in September.¹⁰¹ Gender equality and women's issues were high on international leaders' list for Afghanistan, but they were far lower or absent on ANSF leaders' list of priorities. This gap represented one of many areas where international and Afghan aims diverged, creating tension and undermining cooperation.

Even Afghan leaders who valued the concept of bringing women into the ranks, such as Minister of Defense Wardak, found that the ISAF pressured them to do too much, too fast. To succeed, any such initiative needed to develop in ways palatable to most Afghans. Minister Wardak often told visiting dignitaries that they "were asking Afghanistan to do in seven years what took your countries a few hundred years to do" in terms of social change and gender equality.¹⁰² Soviet advisors had taken the same approach in the 1970s and 1980s. Programs in the era of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan trained Afghan women to join the army and police, fueling anti-Soviet sentiment. The mujahideen were able to exploit this initiative and to translate it into support for their cause. Initiatives that to Russia seemed to promote fundamental gender rights fueled opposition to the Russian presence, as the Afghans saw these efforts as attacks on their traditional values and Islam. The Taliban have been able to make similar appeals to some effect in the twenty-first century in light of coalition efforts to address gender inequality in Afghanistan.

Gender-based initiatives driven by international leaders represented profound changes to Afghan society. As Robert Egnell has noted, “Western counter-insurgents should also acknowledge that they are not the defenders of the status quo but often the opposite—they are agents of change and thereby also sources of crisis in societal legitimacy. Struggling to win the support of the local population while at the same time forcing modernization makes for a difficult balancing act and may create inherent contradictions.”¹⁰³ Because Afghans tended to see the international coalition as a detrimental presence, they often resisted ISAF actions as they did with gender-based security programs.

A Jobs Program?

For other Afghans, the ISAF meant a good job in a country where work was hard to find. Tens of thousands of Afghans worked at jobs funded by NTM-A/CSTC-A purchases on any given day in late 2010. Local procurement was also a way for NTM-A to limit coalition expenses while stimulating the local economy (if artificially), which also fell to the new Security Assistance Office (SAO). NTM-A personnel (concentrated in Afghanistan’s largest cities) monitored Afghan factories in urban areas more easily. If successful, the local procurement effort stood to provide Afghan businesses with skills that transferred directly to the marketplace. The task of restructuring ANSF production processes had multiple aims. In one case, NTM-A helped Afghans make boots for the ANA and ANP. Maj Darren Rhyne, USAF, chief of local acquisitions at the SAO, explained that the staff sought to “produce a U.S.-quality boot at reasonable prices, foster competition among local vendors, meet needed production quantities in a timely manner, mitigate risk of sole source vendor failure, and enable the team to provide direct oversight of the program in-country.”¹⁰⁴ By fall 2010, the project proved a short-term success. With assistance from production experts from the US Army’s Natick labs, the Kabul Melli company manufactured boots that met US standards at half the cost of importing a similar boot. Natick technicians also visited and assisted other businesses that held contracts with NTM-A.

Over the middle months of 2010, Kabul Melli improved its products until they met US quality standards. Before long, three more

boot companies could meet the US standard and were contracted to supply ANSF boots. The new Afghan-made boots started to appear around Camp Eggers as coalition officers chose to purchase them for themselves. This endorsement of the boot's quality showed that, in some areas, NTM-A partnerships with Afghans could produce impressive results in a short period. Just a few months earlier, these same companies made boots that quickly fell apart, resulting in strong complaints from MOD and MOI leaders. At one juncture, Minister Atmar insisted that local procurement was turning his police into guinea pigs for inferior products. With support from NTM-A and Natick labs personnel, these same firms soon produced boots that NTM-A leaders bought to wear. Yet this seemingly bright spot failed to live up to its promise. Afghan leaders ended the relationship with Kabul Melli just three months after they took over boot procurement in 2012. Significant investments of NTM-A and ISAF time, money, and effort were lost in this case because the factory was neither what the Afghans wanted nor an expenditure they could afford. They instead purchased boots from China at \$22 a pair versus Kabul Melli's superior boots costing over \$60.¹⁰⁵ ANSF leaders would only continue projects they saw as beneficial and sustainable in terms of their interests and resources. Short-term gains generated by achieving "Afghan buy-in" could never substitute for genuinely joint plans that respected Afghan input and limitations. It seemed that NTM-A—and more broadly, international actors in Afghanistan—could either see Afghans follow their plans to some degree as long as oversight was present or allow Afghans to do things their own way.

2010 in Review

All in all, NTM-A efforts had mixed results in 2010. According to General Bear's 22 September Weekly Report, the "MoI's performance represent[ed] a marked improvement over [2009's] Presidential election—a great example of the growing capabilities within the MoI to operate independently." The ANP secured more than 5,000 polling stations, while the MOI deployed over 7,000 female searchers to assist with election security after an initial period of difficulty in recruiting.¹⁰⁶ On the other hand, ANP attrition was still unacceptably high, especially in the ANCOP and Afghan Border Police. Low literacy rates and undeveloped institutions hampered police professionaliza-

tion, and corruption continued to “negatively affect the reputation of the AUP among the Afghan population.”¹⁰⁷ One study conducted in late 2010 found that “despite international investment the ANP remains ill-trained, ill-equipped, ethnically unbalanced and badly affected by corruption.”¹⁰⁸ The all-too-frequent tension between operational demands and institutional development continued to restrict efforts to build the MOI and ANP to enable transition. Likewise, tensions between Afghan and international plans and expectations continued to impede ANSF development. Neither the ISAF nor the ANSF effort operated on a scale that could enable a successful security transition in 2010. The ISAF needed either more resources or more time. Neither option seemed possible in the global political environment characterized by widespread economic recession and war fatigue. Additionally, NTM-A had put considerable effort and time into communicating its achievements in 2010, but it did not always see the desired results: more trainers and resources. On the whole, NTM-A leaders garnered more resources, and the staff clearly improved their performance over the course of 2009–10. At the end of its first year, the international training command was having greater influence but was also discovering its limitations.

As more personnel became available, NTM-A began to better understand the scope and scale of obstacles to its plan to professionalize and modernize the ANSF. In response, on 13 March, NTM-A implemented its largest anti-corruption measure to date—mandatory literacy training for all ANSF personnel. The program proved to be a widely recognized positive accomplishment in NTM-A’s short history. For example, in *Understanding War in Afghanistan*, author Joseph Collins posits that the NTM-A literacy program “may be a model for others engaged in building capacity in nonmilitary sectors.”¹⁰⁹ The program was a rare example of successful cooperation between coalition experts and Afghanistan’s Ministries of Education, Interior, and Defense. Literacy training for Afghan soldiers and police began in 2005, when Combined Forces Command–Afghanistan (CFC-A) staff recognized that beyond literacy programs enabling professionalization, they also gave young Afghans a powerful incentive to join the ANSF. The two security ministries, CFC-A, and the State Department—and later CSTC-A—implemented the program and hired Afghans to teach basic literacy in Dari and Pashto. This initiative could be transformative but only if it operated with the right instructors and a good degree of oversight to ensure quality delivery.

General Caldwell tapped his deputy, Dr. Jack Kem, to create a comprehensive educational system for leader development and a concurrent adult literacy program across ANSF training centers. Dr. Kem directed the development of the Afghan National Defense University and Command and General Staff Colleges for the ANP and ANA and also helped to organize specialized training schools across the ANSF. In many cases, the ANA and ANP attended separate institutions with similar functions because of traditional animosity between the two Afghan security services.

The first order of business was implementing introductory literacy courses. With literate recruits in short supply (as few as 14 percent of new recruits), the ANA could not hope to develop key capabilities like signals, intelligence, communications, artillery, engineering, or logistics. NTM-A worked to bring in numerous new literacy trainers and implemented mandatory literacy training for ANSF recruits for the first time. Compared to 13,000 recruits in voluntary training in November 2009, over 134,000 recruits studied literacy by December 2010. Further, 116,000 ANA and ANP personnel had graduated with a first-, second-, or third-grade reading level and could enter a variety of needed training areas, including more advanced literacy classes.¹¹⁰

The Ministry of Education (MOE) developed the curriculum in conjunction with its international advisors and created testing standards and assessments for literacy levels matching the courses offered. The MOE set first- and third-grade literacy standards for army and police classes, and testing began soon afterward. New recruits completed examinations and were divided into literacy levels zero through three. Any recruit who failed to pass level three (third grade) standards could begin classes at the appropriate lower level. The program started small and grew only gradually until NTM-A staff prioritized literacy and set numerical goals for 100,000 literacy students by July 2011. By September 2010, more than 27,000 ANSF personnel were in literacy training.¹¹¹

By mid-2010, literacy training was part of NCO (*bridmal*) courses and ANA basic training courses and was conducted in the entire ANA corps. The Afghan National Army Training Command also expanded existing efforts at KMTC and the regional military training centers. Basic reading courses consisted of 64 hours of instruction, followed by 128 hours of second-grade and 120 hours of third-grade instruction to achieve MOE-established minimum literacy standards.¹¹² The impact for graduates was difficult to measure, but con-

versations with recruits consistently showed that literacy training was a major incentive for Afghans to join and remain in the ANSF. The broader implications for Afghanistan were potent. A generation of Afghans who grew up in the mujahideen civil wars of the 1990s and the lost years under the Taliban had its first chance to receive a basic education. Military and police literacy programs offered a powerful incentive to join the ranks and provided recruits with a fundamental skill that would create better opportunities for them in the ANSF and afterward. The brief courses NTM-A included could not turn ANSF recruits into highly literate members of society. However, the basic literacy they gained was empowering, and the program was popular with the new soldiers and police.

Most of these recruits began the courses with no literacy whatsoever and could not recognize even basic numerals. The basic literacy programs could act as a catalyst and enabler for other programs. For example, anti-corruption measures like EFT payments merely fostered new types of corruption and exploitation among the ANSF without concurrent literacy training. EFT programs kept officers from skimming as easily as they had when cash payments occurred in previous years. Predominantly illiterate ANA and ANP members had to enlist help from literate people to obtain and use their money from a bank or ATM. Thus, EFT only worked against corruption as long as literate facilitators chose not to exploit their illiterate colleagues. One of the most frequently heard stories from newly literate Afghans was that they now knew the exact pay they should receive and, for the first time, how to count their own money. Critics maligned the limited scope of literacy courses, yet even brief introductory courses gave ANSF members valuable skills. They also served as a recruiting and retention incentive.

Many literacy students requested additional literacy training and expressed great appreciation for the value of the courses. Others proudly proclaimed that they would teach their children to read or demonstrated their new competence to NTM-A visitors. Accelerated and expanded ANSF literacy programs were the most significant NTM-A initiative in 2010 and held the most potential for driving real progress in the ANSF. Suddenly, many more ANA and ANP members could read and write their names and count their pay. The program laid a foundation for them to continue their education. Newly literate ANSF members proudly displayed pens in their breast pockets so others could know that they were literate. Adding these courses di-

minished the maximum rate of ANSF expansion, but the cost seemed well worth it.

By the end of summer 2010, over 27,000 ANSF members studied literacy at any given time, and the numbers were steadily growing toward a goal of 100,000 enrollments by mid-2011. Basic reading skills also helped ANSF members learn and retain more information, such as their rights under the Afghan constitution. Literacy programs contributed to ANSF progress during 2010, if only to draw more recruits and restrict corruption through basic numeracy. NTM-A's first annual report states,

Literacy undergirds accountability, supports branch and specialized competency, and helps prevent corruption by empowering individuals and increasing individual awareness of rights, responsibilities, and procedures while enabling specialized training. ANSF members who are literate can account for equipment—especially weapons—including filling out paperwork or reading a weapon's serial number. Literacy also supports the various branch and specialty schools, contributing to greater competency and corresponding improvement in the quality of the ANSF. Literate individuals contribute to an increase in overall transparency, and their literacy mitigates corrupt practices, as literate ANSF members can track their pay and are less likely to be defrauded.¹¹³

One of few drawbacks was the need for a large pool of competent, literate instructors. This requirement led to attracting skilled Afghan professionals from the civilian economy and education sector to working with the coalition as contracted literacy instructors. Another drawback was that the literacy program required careful and thorough financial oversight and quality control—two challenges NTM-A struggled to overcome in 2010.

Though literacy alone could not transform the ANSF into an effective fighting force, it built morale, attracted recruits, and helped keep them in the ranks. Basic literacy could enable a professional ANSF in many ways. On the other hand, near-total illiteracy could render it impossible to build a functioning army and police and, for many years, had done just that. The literacy initiative's long-term impact could not be apparent for some time, yet initial results were encouraging. Perhaps most important, the program demonstrated NTM-A's ability to identify and subsequently plan and execute a large-scale solution to a critical problem that had limited Afghan capacity for decades. Although most NTM-A programming in its first year of operations had produced a mixture of short-term gains and failures, literacy programs along with the emphasis on oversight showed that NTM-A

was an organization learning how to better assist the ANSF. Continued improvement after 2010 would depend in part on NTM-A's ability to communicate its progress to international stakeholders who would resource and sustain the effort over time. For this effort to work, NTM-A's leaders had to educate VIP guests on a series of complex issues in very little time.

Visiting US and NATO leaders frequently arrived at Camp Eggers with sparse knowledge of ISAF operations and NTM-A/CSTC-A programs. For example, one longtime US senator, who had voted favorably on CSTC-A's budget since it began operations, visited the training command but did not know what CSTC-A meant or understand the training command's functions. More commonly, leaders found they received new information each time they visited NTM-A—information that did not reach them in their offices. National leaders often misunderstood trainer requirements and training command functions. NTM-A's strategic communications efforts were intended to correct these perceptions within internal ISAF channels and among political leaders. Strides in those initiatives helped increase NTM-A manning and resource levels but did not succeed in rebalancing reporting on the war as a whole. By and large, press stories portrayed the ANSF more negatively than positively.

Collectively, strategic communications produced mixed results in 2009–10. General Caldwell personally directed proactive efforts to correct the record about ANSF training and performance. He also had success with communicating command requirements to superior headquarters and national leaders in coalition nations. Nevertheless, concerted command efforts had not entirely filled the large shortfall in institutional trainers and advisors. Additionally, negative reporting about the ANSF persisted, and NTM-A developed a reputation for producing only good news. Further, no amount of communications could change the fact that the ANSF had a long way to go in becoming an effective national force. NTM-A's publications were initially meant as a corrective measure to overwhelmingly negative reports, but they came out so frequently that by year's end some of their audience dismissed them. In reality, General Caldwell and other NTM-A leaders spoke openly about ANSF attrition and corruption but spent much of their time relaying positive accomplishments.

At worst, NTM-A's strategic communications program for 2009–10 wasted staff time and effort. At best, it redefined the discussion among international leaders about the value of the training mission and the

importance of resourcing it. Evidence points toward a result somewhere in the middle. Public statements by political leaders showed a better understanding of NTM-A's role in Afghanistan. This shift was seen most clearly when NATO secretary general Anders Fogh Rasmussen began using the line "no trainers, no transition" in public speeches in fall 2010.¹¹⁴ The 76 percent manning at the end of 2010 also suggested that General Caldwell's persistence in communicating NTM-A's mission requirements paid off, if not at the desired level.¹¹⁵ Having a three-star personally engage with senior international leaders, often one on one, undoubtedly helped generate personnel for the mission that may not have otherwise been contributed.

The result was a larger force with many of the same problems seen in the first eight years of US-led training efforts: attrition, poor ANP performance, endemic corruption, and declining ANSF morale. These problems did, however, become less systemic and more localized. When partner units from the ISAF came in to support fielded ANSF units, they mitigated the lack of ANSF leaders and performance improved. Had ISAF opted for a smaller ANSF in 2010, 100 percent of Afghan units could have been partnered, which could have proved more effective overall. Afghan forces were not yet ready to operate independently and required 24-hour partnering and assistance to execute their mission. Untrained and unsupervised Afghan forces could further destabilize Afghanistan through incompetence and failure to act in the interests of the population. This scenario replicates David Kilcullen's "accidental guerrilla" model, whereby bystanders become insurgents through government security force errors.¹¹⁶ However, coalition forces could not substitute for Afghan forces either in the short term or over the long haul; they could only develop Afghan capacity and oversee ANSF operations.

For more than seven years, international assistance to the ANSF rested on the faulty "for, with, and by" progression. This method was the staff work equivalent to T. E. Lawrence's dictum to let the Afghans "do it tolerably" rather than NTM-A doing the work "perfectly." As he asserts, "It is their war, and you are to help them, not to win it for them."¹¹⁷ NTM-A's one-year report for 2010 maintains, "Only the Afghans can ultimately secure and stabilize their country, and a secure and stable Afghanistan is a vital interest of Afghans, the international community, and the Coalition."¹¹⁸ Within Afghan borders, ISAF leaders and prominent visitors were confident. For example, in September 2010 the Australian defense chief, Air Marshall Angus Houston, cap-

tured international enthusiasm when he declared that “we have the right strategy and associated resources for the first time since 2001.”¹¹⁹ Visitors to the training command departed with a similar spirit of optimism. Retired Army lieutenant general James Dubik, who commanded the international training effort in Iraq in 2007, assessed NTM-A progress in its first year as “nothing short of a miracle.”¹²⁰ However, by other assessments, the overall strategic situation remained highly problematic in 2010. Author Amin Saikal argues that

the traditional [Afghan] culture of rivalry, treachery, back-stabbing, alliance-making and vengeful actions, along with local power holders’ ability to dispense and impose authority in pursuit of either defensive or assertive objectives, which had featured and marred the Afghan polity for much of its modern life, still remained in place, especially at elite levels. They were so deeply ingrained in the Afghan psyche and social and political norms and practices that they could not be wished away without the country going through a long period of mass education, social and economic development and political reform, and acquiring a national capacity to control its borders and reduce its vulnerability to its neighbours, Pakistan in particular.¹²¹

Going into 2011, its formidable challenges kept the ANA from being as effective as its international partners hoped. The lack of educated recruits slowed growth in technical branches like logistics, personnel, and artillery. Illiteracy and attrition were the principal problems facing the ANA rank and file. Corruption and internal Afghan political rivalries were problems at higher levels. According to the 2010 annual report from NTM-A’s deputy commander for the Army, “Factional and ethnic agendas remain an obstacle to change and professionalization.”¹²² Additional issues for 2011 included solving the lack of southern Pashtun recruits (a concerted effort in October produced only 236 recruits), ANA attrition in combat areas, and the rising shortage of NCOs and officers as the ANA grew. Improving the quality of leadership and capability of the MOD to manage the force and execute a strategic plan also constituted persistent challenges in late 2010. Overall, the ANA and MOD were on track, but they required better coalition partnering and oversight to foster the professionalization deemed necessary by ANSF’s international partners. In 2011 it would become even clearer how NTM-A’s conceptual and resource limitations would affect its ability to prepare Afghan forces to resume full responsibility for securing the safety and security of the Afghan people and defeating the resurgent Taliban.

Notes

(All notes appear in shortened form. For full details, see the appropriate entry in the bibliography.)

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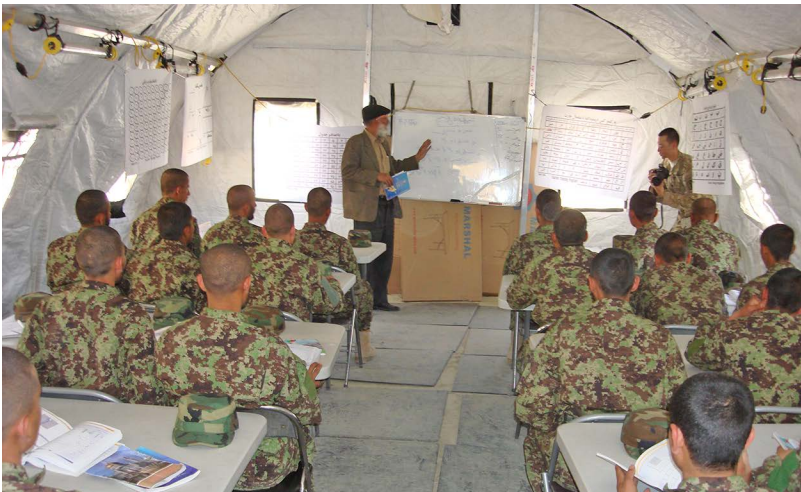
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Photo Gallery



US Air Force photo by SSgt Larry E. Reid Jr.

US Army trainer mirrors Afghan National Army trainee for technique corrections



Afghan National Army recruits undergoing literacy training

Some photos modified by Air University Press to preserve anonymity
Nonattributed photos courtesy of Craig C. Felker



Afghan kitchen



The limits of modernity. Afghan and NTM-A officers troubleshooting a broken air conditioner in a troop tent.



Highway 1 in northwestern Afghanistan



Shura, or meeting, between senior NTM-A personnel and Afghan Army officers, northwestern Afghanistan



Kabul-based Afghan National Police vehicles damaged beyond repair in only one month



Shipping containers on an Afghan Army base filled with aging sticks of TNT



Afghan soldiers in many forward bases would simply discard NTM-A-supplied gear that they felt was unnecessary.



NTM-A personnel outside the wire



US Air Force photo by SSgt Matthew Smith

Afghan Air Force Mi-17 helicopter starting up engines in preparation for a flight at Kabul International Airport



NTM-A photo

Afghan National Army private sits with other soldiers as they wait for their turn to practice urban operations on a training site in southern Afghanistan



US Air Force photo by MSgt Kristina Newton

Afghan policewomen prepare to graduate from Women's Police Corps training during a ceremony at the Regional Training Center in Mazar-e-Sharif, Afghanistan



US Air Force photo by SrA Kat Lynn Justen

Afghan National Police trainees order a fellow trainee, acting as a terrorist, out of his vehicle during an exercise



NTM-A photo

An Afghan National Army team leader course teacher instructs ANA soldiers on room clearing procedures during the urban operations training portion of the course at Camp Hero, southern Afghanistan



US Air Force photo by SSgt Sarah Martinez

Two students from the Afghan National Army 203rd Corps Regional Basic Warrior Training provide security for fellow classmates during an ambush operations exercise



US Navy photo by Petty Officer Michael James

Maj Gen D. Michael Day, Canadian Army, addresses female Afghan National Army Officer Candidate School students at Kabul Military Training Center



US Air Force photo by SrA Kat Lynn Justen

Lt Gen William B. Caldwell, USA, speaks to Senator Robert Patrick "Bob" Casey, Jr. (D-PA), and a congressional delegation



US Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Eric Lockwood

Lt Gen Daniel Bolger, USA, shakes hands with Lt Gen William Caldwell, USA, at NTM-A change of command ceremony where Bolger relieved Caldwell of command

Chapter 5

The NTM-A Vision Meets the Challenges of Reality: 2011

Craig C. Felker

In his final weekly update to International Assistance Security Force (ISAF) commander Gen David Petraeus for 2010, Lt Gen William Caldwell highlighted the many accomplishments of NATO Training Mission–Afghanistan (NTM-A) for the year. Both the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP) force grew by over 49,000 and 21,000 members, respectively. By the end of December, 32,196 Afghan National Security Force (ANSF) personnel were enrolled in institutional training schools. Nearly 600 soldiers graduated from Basic Warrior Training, and 110 newly minted NCOs graduated from the Team Leadership Course.¹ In all, over 266,000 Afghans were members of their country's security forces. Army rolls showed 149,000 soldiers, while 117,000 Afghans filled the various pillars of the Afghan National Police. Metrics for quality pointed to strides in areas such as NCO production, rifle qualification, and literacy training. While focused on growth, Caldwell also acknowledged the need to professionalize the force, citing efforts to curb corruption, develop institutions, train leaders, and embed partnering.²

In equipment, over 6,700 vehicles—including 1,658 up-armored Humvees—had been issued to the army. The police were issued over 1,000 Humvees and an additional 2,647 Ford Ranger pickup trucks (in military jargon, light tactical vehicles). To begin the transition to an Afghan-managed recruiting process, NTM-A aided in the standup of the ANP Training and Recruiting Command to initial operating capability, with the goal of achieving full operational capability in 2011.³

For the Afghan Air Force (AAF), 12 maintenance personnel completed cross-training on the C-27 fixed-wing cargo plane, increasing maintenance personnel by 35 percent. Additionally, all of the air force's Mi-17 helicopters stationed in Kandahar were mission capable, permitting the wing to fly 120 hours per month. Complementing these developments were some pivotal operational events. A combined NATO and Afghan aircrew flew its first mission to support humanitarian operations in Bamiyan Province, delivering over 3,200

kilograms of supplies to the villagers. Also, an all-Afghan helicopter crew from the Kandahar air wing conducted its first operational sling load mission, hauling 1,000 kilograms of firewood and supplies to the operating forces in the field.⁴

While NTM-A's emphasis in its first year was to build the force, by the end of 2010 General Caldwell and his staff had also begun to focus on building the institutions necessary to sustain, enable, and professionalize the ANSF. Drawing from their own US Army experiences, Caldwell's team organized Afghan Army specialty training into 12 "branch schools" slated for completion in 2011. The military intelligence branch school was the first of these training programs to graduate students, with 52 officers and NCOs in its first eight-week course. The company deployed to the ANA 205th Corps, where it would provide basic intelligence, signals intelligence, human intelligence, and counterintelligence support to the ANA. On the police side, the Afghan National Civil Order Police (ANCOP) launched a logistics training program to develop a cadre of logistics trainers and improve property accountability.

Additionally, a special NCO training school was established in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to accelerate the development of enlisted leadership in the ANA. Candidates were drawn principally from graduates of Afghan high schools or Afghans who did not receive appointments to either the National Military Academy of Afghanistan or Officer Candidate School (OCS). Theoretically literate and more educated than many of their cohorts, these young Afghans were sent to the UAE and spent three months in an intense military training program, graduating with automatic promotion to staff sergeant. A helicopter training program for the Afghan National Air Force (ANAF) was also established in the UAE to supplement existing programs in the US. Additional external training for the ANA was being conducted in Turkey, with a police officer training program soon to be established.

Building on 2010, however, required a coherent strategy for the ensuing year that continued the gains while also shaping the direction of the command toward the transition of recruiting and training to the Afghans. Shortly after the new year, Caldwell's team developed their vision for what they believed would not only accelerate the growth and development of the ANSF but also lay the groundwork for transition. Accomplishing this goal would require materiel resources and the cooperation of the US, the international community,

and—most importantly—the Afghans. In 2010 Caldwell had enthusiastic support from all three and virtually a free hand in developing the ANSF. But in 2011 Caldwell discovered, much to his dismay, challenges to his vision—challenges that reflected just how complicated modernization could be.

Constructing the Vision

On 20 December 2010, General Caldwell held the first of several strategy sessions to develop the vision for the ensuing year. Attended by the deputy commanders for the army, police, air force, and programs, as well as officers from directorates across the command, these sessions served two purposes. The first was strategic communications. Caldwell firmly believed that NTM-A's success would be heavily dependent on a vision statement. It had to be “easily communicated: simple, unexpected, concrete, credible, [an] emotional story (made to stick).” It had to explain NTM-A's major lines of effort for the year but also “inspire the organization” and “resonate” with both Afghan and outside constituencies.⁵ The second purpose of the strategy sessions was to outline realistic lines of effort for the year. Staff member assessments of focus areas ranged from processes for developing Afghans into trainers and training systems managers to improving education and logistics systems, ethnic and gender balance, leader development, and ANSF expansion.⁶

The discussions led to consensus on three primary themes for the next year. The first was that the next phase of ANSF development should concentrate on enabling Afghans to train Afghans and, in turn, cultivating some of those trainers to manage training processes themselves. A second theme arising from the session was the necessity of continuing to build and balance the force with “enablers,” such as medics, logisticians, mechanics, and facilities managers. Why NTM-A did not at the outset develop these specialties was a consequence of the limited time allotted to build a force capable of both fighting and assuming the security lead by 2014. Consequently, the command's initial efforts focused on building operational capability. While some schools' training support elements were established in 2010, by 2011 support elements were at best trickling into the ANSF. Finally, agreement was reached on a third item of continued expan-

sion of the ANSF to at least, if not beyond, the 305,000 force level set by the international community in its London communiqué.⁷

Within a week, the command strategy was achieving clarity. The overarching theme for 2011 was refined to “The Afghan Trainer: Accelerating Progress and Strengthening the ANSF.” The justification for an emphasis on the Afghan trainer was seen as crossing all lines of NTM-A programs and essential to developing operationally capable and enduring security forces. As to the Afghan trainer, the staff sought to project an image of a soldier role model: disciplined, educated, trained as a subject matter expert, and imbued with an ethos of service to the country. The staff viewed the Afghan trainer as an integral component of transition from coalition to Afghan responsibility for security. Increasing the training capacity was seen as a primary enabler of not only improving the quality of the ANSF but also of moving to the next level of developing Afghans skilled in training their own trainers.

Further refinements were interjected into command briefings over the ensuing weeks. On 28 December, Caldwell gave deputy national security advisor Denis McDonough an NTM-A command update. NTM-A’s first year, the general noted, had been focused predominantly on growing the ANSF, improving the quality of the force, and building the institutions necessary for its professional development. The 2011 strategy consisted of several parts. The first was to build on the initiatives begun in 2010. The ANSF would continue to grow to its directed level of 305,000 by October, with processes in place to increase the force beyond that level to facilitate full transition. Second, NTM-A would increase its emphasis on building the sustaining and enabling forces for the army and police. Third, the command would develop self-sustaining systems and enduring institutions in the ANSF that would ensure it would remain a credible, capable force during and after full transition. Afghans on the ground would know how to take care of their equipment, with security ministries that provided competent and effective support. Finally, the strategy entailed further measures to professionalize the ANSF, including a higher priority on developing leadership, creating an ethos of service, and infusing a sense of stewardship for the materiel issued to the Afghans. The chief facilitator of this strategy would be Afghan trainers who would eventually hold the responsibility for continued growth and professionalization of the force, while also demonstrating the coalition’s commitment to a long-term partnership with the Afghans.⁸

Though Caldwell's objective in the briefing was to sell the vision to the White House, McDonough also used the event to air issues of concern within the National Security Council. He first addressed attrition in both the police and army and sought explanations for its severity. Caldwell replied that ANA and ANP attrition were separate issues, each with its unique reasons. One main reason for police attrition, he contended, was the operations tempo, particularly for the Afghan National Civil Order Police. The second area of concern that Caldwell believed was a source of police AWOLs was poor leadership in the ANP. As for the army, Caldwell noted a leadership void due to a shortage in officers and NCOs as one reason for its attrition rate. Caldwell also identified President Karzai's policy of granting amnesty to army and police deserters as a significant enabler of AWOLs. Despite NTM-A attempts to get the Afghans to crack down on desertion, Karzai—who undoubtedly understood his people better than his coalition partners—would instead grant amnesty every year to those army and police members who would return to service. Even those deciding to remain AWOL, though, were not pursued.⁹

Karzai's behavior notwithstanding, Caldwell pointed out that solutions to the attrition problem would have to be service specific. For the police, he argued that adhering to a force-generation cycle would reduce the time police would spend in the field while also providing predictable and consistent time for leave and training. Pay would also prove crucial to decreasing police AWOLs. NTM-A had made strides in raising police pay to equal that of the army while also adding incentive pay for serving in hazardous duty. As to the army, Caldwell argued that the key to solving the attrition problem was leadership, but it would take time to develop a seasoned officer and NCO corps.¹⁰

Building leaders was a second issue that McDonough raised. Caldwell cited several initiatives to bolster the numbers of officers and NCOs. Class sizes at the National Military Academy, for example, would be raised to 600 and the number of OCS classes increased. The pipeline for sergeants would also be widened. In addition to the One Uniform course that trained approximately 900 high school graduates in the UAE, the top 200 enlistees in every basic training course across Afghanistan would be subsequently sent to a Team Leader's Course, with successful completion resulting in promotion to sergeant. Additional courses were being established in the fielded forces to identify and promote qualified soldiers at an accelerated rate.¹¹

The last issue raised during the briefing was how to eliminate the problem of the few but persistent, politically dangerous attacks by Afghan soldiers and police on coalition forces. Caldwell responded that NTM-A had established a screening program for the army and police requiring background checks and biometric screening of enlistees. Additionally, he noted that efforts were underway to increase the counterintelligence presence in ANA battalions and companies to provide a tripwire of sorts prior to an attack.¹²

Caldwell's command update to UK minister Alistair Burt, Member of Parliament, further refined the strategy for priority issues. Gains made in the quantity, quality, and professionalization of the ANSF from 2010, he stated, would not only continue but also be accelerated. This goal would be accomplished by focusing on five high-priority areas for the ensuing year. First, the command would implement the Afghan trainer model outlined earlier. Second, it would fill critical shortfalls in NTM-A's own trainer shortages. Third, it would continue to build and support institutions of professionalization. Fourth, NTM-A would begin to inculcate a "culture of stewardship" in the ANSF, particularly in materiel accountability. Finally, the command would enhance its efforts to grow the support and enabler branches for the army and police.¹³

The vision statement and command briefings demonstrated that NTM-A had made significant strides in its first year and could "accelerate" gains made in 2010. On one level, the briefing slides were accurate. There can be no argument regarding the command's achievements in its first year, from building the training organization to establishing viable recruiting and training programs that were filling ANA and ANP personnel rolls. Yet the empirical foundation of the command briefings did not adequately address the fundamental problem of the vision, which was implicit in the concerns raised during the McDonough and Burt briefings.

Reality Clouds the Vision

The problem lay in NTM-A's ability to apply Western models of security organizations to a country that showed few of the attributes of a Western nation-state. Maj Ian Pruden of the Royal Marines, an NTM-A advisor at the ANA Sergeants Major Academy, offered a cogent but skeptical view of the long-term prospects of the command.

Pruden admitted that his thoughts were based more on his experiences over three tours in Afghanistan than on academic research. However, the major also noted that he had discussed his ideas with coalition and Afghan counterparts and found enough consensus to suggest that the current strategy merited “further scrutiny and analysis.”¹⁴

Pruden identified three fundamental errors in NTM-A’s strategy. The first was the command’s attempts to “build an Afghan Army in the absence of an Afghan Nation.” Pruden characterized Afghanistan’s political system as feudal in nature, with the central government maintaining only a semblance of control by playing off competing constituencies on the periphery. While the existence of an Afghan Army might reflect increased central control, Pruden argued that the army was in fact an “empty vessel.” Absent a concept of nation, the army would consist of soldiers with loyalties lying not with the country but with their tribes and sent to “defend localities to which they owe no allegiance or loyalty.”¹⁵

The second flaw in the strategy was developing the ANA from Western military blueprints, which he believed ran counter to Afghan society and culture. Pruden remarked that Western organizations—specifically, the US military—were the culmination of “the specific cultural and historic environments in which they developed.” He also noted that the US military was a product of historic factors, such as the Civil War, industrialization, World Wars 1 and 2, the Cold War, the post-Cold War world, and a “comparative advantage in high technology.” The collision of a twenty-first-century military zeitgeist with Afghan soldiers drawn from a premodern society was, in Pruden’s mind, an intractable problem. He saw that challenge manifested in areas such as NCO development. While Western militaries had come to value and depend on a professional corps of sergeants, Pruden contended that “the Afghans do not respect NCOs and do not see the importance of having them within the military structure.” Pruden also expressed that along with NTM-A expertise came “layers of bureaucratic processes,” necessary to manage the massive amounts of equipment being issued to the ANA and the infrastructure being built to support the army. Pruden cited complaints of coalition mentors that Afghan Army administrative and logistics organizations were “consistently the worst performing elements of the army.” He concluded that although NTM-A had supplied the army with twentieth-century weapons, it could not develop a consonant Afghan ability to maintain and administer the materiel being issued.¹⁶

The third weakness that Pruden identified was the discontinuity between the training conducted at the tactical versus the operational and strategic levels. For example, while on the training ranges, coalition mentors emphasized Afghans doing the training. However, at higher levels, NTM-A gave the Afghans little say in their development. Pruden cited ANSF force structure as emblematic of the problem. He viewed growth as coalition driven, with consequent demands that he believed the Afghans could not meet when transition left them in charge. Better to adhere to T. E. Lawrence's maxim, Pruden argued, and let the Afghans lead now. The coalition, he realized, should adapt its expectations to the realities of the day and place.¹⁷

Despite Pruden's analysis—and based on the implied possibility of growth beyond 305,000 in the London and Lisbon communiqués specifying growth of the ANSF to 305,000 by October 2011—NTM-A began a series of internal and external analyses to determine the necessary force levels to achieve transition.¹⁸ Based on internal estimates of what force levels the Afghans could sustain, as well as a classified Center for Army Analysis report that looked at force levels and the threat environment, NTM-A determined that the 305,000-member ANSF would be incapable of simultaneously containing the violence and enabling transition. Instead, the command began to argue for growth to 352,000, which it viewed as the minimum size necessary to contain the violence. An additional 26,000 Afghan personnel—divided evenly between the army and police—would be counted in a training status, leaving 352,000 soldiers and police in operational units to set the conditions for transition. NTM-A anticipated that the additional growth would be achieved by incentivizing the Ministry of Defense (MOD) and Ministry of Interior (MOI) to reduce attrition and increase retention.¹⁹

Expanding the ANSF beyond 305,000, however, would not come without its share of costs and difficulties. One problem was the belief that growth could be achieved through reduction in attrition. While some areas of attrition in the Afghan National Police had seen some reductions, loss rates in the army remained at around 3 percent per month. Tied to attrition was the increased cost to build and sustain a force of 352,000. Unlike its predecessor organizations, NTM-A was relatively unconstrained in its budget requests during its first year of operation. To continue to grow the ANSF to 352,000, however, would require nearly \$12 billion in fiscal year 2012, with out-year annual projections of between \$6 billion and \$8 billion to sustain the force.

The international community's views on continued growth proved another potential obstacle. The European Union, which provided its own police training programs in Afghanistan, raised concerns that the MOI would face considerable challenges in managing a police force of 170,000. Without institutional reform—particularly in areas such as recruitment, procurement, and budget—the international community warned that the MOI would be overwhelmed by the demands of expansion. Moreover, the EU did not want growth to undermine its own aspirations to professionalize the force, the first order of which was to move the police from counterinsurgency operations to civil policing.²⁰

A final issue was filling the command's requirement for trainers. NTM-A personnel requirements were met through several sourcing pools. US service personnel were normally assigned either from the Defense Department's joint manning document or as a response to a commander's emergent need for additional support, known as a request for forces. NATO provided personnel through either its crisis establishment process or another manning document, the Combined Joint Statement of Requirements. Across the spectrum of these sourcing documents, the command remained approximately 1,000 personnel short, particularly in vital areas such as medical and logistics trainers. Of the shortfall, about 760 of these were billets to be filled by NATO. The failure of NATO to fill the shortages, though, would leave the command to do more with less or to look to the US. More often than not, the solution pointed to the latter.²¹

Trainer shortages would persist through most of 2011, but they did not compromise ANSF growth. Factors outside of NTM-A's control, though, emerged as potential threats to growth beyond 305,000. Due perhaps to the changed political climate in Washington, key members of the national security establishment began questioning the calculus that went into determining the 352,000 force level and its prospects for surviving the scrutiny of the incoming Congress. Additional pressure was also being felt from the international community. In an update to ambassadors on 8 January, several members voiced what could be best described as cautious support for growth beyond the October 2011 force structure. Both NTM-A and the ISAF dealt with these concerns. The NATO senior civilian representative, Mark Sedwill, reached out to the special representative to the UN secretary-general affirming NTM-A's growth plan. General Caldwell also addressed these concerns with the National Security Council

Deputies Committee on 12 January, outlining the command's analysis that connected growth to transition while also telling the group that he had briefed the North Atlantic Council on the topic earlier that day.²²

While concerns of the international community were informed by its commitment of forces to both the fight and the training mission, the costs of building—and more importantly sustaining—a large ANSF weighed heavily on purses in Europe and the United States. Commenting on a meeting with Vice President Joe Biden, ISAF commander Gen David Petraeus noted that Biden had mentioned that the US economy was only slowly recovering, making cuts to the defense budget likely. Biden indicated that those cuts would have to be spread out, and the Afghans would not be immune from the pain. He also said that the coalition would have to move beyond simply making progress to accelerating the path to transition.²³

The tenor of skepticism on growth increased in late January. The American Embassy in Afghanistan had yet to receive guidance on Washington's decision for expansion beyond 305,000. NATO was also signaling caution. During a video teleconference on 17 January, deputy NATO commander Gen Sir Richard Shirreff conveyed concerns from NATO ministers about the additional costs associated with expansion.²⁴ Adding to the problem was the failure of the defense and interior ministries to influence President Karzai to decide on growth. This lack of resolution stalled a potential vote from the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board, the UN and NATO committee tasked with approving further expansion.

A *Washington Post* article reporting concerns in the international community on ANSF expansion served only to make the issue more contentious and therefore further off the table.²⁵ A scheduled meeting of the Standing Security Committee, in which ANSF growth was the agenda item, was cancelled. Consequently, Caldwell's 19 January briefing to the North Atlantic Council on the methodology behind the growth numbers became informational in nature. Interestingly, but not surprisingly, questions from the representatives focused on other issues, such as quality of metrics for the ANSF, attrition, and the balance between the ANA and ANP. If there was a positive development from the meeting, it was the secretary-general's admonition to his colleagues on the body's failure to fully meet its trainer pledges to NTM-A.

One productive consequence of the hiatus on growth discussions was greater clarity on the trainer shortfall issues as well as the conse-

quences if the NATO pledges failed to materialize. These topics were discussed with the National Security Council Deputies Committee the night of 21 January. Caldwell led the discussion by reviewing the numbers of trainers assigned to NTM-A. He then contextualized the problem by specifying areas of training that NTM-A would not be able to support without specialized trainers. These included embedded medical personnel to help the Afghans develop standards of care, logisticians for stewardship, and facility engineers for infrastructure upkeep. The deputies grasped the magnitude of the situation and suggested that the State Department increase pressure on nations that had pledged but not yet deployed trainers. McDonough even suggested that the group examine the possibility of relocating ISAF forces to support NTM-A.²⁶ Both suggestions exposed the gap between rhetoric and reality. The United States might be the largest contributor to the training effort, but it could only twist the arms of coalition allies so much. Additionally, any notion of moving forces from the war-fighting to the training mission would have meant the loss of combat power. Neither the ISAF Joint Command (IJC) nor the ISAF commander would approve this move based on this outcome.

Caldwell responded to the mounting apprehensions by selling harder. On 22 January, he took the message to Senators Carl Levin, Jack Reed, and Jon Tester. It was during this briefing that NTM-A's strategy was delineated. The overarching focus for the year would be to "accelerate progress" from the previous year while also moving to professionalize the force. The key enablers would focus on training the Afghan trainer, building professional institutions, inculcating an ethos of stewardship, and growing the necessary enablers and support forces to sustain the operational forces. The information packet provided to the senators and their staffs identified the specific training needs for NTM-A, leading Senator Levin to comment at the close of the briefing that training was the most important mission in Afghanistan.²⁷

The senators attending the briefing were part of a congressional delegation or CODEL. CODELs were simply visits by congressional groups from both houses to get an understanding of events on the ground. A typical group had five to eight congressional representatives and a few of their aides. The visits were whirlwind affairs, lasting only a couple of days, with the delegation meeting all the players (ISAF, IJC, NTM-A, etc. and sometimes Karzai and senior Afghan officials if more senior members of the House and Senate were in the

group). The delegation might also go out to one or more regional commands to visit the troops. But in general, the CODEL visits were brief.

NTM-A hosted congressional delegations in two venues. If their schedules permitted, the delegations would be flown to the Kabul Military Training Center, where they could see firsthand the training underway and meet coalition members overseeing the training programs. A command brief held on Camp Eggers would also be arranged or, in many cases, served as the only means of explaining the mission to a delegation on a tight schedule. The CODEL would be brought into one of the command's conference rooms, and Caldwell would then run through a slide deck explaining NTM-A's mission and its progress in ANSF development.

For the most part, the visits were fairly benign, probably because the delegations arrived after spending most of the previous day or so flying followed by the adjustment to the time zone difference. A second reason was that the briefings rarely changed, as one would expect in strategic communications where the message has to remain consistent. Consequently, for the most part, the representatives did not ask many or difficult questions. That was until the arrival of CODEL Pelosi on 19 March. It should have been called the Mica delegation because Rep. John Mica (R-FL) was the only member of the majority party in the group. However, given that Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) was on the trip, she received top billing.

The prep session a few days earlier started out normally. Caldwell and his staff talked about the attendees, their districts, and committee assignments. As might be expected from a group of military officers with conservative leanings, less of the discussion focused on Mica than on his colleagues from the other side of the aisle. That made sense given general Republican support for the war. The session then took a strange turn when the discussion turned to ice cream. The staff conferred about the dessert as if the theme of the briefing was something on the order of an ice cream social. At first, it seemed that the topic was a joke. However, the protocol officer confirmed that Caldwell was indeed planning on serving ice cream with all the toppings. As it turned out, the delegation was having dinner with Karzai. Although light refreshments were routinely served during briefings, Caldwell's idea was to up the ante by providing dessert.

On the evening of the briefing, the ice cream—chocolate, mint chocolate chip, and vanilla—was set out along with toppings. But there was no delegation, as their dinner with Karzai had run late. The

staff started without them, and shortly the group arrived with the perfunctory greetings, handshakes, and chitchat. The CODEL scooped out their ice cream; Representative Pelosi chose chocolate, but Representative Mica did not bother to get any.

With the representatives seated, Caldwell began what appeared to be another fairly benign event. Democratic members raised a few questions but nothing particularly difficult for the general or staff to address. But no plan survives the first shot in battle. Approximately 15 minutes into the briefing, Representative Mica spoke. For the next 20 minutes, he went on what appeared to be a well-rehearsed tirade, focusing particularly on NTM-A's budget. Mica's remarks were laced with choice comments—characterizing spending in Afghanistan as a “rathole” and reflective of US fiscal problems in general. He expressed dismay at the nearly \$10 billion in the current year's budget, telling the staff that “ten billion dollars blows my cork” and Caldwell and the group that his mission was to “get the budget down to zero.” “The manna tree is dying,” cautioned Mica, also telling the staff in no uncertain terms that he wanted a blueprint for complete withdrawal by 2014.²⁸

The staff was usually adept at managing audiences during command briefings. PowerPoint slides were full of information in the form of graphs, charts, and photographs. Discussion of the literacy program—buoyed with moving anecdotes—was particularly effective at tugging on the heartstrings of visitors.²⁹ In the case of CODEL Pelosi, however, there was little the staff, including Caldwell, could do but watch in stunned silence. Eventually, Representative Pelosi interjected herself back into the discussion in a less adversarial tone, mentioning that “the appetite for war is diminished” and noting the presence of protesters on the front steps of her house as evidence that the patience of the American people was growing thin. The briefing ended on a friendly but somewhat uncomfortable note.

Afghans Also Have a Say

Getting the Afghans on board with ANSF expansion was also viewed as key to moving the US international community in the right direction. If President Karzai pushed, international approval would follow. Yet the Afghan president's response took an unexpected turn.

A statement finally emerged from the Afghan president that created more confusion than clarity:

The National Security Council Meeting was held in [the] Presidential Palace led by Hamid Karzai, the President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. Participants included the authorities of the security branches of the government.

At the beginning of the meeting, Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzi, Chief of the Transition Commission, spoke in detail regarding the assessment of the Minister of Defence and ANA. After the extensive discussion, they decided the authorities of Afghan Security Forces should include the following topics in discussions with the United States and international organizations in order to expedite the transition process:

First, currently, the Ministry of Defence and all its equipment, supplies and total expenses are being furnished by the international community without any participation by the Ministry of Defence. From now on the Ministry of Defense will take the lead on these activities.

Second, in order to expedite transition responsibilities, the Ministry of Defence needs to increase its technical, engineering, equipment, vehicles, aircraft, and heavy weapons. These needs should be furnished as possible.

Third, the ANA needs a large armory and logistics warehouse for each corps. All ANA corps should establish these facilities and the necessary long-term goods should be stocked there.

Fourth, the government of Afghanistan agrees with the increase of ANA and ANP personnel, but that these increases should be implemented with the condition that the expenses and equipment should be paid for by the international community.³⁰

Karzai's response reflected the fundamental challenge to the coalition's modernization program. The First Anglo-Afghan War set a pattern for Afghan relations with the outside world that persists to this day. Afghan rulers became adept at acquiring foreign military assistance without onerous strings attached.³¹ Similarly, the Karzai government would go along with growth as long as the international community paid the bill, placed the ministries in the lead for procurement, and provided the ANA with more sophisticated weapons than it was currently receiving. In a meeting on 27 January, the Afghan National Security Council reiterated the conditions for growth laid out in the previous press statement. The Afghan cabinet then offered its own somewhat puzzling contribution to the issue. On 1 February it approved an additional 42,000 personnel, which would take the army beyond the October 2012 target of 134,000 to 192,000 by the end of the Afghan solar year in March (calendar year 2013). Growth for the police, however, was set to reach only 134,000. Fortu-

nately for NTM-A, the initiative died a quick death. However, the moment was instructive, serving as a reminder that Afghans could not be ignored when it came to Afghanistan's future.

The ANSF growth issue cooled somewhat in early February as the international community and US policy makers awaited Karzai's formal request. The lull permitted the command to reengage the strategic vision and give it official sanction. On 10 February Caldwell promulgated his vision for 2011. While the document remained consistent with the myriad strategy sessions, deep dives, and command briefings, it brought resolution to five critical areas.

The commander's top priority for 2011 was training Afghan trainers and instructors. Caldwell identified this area as the "essential building block for institutional self-reliance and eventual transition." He envisioned the process as a multiyear effort. The training system would begin producing basic-level trainers and instructors, eventually developing them into master instructors capable of developing and overseeing their own training systems and processes. While Caldwell anticipated a lengthy process, he projected a "train the trainer" system operating at full capacity by the end of 2012.³²

The second priority, leader development, was integral to growing a professional army and police. The vision statement emphasized active recruiting of qualified officer and NCO candidates and utilizing educational and training courses to their maximum capacity. Two additional officer training courses were to be added in the spring to increase the number of officers for the ANA, while trainers from Basic Warrior Training would be reallocated to Team Leader courses to increase the throughput of NCOs. The command would continue to rely on training outside Afghanistan and was in negotiations with Turkish officials to further expand the training base. For the police, six new training centers would be opened to expand NCO training and an OCS course added in Turkey that would graduate an estimated 500 officers in 2011.³³

Another emphasis area for 2011 was to continue building literacy and vocational skills. In 2010 NTM-A instituted mandatory literacy training in all ANA and ANP courses, with the goal of elevating the quality and institutional development of the ANSF. The objective for 2011 was to expand literacy training beyond the schools to the fielded forces and police districts. Along with NTM-A's intermediate goal of reaching a steady state of 100,000 Afghans in training, the vision statement identified the long-term objective of a third-grade reading

level for every ANSF member. Vocational skills were viewed as the second tier of professional education for the ANSF. These skills were originally characterized as “enablers,” language more in line with the US Army lexicon. The use of the term “vocational” came at the suggestion of Afghan leaders who argued that the word would better resonate with their citizens. The training would fall under 12 branch schools focused on areas such as communications, logistics, facilities management, engineering, law, and finance.³⁴

Inculcating an ethos of stewardship was the fourth of five critical areas. The investment of over \$20 billion in 2011 and 2012 necessitated that all levels of training and education stress the need for equipment accountability and facilities maintenance. The final critical area focused on the institutional level. At the ministerial level, the general emphasized NTM-A’s role in developing the defense and interior ministries to execute the strategic-level functions and systems essential to transitioning the Afghans to leading their fielded forces.³⁵

While the document elucidated the strategy for 2011, Caldwell was also careful to identify the challenges facing the command. Failure to fill trainer and leader shortfalls would slow the professional development of the ANSF. The general also identified attrition as a key risk to the strategy. Finally, NTM-A required skilled personnel to maintain accountability for current and future expenditures until the Afghans were ready to take the lead on stewardship.³⁶

Across all pillars of the vision statement was the necessity to ensure that all constituencies—Afghans, coalition partners, and US policy makers—understood how NTM-A fit into the larger strategic picture. Strategic engagement was a key educational tool. On 20 February, for example, Caldwell and select members of the staff participated in a variety of engagements with NATO and the EU. The group first attended the NATO Parliamentary Assembly reception at its headquarters and met with a dozen parliamentarians—including the Canadian and Turkish delegations—as well as a member of the US House and another of the House Armed Services Committee. The next day, Caldwell briefed the NATO Parliamentary Assembly and NATO Military Committee. At both briefings he emphasized the key role and contribution of NATO trainers to the development of the ANSF and continued to advocate for more specialty NATO trainers.

As with command briefings to congressional delegations and other key constituents to NTM-A’s mission, the principal purpose of the trip was to “inform and educate” policy makers. Briefings, speeches,

and discussions with think tanks were emblematic of Caldwell's belief in the need for strategic communications. In his view, the command message was the primary enabler of the success of the mission. The message had to grab the attention of audiences. Thus, the command briefing was full of visual references implying progress. Alliterative phrases ensured that the message could be easily understood. Procurement of materiel for the ANSF, therefore, fell into the categories of "capable, affordable, and sustainable." The command explained to audiences that its greatest challenges were "losses, leadership, and literacy," alluding to attrition, insufficient numbers of officers and NCOs, and the state of illiteracy among the Afghans entering the army and police.

There was, however, a singular flaw in NTM-A's strategic communications program; it assumed no competition with briefings from other sources, television and radio interviews, blogs, and roundtables. The staff would experience the reality that NTM-A's message was but one of many on Afghanistan—some challenging the talking points and others undermining Caldwell. On 23 February, *Rolling Stone* reporter Michael Hastings published an article stirring a controversy that lasted for months. The previous July, *Rolling Stone* published Hastings' unflattering article on then ISAF commander Gen Stanley McChrystal, creating a firestorm that contributed to McChrystal's firing. Less than a year later, Hastings took aim at Caldwell. At the center of his article were allegations by a former member of NTM-A that Caldwell had used psychological operations techniques on several visiting congressional representatives, including Senators Karl Levin and John McCain.³⁷

Soon after the article broke, General Caldwell and several senior members of the command became subjects of a formal investigation. While they were eventually cleared of the allegations, the investigation took its toll on Caldwell professionally. The commanding general was well into his second year when the article broke. Although it was rumored that Caldwell would leave in the early summer, the investigation delayed his change of command by several more months. The army inspector general determined that the allegations in the article were unfounded, but the investigation itself had to be reviewed at every level of the chain of command from ISAF to the White House. Consequently, the process dragged throughout the summer of 2011. By the time the investigation had cleared the White House, all the vacant

four-star positions had been filled, leaving Caldwell few options other than accepting another three-star command or retirement.

Had the planets been aligned correctly, Caldwell would have more than likely been nominated for a four-star position by spring 2011 and turned over command in late spring or early summer. While the president had named a new commanding general for NTM-A by July, Caldwell could not be nominated for his next position until the investigation had cleared the White House. Consequently, his change of command date kept slipping into September, then October. The president did not announce Lieutenant General Caldwell's nomination for command of Fifth Army until late October.

It never appeared that Caldwell was doing anything in his command briefings other than selling NTM-A to those constituencies that he believed could either help or hinder the mission. In fact, there was no need for any type of psychological operation for these briefings, as most participants viewed the command as key to ending US involvement in the war. The fault of the command's strategic communications program was not in a malevolent purpose but a lack of important context and at times candor. Literacy was conflated with education, and growth was seen as an achievement in itself—with little in the way of corresponding measures of quality, such as how well Afghans were faring in the field. The ANSF was receiving massive amounts of materiel but was heavily dependent on contractor maintenance and support. Equally distressing was how Afghan government coffers, which collected only three to four hundred million dollars a year, could afford the force that the coalition was building for it after transition.

Coalition Partners Also Have a Say

Caldwell viewed the command message as imperative to engaging the international community for support, particularly for acquiring pledges of trainers. Yet while coalition statesmen remained behind the NTM-A mission in principle, materiel support more often than not reflected the complicated nature of the coalition. Canada's enthusiasm for the training mission, for example, proved extremely consistent. In January 2011, the country sat behind only the United States and UK in the number of trainers. The Canadian military was preparing to offer more even though the political environment in Toronto

was less than conducive to expansion. Brig Gen Nicolas Matern, chief of staff of the Canadian Expeditionary Forces Command, consulted closely with NTM-A and Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers, Europe (SHAPE) in developing a plan to present to his parliament that would deploy more than 700 Canadian trainers to address NTM-A's many needs. The increase would satisfy more than 225 NATO shortfalls. Additionally, it would permit the Canadians to take full responsibility for ANA mentoring at the Kabul Military Training Center, the Consolidated Fielding Center, and two additional regional military training centers in the Kabul area. Canadian mentors would also fill requisite positions in the Afghan Armed Forces Academy of Medical Science in Kabul as well as at the Regional Military Hospital in Mazar-e Sharif. Finally, the augmentation would allow NTM-A to move hundreds of US trainers to training positions throughout the country.³⁸

The Canadian pledge reflected two sides of the Afghan war coin. On one side was a sizable increase in the number of trainers for NTM-A. There was no doubting Canada's commitment to the ANSF training mission. However, the increases came as the Canadians were ending their combat mission in the country. Like many other coalition nations, Canada's government established a caveat that restricted the employment of its trainers to Kabul and Mazar-e Sharif. More problematic and illustrating the complicated nature of the coalition were the Dutch. On 15 February, Netherlands prime minister Mark Rutte wrote to President Obama with news that his "minority government" had succeeded in securing a police training mission of 545 people. Yet Rutte also admitted that the pledge came with his parliament's condition that "Afghan civilian police officers trained by the Dutch trainers would not be deployed for offensive military tasks."³⁹

Upon further inspection, the Dutch pledge turned out to be even less beneficial to NTM-A than Prime Minister Rutte had implied in his letter to President Obama. Included in the pledge was a detachment of Dutch F-16s with aircrew and support personnel; support for the German Police Project Team School in Kunduz, which was not under NTM-A command; and mentoring support for Afghan Uniformed Police (AUP) units operating in Kunduz. Subtracting the number of Dutch supporting missions outside of NTM-A, only 20 trainers would be coming to the command.⁴⁰ There were additional issues. First, the exclusive focus of Dutch trainers on uniformed police units clashed with NTM-A's emphasis on counterinsurgency training for the Afghan National Civil Order Police, which was more

military than police. Second, the Dutch trainers would only add redundancy to the current German training program already in the north. Finally, the Dutch caveats sent the wrong signal to the rest of the coalition. Essentially, the Dutch were coming up with their own plan and congratulating themselves on their contribution. Lost in the backslapping at The Hague, however, was the fact that the celebration was over 20 trainers. Permitting the Dutch to go their own way in this case might have implications during transition, with other coalition nations shaping their transition plans to accommodate waning political wills at home.⁴¹

The issue came to a head during a command briefing to Karel van Oosterom, national security advisor to the Kingdom of the Netherlands, on 14 March. During the meeting, Van Oosterom outlined in no uncertain terms how the 20 trainers would be used. The principal mission of the Dutch trainers would focus on civil policing and mentoring in the rule of law. Van Oosterom also pointed out that his parliament required that the Basic Patrolman Course in Kunduz be extended from six to eight weeks. The minister cautioned in somewhat apologetic terms that failure to extend the course would more than likely jeopardize parliamentary support for the mission.⁴²

The deputy commanding general for police development, Maj Gen Stu Beare, Canadian Forces, offered the command's chief criticism of the proposal; the extension of the Basic Patrolman Course would undermine the standardization of police training that had taken months to achieve. Secondly, he argued that the six-week course could not be so easily extended, let alone resourced, across all the ANP training sites. The underlying fear, though, was that any extension of the course would slow the growth of the ANP. In the ensuing discussion, NTM-A leadership offered alternative uses for the Dutch pledge, which the defense minister dismissed. The meeting ended with the defense minister noticeably stunned by the command's resistance to the Dutch offer. He conveyed that he would have to return to his parliament and see what its response would be.⁴³

The two sides found a way to temporarily resolve the impasse. A second meeting with the Dutch ambassador on 3 April resulted in a middle ground suitable to both the Dutch and NTM-A. While Amb. Radinck van Vollenhoven expressed his solid support for the NTM-A mission, he also explained the fragility of the political situation in the Netherlands. His desire was to find a way to support the training mission in a way that would not bring down his govern-

ment. Vollenhoven also pointed out that he had received support from the MOI on his point of the course extension, as well as a pledge that Dutch-trained police would not be employed in offensive or military operations. Despite Vollenhoven's end run, Caldwell responded that he was amenable to a pilot eight-week police training course that would be offered in January 2012. He also wanted a review and a second validation, with a potential revision of all police training to an eight-week course by the summer.⁴⁴

The Dutch trainer issue reflected the challenges of working in the coalition. Caldwell astutely realized that even the nations with small contributions could have strategic effects. One could not be certain that if the Dutch abruptly decided to withdraw, other coalition members might not take the opportunity to follow suit. From a staff perspective, another consequence of the Dutch imbroglio was the matter of filling the command's trainer deficit. Approximately one-third of all NTM-A personnel requirements were NATO positions. Yet the glacial pace at which NATO filled vacancies meant that a trainer deficit would be a persistent problem. From the number of positions NATO had pledged to fill but had not, one could infer that the organization's European members conflated pledges with trainers in place to satisfy their coalition responsibilities. The solution once again pointed to the one member nation without caveats. By mid-February, a tacit agreement was reached between NTM-A, the ISAF, and Washington that US forces would fill the remaining unfilled billets. However, even this plan B was easier said than done. NTM-A requests for additional forces—many reaching back to fall 2010—were still largely unfilled. The US Force Management Level, which provided the limits on US personnel in Afghanistan, was a leading contributing factor.⁴⁵

A timely sign of relief appeared several weeks later when Canadians elected the Conservative Party to the majority. Caldwell reported to the ISAF commander that the Conservative Party had gained a clear majority in the parliament. The majority government, a supporter of the coalition and NTM-A's mission, would be guaranteed a four-year term.⁴⁶ The election permitted Canada to fulfill its proposal of additional trainers to NTM-A during the ISAF Force Generation Conference held from 4 to 5 May. Canada officially pledged 460 personnel, 207 of whom would fill NATO shortfalls. Additional pledges came from Montenegro (3), Croatia (3), and Turkey (25). While Germany and Croatia declined to provide specific numbers of trainers for the engineering, logistics, and military police schools, they never-

theless promised to meet the needed capabilities for training the ANSF at these branch schools. Finally, Italy pledged five medical trainers for Herat and 12 C-27 trainers for Kabul, addressing two of the most critical NTM-A shortfalls. With all of the pledges placed against NATO obligations, the conference reduced the overall shortfall from 870 to 470.⁴⁷

The Attrition “Challenge”

Characteristic of virtually all aspects of coalition activities in Afghanistan, NTM-A's herculean efforts to convince NATO to fill its trainer obligations conjures up the image of Sisyphus cursed to push a rock up a hill. NATO would not, in fact, fulfill its commitment that year. Also, more often than not, a solution to one crisis only made room for the emergence of another. Returning from a trip to Brussels, Caldwell received news that had the potential to undermine the 2011 strategy. At a strategy session on 28 February, senior staff members gathered to discuss the state of attrition in the ANSF. The news was not good. Attrition rates were trending higher. Although ANSF attrition data historically showed seasonal highs and lows, the November 2010 to February 2011 numbers revealed a disturbing trend. In February, army attrition stood at nearly 3 percent, up .08 percent from the previous month but up .58 percent from February 2010. Most alarming was that attrition was beginning to push beyond seasonal norms. Further, while 98 percent of attrition was assumed to be occurring in the fielded forces, the available data did not point to particular brigades or operating conditions as responsible for the attrition. While the trend was not yet a crisis, the staff recognized that the October growth targets might be in jeopardy.⁴⁸ Adding to the problem was the lack of any command-level leadership to synchronize and assess efforts across the ANSF. Finally, there was no connectivity between NTM-A and the ISAF Joint Command to accurately determine attrition from either the training command or fielded forces. This area in particular reflected the sometimes tense relationship between the training and operational arms of ISAF. Both commanders were of equal rank and answered to the ISAF commander independently. While theoretically separated by mission, both were responsible for the overall development of the ANSF. Consequently, neither

organization was initially willing to admit that the attrition problem lay in their area of responsibility.⁴⁹

Maj Gen James Mallory, who arrived in December to assume the role of Caldwell's deputy, was designated to lead a working group with NTM-A, Afghan, and IJC representatives to synchronize command efforts, assess the progress of mitigation efforts, and facilitate cross-command coordination. Pulling out a US Army hammer to hit the Afghan nail, Mallory designated the group as an operational planning team (OPT). Using evidence gathered from surveys, interviews, focus groups, human terrain team studies, and staff assistance visits, the OPT drafted a paper outlining what it viewed as five determinants of attrition. These included poor leadership and accountability, family separation, limited and denial of leave, operational tempo, and ineffective AWOL deterrence. The paper recommended several courses of action, such as pressuring the Afghan government to take more proactive measures, establishing a soldier care task force, and improving leadership and accountability. A meeting between Caldwell and First Deputy Minister of Defense Enayatullah Nazari on 9 March also addressed attrition. Nazari listed the top factors affecting attrition. These included poor treatment of soldiers, leadership's failure to convey the ANA's broader mission to the troops, the Afghan government's amnesty policy, soldiers' confusion about the nature of the insurgency, lack of leave, poor living conditions, seasonality, terrorist threats to family members, and the ability of soldiers to easily transfer to ANP units closer to home.⁵⁰

Afghan major general Jahan Khan, inspector general to the Army General Staff, offered a competing assessment of the causes of attrition in the ANA. Khan dissected the problem into three primary components. First, Afghanistan's porous borders permitted fundamentalists from Iran and Pakistan to threaten families of recruits. Second, he argued that NTM-A did not fully appreciate that the economic disparity between the army and civil society had lessened considerably. Khan stated that street workers made as much, if not more, than a soldier and in a less dangerous environment. A related issue was the compensation for Afghans killed or wounded in the fighting, which, Khan pointed out, was virtually nonexistent. US soldiers enjoyed far greater benefits for the same hazards to which Afghan soldiers were subjected. Finally, Khan observed that soldiers were not getting the proper care. He cited direct reports from soldiers, offering the example of a soldier who was sexually assaulted by his company

commander. Eight witnesses forwarded reports to the brigade commander, who then filed his own report with the corps commander. The corps commander subsequently jailed the eight witnesses and exonerated the company commander.⁵¹ Khan ended his discussion on attrition by stating that while the coalition might deal with the economic dimensions of attrition, the underlying problem was “a generational issue to change the culture of corruption, to train professional specialties, and to eradicate a hopelessness that leads the population to poppy growth and terrorist association in order to provide for their families.”⁵²

Reporting from the field offered additional perspectives of the problem. During an NTM-A visit to the 205th Corps headquarters, the corps sergeant major and G-1 offered their assessments of the reasons for ANA attrition. One area was quality of life for the soldiers. Corps leadership observed problems with food quantity and quality, health care, uniform items such as boots, leave, and pay. For some reason, the soldiers in the 205th Corps were receiving only about \$15 more per month than their counterparts who were not serving in the combat zone. The corps command sergeant major added his top three reasons for AWOL: poor and inconsistently applied leave policy, particularly for newly arrived soldiers; lack of incentive pay; and the paucity of banking facilities in the corps’ operating area.⁵³ Ignored in this analysis, however, was enough extant historical context to point out that attrition, typically in the form of AWOLs, was a thread that ran through the history of the army.⁵⁴

The conflicting, often vaguely defined causes of attrition reflected the complicated relationship between NTM-A, its IJC counterparts, and the Afghans. If there was one variable that should have linked all three stakeholders, it was the actual number of Afghan AWOLs. However, determining how many Afghans were running away required an accurate means of accounting for uniformed Afghan soldiers and police. NTM-A’s solution was to apply modern methods to develop an accurate means of counting and reporting ANSF manning. The counting process was known in US Army parlance as the personnel asset inventory (PAI). The command used the accounting program following any attack on an NTM-A facility or personnel. In minutes, the various training sites and regional commands would transmit their personnel numbers to the headquarters by secure email, and the information would be cross-checked with the NTM-A personnel database.

Counting Afghan heads was to be conducted similarly. First, teams of Afghans would traverse the countryside, entering army and police personnel data into local databases. Eventually, the information was fed into a larger human resources database—the Afghan Human Resources Information Management System (AHRIMS). Once all members of the ANSF were in the system, the ministries would have accurate personnel data at the touch of a computer key.

Theoretically, applying Western technology and expertise seemed the most efficient way to give the ministries accurate, timely information. The program was also viewed as a means of curbing corruption in the ANSF since faces and names would be connected to pay records, reducing the possibility of “ghost accounts.”⁵⁵ The problem, though, was that Western means were being applied to Afghan ends. The practical problem of wiring ANSF training facilities, operational bases, and police stations across the 389 districts in a region with a tenuous power grid was virtually unsolvable. A second issue dealt with training a largely illiterate ANSF with the requisite computer skills.

The final concern lay with the Afghans themselves. Despite support at the headquarters level, on the ground the situation was more problematic. PAI teams tended to be slow to muster personnel for enrollment, a situation exacerbated by their tendency to work short days. Life support for the three- to four-person teams was also challenging. When coalition personnel were on hand to push the teams, some amount of work could be accomplished. However, even in Kabul, the most stable and safe region of the country, counting reached a plateau of no more than 200 Afghan soldiers per week.⁵⁶ In the more hostile areas outside Kabul, counting was a different matter altogether. How long the Afghans would continue to implement the PAI on their own, once coalition mentorship was gone, was open to question.⁵⁷

By the middle of April, the White House signaled its support for growth of the ANSF to 352,000 soldiers and police. The total did not, however, include Afghan Local Police. The decision should have brought resolution to the growth issue but instead opened a new problem in apportionment. The reduction from the original request for a force strength of 365,000 would impinge on such areas as enablers, quick response forces, and additional infantry *kandaks* (battalions) for the army. The police would face losing a sixth civil order police *kandak* and heavy weapons companies for the Afghan Border Police as well as a thickening of existing uniformed police units. Consequently, the army and police staffs reached some force sizing options.

The compromise pointed to an army force size of 187,000 personnel, with a loss of five infantry *kandaks* and a quick response unit, reductions to the strength of signals battalions, cutbacks to the training and holding account, additional thickening of AUP units, and 1,200 unallocated positions left unfilled.⁵⁸

Unfortunately, the ease with which the army and police teams reached consensus did not translate to Afghan acquiescence. Lacking indication from Washington for months, the command assumed that its request for growth would be approved and began socializing an apportionment based on 365,000 personnel with the MOD and MOI. Thus, for fiscal year 2012, the ANA would see a total of 195,000 soldiers while the MOI would have a total force of 170,000 police. Within a week of receiving news of the growth decision, though, the minister of defense registered his disapproval. While Minister Abdul Rahim Wardak found the final growth number “not optimal,” he nevertheless found the increase adequate. What Wardak did object to was his perception of unequal growth between the police and army. In a terse letter to ISAF commander General Petraeus, Minister Wardak argued that earlier in the year he had understood that growth to 378,000 would be apportioned, with the army receiving 56 percent of the force and with growth “relatively equal.” The revised number of 352,000, however, meant that the police would increase by about 33,000 from the Lisbon-directed force level of 134,000. The army, by Wardak’s math, would increase only by 16,000 beyond its original limit of 171,000—a clear violation in his mind of the “consensus” he had reached with Petraeus in February 2011. It was “imperative,” he implored, “that the ANA maintains its status as ‘big brother’ within the security sector.” He concluded with indirect criticism of his MOI counterpart and offered an apocalyptic prediction, which envisioned “great risks and grave consequences in building a high rise on ground and a foundation which cannot support it.”⁵⁹

While Wardak’s resistance to NTM-A’s apportionment plan might be expected, the staff assumed that an agreement could be reached that the Afghans would find acceptable. Perhaps, though, Wardak’s resistance was symptomatic of an inherent problem with modernization. Implied in the theory was the consent of those who were to be thrust into modernity. As it turned out, the Afghans had a say.

The War Comes to NTM-A

In many respects, the activities of the headquarters—whether extolling NTM-A's virtues to congressional representatives or cajoling Afghans to accept the benefits of Western expertise—overshadowed the fact that the command, even in Kabul, was in a war. On 27 April, NTM-A experienced a stark and tragic reminder that the term “battlespace” enveloped the entirety of Afghanistan and that NTM-A personnel were no less vulnerable than their coalition comrades in the field. During a daily planning meeting in the Afghan Air Force headquarters building at Kabul International Airport (KAIA), an AAF colonel shot and killed eight NTM-A US Air Force Airmen and one civilian contractor. The colonel, identified as Ahmad Gul from the Tarakhail district of Kabul province, died soon after either from security forces' or self-inflicted gunshot wounds.

This loss was the first of NTM-A personnel since the summer of 2010 when two US Navy Sailors were killed outside of Kabul. For the US Air Force, the incident was the highest single loss of personnel since the Khobar Towers bombing on 25 June 1996. It was the sixth occurrence in 2011 involving Afghan violence against the coalition, which had resulted in 20 incidents and 36 coalition casualties since 2009.⁶⁰ How many of these incidents were the result of a systemic plan of infiltration remained unclear.

While a formal investigation of the incident was opened several days later, initial indications revealed that predeployment training did not adequately address scenarios that NTM-A personnel might face in encounters with Afghan counterparts. Consequently, Caldwell decided on several policies to enhance personal security. First, the NTM-A would make recommendations to the DOD, coalition partners, the MOD, and the MOI specifying revisions to predeployment training for advisors and trainers. Second, upon arrival in Afghanistan, advisors and trainers would receive additional weapons training to include special handling techniques under live-fire conditions. Scenarios included engaging an enemy while seated in an office environment or rapidly transitioning a pistol or rifle from a holstered or slung status to effective engagement of a target at close range. Additionally, the current Senior Advisor Course program of instruction would immediately be adjusted to incorporate weapons handling and scenario training that incorporated the KAIA incident. Similar training would be implemented for all other NATO trainers at the ANSF

training centers across Afghanistan. Finally, all NTM-A advisors and trainers would receive familiarization training along with training and recertification on appropriate immediate action drills by individuals with sidearms under live-fire conditions.

The command's response to the attack was prudent but left open the sensitive problem of dealing with the so-called green-on-blue attack. Prior to the attack, the command focused on two primary areas. The first was a thorough vetting of recruits entering the army and police. NTM-A developed a process requiring incoming recruits to furnish extensive personal information, a valid Afghan identity card (*Tazkira*), and recommendation letters from village elders. They also had to undergo drug and medical screening, biometrics collection, and a full criminal records check by the security ministries. Additionally, Caldwell convinced the defense minister to increase the number of counterintelligence personnel in army battalions.⁶¹ The second initiative was the PAI, mentioned previously.

Unfortunately for the coalition, NTM-A's best efforts could not singularly eliminate the insider threat. The number of green-on-blue attacks increased dramatically from only five in 2010 to 44 in 2012.⁶² Since nearly all attacks resulted in either the death or disappearance of the Afghan perpetrators, no single causal explanation could be determined. NTM-A's vetting process should have stymied Taliban infiltration attempts provided one believed that the vetting steps—particularly the recommendations from village elders—could not be compromised. However, this was unlikely. For instance, one NTM-A officer contended that “some folks at NATO had the following question: ‘Do all recruits really have their own ID cards at the initial vetting stage? The ones I’ve met in-theater often don’t even know their birthdates!’”⁶³ Co-opting soldiers and police was certainly another possibility but one that the vetting process could not detect. An ISAF red team reported that focus groups of Afghan soldiers and police pointed to “numerous social, cultural and operational grievances with U.S. Soldiers.” The analysis included incidents such as US convoys restricting Afghans on the roads, return fire from coalition forces that resulted in civilian casualties, night raids, roadblocks, and US behaviors seen as arrogant or humiliating by their Afghan counterparts.⁶⁴

Five days after the shooting at NATO Training Mission–Afghanistan, President Obama announced that US forces had attacked a compound in Pakistan and killed Osama bin Laden. The news of bin Laden's death was well received across Camp Eggers yet lacked the

celebratory aspects experienced in the US. The reason was simple; the death of al-Qaeda's leader did little to move the NTM-A mission any closer to transition. However, May 2011 data provided some reason for optimism. Over the course of the first week, a series of meetings was held with the NTM-A leadership, IJC, MOI and MOD, and Dr. Rangin Dadfar Spanta, director of Karzai's Office of the National Security Council. By May 5th an agreement was reached, apportioning 195,000 slots to the army. While the ANP would receive only 157,000 slots—10,000 fewer than anticipated—General Caldwell and Minister Wardak also arrived at an understanding that the army would be used if needed to augment the police.

Vision Is Finally Approved, yet Issues Linger

A subsequent meeting between Caldwell, Spanta, and the two ministers was held on 11 May to codify the growth apportionment. Although both ministers and Dr. Spanta formally acquiesced to the force levels for the army and police forces, the meeting triggered two contentious issues. For months NTM-A had been working to convince the MOD and MOI to destroy tens of thousands of tons of old ammunition, much of it dating back to the Soviet era. For NTM-A, the issue was one of storage. Without destroying the old ammunition, new stocks could not adequately or safely be stored. However, the Afghans proved disinclined to let go of their ammunition, opting instead to assign “technical teams” to assess the status of the old ammunition and storage availability.⁶⁵

A second and serious problem involved the purchase of a light air support (LAS) aircraft. The proposal was for an armed fixed-wing aircraft, similar to the propeller-driven Tucano aircraft used in US Air Force and US Navy pilot training programs, to provide close air support to ANSF operations. The plane more than adequately met the current needs of the army while offering a possible bridge to the purchase of more sophisticated attack aircraft in the future. The staff hoped that the LAS would also allay persistent Afghan demands for jets. NTM-A had rejected previous requests by the Afghans for jet aircraft for a variety of reasons—such as airframe price, operating costs, and logistics support—none of which the Afghans would be able to afford in the near future. Regardless, for months the Afghans had stalled on a decision to accept the planes, holding to their earlier peti-

tions for jet aircraft. Thus, it was all the more surprising when Spanta and his Afghan colleagues declined the nearly \$400 million offer.

A letter from Caldwell to Spanta on 13 May broke the impasse. Caldwell advised Spanta that the LAS aircraft had “the right capabilities for Afghanistan now, and would be an effective bridge to future aircraft programs.” Should the Afghan government persist in its refusal of the aircraft, Caldwell relayed, the \$380 million would be “re-allocated for other purposes or returned to the United States Congress,” and he would pass along the Afghan government’s decision to decline the aircraft purchase to the US government.⁶⁶ At a meeting of the Afghan National Security Council two days later, Defense Minister Wardak responded to Caldwell’s letter, informing him in careful language that the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) would accept the LAS “as an initial training platform.” Holding out the prospect of future negotiations, perhaps with Caldwell’s successor, Wardak noted that acceptance of the LAS would “neither deter nor restrict us from our endeavor of acquiring a proper, multi-role fighter capable of defending and securing Afghanistan’s air space.”⁶⁷

This situation revealed the divide between the practical realities of NTM-A’s mission and the Afghans’ obsession with perception. To NTM-A, replacing old ammunition and purchasing a capable close air support aircraft were key enablers to transition that fit within Afghanistan’s ability to counter the current threat and sustain its force structure beyond 2014. But to the Afghans, tanks, jets, and even old ammunition were symbols of national prestige and power to their regional neighbors. Perhaps equally important, these “national treasures” reflected historic underpinnings among Afghanistan’s ruling classes, which saw a powerful army as a symbol of political legitimacy to the Afghan people.⁶⁸

When contemporary initiatives were framed in a historical context, NTM-A’s designs on professionalizing the Afghan National Security Forces could be no more than aspirational. Afghanistan had never enjoyed what could be considered a viable police force. Police development efforts by both Germans in the 1960s and ’70s ended when the Soviets militarized the force. As for the army, during most of its early history, officers were drawn from the same illiterate, uneducated masses as its conscripted soldiers. Prior attempts by foreign powers to move the Afghan Army into modernity made little progress. British endeavors to tie the army to the Afghan sovereign only served to usurp the power of tribal chiefs, creating a backlash that

ultimately led to Britain's disastrous retreat from the country in 1842. Replacing the British with more culturally acceptable Turkish military missions in the twentieth century enabled some headway in educating the Afghan officer corps and inspiring a reformist movement among younger officers. Nevertheless, Kabul's inability to overcome rural opposition and consolidate its power inhibited the development of a truly national army. The aspirations of army reformers also failed to overcome the momentum of old guard officers who had received their positions through the traditional patronage networks. And for the Afghan soldier, his plight remained one of forced service and mistreatment from his officers. He was more likely to desert than fight.⁶⁹

Less than three weeks after Caldwell's departure for leave and official engagements in the States, Obama outlined his plans to begin the withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan. In a 22 June speech, he informed the American people that 10,000 troops would be withdrawn by the end of 2011, with an additional 23,000 departing Afghanistan by September 2012. US forces would continue to leave Afghanistan "at a steady pace" as the ANSF took an increasing lead for security, at which time the US mission would change from "combat to support."⁷⁰

The president's plan ended what had been weeks if not months of speculation and doubt. Given that the DOD had proposed a modest initial drawdown of around 3,000–5,000 in 2011, President Obama's plan was an aggressive departure from the advice of his military team. Moreover, the president's plan could be viewed as a clear signal to Afghan political and military leaders that the process of transition was beginning and would proceed to its planned objective of Afghan lead for their security. For NTM-A, the aggressive withdrawal plans could also undermine its vision of a more deliberate transition and would more than likely result in reduced force protection and coalition trainers. While it was no time to panic, it was time to adapt current plans to meet the president's strategy.

Notes

(All notes appear in shortened form. For full details, see the appropriate entry in the bibliography.)

For NTM-A historical documents cited, contact the US Army Center of Military History, Fort Lesley J. McNair, Washington, DC.

1. NTM-A/Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan (CSTC-A) Command Group to commander, International Security Assistance Force, email.

2. NTM-A, "Ambassador Update, Version 6," PowerPoint presentation, 8 January 2011.

3. NTM-A, "Ambassador Update."

4. NTM-A, "Ambassador Update."

5. NTM-A, "Strategy Session," PowerPoint presentation, 20 December 2011.

6. NTM-A, "Strategy Session."

7. The communiqué specifically states,

Conference Participants also committed to providing the necessary support to the phased growth and expansion of the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP) in order to reach 171,600 and 134,000 personnel by October 2011, as approved by the Joint Coordination and Monetary Board (JCMB) on 20 January 2010. . . . Beyond this, the Government of Afghanistan and the international community will decide if this is sufficient, based on the prevailing security situation and long term sustainability.

London Conference Communiqué, "Afghan Leadership, Regional Cooperation, International Partnership," par. 10.

8. NTM-A, "Command Update to Denis R. McDonough, Deputy National Security Advisor," PowerPoint presentation.

9. NTM-A, "Command Update."

10. NTM-A, "Command Update."

11. NTM-A, "Command Update."

12. NTM-A, "Command Update."

13. NTM-A, "Command Briefing for UK FCO [Foreign and Commonwealth Office] Minister Alistair Burt," PowerPoint presentation.

14. Pruden, "The ANA Mission – Collected Thoughts." Although his paper is undated, Major Pruden notes a 2010 tour in Afghanistan. The document is included with Major Pruden's permission.

15. Pruden, "ANA Mission."

16. Pruden, "ANA Mission."

17. Pruden, "ANA Mission."

18. London Conference Communiqué, "Afghan Leadership, Regional Cooperation, International Partnership."

19. Sedwill to de Mistura, letter.

20. Ušakas to Caldwell, letter.

21. NTM-A, "Command Update to Commander, U.S. Army Forces Command," 11 January 2011. A dinner and command update for Army Forces commander Gen John Thurman on 11 January proved well timed as the general expressed his support to help fast-track current manning requests. He also promised to investigate how the army could offer personnel to fill the shortfalls.

22. NTM-A, "Ambassador Update," PowerPoint presentation, 8 January 2011.

23. NTM-A, "Command Update to Commander, U.S. Army Forces Command," PowerPoint presentation, 11 January 2011.

24. Video teleconference with Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe, 17 January 2011.

25. Partlow, "US Wants to Expand Afghan Forces."

26. NSC Deputies' Committee Meeting, 21 January 2011, Craig C. Felker, NTM-A command historian, notes.

27. NTM-A, "NTM-A Update to CODEL Levin." In a combined statement following the briefing, Senators Levin, Reed, and Tester made the following comment:

The Administration is currently considering a proposal to grow the ANA by about 35,000 to 208,000 and the ANP by a similar amount to 170,000 by 2012, for a total of 378,000 ANSF personnel. We strongly support the proposed increase in the size of both the Afghan Army and police because it will reinforce and sustain the transition of lead responsibility for the country's security to the Afghan security forces. We were told during our visit that there is a great fear of the Taliban. We believe that a proposed increase in the size and capability of the Afghan security forces is a key part of the ticket to success of our mission and is also the ticket to faster reductions of U.S. troops starting in July. Increasing the size and capability of the Afghan security forces is also far less costly in terms of U.S. casualties and tax payer cost than keeping large numbers of U.S. troops in Afghanistan. We urge approval of the proposed increase of ANSF personnel. Compared to the situation in Iraq, where 665,000 Iraqi security forces provide security to a population of twenty-seven million, an Afghan security force of 378,000 to protect Afghanistan's population of over thirty million constitutes a basic and justified requirement.

NTM-A, "NTM-A Update to CODEL Levin."

28. NTM-A, "Command Briefing to CODEL Pelosi," PowerPoint presentation.

29. One anecdote in particular that was repeated at nearly every command briefing was of the NTM-A command sergeant major who was inspecting a particular training site in the south when approached by an Afghan soldier who had just finished the initial literacy program. Holding up his fingers to the sergeant major, the soldier allegedly exclaimed that he had never known how many fingers he had, but now knew that there were ten.

30. Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, "NSC Should Expedite Transition."

31. Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*, 124–33.

32. Memorandum to NTM-A/CSTC-A, 10 February 2011.

33. Memorandum to NTM-A/CSTC-A.

34. Memorandum to NTM-A/CSTC-A.

35. Memorandum to NTM-A/CSTC-A.

36. Memorandum to NTM-A/CSTC-A.

37. Hastings, "Runaway General"; and Hastings, "Another Runaway General."

38. "BG Matern Office Call with Commander NTM-A," 16 January 2011.

39. Rutte to Obama, letter, 15 February 2011.

40. Rutte to Obama, letter.

41. Caldwell to CSTC-A Special Action Group et al., 23 February 2011.

42. NTM-A, "Command Briefing to Mr. Van Oosterom, National Security Advisor, Kingdom of the Netherlands," discussion.

43. Several days later the Dutch sent an email to Caldwell reinforcing their previous position. Either the Dutch would be permitted to form an eight-week AUP training program under the Netherlands flag in Kunduz, or they would pursue their objectives through a bilateral agreement with the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

44. "NTM-A Meeting with Ambassador Radinck van Vollenhoven, 3 April 2011," PowerPoint presentation, Craig C. Felker, NTM-A command historian, notes. No sooner was an agreement reached when the Dutch began exploring means of stretching their terms. A Radio Netherlands Worldwide article on 22 April reported that Dutch trainers would also assume the role of screening the skill levels of the police under their charge. Additionally, it stated that Armed Forces commander Gen Peter van Uhm

briefed the Dutch Parliament that “the Netherlands reserves the right to refuse cadets who fail to meet standards. The cadets will undergo a medical examination—including a drug test—and will be asked to submit letters of recommendation.”

45. Caldwell to Petraeus, email, 22 April 2011.

46. Caldwell to Petraeus, email, 3 May 2011.

47. Deputy Commanding General for International Security Cooperation (DCOM-ISC) to Caldwell, 4 May 2012.

48. NTM-A, “Strategic Planning Session,” 28 February 2011. The Afghan National Civil Order Police was the only organization in which NTM-A was able to incorporate a red-amber-green operational cycle, which provided ample periods of leave and retraining between operational periods. Despite NTM-A’s efforts, the Afghan National Army never instituted such a policy. Nor did it move units from less hostile areas to ease the stress on units in high-tempo operations areas.

49. NTM-A, “Strategic Planning Session.”

50. NTM-A, “Primary Drivers of ANA Attrition and Mitigating Actions,” PowerPoint presentation.

51. NTM-A IG to NTM-A deputy commanding general, email, 6 March 2011. The email references a meeting with Khan on attrition and AWOL. One positive sign of anti-corruption efforts was the discovery and allegations of pay fraud in the 209th Corps. The ANA held a weeklong trial, concluding with guilty verdicts for 10 of the 14 accused Afghans. Punitive damages were twice the amount taken from the victims (approximately \$50,000). An ANA major who was the ringleader of the crime was given a three-year sentence and fine. The remaining criminals received sentences ranging from six months to three years. To prevent similar occurrences, the ANA planned to deploy payroll internal control teams to each corps to verify payroll reports against G1 unit status reports.

52. NTM-A IG to NTM-A deputy commanding general, email, 6 March 2011.

53. Ingram, “EXSUM [Executive Summary] – Visit to 205th Corps.”

54. Meyerle et al., *Conscription in the Afghan Army*, 38. In their argument to move from the ANA’s current volunteer system to universal conscription, the authors note that attrition was prevalent throughout the history of modern Afghanistan. Desertion rates in the army during the 1980s amounted to 10,000 to 30,000 per year, decreasing total army strength by more than half. Meyerle et al., 26–27.

55. CJ2, “Afghan National Security Force (ANSF) Transparency and Accountability.”

56. NTM-A, “Afghan National Security Force Hasead Tasafiyah.”

57. NTM-A, “PAI [Personnel Asset Inventory] Update,” briefing.

58. NTM-A, “Afghan National Security Forces, Apportioning the 352K Force,” PowerPoint presentation.

59. Afghanistan minister of national defense to commander, International Security Assistance Force, letter, 24 April 2011. Anticipating the MOD’s response, the NTM-A staff looked for ways to mitigate the discrepancy. In a 20 April letter to the ISAF commander, Caldwell outlined four means to strengthen ANA numbers and reduce the discrepancy in growth. First, Caldwell proposed removing 7,500 ANA civilian positions from ANSF force strength calculations. Second, the manning for the 2,500-strong Military Police Guard Brigade, currently securing the Pol-e-Charkhi Prison, would be transferred back to the ANA following the transfer of responsibilities to the Ministry of Justice. Third, some 600 Afghan Customs Police would not be moved under the Ministry of Finance or counted against ANP strength. Finally, Caldwell proposed moving 2,570 spaces from the Counter Narcotics Police to the Ministry of Counter Narcotics. NTM-A commander to ISAF commander, letter, 10 April 2011.

60. Baldor and Faiez, “9 Americans Dead after Afghan Officer Opens Fire.”

61. CJ2, “The ANSF Vetting Process,” PowerPoint presentation; and Caldwell to Monahan, email, 10 February 2011. Responding to a follow-up request from a previous visit by Senator Levin, Caldwell wrote that “since taking over CSTC-A and NTM-A, we have implemented numerous safeguards that ensure only quality recruits join the ANSF and that current members of the ANSF are serving honorably.” Caldwell to Monahan, email.

62. Roggio and Lundquist, “Green-on-Blue Attacks in Afghanistan: The Data.” Data was updated 17 June 2017.

63. CSTC-A Commander’s Action Group (CAG) to NTM-A/CSTC-A CJ2, Biometrics Advisory Team, email, 3 October 2011.

64. ISAF, “Fratricide-Murder Risk.”

65. On 26 May 2011 Caldwell visited the Khairabad Ammunition Storage Facility (ASF) near Camp Morehead with the MOD’s deputy minister (DM) for acquisition, technology, and logistics, DM Mohibullah. He used this visit to engage the MOD on the issue of unserviceable and obsolete munitions. The meeting included MOD senior leaders, ANA/ASF officers, coalition advisors, and HALO Trust (a Canadian munitions destruction nongovernmental organization). The group inspected one of 54 munitions bunkers. The bunker had over 34 tons of unserviceable and obsolete munitions, including T-54 tank rounds, SA-3 AT missiles, air-to-air rockets for the Mig-19, and UK and Chinese mortar rounds. The entire complex had an estimated 5,600 tons of unserviceable and obsolete munitions. While HALO Trust was on-site and conducting limited demolition of some munitions, only 152 tons had been destroyed in 2010 because the GIROA had cleared so little for destruction.

DM Mohibullah recognized the urgency of the situation and the precarious condition of the obsolete munitions. But he also noted that it was beyond his authority to authorize destruction of any munitions. He referred to the munitions as “the treasure of the people of Afghanistan” and hinted that permission would have to come from the parliament. Caldwell reminded the minister that these bunkers had to be cleared first before any new ammunition could be shipped and delivered from the US. He added that the Afghan Army could enter the final year before transition with the current ammunition or new serviceable ammunition, but not both.

Caldwell offered to request that the minister receive authorization to clear five bunkers, which NTM-A would replace with new ammunition. The problems associated with eliminating “legacy ammunition,” however, would stymie the command throughout Caldwell’s tenure. The Afghans seemed bound and determined not to get rid of any type of ammunition or weapon, no matter how old, obsolete, or inoperable.

66. Caldwell to Spanta, letter, 13 May 2011.

67. Wardak to Caldwell, letter, 15 May 2011.

68. Goodson, *Afghanistan’s Endless War*, 36–40.

69. Perito, *Afghanistan’s Police*; Wilder, *Cops or Robbers?*; and Cronin, “Building and Rebuilding Afghanistan’s Army,” 45–91.

70. The White House, “Remarks by the President on the Way Forward in Afghanistan.”

Chapter 6

The Imperiled Road to Transition

Craig C. Felker

The strategic vision for NATO Training Mission–Afghanistan (NTM-A) became clearer in the period from the middle of June to the first weeks of July 2011, but its accomplishments to date were less apparent in some areas. On 28 June, the Standing Security Committee of the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board finally approved the continuation of Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) growth to 352,000, with 195,000 authorized for the army and 157,000 for the Afghan National Police (ANP). While the decision brought closure to over six months of effort by the command, the international community attached the requirement for reporting on ANP professionalization and also expressed concerns about the long-term sustainability of the force.¹ Both the army and police were well on their way to reaching the force limit of 305,000 established by the Lisbon summit and were well established to continue growth to the new limit by fall 2012. However, as subsequent chapters demonstrate, the command was soon to realize that there was a separate Afghan version of reality in the numbers.

There was cause for cautious optimism, as some indicators pointed to increased stability and improvement of the ANSF. All 70 training sites were operational, with the recently completed National Police Training Center in Wardak Province holding its inaugural training. Contracts had been signed to appropriate several new weapons systems for the army and air force: an armored support vehicle, a light fixed-wing attack aircraft, a light fixed-wing cargo aircraft, and training helicopters. But Washington was also signaling that it was time to transition the war to the Afghans. On 22 June, President Obama outlined his plans for the withdrawal of the surge forces from Afghanistan. His decision to remove 10,000 troops by the end of 2011, with the remainder of the surge forces out by the summer of 2012, perhaps stunned senior International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) staffers. They assumed the majority of the surge would be fighting through 2012. While the president's motivation for the dramatic withdrawal might be ambiguous, the implication of his decision was quite clear. Although NTM-A's institutional transition plan might have once

appeared sound, the president's speech implied that the pace of transition would accelerate previously assumed timelines. The command's mission statement envisioned transition being completed "by the end of 2014," with the Afghans having "taken the lead" for their own security. President Obama's words, contrastingly, reflected that this timeline was no longer germane. "By 2014," President Obama noted early in the speech, "this process of transition will be complete, and the Afghan people will be responsible for their own security."²

Preparing for Transition

The problem was that the speech appeared to have competing interpretations. Gen David Petraeus remarked during his morning stand-up on 23 June that he had "flexibility" in the implementation of the first tranche of the withdrawal. Implied was that the ISAF commander controlled the timing of the withdrawal, but Petraeus did not elaborate on who gave him that flexibility or how he would use it. He then went on to put the best face possible on the readiness of the Afghans to step into the breach. He reminded the staff that the ANSF would continue to grow and that the coalition had done its part to push the Taliban out to the point that they no longer posed an "existential threat" to the Afghan government.³

From the NTM-A perspective, the withdrawal of the surge forces and "continued withdrawal thereafter" seemed to imply that the emphasis would shift increasingly toward ANSF development. ISAF planning initiatives, however, pointed out that a different inference could be drawn from the president's speech. NTM-A staff picked up those vibes during a meeting in late June with deputy ISAF commander Lt Gen James Bucknall, British Army. The meeting appeared to be a not-so-subtle means of conveying to NTM-A that it would not be immune from the surge recovery. Attempting to parry Bucknall, programs deputy commander Col John Ferrari, US Army, explained to him that much of the infrastructure for the ANSF was still ongoing. Additionally, ANSF logistics and facilities engineering were nowhere close to being ready for transition. The most serious consequence of prioritizing trainers over combat forces, NTM-A officers argued, would be the diminished ability of regional commanders to provide security to NTM-A personnel in the battlespace. Lt Gen William Caldwell, US Army, had fought a long and eventually successful

battle with the ISAF and Defense Department to provide his command a US Army infantry battalion for force protection. But the staff could not be confident that ISAF Joint Command (IJC) regional commanders would accept responsibility for NTM-A's security requirements in the battlespace. Senior NTM-A officers also cautioned Bucknall that a transition of responsibility in the provinces and transition of security institutions and functions went hand in hand. Without the latter, NTM-A argued, Afghan's security lead "will not be enduring and sustainable."⁴

Bucknall was of a different mind. "The fight is really important," he declared. It was in his opinion a forcing function to reconciliation and reintegration of the less evangelical Taliban fighters. Bucknall would carry the day. By the fall, the developing surge recovery plan pointed to a continued emphasis on combat operations. NTM-A was assessed a surge recovery "tax" of 539 American personnel. While some were prospective arrivals who could be turned off before they deployed, approximately 200 would be reduced from the headquarters. This initial reduction did not bode well for the future. As the ISAF appeared committed to retaining its offensive capabilities and bringing in as much combat power as possible over the ensuing winter, it appeared that NTM-A would suffer further cuts to American personnel.

The surge recovery was one of several planning initiatives pointing to an uncomfortable implication that the ISAF focused more on the fight than on ANSF development. To leave ANSF development as a secondary consideration until ISAF forces were too low to conduct offensive combat operations could also compromise the ISAF's ability to partner effectively with the Afghan National Army (ANA) and ANP in the field. The coalition's command organization implied that the commander of NTM-A would have equal footing with his three-star counterpart on the ISAF Joint Command. However, the president's speech appeared only to accentuate an underlying tension between ANSF development and combat missions.

A related issue was perhaps even more strategically consequential than the competition between NTM-A and IJC to retain forces in light of the drawdown. That issue rested entirely within the IJC and the tension between the fight and its own responsibility to mentor army and police operational forces. NTM-A recruited, trained, outfitted, and assigned the soldiers and policemen. The NATO training organization was also responsible for creating a logistics and engineering system to support the billions of dollars in infrastructure it was build-

ing for the ANSF. But once the soldiers and police completed their training, they became the responsibility of the IJC. Of the many long poles in the tent, the deficit in the number of IJC mentor teams was perhaps most strategically critical to any meaningful transition.

The shortfall in mentors was identified in an unattributed IJC memorandum, "Security Partnering – ANSF Future Partnering." The paper laid out in plain language the extent of the situation and painted an equally dismal forecast of the coalition's further ability to partner with the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). The consequence of ANSF growth to 305,000 and beyond would create a "significant gap in the ever increasing partnering/mentoring requirement." Further, the paper pointed out that "successful transition of the lead for security of Afghanistan to ANSF is heavily dependent on a healthy, sustained partnering and mentoring relationship between Coalition forces and the host nation." ANSF units that were provided meaningful partnering and mentoring, the report noted, showed a "higher level of collective skills and, crucially, a lower level of attrition before deployment to their operational area."⁵

Although the partnering relationship had been fairly healthy early in the war, the current size of the ANSF and its projected growth harbored dire implications for coalition mentors to maintain sufficient contact with Afghan soldiers and police in the field. The reasons were varied. Regional commanders were increasingly being forced to manage partnering requirements with combat operations while also holding to the maxim of counterinsurgency (COIN) doctrine to provide security to Afghan civilians. Any prospects that NATO might supply additional forces for partnering was moot, as Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers, Europe, had recently announced that NATO would not increase the number of mentoring teams for either the army or police.⁶

Another problem was geography. Mentoring army units was simplified by their congregation on a limited number of major and forward operating bases. The ANP, however, was dispersed across every province and district. Even when ISAF reduced the partnering requirement to 94 "key terrain districts," 64 "focus districts," and 44 "areas of interest," the IJC paper projected a current deficit of 4,545 coalition mentors for the police, with a future shortage of 232 teams to support the growth of the ANP to 134,000.⁷

While the IJC paper projected a shortfall of only 43 operational mentoring and liaison teams for the ANA, the police numbers were far more critical and consequential for the success of the coalition's

COIN strategy. The situation was predicted to only worsen as the ANSF continued to grow to 352,000. The IJC paper recommended the coalition “act immediately to infuse the various force management processes with an understanding of the projected shortfalls.” However, the drawdown of US and coalition forces combined with commanders’ emphasis on combat operations made the prospects of ensuring a completely partnered and mentored ANSF highly problematic.⁸

US Transition Strategy and the Soviet Experience

History offered caution to the present, particularly when comparing the US transition strategy with the Soviet experience. Characterizations of both as “cutting and running” constitute a reductionist interpretation that not only lacks serious analysis but also flies in the face of the historical record. On one hand, the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan was anything but precipitous. As Lester Grau argues, the Soviets developed a methodical plan, coordinated it with the Afghan government, and implemented it in a careful and well-resourced manner.⁹ The strategy fit the Soviet acknowledgement that the mission had become “less an imperial adventure than an attempt to preserve some measure of dignity before exiting Afghanistan for good.”¹⁰ Aid continued after the last Soviet troops left in 1989, ending only with the collapse of the Soviet Union itself in 1991.

The history of the Soviet experience offers important context for understanding the situation in Afghanistan. At issue, at least within the confines of a prospective acceleration of transition, is not the withdrawal itself. More relevant is the connection between withdrawal and end state. The Soviets developed Afghan security forces simply to permit an orderly and honorable exit from the war. Consequently, the force they left behind was not designed to deal with the nature of the threat or trained to fight in the manner necessary to diminish the insurgency. That the Afghan government lasted as long as it did is astounding considering that its lingering linkage to communism could not be severed, its security forces were asymmetrical to the threat, and its historic reliance on foreign aid was cut off.

To argue that the Soviets simply abandoned the Afghans also ignores the significant materiel and personnel strength of the security ministries in 1989. Approximately 302,000 Afghans served under arms in the army, police, and secret police. Another 150,000 served in a variety

of militia forces fighting on the side of the government. The Soviets also transferred 15,000 tons of ammunition, 3,000 tons of food, 37,500 tons of fuel, 990 armored vehicles, 3,000 trucks, 142 artillery pieces, and nearly 15,000 small arms.¹¹ While the numbers supported the Soviet end state, the resources proved inadequate against the threat. Afghan security forces were not built and trained to fight a counterinsurgency. Each of the Ministries of Defense, Interior, and State Security had its own armed force, trained within the model of Soviet forces. The army, numbering only 132,000 soldiers, was organized and trained to fight conventionally in large formations. The 70,000 police were thinly dispersed across the country and lacked the weapons and equipment to defend themselves against the heavy weapons that the US and Pakistan provided the insurgents. Militias afforded some level of defense on the cheap but also proved unreliable and—much to Afghan president Najibullah's dismay—prone to changing sides.¹²

Despite their collective size, the individual Afghan security forces were simply too small to deal with a mujahideen force that numbered approximately 82,000 in 1989.¹³ The only strategy available was consolidation and concentration. Army units would protect the cities and communications routes. The police would focus its efforts on key government sites, economic targets, and civil order in Kabul and its major suburbs. The countryside would be left to unreliable militia units, effectively ceding 76 percent of the country to the insurgency.¹⁴

The Soviets built and trained their Afghan counterparts not to deal with the threat but to protect the Najibullah government. Such a national security policy made sense in a highly centralized Soviet state system. However, as the Soviets would discover in 1991 and Najibullah a few years later, no government can survive if it fails to establish legitimacy from the governed. The policies of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) were antithetical to both Afghan tradition and Islam. Afghan communists rediscovered the historic perils of imposing progressivism on conservative and deeply religious Afghans in the countryside. The appearance of Soviet occupiers only solidified resistance to the PDPA. Despite repeals of the most heinous policies, Najibullah survived only so long as he could funnel Soviet money to prospective political rivals. But with the collapse of the Soviet Union went his only lifeline. With the money gone, the ensuing civil war left the country in a state of anarchy, well suited for the arrival of a disciplined group of young religious

students promising a return to order. Similarly, the internationally sanctioned government established in Kabul after the Taliban's ouster was on its own no guarantee of stability in the country. As Larry Goodson noted, "Security cannot come from a strong foreign force on behalf of rulers that people view as corrupt, inefficient, and ineffective. Nor can it come from a domestic army led by those elites."¹⁵

The Soviet experience in Afghanistan reflects the stark difference between "Afghanization" then and transition in 2009–2011. Perhaps drawing from Richard Nixon's Vietnamization strategy, the Soviets built the Afghan security forces in their own image and resourced the Afghans sufficiently to permit their disengagement from Afghan affairs. The US and international community, however, formally declared a commitment to Afghanistan beyond 2014. The commitment entailed the development of an ANSF that could take the security lead by the end of 2014. The commitment was also enduring to ensure that the transition was irreversible. The force that had been developed was infantry-centric and COIN focused. A 352,000-man ANSF offered the Afghan government presence beyond the cities and along major lines of communication, areas that would otherwise fall under insurgent influence. Perhaps most importantly, the ANSF in 2011 provided the breathing space for the Afghan government to develop the institutions and policies essential to gaining the acceptance of Afghans across the country.

The choice implied was either Afghanization or transition. The former offered a cost-effective exit with honor, but virtually no guarantee of the enduring security required to prevent the implosion of the current government or even the return of terrorist safe havens. Conversely, transition would require an extended commitment of coalition partners and financial aid to sustain the necessary ANSF presence throughout the country until the Afghans were capable of managing a Western-oriented security force. While that outcome would be generational, it perhaps offered the only chance Kabul had to earn the acknowledgement of legitimacy from the Afghan people.

The difference was not lost on some members of Caldwell's commander's action group. These mid-grade officers, all of whom possessed master's degrees as well as the imprimatur of the US Army's School for Advanced Military Studies, were the strategic thinkers in the command. One intellectually gifted major identified the parallels of the Soviet experience with NTM-A's trajectory. The underlying theme of his analysis was the historical continuity between expenditures

of materiel and human capital and the return on investment. The Afghans knew how to fight, the presentation pointed out. But did they know how to lead? Soldiers and police knew how to use their weapons, but could they sustain them? Finally, while Afghans were volunteering, did NTM-A have any means of measuring whether they were “internalizing service”?¹⁶

To immediately leap to what appears to be the obvious conclusion—that history was once again repeating itself—ignores a more critical issue. NTM-A leadership recognized the nascent state of the ANSF when it came to logistics, maintenance, and facilities engineering. The deliberate decision to focus exclusively on fielding combat forces first, with enablers to follow, left the command much work to do. What is key, though, was the inflection point that the war in Afghanistan represented: between Afghanization and transition. By implanting the former, the ANSF would be fielded and equipped but lacking the essential skills to maintain the army and police in the field. Transition, however, required the enduring assistance necessary to induce change. The command also needed enough personnel with the right skill sets to overcome the cultural impediments to lasting change. Yet despite NTM-A’s arguments, the direction of planning seemed to be taking the most attractive, but strategically shortsighted, path.

Notes from a meeting on ANSF logistics, for example, portrayed the enormity of the sustainment challenge. The top concern voiced in the meeting was the “near total breakdown of the logistics process.” An attendee added, “We are trying to impose a system upon them that is not working.” The administrative process used to order and receive parts was problematic largely because the Afghans did not understand the Western-oriented system. Adding to the problem was that neither NTM-A nor the fielded coalition forces could accurately measure ANSF consumption or usage rates. Thus, planning was skewed to the worst-case scenario, resulting in one case of 270 years’ worth of mortar rounds in the country. The meeting report stated that “we are supplying a force to fight the North Koreans circa 1954 instead of standing around a traffic circle now.”¹⁷

The fact that these questions were being asked over 18 months after NTM-A’s establishment—and the expenditure of billions of dollars in materiel and infrastructure for the ANSF—was a stark reminder of the previous attempt to modernize the Afghans. The challenges inherent in transition—as well as the commitment required to ensure its success—were also illustrated in an operational narrative by a

coalition mentoring team. On 8 May, a United States Marine Corps (USMC) embedded training team departed Camp Garmsir in Helmand for Kabul, where it had been assigned the mission of assisting the move of 130 vehicles and approximately 450 ANA personnel of a combat support *kandak* for the 215th Corps back to Helmand. The *kandak* began the trek somewhat inauspiciously. Having failed its validation exercise on 11 May, the unit was forced to redo the exercise the following day. While it finally passed the validation, the *kandak* was ordered to immediately move to Helmand, precluding adequate time for recuperation and rest. The officers and soldiers were working the entire day prior to a movement that would begin at night and continue through the next day. Adding to the *kandak*'s problems was the hasty assignment of 90 new personnel to compensate for the 120 soldiers who had gone absent without leave (AWOL) during the validation period. Unfortunately, the Afghans assigned several of these minimally trained soldiers as drivers for the Helmand movement.¹⁸

Consequently, the *kandak* experienced significant problems on the first leg of the journey. The inexperienced drivers burned out the clutches on several trucks, requiring so many vehicles to be towed that some damaged vehicles were left behind. The leg from Qalat to Kandahar was beset by additional breakdowns and disabled vehicles. The potential damage to the remaining operable vehicles left the Marine training team with no alternative but to convince the *kandak* commander to leave the disabled vehicles behind or risk losing even more. Eleven trucks were subsequently left in Qalat to be eventually moved by the coalition. Over the five-day trip, the convoy experienced seven breakdowns, 25 accidents, and 14 burned-out clutches.¹⁹

A second problem set emerged with coalition escort. Combined task forces in the regional commands the *kandak* traversed generally provided satisfactory escorts. However, on the leg through the Poles' area of responsibility, one of the convoy vehicles struck an improvised explosive device. Consequently, the Poles refused to provide lead escort for the *kandak*. The impasse was resolved only by the timely arrival of a detachment from an Afghan Army *kandak* out of Garmsir. To add insult to injury, the embedded training team had to cajole the Poles to continue the escort at night. While grudgingly acceding to the necessity of providing escort, the Polish contingent simply had no heart for the mission.²⁰

The Many Facets of Transition

July marked the beginning of transition in Afghanistan, at least on some levels. The first key event was the change of command for the International Security Assistance Force. Prior to his departure, Gen David Petraeus made some remarks aimed at ameliorating Afghan concerns. Petraeus assured Afghan leaders that the US drawdown was a consequence of the progress the ANSF had made. He further reminded them that the drawdown was merely fulfilling the original surge timeline laid out by President Obama in December 2010. The withdrawal of US and coalition forces, though, would be matched by increasing Afghan lead for security. Finally, Petraeus offered his reassurance that the withdrawal was not precipitous but would be completed over the next 15 months. He assured the Afghans that it did not represent a change in strategy or to the overall campaign plan. Further, the withdrawal would not undermine the coalition commitment to Afghanistan after 2014, as the coalition would not abandon the ANSF before they were capable.²¹

On 18 July, Gen John Allen, USMC, relieved Petraeus as the ISAF commander. Allen outlined four priorities to his subordinate commanders. The first was to maintain the momentum of the campaign. Relentless pressure on the enemy would not only entail sustained combat operations but also include pressure on the insurgents through reintegration and unity of effort with diplomatic organizations.²²

ANSF development represented General Allen's second priority. Efforts would continue to focus on putting Afghans in the lead. However, Allen also emphasized the relationship between NTM-A and the IJC as partners in the development of the ANA and ANP, particularly in partnership and mentoring relationships. General Allen's third priority was to set the conditions for continued support for transition. Emphasizing that transition was part of the COIN campaign and not an end state, Allen stressed that the ISAF would be the "covering force" for completion of the process and a primary enabler of both security and governance.²³

Finally, Allen stressed that the ISAF needed to remain innovative and responsive to the changing environment. He cautioned against a status quo mentality, instead urging the ISAF to remain adaptive by "challenging existing assumptions" while also ensuring the efficient use of resources and business practices.²⁴

The ISAF's change of command was not the only aspect of transition emerging during July. On 21 July the first tranche of the formal transition process began in Herat in the west. General Caldwell represented the ISAF commander at ceremonies hosted by civilian and military leaders. Both ceremonies included speeches by Afghan officials highlighting the country's history and the importance of the transition of Herat City from coalition to Afghan responsibility. The ceremonies also afforded Afghan leaders the opportunity to recognize the accomplishments of the ANSF and its critical role in ensuring that transition endured.

While the rhetoric surrounding transition effused optimism, in reality no assurances to the Afghans could be guaranteed. The president's speech said as much, implying that the withdrawal and Afghan responsibility for the country's security would be complete not by the end of 2014 but "by 2014." Secondly, transition of security responsibility would not by itself ensure the security of Afghanistan. As in Vietnam, the long pole in the tent was not the North Vietnamese army but the government of South Vietnam. Its failure to gain the confidence and support of the people doomed the south to a speedy collapse after the US withdrawal in 1973. For the Afghans, the plagues of Kabul Bank, government corruption, Kabul's inability to provide services to the countryside, and Karzai's contentious relationship with the parliament illustrated that Afghanistan's fate ultimately rested in the hands of its political leadership.

For his part, General Caldwell attempted to give those assurances as part of battlefield circulations as he visited areas identified in the first tranche of transition. On 22 August, for example, he visited Bamiyan Province, which included a meeting with the country's sole female governor, Dr. Habiba Sarabi. The purpose of the visit was twofold. While Caldwell invited members of the IJC, the Regional Command-North staff, and others on his visit, he intentionally avoided courtesy calls and instead went directly to the governor. The visit's orchestration was more than symbolic. As Bamiyan had transitioned, the IJC and NTM-A were now in supporting roles.²⁵

Caldwell's second purpose in visiting the governor was to assure her on another potentially contentious point about transition. His visit was instrumental to relaying that the coalition was not cutting and running from the province but was still committed to supporting its security needs. As such, Governor Sarabi did not hesitate to ask for assistance on a variety of issues. She requested help with the efforts of

the US Agency for International Development to increase power generation, which she viewed as her greatest challenge. The governor was also concerned about the personal security of local leaders and their offices. She asked for an increase to the police *tashkil* (manning) as well as the establishment of a provincial response company, neither of which was in the coalition's fielding plan. Finally, Governor Sarabi accused Kabul of "penalizing" her province because it had shown so much progress.²⁶ Much of what the governor was asking for was well outside Caldwell's jurisdiction. Even the prospect of increasing the numbers of police assigned to Bamiyan was problematic given the relative stability of the province compared to that of the south, southwest, and east.

Caldwell's point for visiting Bamiyan was to convey the message that the transition of Afghan geography to an Afghan security lead was separate and distinct from transitioning the training mission. That promise, however, was becoming increasingly difficult to keep as the transition began to have implications for NTM-A, particularly its budget. To believe that domestic issues and war are distinct entities ignores those periods in American history when domestic politics or policies influenced military strategy.²⁷ An entrenched recession, coupled with the rise of Tea Party Republicans in Congress, signaled a shift in the political sights for the budget. The president's appointment of a supercommittee to craft congressionally mandated deficit reductions had serious implications for the DOD. At stake was \$500 billion of automatic reductions in addition to nearly \$350 billion of cuts already imposed on the department. The implications were not lost on the higher headquarters. During one ISAF morning stand-up briefing on the troubled Kabul Bank, deputy ISAF commander Lieutenant General Bucknall chided the briefer for his too pessimistic appraisal of the bank, noting by comparison that "the race is on. Who will run out of money first, the US government or the Kabul Bank?"²⁸

Bucknall's attempt at humor reflected the unrealistic underpinnings of future funding for ANSF development. NTM-A Programs staffers had developed budget plan assumptions based on the virtually open checkbook the Defense Department had given to Caldwell when he arrived in Afghanistan. The rosy scenario, though, was coming to an end, and the budget analysts in the Programs office knew it. Reducing US funding to the ANSF would jeopardize estimates of the nearly \$4 billion a year it would take to sustain the force beyond 2017. The Programs team made the even more problematic assumption that the

Afghans would pick up the slack. It ignored the inconvenient truth that the Afghan government would have to increase its annual revenues to \$4.25 billion to pay for its security forces and other government functions (see fig. 6.1).²⁹

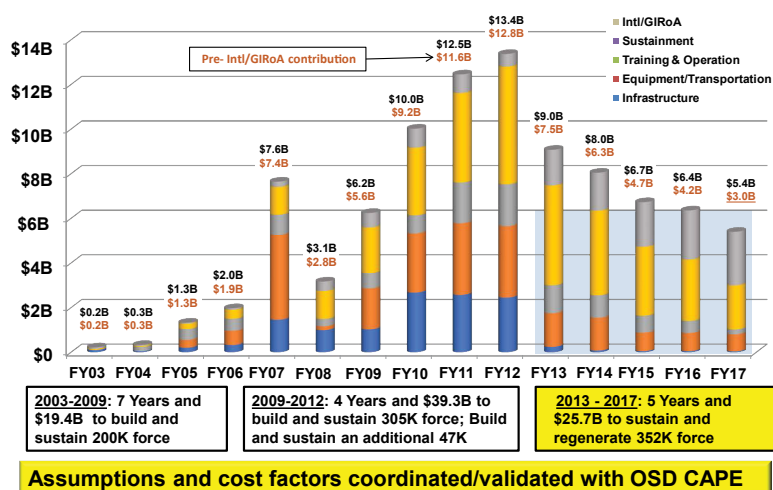


Figure 6.1. Afghan security forces funding FY 2003–17. (NTM-A, command briefing chart, 11 July 2011.)

Staff discussions with the Office of the Secretary of Defense confirmed Caldwell’s suspicion that NTM-A would not be immune from the budget axe. Consequently, Caldwell began looking for cuts in his budget that could be passed back to Congress. On 23 August, the Programs team passed to the commander several potential savings from the FY 2012 budget, which overall pointed to more than one billion dollars in savings. One week later, Caldwell reduced the NTM-A fiscal year 2012 budget by \$1.6 billion to \$11.2 billion. The reduction, outlined in a letter from Gen John Allen to the secretary of defense, made the current FY 2011 budget the high-water mark for ANSF funding.³⁰

There was, however, another less attractive but significant dimension to “transition” that emerged in the late summer to vex the command. For the first six months of 2011, NTM-A was able to convey its message on ANSF development with little interference. In June, though, the message changed abruptly. No amount of strategic

communication could upstage the message that President Obama conveyed to the American people, the international community, and Afghanistan. While couched in terms of “responsible withdrawal,” Obama’s underlying signal was quite clear; the war in Afghanistan, at least for the US, was coming to an end. The path might be open to debate, and the president was careful to convey his withdrawal message to imply that the US would not abandon Afghanistan. However, there was no doubt that the troops would come home in sufficient numbers to eventually make coalition-led offensive operations impossible.

Complementing the president’s speech and adding additional clutter to NTM-A’s messaging was a litany of skepticism about the costs of the war and its perceived benefits. Administration officials viewed the \$113 billion spent in FY 2011 and proposal for another \$107 billion the next year as “simply not sustainable,” with another senior administration official noting that “money is the new 800-pound gorilla.” Congress echoed administration concerns over spending on a war that seemed to have no end. Senator John Kerry characterized continued spending “on a massive military operation with no end in sight” as “fundamentally unsustainable.” Kerry’s remarks found proponents on both sides of the aisle, forcing newly appointed ambassador Ryan Crocker to admit that “we’re not out to clearly create a shining city on a hill” and Defense Secretary Robert Gates to acknowledge that “this is not a war without end” and that the “costs of these wars [are] coming down dramatically.”³¹

NTM-A’s senior leadership felt the first repercussions of Washington’s pushback while in the states on their media blitz in June. Returning from the tour, which included engagements with various think tanks and news organizations, Caldwell and his senior staff were surprisingly astonished that the questions they received focused predominantly on withdrawal. The NTM-A commander had scheduled several interviews with local Atlanta television stations as well as a CNN morning show. The intent was to “inform and educate” the public on the development of the ANA and ANP.³² However, the president’s speech led the NTM-A travel team to reconsider, or at least modify, its talking points to ensure that the speech did not overwhelm the NTM-A message. It was “important for [Fort Benning, Georgia] to hear of the ANSF development and progress especially in light of [the] POTUS announcement,” NTM-A’s strategic communications director noted. Back in Kabul, though, one thoughtful officer offered a different perspective. “If anybody on the [commander’s] team

thinks that the Columbus community gives a rat's ass about ANSF's progress," he observed, "I'm genuinely worried about their mental health."³³

Strategic communications problems persisted throughout the summer as print media focused increasingly on the ANSF. On 3 September, for example, Maria Abi-Habib of the *Wall Street Journal* wrote on corruption and negligent care at the National Military Hospital in Kabul. The problems identified in the article had been well known to the command and involved an IG audit months before. The command had taken measures to improve the quality of care at the hospital while also working to remove Gen Ahmad Zia Yaftali, the army's surgeon general, suspected of stealing pharmaceuticals from the hospital as well as other corrupt practices.³⁴

Several other articles appeared within the span of a week adding an air of skepticism about the prospects of a successful transition. Joshua Partlow of the *Washington Post* commented on the state of attrition in the ANA, noting that more than 24,000 soldiers had left the army in the first six months of 2011. Partlow cited many factors that NTM-A analysis had already identified as leading to attrition: lack of leave, poor living conditions, and corruption on the part of officers. Another article in the *New York Times* took critical aim at the failure of the ANA to recruit southern Pashtuns. Despite the advances made by the coalition in the south and southwest, Ray Rivera stated that the "influx of American troops" had "done little to ease concerns or lift recruitment." Even the impending arrival of the "iron mountain" of equipment could not escape scrutiny. Jerome Starkey of the *Australian* remarked that the cost of the ANSF in 2014 would be three times the annual income of the Afghan government. "An iron mountain of military hardware," Starkey noted, "may be mothballed on arrival."³⁵

Journalists' criticisms of the current state of ANSF attrition did lack some essential context. The area of attrition was certainly problematic. Issues cited in the Partlow article ignored a key point. While attrition was a problem in the ANSF, the unanticipated losses were not expected to slow the growth of the ANA to 195,000. On the other hand, the costs associated with attrition would significantly affect the ANA in the out-years as international funding tapered off. The cost of training and equipping a soldier was approximately \$7,000. At current attrition rates, the ANA was bleeding about \$250 million each year.³⁶ Money was really the only material solution that NTM-A could apply to solve the problem. No amount of classroom training

could develop Afghan Army leaders with the necessary professional compassion for their soldiers.

A slew of reports from the United Nations and other nongovernmental organizations added further interference to the command's strategic communications efforts. A Human Rights Watch report on 14 September criticized coalition efforts to build local defense militias. The report cited what it viewed as the historical tendency of arming local villagers as nothing more than providing direct support to local warlords. In other cases, local defense initiatives led to various human rights abuses. The report was aimed at the Afghan Local Police (ALP), the most recent version of local defense against the insurgency. While NTM-A's contribution to the ALP was tangential, the report did note that ALP training illustrated what European officials viewed critically as reflecting an excess effort on paramilitary training within the ANP as a whole. The report was not wholly unfavorable, as it also outlined recent NTM-A initiatives to broaden police training to include more emphasis on civil policing.³⁷ A second report, released by the Open Society Foundation five days later, focused on coalition night raids. It acknowledged that the ISAF had improved its analysis in planning and was far more careful to minimize collateral effects from the raids. It also argued, though, that the night raids remained extremely controversial because the adverse effects on Afghan society were not balanced against their tactical utility. Again, NTM-A did not have a direct role in the report, aside from an indirect criticism of the attrition problem in the ANA. The report was yet another filter against which the NTM-A message had to compete.³⁸

The increasingly critical tone of reporting was in a sense a consequence of the tenth anniversary of 9/11. Print media, gauging both the public mood and the president's June speech, understandably moved in the same direction. Even in Afghanistan, where the anniversary of the 11 September 2001 attack is largely unknown, many Afghans looked upon the coalition as invaders rather than liberators.³⁹ In a broader sense, the reports demonstrated that Americans had grown sufficiently tired of 10 years of war and its costs to change the calculus of the president and Congress.⁴⁰

For the most part, NTM-A ensured that its strategic communications plan conveyed a consistent message to audiences it believed could help the mission. The tangible effects of the communication strategy, however, were less easily demonstrated—that is until November, when the “message” went off the rails. The previous week,

NTM-A members had been in Washington for the command's semi-annual Program Management Review. The event gave NTM-A the opportunity to discuss the state of the ANSF with a variety of stakeholders in the Defense Department. It also allowed key leaders to engage with think tanks and the press. On 3 November the deputy commander for programs, Maj Gen Peter Fuller, gave an interview with *Politico* reporter Tim Mak generating the kind of publicity the command did not need. While the context of the article focused on the challenges inherent in equipping the ANSF, Fuller went beyond the command's script by making comments directly critical of the Afghan government and particularly of President Karzai. He characterized Karzai's remarks that Afghanistan would side with Pakistan in a war with the United States as "erratic," adding that the president's comments ignored the coalition's significant contribution to the ANSF. As to the Afghans' persistent demands for high-end weapons, Fuller noted, "You can teach a man how to fish, or you can give them a fish. . . . We're giving them fish while they're learning, and they want more fish! [They say,] 'I like swordfish, how come you're giving me cod?' Guess what? Cod's on the menu today."⁴¹

The subtext of Fuller's remarks was intended to convey the challenges of modernizing the ANSF, particularly with his sense that the Afghans persisted in asking for weapons that they could neither afford nor maintain.⁴² While Fuller attempted to put the genie back in the bottle by the end of the interview—noting that Afghan leaders were "starting to come around" to the extent of the sacrifice America was making in Afghanistan—the damage was done. The ISAF's response was swift. Gen John Allen relieved Fuller and issued a press release distancing the coalition from Fuller's remarks. At issue, though, was not the factual content of the remarks but Fuller's candor. Even in this respect, it could be argued that his comments on President Karzai ignored the place of Afghan interests. The fact that Afghan leaders would not stop asking for tanks and jets was perhaps less about ingratitude and more about conflicting national and cultural interests. From the coalition's perspective, it was not in Afghanistan's interest to have weapons irrelevant to the current fight or within Afghanistan's ability to sustain. To the Afghans, however, tanks and jets were less about the current war than the post-2014 environment, when Afghan leaders would have to demonstrate their political legitimacy to the people. To them, the symbolic undertones of offensive weapons were a fundamental component of exhibiting government

strength. Whether the weapons could defend Afghanistan from an external threat was immaterial. Tanks and jets were meant to signal to the Afghan people that the government had that capability.

Simply put, the value of strategic communications has to be weighed against factors that the communicators have absolutely no control over. Competing messages can distract an audience. The communicator may deem information to be pertinent that the recipient does not. Or the audience may be incapable of understanding the message itself. NTM-A's conveyance of "progress," difficult enough to prove in itself, simply could not overcome the momentum generated by President Obama's June address, polling pointing out American war fatigue, or command leaders' missteps with the press.

The higher headquarters did not seem to appreciate the limitations of its messaging power. The greatest obstacle was trying to relay a message to a people culturally disinclined to listen to, yet alone believe, what Westerners were saying. Both the ISAF and NTM-A had taken great pains to get Afghan leadership to the forefront. Yet their efforts had proven only partially successful. Perhaps the ISAF commander's sense of a communications vacuum, and fear of the Taliban filling it, informed his attempts to engage Afghan audiences. Following a series of bombings during the Eid-ul-Adha holiday, General Allen published a news release condemning the acts and message released by Taliban commander Mullah Omar. "Every single Taliban and insurgent fighter," the general said, "should take a moment to reflect on just what is at stake, and whether the fight against peace is worth it." From a Western perspective, the ISAF commander's comments made complete sense. But how reasonable were the remarks of a Westerner, and more importantly a nonbeliever, to Afghans? How would Afghans perceive the ISAF commander's attempt to interpret the Eid message of Mullah Omar, particularly when polling suggested that most Afghans viewed the coalition as occupiers? And while the title of the news release noted that the ISAF was joining President Karzai's condemnation, the press release did not mention the Afghan president's remarks.⁴³

NTM-A's Western-centric approach to security force assistance only added further complication to the historical forces that had been shaping Afghanistan for centuries—a brew that created a challenge to the command's vision statement over the first six months of 2011. The ANA and ANP were well on their way to reaching the targeted growth goals. The army had trained and qualified over a thousand instruc-

tors while the police qualified 431. Officer development across both forces was proceeding apace—with full classes at the National Military Academy of Afghanistan, Officer Candidate School, and the Mujahideen Integration Course—while courses designed to produce noncommissioned officers (NCO) were also running at capacity. All 12 of the ANA's branch schools were operational, with a literacy program providing some level of reading and writing proficiency to incoming soldiers and police. Finally, NTM-A was making inroads in accounting for vehicles issued to the ANSF and was working on a commensurate accountability program for weapons and sensitive items, such as night-vision devices.⁴⁴

Nevertheless, lingering problems only served to diminish the breadth of the command's accomplishments and signaled that the path to transition of security was uncertain. While overall growth was on track, an extensive shortfall of officers and NCOs remained. Even those growth numbers were in question, as explained further in chapters examining ANA and ANP development. Secondly, the train-the-trainer program was still in a nascent state. Many of those soldiers and police received the lowest level of training qualification. Very few were able to teach Afghan soldiers and police how to do training, and only 135 soldiers had reached the top level of training certification. Related to the trainer shortfalls were the limitations of a literacy program that had to first bring up the army and police to a Level 1 reading proficiency before even attempting to move them to the third level.⁴⁵

Finally, despite NTM-A's efforts to inculcate an “ethos of stewardship” into the ANSF, the Afghans' inclination to “use and discard” demonstrated that developing this critical skill set, well habituated in the Western military culture, would take time—if it could be achieved at all. Adding to the friction of ANSF development was a factor that most in the organization were aware of but at pains to address—that of accountability. Senior staffers agreed that no line of effort could be achieved unless the Afghans were allowed to fail. Yet the imperatives of transition kept these ideas in the world of rhetoric.⁴⁶

In a late-August interview with NATO TV, ISAF commander Gen John Allen offered what could only be seen as a mixed review of the state of the ANSF. He acknowledged that newly created ANA units were not performing as well as more senior formations but added that newly formed army units had a distinct advantage in literacy training, which he viewed as a positive sign for the ANSF. Beyond the

scope of reading and writing, however, the interview offered little in the way of empirical evidence on the state of readiness in the army and police.⁴⁷

Factors Complicating the Vision and Transition

NTM-A's "Afghan National Security Force Progress Report for August 2011" provided an empirical basis for Allen's circumspect interview. Despite an estimated shortfall of 480 coalition trainers, force generation and training continued at an impressive pace. The army and police exceeded their fiscal year end-strength goals and had moved beyond 305,000. ANSF recruiting remained a bright spot, with the army enlisting nearly 5,400 soldiers and 3,167 new police recruits. In fact, recruiting for the Afghan National Police was so successful that it had exceeded its manning levels for basic patrolmen, permitting NTM-A to reduce the number of incoming patrolmen and focus on some 24,000 legacy policemen who had entered the force prior to the establishment of the training command. Despite acknowledgements that the Ministry of Defense had "overstated" its growth numbers, the command was confident that even with an NTM-A "adjustment," the army would still meet its growth goals by October.⁴⁸

The report also noted initiatives to increase the numbers of "competent leaders." The Afghan government reached an agreement with the United Kingdom to establish an officer candidate school course similar to the UK's Sandhurst to train an additional 1,200 officers beginning in 2013. Newly established police training facilities in Wardak and Mazar-e-Sharif provinces, complemented by a new police training program in Sivas, Turkey, would provide several thousand new officers to close the ANP's leader gap. Army and police training programs would continue their focus on professionalizing the force as well as further creating the cohort of Afghan trainers necessary to transition the training program to Afghan lead.⁴⁹

Numbers, though, could not mask the fact that successful transition depended as much, if not more, on the Afghans' commitment to NTM-A's training efforts. Assessments in this area were at best mixed. Attrition remained the most pressing problem hindering a successful transition. Attrition for the army had dipped slightly in July to 2.2 percent per month—a significant drop from 3 percent the previous year. That trend did not continue, however. Following Ramadan and

the Eid holiday in August, attrition rose to 3.1 percent—an increase over the previous five months that accounted for nearly one-third of ANA end strength over the year. While the command projected that the army would have an adequate number of officers to meet its end-strength goals, the gap in NCOs was increasing, with a projected shortfall of over 58,000 by November.⁵⁰ For the first time, the command had to acknowledge that attrition from the training base was higher than had been previously thought. A large part of the problem had to do with ANA reporting, which NTM-A noted had failed to effectively track losses during training.⁵¹ Anecdotal reports, however, suggested that Afghans who left basic training were simply replaced by newly recruited soldiers who were in holding facilities awaiting entry into the basic training course. The ruse prevented any accuracy in reporting. More problematic, though, was the fact that Afghan recruits were placed in training at various intervals throughout the process, compromising the quality of their training.

As the summer ended and NTM-A approached its second anniversary, an air of transition began to envelop the staff. The White House had announced that Lt Gen Daniel Bolger would relieve Caldwell sometime in the fall. General Caldwell subsequently instructed the staff to focus its efforts on preparing the necessary reports that would provide the incoming commander an assessment of NTM-A's ongoing efforts and future plans. Caldwell also provided the staff with an extensive laundry list of 28 issues that required updating, such as the officer and NCO gaps in the Afghan Uniformed Police, ANSF attrition, and the incoming “iron mountain” of equipment for the Afghan security forces.⁵² Subsequent deep dives from the deputy commanders addressed some of these items; the shortness of time would allow many to fall by the wayside.

There was enough empirical evidence to reflect incredible success for the command in its first two years. Caldwell established the command with a handful of US and coalition officers. By the time of his departure, NTM-A stood at over 6,000 men and women from nearly 50 countries. Their efforts had made considerable strides in the development of the ANSF. Both ANA and ANP forces were well supplied; they had over 58,000 vehicles from light trucks to armored Humvees, nearly 500,000 weapons from M-16s to howitzers, and 230,000 pieces of communications gear. Every province had training sites that could accommodate tens of thousands of Afghan soldiers and police daily, with the recently opened National Police Training Center in Wardak

Province able to train 3,000 police recruits on any given day. Supporting the training and operational forces was an infrastructure program that amounted to \$11.4 billion, with over 51 percent of the construction projects either completed or in work.⁵³

Yet what progress the command had made in fulfilling its 2011 vision statement could easily be undone by the many challenges that it and the ANSF faced. While overall growth remained healthy, attrition remained a nagging problem—particularly in the ANA. Although a jump in August attrition was more than likely due to the Ramadan holiday period, attrition from the ANA still stood at 2.6 percent monthly and over 31 percent annually. The “accelerate leader development” aspect of the 2011 vision was also lagging. NTM-A army trainers reported shortages of over 3,000 officers and 9,000 NCOs in the army, while their police counterparts noted a deficit of over 12,000 NCOs. NTM-A police trainers also indicated that the ANP still included over 24,000 policemen and numerous NCOs who had somehow avoided training altogether.⁵⁴

A second looming problem lay in the eventual transition of the training mission to the Afghans. While 12 of 28 army training sites had reached a level where Afghans were conducting training with minimal coalition assistance, none had transitioned to full Afghan control. NTM-A was only beginning to develop the next echelons of Afghan soldiers and police who could train their own and manage the institutions the coalition had built for them. Only 135 soldiers had reached a master instructor level, a competency allowing them to train Afghan trainers. The police had none at that level, leading NTM-A to conclude that it would still require another two years to train enough Afghans to the highest competency level. Much of the responsibility for the problem lay with the Afghans themselves. Leaders in the field proved reluctant to release soldiers and policemen from operations to participate in train-the-trainer programs. Another problem, though, lay outside NTM-A’s control. Once soldiers and police were trained and assigned, it was up to the IJC to continue their mentoring. Theoretically, it would be up to coalition mentors in the field to prod their Afghan counterparts to participate in these training programs. However, in October a shortage remained of 45 mentoring teams for the ANA and 218 for the police.⁵⁵

Literacy training was another of the elements of the 2011 vision statement whose future was not secure. By the end of August, over 102,000 soldiers and police had undergone some form of literacy

training, and the staff estimated that by Caldwell's departure over half of the ANSF would be literate to Level 1. However, the literacy training program was not without shortcomings. The command relied on Afghan contractors to provide not only the training but also the empirical evidence used in command briefings. Although this information was channeled through NTM-A's force integration directorate, it was virtually impossible for the command to verify the accuracy of reporting. Command briefings consistently advertised an ANSF literacy rate of 14 percent yet did not reference exactly where the number came from or how it was determined. In fact, literacy rates in the ANSF appeared to be far lower for incoming recruits—"way under 5%" and "probably more like 1%" for incoming recruits, according to the command's force integration directorate. By including Afghans in commissioning programs and by "squinting just right," the literacy rate could be raised to nearly the advertised 14 percent.⁵⁶ Perhaps the extent of the literacy problem in Afghanistan became most evident during a morning staff meeting in June. The assistant commanding general for army development noted that half the National Military Academy's recent graduates could not read the slips of paper with their follow-on branch school assignments.⁵⁷

Budget uncertainties further complicated the command's future. By spring, deficit hawks in the United States—enabled by a public tiring of the war—were aiming at the extraordinary amounts of money devoted to the war in general and NTM-A in particular. By fall, the full-spectrum COIN strategy was falling victim to the realistic expectation of what could be accomplished in Afghanistan. Caldwell's attempt to stave off further cuts by offering his own savings did little to soften the call for more dramatic cuts to accompany the troop reductions from the president's surge recovery initiative. More importantly, senior leaders in the command were recognizing the cultural dimensions underlying the disparity between NTM-A means and Afghan ends. Commenting on reductions in spending on training and equipment, Programs director Maj Gen Peter Fuller admitted the central argument of this examination. "We realized," he commented to *LA Times* reporter David Cloud in September, "we were starting to build an army based on Western army standards, and we realized [the Afghans] don't need that capability."⁵⁸

Finally, NTM-A no longer owned the monopoly when it came to strategic communications. Its resonance began to wane in the spring with the *Rolling Stone* article and President Obama's surge recovery

speech. Journalists looked at the war with increasing skepticism. Even congressional representatives solidly behind the war began to show signs of Afghanistan fatigue. Twenty-seven senators wrote to the president on 15 June requesting a “strong shift in strategy and sizeable and sustained reduction of U.S. military forces in Afghanistan.” They characterized those who still advocated a strong US presence in the country as “misguided,” pointing out that the “costs of prolonging the war outweigh the benefits.”⁵⁹ Even one of the command’s most stalwart advocates seemed to be tiring. During a visit, a congressional delegation headed by Senator Carl Levin asked some particularly pointed questions. Levin asked which NATO countries had yet to fulfill their promised contributions of trainers. Another senator pointed to a slide indicating the number of Afghan trainers and wanted to know how many NTM-A trainers had been re-missioned or redeployed as a result. Senator Jeff Merkell looked at the envisioned 352,000-man ANSF and asked how the Afghans could sustain such a force without extensive international support, implying what Rep. John Mica had explicitly warned the staff about months before. Merkell went even further, commenting to the press five days later that he was “pessimistic” the US could transform Afghanistan into a “functional and honest country.” He further noted that this recent trip had only strengthened his belief that the pace of the withdrawal should be quickened.⁶⁰ Congressional skepticism only fueled the increasingly critical tone of journalists, who observed that the war at home was represented in “fleeting, sentimental, and sanitized glimpses” while also hinting that the White House was exploring how to quicken the pace of transition well ahead of 2014. The reporting had material consequences for the staff as well, as Maria Abi-Habib’s report on corruption and mismanagement at the Dawood National Military Hospital instigated an investigation by the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee.⁶¹

In the winter of his last year in command, General Caldwell laid out a vision that he believed would resonate well beyond his departure. Using terminology that 1960s modernists would have easily recognized, he stated that growth of the ANSF would “accelerate” beyond 305,000 to 352,000 soldiers. Further, the ranks would see a consonant increase in both NCOs and officers to lead the new legions of the ANA and ANP. Afghans would learn how to care for the mountains of equipment issued to them and how to distribute equipment to the op-

erating forces. Finally, NTM-A's "inform and educate" strategic messaging plan would ensure continued support from home and abroad.

The plan that appeared sound early on, however, failed to weather the factors that sought to unravel it. Caldwell could not protect NTM-A from the personnel reductions coming from "surge recovery." Growth to 352,000 became a mounting concern as it became more evident that the Afghans could not pick up the inevitable slack from a US tiring of the war and congressional calls for reductions in spending. Closing the deficits in the number of officers and NCOs would take time, and in the case of the ANP, would require that the Afghans manage their security forces far more diligently. Attrition proved a problem that Western expertise could not solve. Finally, the message that early in 2011 seemed so clear and unambiguous became just one of many competing messages on Afghanistan. Voices from outside the command, from the president and Congress to news journalists and polling, increasingly reduced the fidelity and resonance of NTM-A strategic communications.

Transition was occurring but not necessarily in the ways that NTM-A had originally conceived. The command had envisioned an orderly process that would transfer the training mission to the Afghans by the end of 2014. Yet what became increasingly apparent was that the ground underneath the command was shifting faster than planned. By November, the vision statement had blurred considerably. It would not be long after the "transition" of command of NTM-A for it to be erased completely.

Notes

(All notes appear in shortened form. For full details, see the appropriate entry in the bibliography.)

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Chapter 7

The Afghan National Army

The Limits of Professionalism

Craig C. Felker

The Afghan National Army's (ANA) doctrinal manual—ANA-1, *The Afghan National Army*—states that Afghan soldiers and leaders act on the values of loyalty to the constitution, nation, and Afghan citizens in their “commitment to national service,” “professional excellence,” and “obedience to civilian authority.” The 12-page document characterizes the army as a tool of national defense yet at the same time capable of being an offensive combat force to “keep the initiative in warfighting, build momentum quickly, and win decisively.” Achieving victory would require the ANA to act “decisively,” “seiz[e] territory held by the enemy, degrade his will to win,” and “close with and destroy aggressor forces through maneuver and precision direct and indirect fires.” To the authors of ANA-1, close combat with the highly trained and patriotic Afghan Army would leave only two outcomes: “destruction or surrender.”¹

The language in ANA-1 would not surprise any graduate of the US Army's Command and General Staff College. But would an Afghan soldier appreciate the virtues the doctrine ascribes to the ANA? The country's history would suggest otherwise, as the notion of an Afghan “nation” and the security forces necessary to protect it lacked deep roots. Since its inception in the eighteenth century, Afghan nationhood was typically a pretense to rally support to fight wars with outsiders. Afghan rulers often had to rally tribal militias to offset the deficiencies of a poorly led and paid conscripted national army. Even then, nationhood and Islam were inextricably linked to further incite the more individualistic tribesmen to action beyond their lands. It was the United States and its coalition partners, not the Afghans, that facilitated Afghan president Hamid Karzai's rise to power, crafted a Western-leaning Afghan constitution, secured elections, and were building the security forces to protect the country. Western money, weapons, and professional expertise were diligently applied to developing indigenous security forces capable of relieving the coalition by the end of 2014 and continuing the fight against the Taliban. NATO

Training Mission–Afghanistan (NTM-A) was the medium through which the Afghan Army and Afghan Air Force (AAF) would be recruited, trained, equipped, and deployed to the field. By 2011 the training command had surpassed all previous efforts in spectacular fashion. But NTM-A was also pouring Afghan soldiers and airmen into a Western mold. Gen George Patton would have nodded approvingly at the decision to build a “well-trained and equipped, highly motivated and patriotically oriented force.”² However, these were Afghans, not Americans. The Afghan Army and Afghan Air Force would test the limits of modernization.

Laying the Foundation for Professionalism

In December 2010 the ANA totaled 148,352 personnel, including 18,764 officers and 38,927 noncommissioned officers (NCO). Maj Gen Gary Patton, US Army, deputy commander for ANA development, was confident that the current training infrastructure had the necessary throughput to reach the October 2011 force level of 174,000 and growth beyond 174,000 if approved. The training capacity, though, experienced shortfalls in two areas. Officer growth would lag by approximately 3,961 while the army would also be short 8,282 NCOs by October 2011. Increases in throughput in the out-years, however, projected those shortages to be relieved for officers by June 2013 and for NCOs by March 2014.³

Despite these shortcomings, the ANA had grown to the extent that Patton could focus on the NTM-A 2011 strategy of laying the foundation for professionalism. The 2011 annual training capacity would permit a throughput of 2,300 officers, 4,000 NCOs, and 14,000 graduates of Basic Warrior Training. All 12 branch schools were expected to be fully operational by June, with an annual graduation of 4,735 soldiers. Including the basic training facilities, the Afghan National Army Training Command boasted a curriculum of 251 courses covering virtually every type of position generally found in a modern, Western army and air force.⁴ Additionally, 20,000 soldiers per year would be involved in literacy training, either at Level 1 or above. To help address officer shortfalls, the ninth and tenth Officer Candidate School companies would begin in January, with two more companies online by March.⁵

Recognizing that training capacity alone would not build the necessary foundation for professionalism, Patton introduced several initiatives that would be implemented in 2011. NTM-A's emphasis on creating an infantry-centric, counterinsurgency-focused army—at least in numbers—had been largely achieved by the end of 2010. The focus in 2011 would be fielding the forces to sustain the army's operational capability. The 2011 fielding plan envisioned an increase of six infantry battalions; 12 headquarters, combat logistics, and combat support battalions; and additional route clearance companies, military police, and intelligence companies. It also emphasized reducing attrition and increasing retention to improve the percentages of Afghan reenlistments to 70 percent. To improve retention in the NCO ranks, promotion and pay to staff sergeant was conditioned on graduation from the Team Leader's Course, with increased accountability on operational units to ensure that the course's quotas were filled.⁶

Implementing “Year of the Afghan Trainer” Goals

Patton's strategy for 2011 also reflected NTM-A's overarching theme that year, Year of the Afghan Trainer. All 12 branch schools would reach full operational capacity by June. Seventy-two percent of Afghan trainer requirements across the force were scheduled to be met by June 2011, achieving an 80 percent fill by December. Patton wanted efforts directed toward developing and implementing standardized train-the-trainer policies of instruction and accelerating training certification. Finally, he hoped to develop and implement a trainer quality control program overseen by the Afghan National Training Center headquarters.

Canadian brigadier general David Naismith, responsible for ANA training under Patton, further refined the general's priorities. First, he emphasized that the Afghans maximize attendance at the courses designated to train Afghans to be the trainers. Second, leadership schools and courses would also be filled to their maximum capacity while instructional curricula at all schools would be reviewed and improved. The third priority was to integrate branch school training to more rapidly provide enablers to the fielded forces. Literacy training would also be expanded into the basic training course for all classes in Kabul and across the regional training centers. The fourth priority was to establish permanent regional military training centers

in Gamberi, Gardez, Shorabak, and Shindand provinces, while also forming permanent branch school locations in Kandahar and Mazar-e-Sharif and additional schools in Kabul. The final priority was to assist with the development and utilization of the ANA logistics system.⁷

One ANA program that pointed to the future of professionalization was the National Military Academy of Afghanistan (NMAA), the envisioned ANA equivalent of West Point. The number of applicants to the four-year degree-granting military academy rose steadily from 2008, averaging approximately 2,000 applicants for a class. The incoming Class of 2015, however, drew 4,650 applicants for the 604 positions available. The large pool of applicants was credited to a more robust recruiting effort by defense ministry recruiting teams, which visited every province in the country and spoke with the top high school candidates. These candidates were invited to the NMAA in November 2010 to take qualifying exams and the physical aptitude test. The admission process was completely transparent; decision briefings on candidates were conducted without using the candidates' names. The final slate of candidates selected for admission reflected the ethnic diversity of the country while also ensuring representation from every province.⁸ The NMAA also ensured that the nonselected candidates were offered the opportunity to apply for other army commissioning or NCO programs or with the Afghan National Police.

The Afghan National Army reached other professionalization milestones in January. The 124 Logistics Branch School graduates were now assigned to the 205th Corps Logistics Battalion. Additionally, graduates from the Engineering Branch School included 41 soldiers trained in explosive ordnance disposal—many of whom were slated to help form the core of specialists for the three route clearance companies scheduled to complete training in January. Finally, 33 ANA officers graduated from the 11-week Legal Branch School Course. Of this cadre, three graduates were retained to become course instructors.⁹

By the end of January, the army training pipeline had widened significantly. At the week's end, 24,164 soldiers were in training—the most since the establishment of NTM-A. In addition to the graduation of 1,354 recruits from Basic Warrior Training on 27 January, graduations were held across the regional training sites in other various courses.¹⁰ In mid-January, 166 soldiers graduated from the pre-branch-school literacy course—with 81 percent passing at the third-

grade level—and advanced to follow-on specialty branch school training in areas such as signal, supply clerk, engineer, and military police.

Soon after NTM-A commander Lt Gen William Caldwell published the NTM-A vision statement for 2011, Patton's team put together its plan to support the stated goal of Year of the Afghan Trainer. Patton unveiled several key initiatives during an Army deep dive on 18 February. The first involved the development of an ANA instructor hierarchy. Patton introduced five *sathas* or levels of training proficiency. The *sathas* ranged from the lowest position of apprentice up to NMAA instructor. The highest level that most ANA trainers would reach was master instructor, when they then would teach as well as plan training programs and oversee Afghan instructors. Applying current training capacity to the matrix, Patton predicted that by the end of 2011 approximately 1,967 trainers would attain a Satha 2 (Level 2), while 492 Afghans would achieve the master instructor designation. Patton was careful to couch his estimates based on the ANA filling its instructor billets, filling class seats to full capacity, and most importantly, keeping attrition within manageable limits.¹¹

A second and related issue concerned grandfathering long-serving ANA trainers with the requisite experience but lacking formal instructor courses. Patton identified several criteria for grandfathering. Instructors must have taught for at least two class rotations and at least six months. They would also need to pass the school commandant's assessment. Finally, a formal report had to be generated as evidence of completion of the first two criteria. Approximately 244 soldiers already screened by senior ANA and coalition trainers were awarded a Satha 2, with some grandfather rights already applied.¹²

The third army training initiative involved standardization of training instruction. As with the police, instruction for army soldiers was being conducted in different formats across the training base. Patton proposed two training tracks for junior and senior instructors. The basic course for an instructor qualifying at Satha 2 or 3 would consist of a three-week program covering instructor techniques and concepts and how to deliver school-specific training. Basic instructor techniques and general instructor knowledge were further broken down along lines of core and professional skills. Basic instructor training would focus on core skills, such as developing lectures, practicing lesson delivery, evaluating, and improving military literacy. General instructor knowledge would emphasize professional aspects such as ANA values, duties and responsibilities, and accountability.¹³

The qualification process for master instructor (Satha 4) was envisioned as emphasizing an increased level of instructor and training management skills. The training management module included developing learning objectives, planning and scheduling, evaluation, and military literacy. To cultivate the ability of master instructors to provide higher-level training skills, the second module would focus on areas such as communication, counseling, and range of instruction.¹⁴

The final two initiatives involved incentivizing instructor duty and quality control. While broaching the notion of instructor pay was viewed as a future initiative, Patton identified several nonmonetary incentives—such as badges and ball caps—to distinguish instructors. To ensure that the instructor cadre maintained training standards, an army staff review process would be developed to track an instructor's professional ability, attitude, and reliability.¹⁵

While building a cadre of Afghan instructors was one key item in General Caldwell's vision statement, it was just the first step to further cultivate the Afghans' ability to develop and manage their own training systems. Consequently, it was envisioned that as more Afghans entered the training centers, coalition trainers would begin filling understaffed schools or training Master Skills-qualified Afghan instructors on systems management.

While still focused on the training of Afghans for the fielded force, NTM-A's efforts were also moving toward developing the cadre of Afghans with the skills to take over a training organization that had, at any one time, over 10,000 Afghan soldiers in some form of training at facilities across the country. The prospect was challenging as even ANA training facilities under NTM-A control showed mixed results. Evidence could be seen in summary reports on army units graduating from the Consolidated Fielding Center (CFC) in Kabul. This nine-week course married all the elements of an army *kandak* (battalion), equipped the unit, provided additional training for the officers, and then put the battalion through a final exercise to grade its readiness for the field. *Kandak* 6/1/215, for example, was an infantry battalion slated for duty in the southwest. The unit graduated from the CFC with a commander's "capability milestone" rating of CM-3, identifying the *kandak* as "dependent on Coalition Forces for success." The battalion was further rated as "trained" in the task of evaluating and evacuating casualties; "partially trained" in 12 other tasks not identified in the summary; and "untrained" in duties such as reporting tactical information, reacting to an improvised explosive device, implementing

administrative functions, and managing supplies.¹⁶ Several months later British Army brigadier David Maddan, who had recently arrived to take over NTM-A's Combined Training Advisory Group for the army (CTAG-A), assessed Kandak 4/1/215, slated to deploy to Helmand Province, as "well above the average" of previously fielded battalions. He observed that the senior officers, most notably the executive and operations officers, were "intelligent" and by far the best officers on the staff. But Maddan also cited deficiencies in the unit, particularly leadership of the reconnaissance company commander whom he rated as the weakest of all the battalion's commanders. Despite some shortcomings—which Maddan believed could be resolved with continued partnering—the battalion graduated with officer strength at 86 percent, noncommissioned officer manning at 76 percent for senior NCOs and 80 percent for E-5s and below, and 126 percent manning for privates. The *kandak* was supplied with 81 percent of its vehicle requirements, 64 percent of communications equipment, and 98 percent of its weapons.¹⁷

Embedded within the progress, though, were issues that could undermine NTM-A's herculean efforts. One was attrition. Despite the achievements of Kandak 6/1/215 during its CFC training, 24 percent of the battalion had gone AWOL, while a route clearance company suffered an AWOL rate of 31 percent in April. Maddan indicated several reasons for the problem, such as pay issues for soldiers arriving without proper orders. Perhaps most disturbing were AWOLs from units deployed to the south and southwest—the regions experiencing the hardest fighting. By March, Maddan noted that the AWOL rate for CFC graduates had climbed to over 17 percent.¹⁸

Recognizing Limits to Professionalizing the Force

The overall state of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) in 2009 was in a major sense responsible for the current status of its logistics corps. The staff prioritized building infantry battalions first at the expense of enablers, with the thinking that NTM-A would be in Afghanistan long after 2014 to put the rest of the puzzle together. The problem was that by late spring of 2011, the pressure was on to move up transition timelines and consequently draw down coalition assistance to Afghanistan. Additionally, in many ways the development of a functional logistic and facilities engineering capacity best reflected

the limitations of coalition efforts to modernize the army and police. The problems were societal, cultural, economic, and technological. Logistic automation was mostly limited to Kabul. Hand-carried requests and faxes were used to move supplies more often than the vaunted very small aperture terminal (VSAT) system, a satellite and web-based system for reporting vehicle maintenance issues and ordering replacement parts. The sparse number of literate Afghans challenged what in the West would be the critical yet relatively mundane tasks of maintaining property books. The fielded forces had scant trained logisticians, no programs for professional development, and few NCOs to manage and lead at the intermediate level.¹⁹

The limits of developing professional skill sets—particularly those aimed at Caldwell's focus on stewardship—were apparent during a battlefield circulation in June. Caldwell and senior members of his staff were in the United States visiting various think tanks and doing television interviews, along with taking some leave. The absence of key staff afforded the opportunity for a team to head to the countryside and see firsthand the fruits of NTM-A's labors. The prospect of leaving the relative security of Eggers was more than offset by the importance of seeing what was going on, albeit in the battlespace.

We headed to the military side of Kabul International Airport and boarded a German C-130 for a short flight up to Camp Marmal, a coalition base outside of Mazar-e-Sharif and headquarters of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) Joint Command's Regional Command-North. From there we boarded a Molson Air SH-3 Sea King for a short hop to Camp Mike Spann, the home of NTM-A's Regional Support Command-North.

The following day we headed out in an armored convoy to visit Hazrat-el-Sultan, an ANA battalion-sized forward operating base about an hour and a half east of Mazar-e-Sharif. We drove along Ring Road, the highway connecting the country's major urban centers and constituting most of its paved roads. Although the ride was a bit uncomfortable (which was fine considering the discomfort was offset by the vehicle's protective features), the drive permitted an extensive view of the countryside. For about the first hour we drove through some incredibly fertile ground, fed by runoff from the surrounding mountains. There were extensive tracts of farmland and orchards, and a stream ran along most of the road. But when we got on the other side of the mountains, the landscape resembled the movie

Dune. By the time we arrived at the base, we were in the middle of nowhere. I was waiting for the giant sandworms to rise up.

The tour of the facility was both fascinating and disturbing. The ANA battalion had occupied the place for just a couple of months, and the \$3.8 million facility was already in a significant state of disrepair. Only 500 soldiers were on the base out of the complement of 800. The *kandak* commander explained that the missing were on leave. Perhaps the state of the camp's facilities had something to do with the absent soldiers. Many of the air conditioning units for the tents were inoperative. In one tent, the Afghans had the heat on despite outside temperatures of well over 100 degrees. The immediate question that came to mind was why units were installed at all, given that most if not all the soldiers had never experienced the comforts of air conditioning. Soldiers never exposed to such technology are unlikely to be able to maintain it. The consequence was broken units, which was nothing to the soldiers anyway.

The lack of cool air was not the only problem evident in the camp. The pumps providing the flushing water for the soldiers' latrines had burned out, as the Afghans had not bothered to turn them off when the water supply had been interrupted. That problem did not prevent the troops from using the latrines, which, without flushing water, were full of fecal matter. Adding to the predicament, the latrines were inundated with flies that more than likely were traveling between the latrines and the outdoor cooking area. We wondered why there was an outdoor cooking area—at the time consisting of a single Afghan chopping up chicken and throwing the pieces into a large pot under a fire—when NTM-A had built an indoor cooking facility. Closer inspection of the propane-fueled cooking facility revealed that it had recently caught fire and was no longer functional. It did not appear that much thought had been put into making the cook shed “Afghan right,” so the soldiers had abandoned it and set up a fire pit outside.

The issue, though, was not just with the Afghans. Theoretically, all fielded Afghan Army and police units were to have US and coalition mentor units teach them how to perform like Western army and police forces. In this case, the particular coalition operational mentoring and liaison team (OMLT) was nowhere to be found. And it did not appear as if it had been at the facility for a while. If the team had been at the base, its activities there were not evident. To operational commanders, killing insurgents was higher on the list of priorities than teaching Afghan officers and NCOs that they should be inspecting

barracks, fixing latrines, ordering supplies, and maintaining their facilities. In the end, some units received good mentorship, some received little or poor mentorship, and some units were simply left on their own.

We finished up the tour and headed back to Camp Marmal, where we spent the last night of the trip. The food in the German dining facility was excellent—a nice change from the Camp Eggers fare. After dinner, some of the travel party headed to the atrium, a gathering area with tables and chairs where base residents relaxed after working their eight-hour day. It was a very nice place that, by the way, was surrounded by bars. There was also a disco on the camp, but, being good American Soldiers, we kept our distance. Of course, US forces are prohibited from drinking in-theater and many other activities, some of which are understandable and others that make no sense. So we sat drinking Cokes and watching our coalition partners quaff cold beers on a hot evening.²⁰

Experiencing the Effects of a Cultural Divide

While NTM-A could offer the equipment, money, and expertise to develop Afghan civilians into soldiers, it could not habituate the virtues of Western armies that had taken centuries to establish. Attrition and AWOL were just the most obvious issues that could undermine coalition efforts to transition the war to the Afghans. This quandary didn't develop from lack of attention, at least on NTM-A's part. Caldwell's command could point to various suspected reasons for Afghan soldiers dropping their arms and running away. One reason was that officers neglected soldiers' needs. Supply issues at the regional training center in Khost were so bad that 600 newly arrived recruits were training without boots. What boots did arrive were of such poor quality that they only lasted for three months—that is, if they came in the correct sizes, which also seemed to be a problem. Further, it was not uncommon for Afghan soldiers wounded at distant locations to die because of inadequate medical support. Comrades of fallen soldiers were forced to rent a cab to return the dead to their families, noted as a “severe drag on morale.” A second reason that soldiers left was that they elevated loyalty to their families over service, particularly when the families experienced crises such as death or sickness. Third, too many soldiers remained in combat for extended periods

because Afghan Army leaders resisted rotating units from more secure areas into the fight in regions such as the south and southwest.²¹ Adding to the problem were the Afghans themselves. The Afghan president often promulgated decrees offering amnesty for any soldier—officer or enlisted—who returned to the army. Soldiers who did not return were “DFR’d” or dropped from rolls, yet no mechanism was in place to track down and hold these soldiers accountable.²²

NTM-A could implement some means to mitigate attrition, such as raising pay for soldiers in combat areas, increasing inspections of ANA facilities, and exerting pressure on senior Afghan leaders to hold low-performing officers accountable. However, these measures would be of tactical value at best. The systemic issues were well beyond NTM-A’s ability to solve. In the words of one senior Afghan, the problem required a “generational issue to change the culture of corruption” in the Army and societal change that moved Afghans away from poppy growth and association with the Taliban to provide for their families.²³

Of itself, even ANA battalions demonstrating above-average performance in training was no guarantee of success in the field. Brigadier Maddan offered an enthusiastic assessment of Kandak 3/3/209, having proven itself “one of the strongest Kandaks going through the CFC in recent history.” The battalion received the highest validation score from the ISAF Joint Command (IJC) validation team to date and was manned at 101 percent and equipped at 95 percent for weapons, 72 percent for vehicles, and 75 percent for communications gear. Maddan warned, however, that the performance of the *kandak*’s chain of command was essential to overcoming significant shortfalls in its OMLT, where only five of 21 required mentors were sent to partner with the unit.²⁴

In late spring General Patton departed the command, placing responsibility for developing the ANA in the hands of Canadian Army two-star Michael Day. Day inherited a training program that, at least by the numbers, was moving steadily to completing growth and fielding within NTM-A’s envisioned timeline. Army rolls showed a force level of 164,003 soldiers, exceeding the timeline’s goal by about 7,000. More than 28,000 vehicles were issued to the ANA along with nearly 69,000 weapons and about the same number of radios. More than 2,100 Afghans were at army training facilities.²⁵ Finally, NTM-A continued to push out Afghan units with reasonable proficiency levels to the fielded forces. Some of the proficiency ratings, though, did not

reflect a unit's ability to operate independently. For example, a combat support battalion slated to deploy to Helmand was rated "well above average," but the rating was tempered by the acknowledgement that the unit would "continue to require Coalition partnering and assistance." Kandak 3/3/209, which graduated in mid-May, received high praise from the NTM-A trainers who noted that it was "one of the strongest Kandaks going through CFC in recent history." Yet again, NTM-A cautioned that the unit still required considerable partnering, adding that the IJC had sent only five of the 21 required OMLTs. Nevertheless, had the unit not been as strong as it was, it would have required a more robust OMLT to achieve the success that it did.²⁶

The numbers implied a steady advance to transition. But within days of taking command, the new deputy commander for army development learned how tenuous statistics could be. On May 21st at lunchtime, a man wearing an ANA uniform detonated a personal suicide vest inside a dining tent in the Afghan National Military Hospital in Kabul. No NTM-A medical trainers were injured, but the blast killed six ANA medical students and wounded 23 others.²⁷

Despite having advanced warning of the attack, ANA security forces at the hospital failed to locate the bomber before he detonated himself. That could be excused, given the bomber's disguise. Regardless of previous vulnerability assessments—the latest just three weeks before the bombing—the investigation following the attack revealed the extent of negligence for installation security. Of the 93 soldiers assigned to provide security at the hospital, only 63 were available on any given day. Most of the soldiers had received just six months of training, and standard operating procedures were not being enforced (perhaps because many Afghan soldiers could not read). Consequently, checkpoints were not fully manned, and those that were demonstrated lax procedures for admitting authorized personnel and visitors. Many soldiers slept while on duty. Interviews suggested that senior officers were "incompetent," "concerned with their own personal prestige and protection," and showed "little interest in the protection and well-being of the NATO/Coalition advisors."²⁸

Even days after the attack, the security situation at the hospital showed little improvement. The security posture at the hospital remained "woefully inadequate to the task." Guards were not searching senior officers or hospital staff, and others assigned to protect gun trucks were caught sleeping. When asked how they knew who the

staff personnel were, the guards responded that they wore lab coats. Only one soldier—who left the gate unguarded at times—was stationed at the walk-in gate. NTM-A advisors additionally reported an altercation in which an ANA soldier approached the advisors in a threatening manner. When an advisor instructed the soldier to stop, he instead continued to close, forcing the advisor to draw his weapon and repeat the call.²⁹

The situation drew a strongly worded letter from Day to the ANA chief of the General Staff threatening to remove all NTM-A personnel and funding for the hospital if security measures were not substantially improved. While the ensuing weeks showed some signs of progress, Day remained “dubious about the value of the overall contribution.” He added that given the money and time invested in the hospital over the past three years “trying to make a difference, I don’t see it.”³⁰

Day was not able to convince General Caldwell to cut ties with the National Military Hospital. Consequently, the hospital would be a festering sore for the rest of Caldwell’s tour. The new deputy commander’s main concern was the ANA’s progress over the summer and fall, when it was believed that Caldwell would end his tour of duty. That gave Day just five months to shape the ANA as political winds were shifting and a new commander would arrive with another and perhaps dramatically different agenda. The changing atmosphere demanded pragmatism, and Day proved to have the requisite intellectual thoughtfulness and adaptability to steer NTM-A to its stated goals while also preparing contingencies should the conditions change.

Day began by laying out the tasks for the next five months. The apportionment issue had been settled, with 195,000 personnel assigned to the ANA and 157,000 to the police. Over the summer and autumn, NTM-A would field five more battalions and 22 companies, most of them in areas other than infantry. The army and police would be issued 33,000 weapons, from Soviet-era D30 howitzers to 9 mm pistols; over 19,000 vehicles, from Ford Ranger pickups (called light tactical vehicles) to up-armored Humvees; and over 43,000 pieces of communications gear. Day’s trainers would have to push out around 36,000 soldiers during the period while battling severe attrition: from January to March an average of 4,000 soldiers dropped from the ranks monthly.³¹

By summer, Day had sufficient time on the ground to offer Caldwell his assessment on the state of the army. CTAG-A commander David

Maddan briefed the status of instructors in the ANA. Although the army team's algorithm was somewhat confusing, the underlying theme was that the ANA was on track to achieve its goals of overall instructor output and the number of Afghans qualified to instruct Afghans. Maddan did note that the number of Satha 4-qualified instructors lagged behind projections, attributing the potential shortfall to the limited number of instructors who met the literacy and experience requirements.³²

Brigadier Maddan also commented on two associated issues concerning instructor status. The first was the relationship between the qualification of Afghan instructors and the re-missioning of NTM-A trainers. He estimated that the first opportunity to reinvest or re-mission NTM-A instructors would occur around the end of 2011, when he predicted that training facilities in Kabul would require coalition oversight only. Maddan cautioned, though, that re-missioning would correspond more to institutional transition than filling instructor positions. The second issue regarded increasing the quotas of ANA instructors in higher *sathas*. Maddan noted that an incentive pay structure for instructors was working through the Afghan system. The incentive pay, which would amount to \$15 per month for a basic instructor and twice that amount for a senior-level instructor, had yet to be approved.³³

The fielding plan for the mobile strike force vehicle—the soon-to-be-delivered carrier with “a rapidly deployable, highly mobile armored capability”—was another area of concern about the ANA.³⁴ What armored vehicles the Afghan Army owned were of Cold War vintage and in various states of disrepair. Forty-three US M113 armored personnel carriers sat on the Afghan books, all allegedly operational for training purposes but in need of refurbishment. The ANA “tank corps” was not in quite as good shape. NTM-A did not provide any support, leaving maintenance support up to the Afghans. In this, their record was not particularly impressive. Although 44 Soviet-era T-62s were on the books, only 21 were on hand. Four could shoot but not move while 15 could move but not shoot. With the six T-55s (not on the books and an even older version than the T-62) and only one fully operational T-62, the question was what the Afghans could possibly do with these vehicles. At best, the ones that could move could be paraded through Kabul or perhaps defend the presidential palace from a coup, if not instigate one.³⁵

The armored combat support vehicle—a four-wheeled mine-resistant, ambush protected (MRAP)-quality armored vehicle built

in the US and constituting a \$500 million program—offered a significant operational capability for the ANA. IJC had blessed the fielding plan, and the training infrastructure would at least permit a temporary armored branch school to begin instruction in October. At the same time, Maddan also observed that the school was far from being ready to accept students, citing a shortage of instructors and an incomplete training plan. Additionally, the requirement for *kandaks* to receive prerequisite training before entering the school posed its own set of challenges. Given the accelerated US withdrawal, the possibility that training would diminish or cease over the remaining two fighting seasons could not be discounted.³⁶

The army team's final area of interest involved the controversy surrounding the disposition of old ammunition not issued to the Afghans by the coalition. Of the 550 tons of legacy ammunition, the Afghans destroyed only 10 tons; an additional three tons were turned over to a nongovernmental organization and destroyed on 3 July. While NTM-A submitted a request for the destruction of another seven tons of unserviceable ammunition, it was put on hold. The Afghans justified this delay to "avoid creating multiple requests to the Minister of Defence for small quantities." Given that the Afghans also considered legacy ammunition in terms of national treasure, it was doubtful that the remaining bunkers of ammunition would see destruction anytime soon.³⁷

What the Afghans had in mind for tons of ammunition left over from the Soviet occupation, much of which was unusable (and unstable), was anyone's guess. Perhaps at issue was not the ammunition itself but the Afghans' way of pushing back at the coalition. In early summer, another matter emerged that reflected the challenges of intercultural dynamics and ANSF development. Staffers under the deputy commander of the Army (DCOM-A) noticed a curious disparity in ANA growth numbers. In short, personnel numbers that NTM-A received from the fielded units were lower than those the Ministry of Defense (MOD) relayed. While an accurate difference could not be determined, the DCOM-A estimated it to be as high as 12,000 soldiers.³⁸

The question then became what to do about it. It is important to note that there was no accompanying financial corruption with the numbers discrepancy. Pay analysis showed that ANA payrolls matched the lower numbers from Afghanistan's National Military Command Center. That left resolving the discrepancy. To continue to report MOD numbers would be providing inaccurate information

and would reflect an increasing but misleading disparity. Immediately replacing MOD figures with the more accurate numbers from the field, however, was also problematic. To disregard the MOD numbers would have been an embarrassment for the minister. While from a Western lens the consequences would be short lived, from the perspective of a southern Pashtun, honor was only one of three things worth fighting for.³⁹ For an Afghan, honor meant personal reputation. Adding to the complexity of the problem were Afghan National Police growth figures, which put the force above the 134,000 mark by the end of July. Perhaps the defense minister's purpose was to ensure that his "little brother" in the Ministry of Interior did not reach his benchmark before the army.

Maj Gen Gary Patton had attempted one swipe at the problem with in-house accounting. In a discussion with a senior officer in DCOM-A, Patton simply increased the attrition figures for the ANA. Patton was under the impression that the overage was approximately 4,000 and departed the command convinced that he had solved the problem. In fact, the miscounting continued—and to three times the level. More importantly, the disparity issue had somehow found its way to the US press. In a meeting with Defense Minister Abdul Wardak, *Washington Post* reporter Josh Partlow raised the issue of a potential numbers disparity. Caldwell downplayed its significance by submitting that NTM-A was reviewing the numbers, but he warned the minister that he would go public with the issue if Wardak did not own up to the problem.⁴⁰

Although there was no evidence of corruption, the matter revealed a systemic obstacle to the professional development of the ANSF and a related communications problem for NTM-A. No amount of mentoring and advising could change the reality that, in the end, the Afghans were ultimately in charge. NTM-A was resourced to respond sufficiently to these kinds of concerns and keep the Afghans in check. But the winds of drawdown were blowing. Despite his protests, Caldwell could not keep his command immune from personnel cuts, leaving the Afghans increasingly to their own devices. Secondly, the ANA personnel issue cut at the core of NTM-A's strategic communications efforts. Numbers showed "progress," and consistency meant credibility. The myriad briefings remained loyal to the notion that growth had been on track. Nevertheless, Caldwell feared that the potential disparity, particularly in the hands of an increasingly

skeptical American press, could undermine all of the command's efforts over the previous two years.

A solution was eventually found to resolve the discrepancy and salvage Wardak's honor. ANA growth for July was set at a "soft" 170,000, with the ANSF and NTM-A arriving at a firmer number. The soft 170,000 would remain in place until more accurate growth figures emerged, and from there ANA growth would be closely monitored by both NTM-A and the ANSF in tandem.⁴¹

Western Methods and Afghan Military Effectiveness

Enough money and coalition expertise were certainly available to train an Afghan how to "shoot, move and communicate." However, developing professionalism proved more difficult when rhetoric met reality. Getting the Afghans to habituate leadership qualities that took centuries to develop in Western militaries proved difficult. In Pol-e-Charkhi, for example, an ANA army supply center commander was discovered to have sold his issued 9 mm pistol to pay for two vehicles he had wrecked while drunk. In the US Army, the response would have been swift and severe. But this was Afghanistan. Investigation revealed the captain had a familial connection with a general at the MOD. To make matters worse, the captain was suspected of loaning his M4 rifle to a relative in the MOD. Efforts to get the Afghans to pursue the matter had "fallen on deaf ears," undoubtedly for fear of upsetting the general.⁴²

The Regional Military Training Center in Kandahar suffered from similar levels of corruption. Facility workers complained to NTM-A advisors that the executive officer of the facility had pulled them off jobs to attend to his office, which included building furniture and adding a meeting room. An Afghan captain was also accused of shaking down contractors at the facility. When confronted with the information, the Afghan colonel commanding the site could only acknowledge that the problem existed. As to solving it, he candidly admitted that "there is only so much I can do; it is not easy to fire an officer, especially one that is connected. . . . It could be very dangerous."⁴³

Notions of "professionalizing" the ANA to mirror its coalition counterparts were akin to bridging the Atlantic from the United States to Europe. Yet some in NTM-A's senior circle were convinced that the Afghans could quickly habituate martial values that took the

West centuries to develop. Thus, NTM-A advisors assisted their counterparts in developing core values for the Afghan National Army. General Caldwell viewed this initiative as a “significant move forward to bring a singular unifying vision of culture and ethos to the ANA.” Under the core values of “God,” “Country,” and “Duty” were subsidiary values such as “integrity, honor, service, respect, courage, and loyalty.” The core values instructed Afghan soldiers to “do what is right morally and legally,” “serve the needs of the country,” “put aside rivalries and work as a team,” and to perform their duties “regardless of tribal politics, religious, ethnic relationships and with considerations of national interest.” However, the US Navy lieutenant commander who briefed the initiative at a 3 August deep dive—and most of the NTM-A audience—failed to recognize the underlying paradox in his slides. His admission that NTM-A had decided to move away from instilling Western values and instead “help” the Afghans develop Islamic-based values was particularly rich with irony. No Afghans were at the meeting, and the naval officer did not appear to be a Muslim and certainly was not an Afghan.

Further, the verbiage in the values did not seem to account for two millennia of Afghan history, tradition, and culture, yet the Afghan Army was expected to break from its past and embrace modernity. The core values also failed to reconcile notions of “nation” and ANA attrition. Analyses revealed that the predominant reason for Afghan soldiers going AWOL was to visit family. The “cultural imperative,” one study pointed out, “dictates that the family is the strongest, most compelling component of Afghan society.” Finally, the core values, which would be placed on cards and distributed en masse to the ANA, also ignored the problem that most soldiers likely could not read what was written on the cards, let alone understand what the values of country or duty meant.⁴⁴

Professionalizing the ANA was a long-term endeavor; it would take at least a generation to remove old habits. Many in NTM-A initially believed that the training mission would remain strong even after transition. However, looming budget decreases were emerging as a shaper of transition—forcing the command to begin examining ways to bring efficiencies and savings into its training program. While achieving savings through cost cutting and cost avoidance would mitigate the consequences of dwindling budgets, those initiatives failed to address the more rudimentary question of the future development of the ANSF. The prospect that out-year budgets would

be inadequate to sustain a 352,000 ANSF meant that the army and police would eventually have to be downsized. However, simply downsizing both would not adequately address the future security situation, the capabilities needed by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, or the cost.

General Day had had anticipated the need to develop a coherent force restructuring plan. He devised a model providing an understandable methodology for restructuring the ANSF and a spatial design permitting maneuver with reduced army and police manning. The model was divided into four phases. The first determined the concepts of employment for the ANSF and, correspondingly, characterized a low, medium or high threat. The second phase matched variable levels of capability among categories Day classified as “simple,” “balanced,” and “agile.” Phase three placed capabilities against high-, medium-, and low-cost estimates, then collated the army, air force, and police into three courses of action along the threat classifications. In the final phase, Day translated the model into a graphic format to demonstrate that while force manning levels could be maintained until about fiscal year 2015, significant savings would be available from material not needed to equip the smaller force of 2015.⁴⁵

The Army team asked for a deep dive in September to give a more extensive review of ANA personnel levels and further refine and reform the force. While having little to do with the developing concept of the 2017 ANSF, the review nevertheless was a complementary effort that might provide a path to a more cost-effective army without compromising capability. General Day cited several reasons for the review. In the first place, army growth had followed a linear trajectory with infantry *kandaks* built first, followed by the enabling forces. He noted that there was no systemic review of processes as new capability, such as combat support and logistics battalions, was established. Secondly, requests for personnel changes had been made, and in some cases granted, before new capabilities were fielded as a gap-filling contingency.⁴⁶

Subsequent information provided during the briefing reflected one of the underlying arguments of this work. In many respects, an infantry *kandak*, the building block of the ANA, was a mirror image of its US Army counterpart (battalion). However, the propensity was to unwarrantedly overequip units. Support platoons, for example, owned wreckers that were never used at a cost of \$25 million. Also, \$4 million were spent on trailers that, again, were never used. This prompted one NTM-A officer to note the irony since “the ANSF are

not exactly an expeditionary force.” The ANA owned 196 fuel trucks and 213 fuel trailers even though private contractors hauled fuel for the ANA. Infantry units demonstrated similar levels of excess. Mortar platoons owned 12 mortars and 21 vehicles—over twice as many weapons and vehicles as a comparable US Army unit. Heavy machine gun platoons were supplied with 16 .50-caliber machine guns and 21 Ford Ranger light tactical vehicles even though the trucks were incapable of supporting heavy weapons. The Army had 73 howitzers in surplus. Finally, rifle platoons—designed as light infantry—had 48 vehicles at their disposal. In 2011 alone, procurement overages included 600 mortars, 731 .50-caliber machine guns, nearly 3,900 light tactical vehicles, and over 4,200 trailers.⁴⁷

Day offered a revised organization for the infantry *kandaks* that cut a sizable number of both vehicles and weapons. His plan reduced the number of vehicles, for example, by over 20 percent. The new infantry *kandak* design would also lead to impactful savings in recapitalization and sustainment costs to the tune of nearly \$130 million annually. Day also offered recommendations to improve the efficiency of logistics units, demonstrating the excess capacity in combat service support and combat logistics *kandaks* in vehicles such as tractor trailers, fuel trucks, and trailers. The number of fuel trucks offered a particularly curious example of a procurement process that could have benefited from more critical analysis. ANA logistic units owned 136 5,000-gallon fuel trucks, yet private vendors moved all the fuel for the ANA. It was as if NTM-A logistics personnel just looked at their own army manuals to determine the number and type of vehicles the ANA should have without considering the country’s geography or the prospect that the ANA would not use the vehicles being procured for them.⁴⁸

Day looked to Caldwell at a 15 September deep dive for decisions on the proposed equipment efficiencies for the ANA. Given the potential savings of over \$200 million, Caldwell approved the decision and acknowledged that NTM-A had embarked on its mission of building the ANA “in our own image.”⁴⁹ It was not a startling admission but one borne of the fact that forces beyond Caldwell’s control had taken over. The Army team’s analysis of equipment lists had consequences beyond the reduction of unneeded or redundant equipment. Reducing the number of vehicles, for example, would also likely free up a substantial number of drivers and maintenance personnel. As the 2017 ANSF concept envisioned ANA personnel roles

dropping below 195,000, any savings in the short term would ameliorate the pain of demobilizing in the future. In fact, Day's modeling of the ANA, begun in June, noted that a more streamlined army of 149,000 could offer the same capability as the current force of 195,000 currently being built.

The Army team arrived at other initiatives that enabled savings and a concerted move to professionalize the Afghan Army. Brigadier Maddan identified the Mujahideen Integration Course (MIC) as an officer development program that hurt more than helped the ANA. Maddan noted several shortcomings with the course, initially seen as a stopgap measure to fill mid-level officer positions until academy and Officer Candidate School graduates could rise to make the course unnecessary. Unlike the four-year NMAA curriculum and 20-week officer commissioning course, the MIC lasted only eight weeks. Literacy levels for incoming candidates were low and education levels even lower. As a consequence, the training itself was deemed inadequate for ANA officer requirements. Although enjoying a high graduation rate, the course also suffered a sizable AWOL rate. Moreover, it appeared to be a conduit for corruption. The ANA General Staff and not the recruiting command enrolled candidates, rendering the process opaque to NTM-A. The direct line from the minister of defense to the course also afforded the minister the means to exercise patronage and corrupt practices. Finally, the course was no longer deemed necessary to fill the required officer positions. Officer growth was above the glide path to the 31,000 required by November 2012. Consequently, Caldwell decided to cancel the program.⁵⁰

As Caldwell prepared to turn over command in November, he could certainly look back on the last two years with some sense of satisfaction. The personnel reporting imbroglio of the summer had been resolved, and ANA growth was on pace to meet its 195,000 limit by November 2012. Officer growth was slightly behind projections but predicted to catch up by the time the army reached its peak strength. Predictions on NCO growth were not as rosy. However, given the reasonable prospect of diminishing international funding for the ANSF, the Army's eventual reduction would remedy the shortfall. Over the previous two years, NTM-A had recruited, trained, and fielded 31 infantry battalions, 11 support battalions, and various headquarters and other smaller units. Similarly, most of the ANA's training schools were at capacity, although manning at combat support and logistics schools were running slightly below average—percent-

ages that the briefing slides noted “hid some vulnerabilities.” At the same time, over 2,700 Afghans were assigned to the training sites, including 364 Afghans who had reached Master Skills status—an increase of nearly 50 from the previous month.⁵¹

Concurrently, evidence also pointed to the limits of coalition efforts to develop a modern Afghan Army. Attrition accounted for a loss of over 32 percent of the army annually. The drain was felt not only in the loss of trained personnel but also in costs. NTM-A analysts estimated personnel loss was costing the United States and coalition (which picked up virtually all of the cost for the ANA) nearly \$7,000 per soldier, well over \$250 million a year.⁵² To complicate matters more, the cultural underpinnings of Afghan AWOLs—which analyses suggested prioritized family over “nation”—meant that no amount of schooling could transform Afghan soldiers to behave like their Western counterparts. Finally, the long-term implications were not promising. Decreasing funding from the US and international community would place a greater burden on Kabul to fund its army or carefully manage its reduction—scenarios well beyond the administrative acumen of the current regime.

The attrition problem represented a significant piece of a much greater challenge to coalition efforts to develop the ANSF into a professional force. Western training efficiency did not necessarily translate into Afghan military effectiveness. A reporter accompanying Marines in Helmand Province’s Garmsir District noted their frustration with their Afghan counterparts, who did not seem to share the level of commitment to defeating the Taliban. One young lance corporal, faced with an Afghan soldier who refused to continue to patrol, gave an undiplomatic appraisal of the Afghan Army to the reporter: “The ANA [is] garbage.”⁵³ Though anecdotal, the small incident seemed part of a larger picture. The ANA had grown considerably over the last two years. While not resourced with the best weapons available, it was certainly better equipped than its enemy. Yet by the fall of 2011, not one Afghan infantry battalion was operating independently. No amount of Western money, technology, or military expertise could overcome the country’s history and culture.⁵⁴ As former CIA analyst Michael Walker observed, “Regardless of how well the ISAF and the ANA perform, violent tribal feuding and internecine warfare will remain part of life in large swaths of the country; it is hard to imagine that Afghanistan will ever be fully pacified. Ancient rivalries and alliances are the core of the country’s tribal power structure, and the vio-

lent struggle to protect one's power base is a perpetual endeavor for tribal leaders.⁵⁵

Modernizing the Afghan Air Force

Unlike its American counterpart, NTM-A situated the AAF within the national army structure. The mission to build a self-sustaining Afghan Air Force had three major components. The first was to educate and train aircrew and maintenance personnel to perform the air missions necessary to support the ANSF. Secondly, NTM-A's air training directorate was charged with the further training of AAF personnel to assume responsibilities for their own flight and maintenance training. The vision was to generate the AAF into an enduring and operationally effective air force of 8,017 personnel, serving in air wings in Kabul, Shindand, and Kandahar and supported by Afghan-led maintenance and pilot training programs. The final piece of the air force development mission was to acquire some 145 rotary- and fixed-wing aircraft and sustain the force until sufficient Afghan expertise was developed to transition full control of the air force.⁵⁶

In the 1980s Soviet airmen sought to mold their Afghan counterparts into a modern air force capable of defending the socialist republic against the insurgent mujahideen. Although at the time considered the elite of their armed forces, Afghan pilots demonstrated tendencies that often confounded the efforts of their mentors. The sons of wealthy Afghan families filled the cockpits of prestigious fighter planes while cargo and helicopter pilots came from more humble roots. Soviet advisors found their trainees "lacking in diligence" and reported that pilots demonstrated "fear while in flight, passivity and inaction in the face of nonstandard situations, confusion and bewilderment, . . . banal laziness, lack of work ethic, and a tendency to avoid challenges." Despite their elite status, Afghan pilots paid little attention during preflight mission planning; lacked enthusiasm for flying missions beyond those deemed essential; and flew rarely, if at all, on Fridays and during Ramadan.⁵⁷

In 1947 US Army Airmen broke free of their terrestrially bound comrades and achieved their independence. Sixty-four years later, their prodigies similarly attempted to apply a Western organizational and operational ethos to airmen lacking a similar pedigree. NTM-A air advisors envisioned their Afghan counterparts habituating profes-

sional virtues that were intuitively obvious to a modern, Western air force. While coalition airmen could point to significant achievements, they found themselves no less stymied than their predecessors in the 1980s. Afghan airmen tempered NTM-A's initiatives with behaviors contrary to the efficiency essential to a modern technocratic air force.

By January 2011, the AAF had achieved structural, operational, and institutional milestones. Its aircraft inventory included 40 Mi-17 utility and Mi-35 gunship helicopters and 12 fixed-wing aircraft (older Soviet-era An-32s and the newer Italian-built C-27A, acquired as a replacement to the An-32s). The Pohantoon-e-Hawayee (PeH) or "Big Air School" was running the introductory ground school courses for officers and airmen, with flight training conducted in the United States and United Arab Emirates. Operational air wings were flying missions from Kabul and Kandahar. In January the AAF flew 602 sorties, 68 percent of which were operational missions that carried 4,981 passengers, 84,230 kilograms of cargo, and 166 patients. The main runway at Shindand, set as the primary training air base for the AAF, was complete, allowing approximately eight operational training sorties to fly daily. A second training runway was under construction.⁵⁸

The pace of development for the AAF, however, was not free of challenges. The grounding of 13 of the 22 Kabul wing Mi-17 helicopter fleet the prior November was evidence that the newly established air force was far from standing on its own. The grounding resulted from aircraft material discrepancies, poor or nonexistent documentation, and even poorer aircrew mission planning. Though disappointing, the problems were attributed to the lack of coalition oversight prior to 2009, which nurtured a subsequent culture of complacency within the Kabul air wing. NTM-A air advisors noted an "overall lack of professionalism; little discipline in scheduling, operations and execution; and poor flying habits continuing from years of "flying the 'old way.'" The proximity of the air wing to the capital may also have influenced the air wing's tendency to sacrifice crew planning and maintenance to accommodate short-fused general officer tasking. By the beginning of January, NTM-A advisors had increased their oversight of aircrew training and resolved enough of the documentary issues to put the air wing back in a flying status. But the incident clearly demonstrated that technology and infrastructure alone were not going to push the AAF into a modern force.⁵⁹

A second challenge involved the operational readiness of the C-27 aircraft slated to replace the older Soviet-era cargo aircraft. Despite contractual arrangements that promised an 80 percent mission-capable rate, the nine aircraft assigned to the air force managed only a 34 percent readiness rate. Poor logistics support, particularly replacement of corroded propeller blades, was the predominant problem.⁶⁰ Additional problems complicated the eventual transition of flight training from the United States and UAE to Afghanistan. Of the total NATO allocation of 222 coalition trainers, only 68 were in place with another 88 pledged.⁶¹ Of those pledges, however, most were identified to fill operations and maintenance positions, leaving 66 unfilled pilot and flight engineer trainer positions. Also affecting the development of indigenous training was the delay in completion of the training runway at Shindand Air Base in the west. Although the runway was presumed to be completed in January 2012, construction delays pushed its completion to the following July. The implications not only touched the planned development of flight training at Shindand but also required that training and operational sorties use the only runway available, further slowing training and posing a potential safety issue.⁶²

NTM-A's plan for the AAF in 2011 considered its achievements and challenges in framing a strategy to build the enduring institutions necessary for professionalization. Training Afghan instructors was viewed as a critical element of professionalization. Established to provide basic education and training for AAF airmen, the PeH was also seen as the institution to begin building a cadre of trainers.⁶³ At the beginning of 2011, 27 Afghan military personnel had completed PeH instructor "boot camp," consisting of computer, English language, and basic instructor training. The instructors were enrolled in an instructor immersion program, a prerequisite to instructor certification. By the end of 2011, the first cadre of instructors was expected to be certified and instructing at PeH without mentoring.⁶⁴

Populating the PeH with Afghan instructors was key to the institution becoming self-sustaining. No less essential was developing maintenance training capacity at the operational commands. Unlike the Satha system General Patton devised for the army, NTM-A air advisors arrived at what they believed was a training paradigm that best fit the aviator culture, at least in a Western sense. A newly minted airman entered his squadron from basic training as an apprentice. His job was simply to perform those operational-level maintenance tasks to keep the aircraft flying safely. Above him would be journeymen—

maintenance personnel with the training to oversee the work of the apprentice but also the skill sets to perform higher-level maintenance and train the apprentice to become a journeyman. At the top tier of the paradigm were craftsmen who—through additional education, training, and experience—were the last level of oversight on maintenance procedures directly related to flight safety while also training journeymen and apprentices.⁶⁵

Initial measures for the first half of 2011 were to develop an embedded trainer capacity at the craftsman level to identify those in the initial cadre of maintenance personnel with the skill sets for the top tier. Those who met the qualifications would be immediately certified while personnel who required additional training would be sent through a basic instructor training course to top off their skill sets. The second leg of the plan was to validate core training course requirements for the craftsman and journeyman levels to create a training pipeline for maintenance personnel. Finally, all non-aviation airmen would be assessed and assigned the appropriate skill level.⁶⁶

The challenges and implications of developing an air force in a non-Western country from scratch were on clear display by the spring. From a materiel perspective, the aircraft inventory had increased to 56 aircraft, with acquisitions to increase the force to 71 by November. Officer and NCO numbers were growing, albeit slowly, but the pace was largely a consequence of the service's demands for more literate, educated, and technically competent recruits. On the positive side, attrition stood at less than 2 percent monthly—slightly higher than the 1.4 percent goal but far lower than the army's. The air force's organizational infrastructure—which included the air wings, schoolhouses, and headquarters—remained at the lowest of the capability milestones set by NTM-A. However, NTM-A airmen justified that standing on their timeline, which required them first to break the Afghans from old Soviet habits and then gave them until 2016 to transition the air force to Afghan control.⁶⁷

AAF flight logs showed a sizable proportion of flight hours dedicated to operations.⁶⁸ Some of these operational flights reflected an increasing level of sophistication. For example, the Presidential Airlift Squadron completed its first rotary-wing airlift of the president of Afghanistan with an all-Afghan aircrew. Mi-17 and Mi-35 helicopters also participated in a combined exercise with Afghan Army commandos, providing air security and support to the commandos as they engaged hostile forces and during insertion and extraction

events. In early March, Mi-17s and Mi-35s provided logistics support to Barg-e-Matal, considered a medium threat area in Nuristan Province in the east. The helicopters moved 3,000 kilograms of cargo and two passengers in what the senior NTM-A air advisor described as a “pre-planned yet discreet initial site reconnaissance, training, and execution of 25% of the cargo movement.”⁶⁹

Still, the problems inherent in building, developing, and operating the AAF all at the same time were beginning to show. Only 23 percent of 670 sorties in February and of over 1,000 flights in March were designated for training. The AAF was experiencing tension from the need to develop the force and operational demands. The Barg-e-Matal airlift also placed several helicopters into scheduled maintenance earlier than anticipated, removing their availability for either operations or training flights. Finally, the operational tempo was having an adverse effect on aircraft availability. While overall mission-capable trends were improving in February, Mi-17 mission-capable rates stood at 62 percent, well below the 75 percent standard. The newly arriving C-27 cargo aircraft were showing an even lower mission-capable rate of 29 percent, severely below the expected rate of 80 percent. By March the C-27s were more available, but the Mi-17s—the workhorse of the AAF—were not.⁷⁰

A second area of friction emerged as a consequence of NTM-A’s efforts to build a systematic command and control process for directing air operations. While in an ideal world NTM-A’s airmen would have preferred an independent air force, Afghan airmen were part of the ANA and subject to pressures from senior army and Ministry of Defense officials. The Kabul air wing chief of personnel, for example, expressed frustration over MOD interference in personnel matters, sending unqualified officers to fill specific billets. In one instance, the ministry sent a ground maintenance officer to fill a public affairs billet, leading the Afghan personnel chief to suspect that the “MoD fills the positions with friends and people with influence regardless of the skills needed in the position.”⁷¹

Generals in Kabul also showed no reluctance to interfere with operational missions. On 22 March, the Kabul wing launched its only alert helicopters on a human remains recovery mission. Within hours of their departure, calls from outside the air wing came for a no-notice passenger run to Kunar Province in the east. The Afghan wing commander replied that there were no spare aircraft or crews to accommodate the mission.⁷² By the afternoon, the plot thickened. A

second call came for an airlift of Afghan VIPs to Jalalabad City in the east. When NTM-A advisors responded that there were no available aircraft to perform the mission, they were told that the mission was on the orders of ANA chief of the General Staff—Gen Sher Mohammad Karimi himself. Shortly thereafter, General Karimi called directly. He announced that there was fighting in the area, implying that the seven civilians were somehow needed. When he was queried about the mission and advised that there were no other aircraft, General Karimi then claimed that it was an emergency mission. Further questions from the NTM-A advisors led Karimi to threaten a call to Gen David Petraeus, the ISAF commander, and add the claim that the mission was coming from President Karzai.⁷³

In short order an IJC officer, probably responding to complaints from Karimi, called to inquire on the status of the mission. The senior NTM-A air advisor relayed all of the same information about the aircraft and crew status. The IJC then wanted to know about all aircraft on the line. When told about the two aircraft going to Shindand, the inquiring coalition officer asked why the aircraft could not first drop off the passengers, emphasizing that they were important and were going to do something about the alleged fighting near Jalalabad. Fortunately for NTM-A, IJC demands to “just fly them there” ended when his phone battery died.⁷⁴

As it turned out, the VIPs arrived at the ramp and said that they merely asked for a ride to Jalalabad and that the “senator’s” name was Assadullah Wafa. Their total party size was seven. When told that no aircraft were safe to fly, they packed up and drove to Jalalabad. Within days of the incident, General Karimi ordered that two helicopters and one fixed-wing aircraft be maintained on continuous alert for emergent high-priority missions.⁷⁵

Afghan unwillingness, or perhaps indifference, to adhering to what would seem by USAF standards as a responsible command and control system were accentuated by ISAF Joint Command pressures to prioritize AAF assets toward operational matters. A late March meeting between the ISAF and NTM-A brought the problem to light. At issue was the desire of the commander of ISAF forces in the east to extend Afghan air support beyond what the NTM-A deputy commander for air, Brig Gen Dave Allvin, believed were their responsibilities. Allvin pushed back, identifying documents that specifically limited AAF operations. He also indicated that operational support to the ANA was not to interfere with training.⁷⁶

Allvin took the opportunity of a midweek briefing to the ISAF commander to address the issue. He pointed out that only 28 Mi-17s were available on any given day. When the historic mission-capable rate of 65 percent was applied, just 18 helicopters were available for missions. Allvin then gave examples of stressors on the Mi-17 fleet, such as the grounding the previous November for unsafe practices and also for what he believed to be excessive use of the helicopters for resupply missions. When Mi-17 growth and operational usage were compared with mission-capable rates, he noted that the increasing use of helicopters for other operational missions was adversely affecting mission-capable rates. He added that this was a decreasing slope that would compromise the ability of the AAF to train pilots and instructors. Rather than consolidate AAF rotary-wing assets, Allvin recommended instead that additional aircraft be distributed to Shin-dand to increase training capacity. Looking to the future rather than at the present, Allvin believed that keeping the force distributed would increase the pilot capacity to support the upcoming delivery of 32 new Mi-17s, enhance the overall quality of the existing air force, and improve AAF management practices. Perhaps Allvin also hoped that a more distributed AAF would prevent his war-fighting counterparts in ISAF from employing an air force that was years from transition.⁷⁷

No other NTM-A directorate experienced the challenges of modernization more than the air team. Overseeing the smallest yet most technical of the forces, Allvin and his team of trainers and mentors were charged with developing operationally capable helicopter and fixed-wing pilots and maintenance personnel. Perhaps just as important, however, was the requirement to develop a command and control system that could provide air resources to support the ANA effectively and efficiently. By the summer, Allvin saw some encouraging signs. Rotary- and fixed-wing availability rates hovered around the 60 percent mark. Numerous operational and training missions for the period made these rates even more impressive and pointed to improved maintenance contract support, particularly frequent liaison with the civilian contractors for the C-27. Allvin also noted the addition of 14 instructor pilots by July, with an additional 20 by September. The first two Big Air School instructors would be certified in July and then begin instructing at PeH. At Kabul International Airport, 30 maintenance personnel had attended the two-week Level 2 trainer course and achieved instructor designation by the AAF. Another 20 maintainers attended the one-day trainer course and would eventu-

ally be capable of training others at the shop level. Despite somewhat spotty support from the army General Staff, the ministry was making some inroads to increasing the number of air force personnel in officer and NCO development courses to reduce the leadership gap. One of the most noteworthy accomplishments was the graduation of the first four female rotary-wing pilot candidates from Thunder Lab, an intense English-language-immersion training program. All four were slated to leave in mid-July for Defense Language Institute training in San Antonio, followed by rotary-wing instruction at Fort Rucker.⁷⁸

Establishing the Afghan Air Force Professionalization Program

Despite some measureable improvement, Allvin was extremely concerned that major systemic problems in the AAF would compromise the gains made over the last six months. They would jeopardize its ability to operate the additional aircraft that would be arriving over the ensuing two years. Allvin characterized the problem as a “perfect storm” converging from issues such as excessive operational demands, subsequent redirection of training for operational support, and little improvement in the professionalization of the AAF. With the impending delivery of 21 new Mi-17 helicopters, the problems demanded immediate remedial action on the part of the Afghans to develop the professional habits necessary to operate their air force safely and effectively. Solving the problem also required the necessary leverage to nudge the Afghans toward professionalization.⁷⁹

Allvin relayed the remedial plan in his document entitled “Afghan Air Force Professionalization Program” and subtitled “A Systematic and Quantifiable Path for AAF Development to Enable the Delivery of Its Final 21 Mi-17s.” The title imparted an unambiguous message of where the “forcing function” lay. The professionalization plan pointed out that while the AAF had experienced a rapid increase in its inventory, “its ability to professionally operate, maintain and sustain the aircraft had not kept pace.” It then went on to identify significant shortcomings in AAF professional behaviors. Short and no-notice tasking of AAF aircraft, particularly the Mi-17s, reflected an immature command and control process and, more importantly, compromised aircrew training and maintenance requirements.⁸⁰

Allvin's plan identified three main areas through which NTM-A would monitor AAF progress to determine the delivery of the remaining Mi-17s. Failure to achieve any of the objectives would result in further delays to the delivery schedule and might "result in the non-delivery of these assets." The plan identified command and control as the first area of assessment, particularly violations of established procedures. Too often, scheduling of aircraft was a consequence of "'day prior' scheduling and 'morning of' cell phone tasking." The consequence of such ad hoc tasking was poor mission planning, often resulting in aircraft launching outside the gross weight envelopes and placing aircrews and aircraft in jeopardy. Inadequate information flow was a second item contributing to poor command and control. Finally, improper scheduling diminished the quality of information aircrews received on their missions.⁸¹

Another area of deficiency lay in operations and maintenance discipline. The most pressing problem facing the AAF in this area was "the inconsistent handling of passengers and cargo, a lack of progress in the development of AAF maintenance capability, and a complete absence of forward planning." While AAF air operations policy clearly articulated passenger and cargo screening procedures, the Afghans were not following their policies. A similar lack of commitment could be seen in maintenance activities. The short working day, which in the Kabul wing amounted to one shift of only four hours, was limiting the capacity of Mi-17 operations to approximately 600 hours per month for all of Afghanistan. Finally, the AAF suffered from the lack of a flying hour program. As a consequence, not only could flight time not be managed, but the lack of management also prevented the establishment of any predictability in the maintenance program.⁸²

The final area of concern lay in accountability. The AAF could not account for all personnel, which meant that the force had little understanding of whether its personnel were sufficiently trained, assigned to the right positions, or adequately paid. Related to gaps in the personnel asset inventory was the inefficient training scheduling, leaving many airmen in an untrained status. Finally, Mi-17 crews demonstrated significant shortcomings, such as inadequate English language proficiency and mission planning skills. They also had not developed a training continuation program.⁸³

The professionalization program then identified an extensive list of criteria that would be measured over the remainder of the year and determine the delivery schedule for the Mi-17s. In the area of com-

mand and control, for example, AAF aircrews would be required to consistently demonstrate their ability to plan and execute missions within published AAF doctrine. For operations and maintenance, the AAF would be required to revise its maintenance work schedule by expanding the workday and adding a second shift where maintenance personnel allowed. For accountability, the program directed that the AAF complete its personnel asset inventory to accurately account for its personnel, including duty locations, education and literacy levels, and training qualifications.⁸⁴

The program was exactly the kind of systematic approach that a USAF commander would impose on a unit demonstrating deteriorating or unsafe performance. Giving the Afghans until December to show improvement offered some promise that they would not just temporarily modify their behavior. As to the status of delivery of the remaining Mi-17s, Caldwell decided to keep the aircraft at the factory, thus minimizing maintenance and storage costs while possibly softening the political impact of delivery delays.

Many of the problems Allvin identified were put on display during a 31 July meeting of NTM-A and Afghan senior leaders. Included in the *shura* were the minister of defense, his chief of General Staff, Caldwell and Allvin, the AAF commander, and other senior representatives of the General Staff and Afghan Air Force. Some of the issues raised during the meeting illustrated the extent of the systemic problems that lay within the air force. For example, Minister Wardak asked whether discrepancies in maintenance reporting on the Mi-17s and C-27s stemmed from supply constraints or maintenance issues. Recognizing Wardak's ploy to ask for more sophisticated aircraft such as C-130s, Allvin countered that his data indicated that the culprit was maintenance related. Caldwell added that he believed that the minister had been receiving inaccurate or perhaps false readiness information. He cited a MOD report indicating only one operational C-27 even though there were two flying at the time of the report and maintenance reports identifying five operational aircraft.⁸⁵

A second issue involved alleged friction between AAF pilots and NTM-A air advisors. The minister and the AAF deputy commander raised concerns that air advisors demonstrated unprofessional behavior toward their Afghan counterparts. The minister pointed to several fly/no-fly decisions apparently made by air advisors without consulting Afghan pilots. Allvin then reminded Wardak that NTM-A air advisors were responsible for safety-of-flight decisions but also

noted that he emphasized to his advisors the importance of maintaining professional relationships with their Afghan partners. Allvin also stated that, in many cases, Afghan pilots felt pressured by senior Afghan officers to fly unsafe missions and used the advisors as a means to avoid flying yet save face. The issue was not resolved, although NTM-A leaders recognized that their perceptions did not necessarily match those of their Afghan partners.⁸⁶

The 31 July *shura* reflected the complicated nature of the relationship between NTM-A and its Afghan counterparts. A week later, a Department of Defense inspector general (IG) outbriefing on the AAF revealed even more evidence of the difficulties of modernization. The audit debrief was somewhat problematic from the outset. Only two of the 12 members of the team had aviation backgrounds. The team's lack of familiarity with aviation issues did not prevent it from identifying systemic problems that illustrated the problems of applying Western military standards to the Afghans. The team validated the issues with command and control, noted earlier in this chapter. It specifically pointed to the failure of Afghan leadership to adequately plan or execute a flight hour program, track mission-capable rates, determine training requirements, and manage general use and care of aircraft without direct coalition intervention. It also identified two rather interesting problems associated with Afghan pilot training and maintenance. During interviews with AAF pilots, the IG team noted complaints from the pilots that they were "forced to start over with each new set of advisors and were not receiving credit for training already accomplished."⁸⁷ Allvin explained that the complaints were not accurate. His trainers kept thorough training records on Afghan pilots to maintain consistency if advisors changed out. Allvin then noted that the problem lay in history. Afghans had become comfortable with the Soviet training system emphasizing repetition over the quality of training. Afghan pilots preferred the old system because it alleviated any measure of accountability on the part of the pilot. So long as a pilot could complete the requisite number of maneuver repetitions, he would not fail training and thus keep his honor intact.⁸⁸

The IG team identified a maintenance-related item that further highlighted the limitations of modernization. It found that aircraft operating and maintenance manuals were unavailable in Dari or Pashto, impeding the development of aircrew and maintenance personnel. In fact, aircraft manufacturers were reluctant to supply Dari

versions of their maintenance manuals for fear that information might be lost in translation and possibly compromise air worthiness, with the end result of holding them responsible.⁸⁹

Several weeks after the DOD brief, Allvin presented the first results from the performance measure outlined in the AAF Professionalization Program. As might be expected, the first set of results left the AAF little direction to go but up. Seventy-three of 107 critical command and control positions remained unfilled. Only 40 percent of missions had been executed through the required air mission request (AMR) process, a tool to monitor aircraft tasking and completion. Only 30 percent of AMR scheduled missions were completed on time. Flight hour management fell within what might be considered reasonable, although the statistics again pointed to poor maintenance productivity at the Kabul air wing. Finally, maintenance workday averages at Kabul and Kandahar were between five and six hours, well under the eight-hour day prescribed in the program.⁹⁰

Information collected on the air force during August offered similar mixed results. Readiness for the C-27 fleet had increased by 11 percent to 76 percent, above the 70 percent standard set for the aircraft. Additionally, the aircraft logged a squadron record 493 hours in August, with another 400 scheduled for September. The rotary-wing fleet, however, was showing signs of decline. Mi-17 readiness had dropped by 2 percent to a 64 percent readiness while the seven Mi-35 gunships dropped 5 percent to 78 percent, just three percentage points higher than the 75 percent standard. The overall assessment for August was mixed, with an improvement in fleet management discipline. Personnel and payroll record keeping were also showing improvement. On the other hand, two key indicators of fleet usage showed declining trends. Aircraft movement record submissions fell by approximately 50 percent from July to August. Perhaps more disturbing was the average workday for air force maintenance personnel. Kandahar wing maintainers increased their productivity to 7.1 hours per day, up slightly more than an hour from July. But the Kabul air wing showed a decline in its already short workday, from five hours to just less than four hours per day. Considering that 22 of the fleet's 40 helicopters were based in Kandahar, the decrease in work hours certainly contributed to the helicopter fleet's decreasing readiness.⁹¹

The rather dismal picture was simply the first in what would be a prolonged effort to measure and correct those elements of professional behavior essential for the air force to operate effectively and

safely. Unlike the Afghan Army and police, NTM-A did not anticipate its responsibility to transition the air force would be completed by 2014. Yet there was no guarantee that transition would succeed in 2016—or 2026 for that matter. Allvin, for example, had specifically tied delivery of the remaining 21 Mi-17s directly to improvements in the professionalization program metrics. What Allvin did not expect was the US Defense Department registering its opinion on delayed delivery. While these concerns were not formulated into specific guidance, indicators from Washington pointed to concern over the political implications if the helicopters remained in Russia. Suggestions that the helicopters could simply be stored on the coalition side of Kabul International Airport, while expedient from Washington's perspective, would only induce the Afghans to complain that the coalition was withholding a vital enabler of transition.⁹²

It is no wonder that Allvin's end of tour report was at best noncommittal on the chances of successful transition. After outlining the accomplishments and challenges during his tenure, he could only observe that "this is just hard business." Yet Allvin firmly believed that he and his Airmen had put the Afghans in the best position to succeed. They had established the "behavioral boundaries" within which the AAF could become a self-sustaining, professional force. But even if NTM-A could, as Allvin suggested, "revalidate those boundaries" to ensure that the command was not "exerting our own Western biases and attempting to demand something that is inconsistent with the culture," in fact he and his Airmen were doing precisely that. In the end, as the general was departing command, he remarked that advising a "partner with a radically different culture, fighting its own demons—past and present—results in an often challenging relationship" and concluded that "we may not be certain about the final outcome."⁹³

In late August, command transferred from General Allvin to Brig Gen Timothy "T-Ray" Ray, USAF, leaving the professionalization of the ANSF in his hands. In one of his first deep dives, Ray pointed out the many initiatives still on the AAF docket but was also careful to note the obstacles lying in the way of air force development. Not all was gloom and doom. During his deep dive, Ray discussed the prospects of the C-208B light aircraft, the first of which was set to arrive in October. While originally conceived as a light-lift asset for the air force, Ray pointed out that the aircraft was essentially a "pickup truck" and had utility well beyond its intended usage. The aircraft's range and extended on-station time offered the promise of use as an intelligence-

gathering platform or even in a close air support role. The C-208 also offered an extremely cost-effective means of moving personnel around the country. Ray noted that with eight passengers or 800 pounds of cargo, it cost \$1,900 per hour to fly. He added that compared to the \$5,000 per hour C-27 or the nearly \$9,000 per hour Mi-17, the C-208 seemed a shining example of equipment that fit within General Caldwell's maxim of capable, affordable, and sustainable.⁹⁴

Ray even identified a problem he admitted was actually good to have. The pilot training program in the UAE had become so successful that by 2013, pilots arriving at Shindand to begin training in the Mi-17 would quickly overwhelm the capacity of the training pipeline. To not act would create a large holding population of trainees who would sit idle until training capacity increased to accept them into the program.

Ray identified three courses of action to mitigate the bulge. The most promising of these was a combination of increasing the training capacity by looking at Mi-17 training opportunities outside of Afghanistan while also slowing the surge of student pilots through attrition and holding pilots in the UAE for longer periods. Simply reducing the number of pilot trainees, however, was not an option. Ray pointed out that even with the surge in pilots, the AAF would still be short of qualified Mi-17 aircrews. While lowering the overall crew-to-aircraft ratio, increasing Mi-17 training capacity, and revising training standards to "Afghan right" could reduce the gap, the issue highlighted an important dimension of transition.⁹⁵

While Ray accentuated the gains made by Afghan airmen, he also pointed out the persistent problems displayed by the Afghans when it came to command and control. To Ray and his advisors, the criticality of a methodical process to the efficient and effective use of air assets was intuitively obvious. Requests for air support should follow a logical path from the local commanders to air liaison officers to the Air Command and Coordination Center (ACCC). The brain of the system, the ACCC directed air wings to provide assets and received direction from higher headquarters, charged with developing overall air strategy. But Ray was no less naive to his human capital than was his predecessor. Afghans were not Americans. There was, in Ray's words, a "cultural" piece to all of this. He related an anecdote in which an Afghan Army general had ordered MEDEVAC patients removed from an aircraft so it could transport his personal vehicle. Ray further disclosed that far too many missions were still being flown without

going through the usual air mission request process, while the trend of correctly documented missions had fallen from 57 in August (out of 142 total missions) to 23 in September.⁹⁶

US Air Force Airmen knew how an efficient air force should be managed. The only problem was that the Afghans, lacking the history and traditions of the NTM-A trainers and planners, had another vision of how air operations should be conducted. More often than not, air operations were tasked by cell phone, often with direction going straight from senior MOD officials to the air wings. There were no means to hold senior MOD officials accountable for abusive scheduling practices, and aircrews were not empowered to dispute the demands of senior officers. The cultural divide between Afghans and the coalition came with consequences. The lack of command and control discipline had measurable effects on aircraft readiness. Following the murder of NTM-A air advisors in late April, for example, NTM-A advisors went through a period of reset and training. The Kabul air wing was subsequently left on its own for weeks. Lacking any NTM-A oversight to tasking, the erratic degree of daily air operations in May illustrated that the air wing was responding to external tasking without any concern to flight hour management. Ray pointed out that the failure to manage the air wing's flight time had implications on aircraft availability. With the Kabul maintenance personnel capable of performing phased maintenance on only a few helicopters at a time, the air wing was on track to place the entire fleet of helicopters into phase maintenance, effectively grounding the entire fleet for a time.⁹⁷

Whether General Ray could infuse the spirit of Billy Mitchell into the Afghan Air Force was tenuous at best. By the fall, NTM-A's efforts to develop the Afghan Air Force were showing mixed results. All the training programs were in place, with 58 courses offered at the Big Air School and nearly 800 Afghans enrolled in courses. Afghans seemed to be competent pilots. Only three helicopters and one fixed-wing cargo aircraft had been lost since NTM-A was established. New aircraft were arriving despite Allvin's attempt to tie aircraft delivery to professionalism. The movement of pilot training from foreign soil to Afghanistan was headed in the right direction. And yet, enough issues remained to offset the gains NTM-A had made the past two years. The air force still suffered from deficiencies in training. Of the 2,873 airmen surveyed, more than half (over 1,900) were under-trained yet remained attached to their units, while only 973 personnel

were deemed fully trained for their positions. How long it would take to populate the force with trained personnel to replace the thousands of airmen who entered without any training was an open question.

Any successes in the “professionalization” of the AAF had to be taken in context with the attack on NTM-A air advisors in April and further evidence of corruption in other areas of the air force.⁹⁸ Whether NTM-A advisors would be any more successful than their Soviet predecessors remained to be seen. Thirty years prior, Soviet air advisors experienced similar frustration with their fledglings and ultimately resigned themselves to the limitations of a “14th-century” country.⁹⁹ Afghans knew how to fly. How to get them to work an eight-hour shift, manage their personnel and maintain their aircraft, and stop using cell phones as a mission tasking tool were still open questions.

History itself did not bode well for the Afghan Army or Afghan Air Force to maintain the patina of modernity—at least in a Western sense—on its own. Coalition efforts in Afghanistan fit a broader historical pattern of the effects of culture in Western-Islamic military cooperation. The French, British, and Soviets all attempted to convince Egyptian counterparts to habituate the virtues of modern military professionals. The Egyptians simply took what weapons and training were offered and adapted them to their own culture. Similarly, despite close cooperation with the US military, the Saudi military demonstrates a pronounced professional dysfunction: avoidance of responsibility and hard work on the part of the officers, little responsibility given to its NCOs, hoarding of supplies, and poor logistics and maintenance capabilities. American advisors leaving Iraq were quickly replaced by returning officers from the prior regime with the “old Iraqi mindset.”¹⁰⁰ Afghans are not Arabs. But Afghan culture is no less alien to the West and proved no less impermeable to Western military culture.

Notes

(All notes appear in shortened form. For full details, see the appropriate entry in the bibliography.)

For NTM-A historical documents cited, contact the US Army Center of Military History, Fort Lesley J. McNair, Washington, DC.

1. Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Ministry of Defense, General Staff of the ANA, ANA-1, *Afghan National Army, 1–12*.
2. ANA-1, 6.

3. NTM-A, “DCOM-A [Deputy Commander–Army] Deep Dive,” PowerPoint presentation, 12 December 2010. The recruitment of southern Pashtuns, an important barometer of the development of a national army, improved noticeably in the October–December time frame, nearing the NTM-A established goal of 4 percent of the army. The recently established Provincial Recruiting Councils appear to have been a contributing factor to the increase.

4. Afghan National Army Training and Education Command, *SY1389 Course Catalog*, Second Quarter, July 2010. The list is exhaustive, but the courses reflected Western influence, including the Company Commander’s Course, System Administration and Network Basic Course (for a country largely unwired with a tenuous power grid), Aircraft Non-Destructive Inspection (to determine cracking in aircraft components), Biomedical Equipment Technician, the Cook course, and Air Force Imagery Exploitation (though the Afghan Air Force had no reconnaissance capability).

5. Afghan National Army, *SY1389 Course Catalog*.

6. Afghan National Army, *SY1389 Course Catalog*.

7. Afghan National Army, *SY1389 Course Catalog*.

8. NTM-A “NMAA Class of 1393 (2015) Admissions,” Power Point Presentation, 17 January 2011. The ethnic breakdown for the Class of 2015 was 265 Pashtun (44 percent), 150 Tajik (25 percent), 60 Hazara (10 percent), 48 Uzbek (8 percent), and 81 other (13 percent). These percentages were virtually identical to the goals that the NMAA had set.

9. NTM-A, Assistant Commanding General–Army Development, memorandum, 27 January 2011.

10. NTM-A, memorandum, 27 January 2011. Of students graduating, 96 were from the up-armored Humvee course in Kabul, 67 from a similar course at the regional training center in Kandahar, 20 from the engineering basic officer training course at the ANA Engineer School in Mazar-e-Sharif, 11 from the intelligence course at the intel school at Sia Sang and other locations, and 195 from the basic literacy course at the regional training facility at Mazar-e-Sharif.

11. NTM-A, “The ‘Afghan Instructor,’” PowerPoint presentation, 17 February 2011.

12. NTM-A, “The ‘Afghan Instructor.’”

13. NTM-A, “The ‘Afghan Instructor.’”

14. NTM-A, “The ‘Afghan Instructor.’”

15. NTM-A, “The ‘Afghan Instructor.’”

16. Patton to commander, Regional Support Command (RSC) Southwest, email, 17 March 2011.

17. Ferrari to NTM-A CJ1 Director, CSTC-A et al., email, 14 May 2011.

18. Combined Training Advisory Group–Afghanistan (CTAG-A), memorandum for record, 27 February 2011; and CTAG-A, memorandum, March 2011.

19. NTM-A, “Command Briefing to Lieutenant General John Allen,” PowerPoint presentation, 18 May 2011. Allen was in Kabul as part of his briefing schedule prior to assuming command of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) from General Petraeus in July 2011.

20. I heard two reasons for the prohibition, neither of which holds much water. The first is that a couple of beers would result in negligent weapons discharges or, worse, safety violations. But the Europeans were all carrying weapons, with magazines inserted, and seemed under control. The other justification was that it would be culturally insensitive to drink alcohol in a Muslim country. Yet the fact that the coalition constitutes a force of nonbelievers in a Muslim country in itself would appear to be somewhat culturally incorrect.

21. NTM-A/CSTC-A, "Primary Drivers of ANA Attrition and Mitigating Actions"; and O'Neill to Krause, AUS, ISAF Joint Command, email, 16 March 2011.
22. NTM-A/CSTC-A, "Primary Drivers of ANA Attrition." The document went on to state that the president of Afghanistan's amnesty decree was ineffective, bringing back only about 12 percent of AWOL soldiers.
23. NTM-A/CSTC-A CJ IG to deputy commanding general, NTM-A/CSTC-A CMG GRP, email, 6 March 2011.
24. Maddan to commander, NTM-A, email, 18 May 2011.
25. NTM-A/CSTC-A CJ8, "May ANSF Progress Overview," charts, 10 May 2011. The two statistical charts, one for Army and one for police, cover information such as growth, AWOL, retention, literacy statistics, and Afghan instructor numbers.
26. Maddan to commander, NTM-A.
27. NTM-A/CSTC-A deputy commanding general to chief of staff, NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan, 10 June 2011.
28. NTM-A/CSTC-A deputy commanding general to chief of staff, memorandum.
29. CSTC-A/CJ3 to XO DCG NTM-A CMD GRP et al., email, 27 May 2013.
30. NTM-A, "National Military Hospital KLE," executive summary, 30 May 2011; and NTM-A DCOM-A to DCG NTM-A/CSTC-A CMD GRP, NTM-A DCOM-A, 18 June 2011.
31. NTM-A, "ANSF Development Summer-Autumn 2011," PowerPoint presentation, 12 May 2011.
32. NTM-A, "DCOM-Army, June 2011 Update to the CG [Commanding General]," PowerPoint presentation, 5 July 2011.
33. NTM-A, "DCOM-Army." Given that the political winds back in the US were blowing in the direction of severely reduced funding for NTM-A, these incentive pays would be the first to go in the future. The potential problem would be an increase in an already unsustainable attrition rate—a harbinger of the larger problem when the vast majority of coalition support would be gone by 2014.
34. Good, "Afghan National Army Receives Mobile Strike Force Vehicles."
35. NTM-A, "DCOM-ARMY Update," PowerPoint presentation, 2 June 2011.
36. NTM-A, "DCOM-Army Update."
37. NTM-A, "DCOM-Army Update."
38. NTM-A, "DCOM-A deputy commander of the Army Brief on ANA Strength Total Discrepancy," briefing paper, 10 June 2011.
39. As derived from *Pashtunwali*, the code that guides the behavior of Pashtuns, only three things are worth fighting for: honor, gold, and women.
40. NTM-A/CSTC-A ANA Development to NTM-A DCOM-A, email, 16 August 2011.
41. NTM-A, "ANA Strength Total Discrepancy"; and CSTC-A Command Advisory Group (CAG) to CSTC-A SAG, NTM-A/CSTC-A CAG, email, 23 August 2011.
42. Logistic training team lead, Warrior Training Alliance, Camp Blackhorse, Pol-e-Charki, to CSTC-A, email, 14 June 2011.
43. Logistic training team lead to CSTC-A, email; and RC(s) ANA ops officer to RSC(s) Sergeant Major (SGM), email, 30 July 2011.
44. NTM-A/CSTC-A CMD Group to COMISAF, email, 5 July 2011, with attached slide, "ANA Core Values"; ISAF Joint Command Human Analysis Team, "ANA Perceptions on AWOL Attrition," report, 4 July 2011; and NTM-A, "ANSF & NTM-A/CSTC-A Cooperative Stewardship Move, Shoot, Communicate," PowerPoint presentation, 3 August 2011.
45. NTM-A DCOM, "ANSF Force Development Modeling," Army analysis, 4 September 2011.

46. NTM-A, "DCOM-Army Deep Dive," PowerPoint presentation, 15 September 2011.

47. NTM-A, "DCOM-A Tashkil Review," PowerPoint presentation, 20 September 2011; US Army Training Publication (ATP) 3-21.8, *Infantry Platoon and Squad*, app. G, April 2016; and NTM-A CJ7 to NTM-A CoS, DCG-Ops, email, 24 November 2011.

48. NTM-A, "DCOM-Army Deep Dive," PowerPoint presentation, 15 September 2011; and NTM-A, "DCOM-Army Tashkil Review."

49. Discussion during NTM-A presentation of "DCOM-Army Deep Dive."

50. NTM-A, "Mujahideen Integration Course Cancellation," PowerPoint presentation, 15 October 2011; and CG NTM-A, "Decision Brief," 15 October 2011. Caldwell approved one final course to begin in late November on the condition that the class size would intentionally be kept as small as possible.

51. NTM-A, "COM NTM-A Assessment Brief, October 2011," PowerPoint Presentation, 2 November 2011.

52. NTM-A, "COM NTM-A Assessment Brief"; and CSTC-A CAG to NTM-A CJ35, CSTC-A CJ7, NTM-A DCG, email, 9 November 2011.

53. Millham, "Afghan Forces Show Little Progress as Security Handoff Nears."

54. Ackerman, "Not a Single Afghan Battalion Fights without U.S. Help."

55. Walker, "Will the Afghan Army Ever Stand Up and Fight?"

56. Aircraft included 55 Mi-17s, 11 Mi-35s, 20 C-27As, and six MD-530F helicopter trainers. Light, fixed-wing cargo planes, as well as turboprop close air support aircraft were also envisioned as future acquisitions.

57. Oliker, *Building Afghanistan's Security Forces*, 48–51.

58. NTM-A, "DCOM-Air Update Brief," PowerPoint presentation, 15 December 2010; and NTM-A, "2011 Vision and Objectives Deep Dive," PowerPoint presentation, 10 January 2011.

59. NTM-A, "DCOM-Air Update Brief."

60. NTM-A, "DCOM-Air Update Brief."

61. NTM-A, "Maintaining NTM-A's Training Momentum," PowerPoint presentation, 2 January 2011. The concept of the "pledged" trainer proved a continuous source of problems for the command. Too often, it seemed that countries conflated pledged trainers with having filled a billet. Subsequently, the position would sit empty for months, with little NTM-A could do to force the pledging nation to actually produce a body. For example, Lithuania, Latvia, Ukraine, Hungary, and Spain had pledged 8, 2, 2, 16, and 8 trainers, respectively. Yet from September 2010 to January 2011, only seven Hungarian trainers had arrived.

62. NTM-A, "DCOM-Air Update Brief."

63. The school offered 50 courses in the areas of aviation, aircraft maintenance, mission support, literacy, language, and professional military education. A total of 454 students were enrolled in January 2011.

64. NTM-A, "2011 Vision and Objectives Deep Dive."

65. NTM-A, "2011 Vision and Objectives Deep Dive."

66. NTM-A, "2011 Vision and Objectives Deep Dive."

67. NTM-A, "COM NTM-A Assessments CUB," April 2011. The commander's update briefing (CUB) was a monthly statistical wrap-up from all NTM-A elements.

68. NTM-A, "DCOM-Air Deep Dive," PowerPoint presentation, 18 March 2011. In February 2011, the AAF flew 540 sorties and logged 558 flight hours in support of operations. Aircrews moved 5,880 passengers, 49 patients, 26 human remains, and 54,145 kilograms of cargo.

69. 438th Afghan Expeditionary Air Service (AEAS)/CC NATO Air Training Command-Afghanistan (NATC-A) to NATC-A, email, 22 March 2011; NTM-A/

CSTC-A CMD GRP to COMISAF, email, 8 March 2011; and Deputy Air Force Commander (DAFC) 438 AEW (Air Expeditionary Wing) NATC-A to NTM-A command historian, email, 17 March 2011. The first presidential airlift on 3 March included one advisor in one helicopter, but he did not advise on the flight. On 22 March, though, an all-Afghan crew flew without advisors, transporting the president of Afghanistan around the Kabul area.

70. NTM-A, "DCOM-Air Deep Dive," 18 March 2011; and NTM-A, "Afghan Air Force (AAF) Update Brief to COMISAF," PowerPoint presentation, 6 April 2011.

71. DAFC 438 AEW NATC-A to NTM-A command historian, email, 17 March 2011.

72. 438th AEAS/CC NATC-A to NATC-A, email, 18 March 2011. The email is a broadcast to the entire NATC-A staff.

73. 438th AEAS/CC NATC-A to NATC-A.

74. 438th AEAS/CC NATC-A to NATC-A.

75. 438th AEAS/CC NATC-A to NATC-A.

76. ISAF and NTM-A meeting, 30 March 2011.

77. ISAF and NTM-A meeting; and NTM-A, "AAF Mi-17 Capacity and Development," PowerPoint presentation, 1 June 2011.

78. NTM-A, "Return to Work Back Brief: DCOM-Air," PowerPoint presentation, 4 July 2011.

79. NTM-A, "Conditions-Based Mi-17 Delivery." Allvin pointed out a continued lack of transparency in command and control, such as failure to document missions flown and passenger manifests. The personnel inventory of the AAF was also lagging and missing key information, such as personnel training levels and pay data.

80. Allvin, "Afghan Air Force Professionalization Program," 1.

81. Allvin, "Professionalization Program."

82. Allvin, "Professionalization Program."

83. Allvin, "Professionalization Program." A related issue was the recent influx of AAF reservists—an initiative with neither the oversight nor blessing of DCOM-Air. NTM-A viewed the activity as patronage at the least and possibly having corruption undertones. The AAF colonel who murdered the NTM-A advisors in May was a reservist.

84. Allvin, "Afghan Air Force Professionalization Program."

85. Air Advisor to VCoGS-Air, DCOM-Air, "DCOM-Air Air Shura," executive summary, 31 July 2011. VCoGS-Air was the vice chief of the Afghan General Staff, Air Force, Lt Gen Mohammad Dawran.

86. Air Advisor to VCoGS-Air, DCOM-Air, "DCOM-Air."

87. Department of Defense, Office of Inspector General, Office of Special Plans and Operations, "In-Process Review/Outbrief for NTM-A/CSTC-A."

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89. DOD, "In-Process Review/Outbrief."

90. NTM-A, "ANSF & NTM-A/CSTC-A Cooperative Stewardship: Move, Shoot, Communicate," PowerPoint presentation, 18 August 2011.

91. NTM-A, "AAF Professionalization Matrix, July and August," PowerPoint presentation, 14 September 2011; and NTM-A, "NATC-A: AAF Aircraft Weekly Update, 1–7 Sep 11," September 2011.

92. NTM-A morning stand-up, 25 August 2011. Reporting on a 24 August phone conference with the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Caldwell noted the pressure from Washington to have the helicopters delivered to Kabul, with NTM-A figuring out how to delay delivery from there.

93. 438 AEW/CC and commanding general, NATO Air Training Command–Afghanistan, memorandum for record, 26 August 2011.

94. NTM-A, "DCOM-Air Deep Dive," 7 October 2011.

95. NTM-A, "DCOM-Air Deep Dive."
96. NTM-A, "DCOM-Air Deep Dive."
97. NTM-A, "DCOM-Air Deep Dive." The flight hour breakdown for the first half of May was as follows: 1st–30 hrs., 2nd–16 hrs., 3rd–28 hrs., 4th–19 hrs., 5th–7 hrs., 6th–2 hrs., 7th–8 hrs., 8th–9 hrs., 10th–15 hrs., 11th–19 hrs., 12th–2 hrs., and 13th–29 hrs. The erratic pattern continued throughout the month.
98. NTM-A, "DCOM-Air Deep Dive"; and Statement of Anthony H. Cordesman in *Afghan National Security Forces and Security Lead Transition*, H.A.S.C. no. 112-144, 2–4.
99. Oliker, *Building Afghanistan's Security Forces*, 51.
100. DeAtkine, "Western Influence on Arab Militaries," 22.

Chapter 8

The Afghan National Police

The Security Paradox

Craig C. Felker

During an early January 2011 deep dive, NATO Training Mission–Afghanistan’s (NTM-A) deputy commander for police development made a rather obvious yet incredibly important observation about training practices in police versus army forces. The primary difference between the Afghan Army and police, observed Maj Gen Stu Beare, Canadian Forces, was that the army spent most of its time training rather than operating. The police, by contrast, spent most of their time doing police work and had to develop skills and experience while on the job.¹ The Canadian general was trying to explain the enormity of his mission to build the Afghan National Police (ANP) into a disciplined, effective organization. It needed to be capable of surviving and operating in the current counterinsurgency environment while also moving beyond paramilitary operations to the role of civil policing.

The task was daunting, to say the least. If a consistent theme runs through the literature on policing in Afghanistan, it is what has been described as a “justice deficit” in the country. Internal security had historically been largely in the hands of the army. What was left was a police force untrained, vulnerable to control by local warlords, prone to corruption, and operating without any semblance of a coherent justice system or rule of law. The environment not only created dissatisfaction among Afghans but also enabled sympathies with the Taliban, which offered a stern albeit consistent alternative.²

Historical and cultural forces beyond NTM-A’s control initially inhibited efforts beyond simply building and deploying police to the field. But the command also imposed limitations of its own. In fact, General Caldwell’s strategy reflected the systemic practice by the Afghan government and its international partners to focus on short-term rather than long-term strategies necessary for state building. Consequently, NTM-A’s police development team was at the center of a paradox. Its vision was to develop Afghan police force survival skills against the current insurgency while contemporaneously instilling

professional attributes. Expediency triumphed. The imperative of fighting the insurgency informed the command's emphasis on growth and paramilitary training. In the end, building a police force capable of surviving in a counterinsurgency (COIN) environment forced a rethinking of early assumptions about what "transition" would look like and stymied any notion of developing the Afghans toward civil policing. Like their army counterparts, Afghan police leaders demonstrated behaviors that ran counter to Western ideas of efficiency. General Beare recognized that the model Afghan police instructor—a "subject matter expert committed to the best ideals of his/her profession" and "imbued with an ethic of service to his/her country"—was "not the current reality."³ Whether the model could ever come to fruition would remain in doubt by the end of the year.

NTM-A Takes on Afghan National Police Development

By the end of 2010, 116,856 personnel were assigned to the Afghan National Police: approximately 7,500 to the Afghan National Civil Order Police (ANCOP), 87,000 to the Afghan Uniformed Police (AUP), and 19,000 to the Afghan Border Police (ABP).⁴ Growth estimates placed the ANP at its expected force level of 134,000 by October 2011, with shortages in officers and noncommissioned officers (NCO) largely resolved by December.⁵

The end of the year also brought significant progress beyond force-level growth. Over 34,000 policemen had undergone training, including 7,000 support personnel. The establishment of personnel development courses pointed to initiatives designed to professionalize the force. These included a six-month Officer Candidate School course, Team Leader's Course for sergeants, ANCOP Battalion Command and Staff and Company Commander's Course, and a provincial zone commanders' seminar. On the ministerial level, the signing of decrees covering pay, active duty service obligation, and mandatory retirement represented the first inroads toward the development of a stable, enduring police force.⁶

Yet NTM-A's police development team also observed critical issues that could compromise further police development. Corruption within the Ministry of Interior (MOI) was contributing to negative perceptions of the police. Low literacy rates challenged training and any effort toward professionalization. The lack of candidates having

the required Level 3 (third grade) reading proficiency to enlist in the civil order police, for example, required lowering the standard to Level 1 (first grade) to increase the recruiting pool. Low literacy levels also affected subject matter content in the entry-level Basic Patrolman Course. Finally, while General Beare recognized the importance of growth, he also cautioned that it constrained professionalization of the police.⁷

The extent to which NTM-A could “professionalize” the police, at least in a Western sense, was questionable in the first place. The Basic Patrolman Course syllabus, for example, included the lesson “The Role of the Policeman” to expose the police recruit to the characteristics of the profession, such as “professional,” “impartial,” and “objective.” Other teaching objectives included educating the patrolman on his obligation to act within the constraints of Afghanistan’s constitution and laws and to respect human rights. The curriculum allocated eight one-hour periods of instruction. There was no doubt that the concepts could be presented to a class of Afghan police recruits. But how those recruits—many of whom were undergoing literacy training to get to the base proficiency—were to understand the concepts, let alone practice them, was another question.⁸

The Coalition Determines Focus Areas and Solutions

The NTM-A police team would subsequently focus on core areas in 2011. The first was enhancing ANP leadership and force quality. Toward that end, the team planned to make more slots available for Officer Candidate School and allocate additional police billets from National Military Academy graduating classes. It would also direct efforts toward the interior ministry to fill Team Leader and other professional courses to their maximum capacity. Further, NTM-A planned to expand the number of police involved in literacy training. Finally, it set a ceiling of 16.8 percent annual attrition to improve retention in the force.⁹

A second core focus was the prospect of including aspects of civil policing in training courses, which Beare recognized as integral to eventual transition. Beare proposed reviewing the Basic Patrolman Course, originally designed for eight weeks. However, the emphasis on growing the ANP led to a two-week reduction. Beare wanted to make the course less military oriented and more police centered and

Afghan-centric. Extending the course from six to eight weeks would permit additional instruction in subjects such as intelligence, arrest procedures, tactics, domestic intervention, and traffic policing as well as a final exercise. Modifying the course was just one piece of a third goal of a professional police force. Beare provided a Western template, the “English System,” as one example of a systemic approach to police professionalism. The system provided 18 to 24 months of mentorship following graduation from basic training, continued professional training down to the local precinct, accredited instructors, and training standards tied to the British Association of Chief Police Officers’ *Manual of Guidance*.¹⁰

As to the issue of training capacity, the imperative to build and field police forces prior to 2010 had resulted in many police receiving no training prior to assignment. Efforts would also focus on finding and assigning the estimated 42,000 untrained policemen to training positions, with the expectation that nearly 14,000 would be trained by March and overall ANP training capacity would reach 19,472 by December. To support these training requirements, the police team envisioned a total of 37 training sites in operation by December 2011. Personnel rolls in 2011 and 2012 would include slots for 1,097 and 2,026 instructors, respectively.¹¹

In keeping with the NTM-A theme of 2011 as the Year of the Afghan Trainer, the police team defined the model instructor: “a disciplined, hand selected (uniformed) Afghan leader (NCO/[officer]) who stands apart from his/her peers; is a role model for emulation; is a subject matter expert committed to the best ideals of his/her profession; and is imbued with an ethic of service to his/her country.” Beare acknowledged that the model was not reality. While instructor billets could be added to the rolls, the predominant problem impeding the development of capable trainers was the lack of any coherent training system. There were major reasons for this deficiency. The first was that 2010 had been spent simply building the police force—a considerable effort given the problems with attrition. The police train-the-trainer system had not received the attention of its army counterparts. Further, the human relations department of the interior ministry was so nascent as to be virtually ineffective. Consequently, the ANP had no knowledge of the whereabouts or employment of some 336 police instructors trained during 2010. There was additionally little to no information on train-the-trainer courses, nor was there any standardized program of instruction. Similarly, no process was in place

for selecting and screening police instructors. Even if a selection process existed, there were enough disincentives—from pay to an uncertain career path—to dissuade volunteers. In short, there was no system.¹²

Despite these problems, the NTM-A police team arrived at short- and long-term solutions to address the instructor issue. By the following December, it planned for an increase in training capacity from 11,662 policemen to 19,472, with an estimated 16,337 policemen involved in training by the end of the year. The team also envisioned that pay and career path issues would be solved by December, with a mentorship program in place for newly minted instructors as well as accountability procedures to address poor performance. Beare had adopted the “Satha” (levels) system of trainer skill levels developed for the army. An approved train-the-trainer standardized program would be completed by June 2011, which by the following December would have an estimated 900 “Satha 2”-qualified Afghan trainers. Over the long term, a comprehensive assessment of current training courses would be implemented to standardize instructional programs. More instructor courses would be developed, while the current course load capacity would be synchronized with instructor billets on ANP personnel rolls. Finally, literacy goals for 2011 envisioned all officers at the 12th grade reading level, ANCOP NCOs at the 1st to 3rd grade levels, and all other police NCOs at the 3rd to 6th grade levels. While no standard was set for patrolmen, they would receive 64 hours of literacy training during the Basic Patrolman Course, with a long-term goal of achieving literacy to Level 3.¹³

While NTM-A’s police team worked through the programmatic issues, it had a more difficult time cracking the problem of identifying and training the tens of thousands of police who had entered service without any formal training. Many of these policemen had enlisted prior to NTM-A’s establishment. But even the formation of the training command could not account for police units in remote districts hiring off the street, particularly if coalition mentors were not around. While estimates varied, the numbers were staggering. The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) Joint Command estimated 50,000–58,000 police had received no formal training, with as many as 75,000 untrained policemen on duty. The best that NTM-A could do was a hybrid solution that grandfathered some police based on previous service while providing reform training to the rest, if they could be identified.¹⁴

An Afghan for-Profit Security Force Gets in the Way

As if building and training the existing police forces were not challenging enough, another issue emerged that proved to be a major distraction to police development. The president of Afghanistan's declaration to disband private security companies (PSC) had severe implications for the protection of many NTM-A and ISAF facilities across the country. Following a meeting with Karzai advisor Dr. Ashraf Ghani on 27 January, Army brigadier general Jefforey Smith, who led NTM-A's ministry development efforts, reported that the Afghan National Security Council had decided to disband seven PSCs. According to Ghani, the companies would have no longer than 90 days to dissolve. The impact was consequential; 2,749 of the guards were tied to ISAF bases, 60 to Army Corps of Engineer projects, and 504 to US Agency for International Development projects. The Afghans proved willing to bend when it came to protecting diplomatic missions. They would be allowed to continue using existing PSCs for the long term. This was an important consolation, though primarily driven by the UK's threat to completely shut its embassy if not allowed to retain its security force.¹⁵

NTM-A staff discussed several creative ideas with Dr. Ghani on what to do with the seven companies to be disbanded. The prevailing option seemed to be a total incorporation of the privatized guards providing security at the respective bases and projects into an Afghan government-owned security organization. While the PSCs would eventually be replaced by a government-sponsored security organization, the Afghan Public Protection Force (APPF), all agreed to a temporary "bridging strategy" that would meet both coalition security demands and the sovereignty requirements of the Afghan government. However, Caldwell recognized that the APPF was a vine that could eventually entangle NTM-A attention and resources. He was therefore careful to instruct his police team not to devote resources to the training or equipping of the APPF.¹⁶

By the middle of March, a solution to the PSC issue was defined. A presidential decree on 15 March, effective for one year, included a bridging strategy. The strategy was to be the guiding document for transition from PSCs to a state-owned and operated Afghan Public Protection Force. It would become wholly responsible for the security of bases and facilities in the country—including ISAF and NTM-A facilities and convoys. A point of contention, though, emerged shortly

after the document was promulgated. Both ISAF commander General Petraeus and Lieutenant General Caldwell objected to the reduction from the originally agreed two-year proviso covering transition from PSCs to the APPF to one year. A second issue lay in who would assume responsibility for developing both the force and its business plan. NTM-A took on the responsibility of establishing and training APPF headquarters staff. However, the command distanced itself from further developmental responsibilities given the legal problems potentially associated with a state-owned, for-profit company.¹⁷

Afghan and NTM-A Strategies Align . . . in Principle

While the development of a police training system was moving forward, albeit slowly, NTM-A advisors made noticeable gains in its ministerial development program. Sixteen of the interior ministry's 38 offices had nearly reached independent status, with eight offices estimated to be ready for a decision to transition to autonomous operations within the next six months.¹⁸ Enabling the progress in ministerial readiness was the leadership of Bismillah Khan Mohammadi, appointed as minister of the interior in July 2010. Since taking office, Mohammadi had begun initiatives to reduce corruption, improved the efficiency of the ministry, and delegated authority while also retiring many old Soviet-era leaders.¹⁹

Mohammadi appeared to have taken another important measure with the development of a national strategy for the police. On the surface, the *Afghan National Police Strategy* represented a major step forward in identifying Afghanistan's national interests and the ANP's roles in supporting them. Mohammadi outlined 13 specific national interests, chief among them to provide public safety and civil order, counter the insurgent threat, eliminate corruption, and create an environment supporting the Afghan constitution—particularly human rights. The interior minister then went on to identify the main threats to Afghanistan's national interests: the insurgency, corruption, the drug trade, organized crime, and illegally armed groups.²⁰

To combat these threats, Mohammadi laid out his priorities for the next five years, many reflecting NTM-A initiatives. One of these was to expand and improve police training to ensure that all newly recruited policemen completed basic training. Training and education were also viewed as essential to improving the leadership skills of officers

and NCOs. As a means to eliminate corruption, he advocated for transparency—which in turn would build the respect and trust of the people. Another priority was to improve the living standards and working environment of the police. These efforts would be overseen by a commission led by senior police and civilian leadership as well as international experts. The strategy also touched on administration. Mohammadi emphasized continuous reviews of the personnel rolls to ensure that the capacity and capabilities of the ANP met requirements, satisfied security priorities, and maintained a balance among the ministry's police agencies. Finally, he recognized that accountability—whether rewarding performance or holding police who abuse their authority responsible—would be central to building a credible, competent, and legitimate police force.²¹

Owning a strategy and having the ability to implement it, though, are two different things. The viability of the police strategy required the Afghans to take ownership of a critical part of the overall security picture. Here the evidence was mixed. On the one hand, a United Nations Development Program survey in November 2010 indicated that perceptions of the ANP were largely positive. While sharp differences among regions remained, Afghans generally held a more favorable opinion of the police than the previous year, with the recognition that the police were maintaining a strong presence in many areas. While the survey also noted perceptions of corruption, drug use, and police mistreatment, most Afghans rated their personal security positively, with 89 percent feeling safe in their communities during the day and 70 percent feeling safe at night. Other surveys, however, indicated contrary evidence, citing Afghan concerns about the predatory practices of the police. Serious misgivings also existed about NTM-A's focus on quantity at the expense of quality; the limited numbers of civilian police on the staff; and excessive Pentagon influence on police training, with European Coalition members having little say.²²

The coalition also bore some responsibility for the success or failure of the police strategy. Unlike the Afghan National Army (ANA) that was predominantly concentrated on major bases, police units—particularly the Afghan Uniformed Police—were situated in precincts across all of the country's 398 districts. The issue was simply how the ISAF Joint Command, responsible for both combat operations and mentoring the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), could support and protect coalition mentors spread far and wide across the country and still fight the insurgency. The answer was that

mentoring priority went first to ANCOP units, next to the border police, and finally to 94 key terrain districts (mostly those situated along Highway 1 between major cities) and 44 other regional areas of interest. Even with these goals, 84 high-priority ANP units had no police operational mentoring and liaison teams (POMLT), with an additional 178 units of lesser priority left uncovered.²³ Without continued coalition oversight, there was no guarantee that Afghan police would retain the skills NTM-A had taught them or, worse, would not become little more than state-paid security forces for local warlords or corrupt AUP district commanders.

The publication of the interior ministry's police strategy roughly coincided with Caldwell's vision statement. General Beare's team accordingly crafted its strategy to support the command's strategy. On 9 February, Beare outlined his 2011 fielding plan for the police. Anticipating that the ANP would grow by at least 12,000 personnel to the requisite 134,000 force level by October, the fielding plan not only thickened operational police units but, more importantly, increased enabling forces—particularly recruiting, logistics, fire and rescue, and medical units—to begin the process toward self-sufficiency. The plan was complemented by a development strategy that blended well with the 2011 vision statement. In his deep dive on 11 February, Beare outlined four major initiatives aimed at setting the initial conditions for transition. First, he presented a training model dedicated to producing professional police instructors. Second, at the institutional level, responsibility for training development and execution was placed under the purview of a recruit-train-assign council comprising the commanders for recruiting, training, and personnel. Third, the Professional Development Board was established to oversee specific training program design and development. Drawing representatives from the Afghan National Police Training General Command, European Union Police Mission in Afghanistan (EUPOL Afghanistan), German police training program, and NTM-A, the board had already agreed to standardize instructional programs for the Basic Patrolman and train-the-trainer courses. It was also working toward a unified police operational policy, the fourth initiative aimed at transitioning the ANP to Afghan lead.²⁴

The emphasis on unity of effort had already led to the interior ministry's approval of a standardized, three-phased train-the-trainer development model. In the plan's first phase, a qualified instructor would conduct initial training for ANP candidates. In the second

phase, trainees would receive five weeks of formal instruction leading to the designation of assistant instructor. The assistant instructors would then teach under supervision, which would lead to their formal certification as instructors. A final level of cultivating instructors to develop, evaluate, and oversee training in all three phases was under development. With a German-led pilot course already underway, Beare estimated that approximately 900 policemen would achieve instructor qualifications by the end of solar year 1390 (2011–12). Beare carefully pointed out, however, that the increased numbers of Afghan trainers did not correlate to offsetting current shortfalls for NATO trainers. Rather, he emphasized that both NTM-A and Afghan trainers would be necessary to support the increased training capacity required for growth in 2011 and perhaps into 2012.²⁵

NTM-A Efforts Show Mixed Results

A March Department of Defense Inspector General's report on the state of the police reflected not only the good timing of Beare's strategy but also the consequences of NTM-A's focus on growth over development. Overall, the report noted that NTM-A's restructuring of police training was an appreciable improvement on previous efforts and offered the clearest way to transition. But it also identified deficiencies within the ANP that would impede efforts to professionalize the police and possibly derail transition. It cited the inconsistent application of instructional programs at training sites, the high numbers of untrained uniformed police, inefficiencies in the established training programs, shortages of institutional trainers, an ineffective logistic system, and poor support from collocated ANA units. Perhaps most troubling was the report's estimation that 25 percent of police officers had taken bribes. It further indicated that "a professional culture of accountability and responsibility has generally not yet taken hold among the AUP, . . . and there are insufficient police leaders to set an appropriate example for more junior police to follow."²⁶

While the IG report was troubling, efforts over the previous year were nevertheless beginning to show promising results in at least one of the police organizations. The state of the ANCOP during NTM-A's first year was described best by Beare in that it had been "consumed" rather than developed. A lack of coalition partnering exacerbated poor leadership on the part of the Afghans. Training was unstruc-

tured and unstandardized across training centers. The force also did not have an equipment fielding plan, resulting in backlogs for vehicles and equipment. Recruitment was dismal with approximately 400 entering the force, while attrition for the year had reached a monthly average of 7.63 percent.²⁷

Despite these challenges, NTM-A's concentration on leadership, training, and personnel was showing dramatic changes in the Afghan civil order police by early 2011. A new commanding officer, coupled with reassignment of two brigade commanders, infused new leadership into the force. The establishment of the Professional Development Board and ensuing standardized training instruction brought unity to the training effort for both recruits and trainers. Coalition partnering increased in quantity and quality. The ANCOP instituted a pull system for equipment issue, clearing a backlog of over 1,300 vehicles.²⁸

Perhaps the most impactful reforms addressed personnel. Pay improvements included an incentive signing bonus of \$200, hazardous duty pay of \$45 per month when in a medium-threat environment, and an additional \$30 per month of National Expeditionary Pay when deployed. Of even greater consequence to the force was the institution of a force-generation cycle. Implemented the previous fall, the rotational cycle ensured that the civil order police would get periods of leave and retraining before being sent back into action. The initiative added predictability to the ANCOP and ensured that while units would be kept in the fight for reasonable tours, rotations would be followed by mandatory periods of leave and retraining prior to the next deployment cycle.²⁹

Consequently, a force that was previously losing almost 75 percent of its personnel yearly had lowered its attrition by more than half by February 2011. During a battlefield circuit during the second week of March, Caldwell observed the fruits of this process at the Adraskan National Police Training Center in Herat Province. Sixteen months prior, the training facility was completely contractor run—and failing. NTM-A subsequently brought in the European Gendarmerie Force (EGF), headed by Italian Arma dei Carabinieri. Within six months, the mentorship of professional gendarme (police officer) trainers had transformed the training center into a model program for producing ANCOP graduates. Italian trainers also instituted a train-the-trainer program, producing 23 certified trainers by early March. Additionally, the EGF had moved on to a third phase by training the Afghan trainers in systems management. A small but notable

consequence was that the Afghan trainers produced their own written operations order for an ANCOP graduation. Immediately following the graduation, they also flawlessly executed a ribbon-cutting ceremony with media for the new Adraskan ANCOP training facility.³⁰

Where one training facility showed promise, though, others could be found lacking. On a second battlefield circulation in the western part of the country, Caldwell was so appalled at the security conditions at the Police Training Center–Qalat that he ordered the facility closed. The following month, Caldwell’s tour of training sites included an ANCOP facility in Kunduz Province in the north. During a weapons training demonstration, he noticed that students failed to zero their weapons and were also sharing them. Caldwell was later informed that the facility lacked sufficient weapons, but the Afghan commander could not provide the exact number needed. Caldwell also observed deficiencies in the quality of uniform items including helmets and boots as well as training equipment including riot shields and batons. Perhaps most interestingly, the ANCOP commander admitted to Caldwell that police recruits who failed to complete the training were not released but designated as “privates.” The problem was that all ANCOP recruits were by existing regulation promoted to sergeant upon graduation. There was no established rank of private for the ANCOP.³¹

Pulling together training sites across the country into a coherent, standardized system was difficult enough. However, NTM-A’s police team had to simultaneously build the foundation that would eventually transition training to the Afghans. Producing Afghan trainers was a thorny problem—a consequence of the state of the ANP before NTM-A was established and then NTM-A’s focus on growth of the force. Trainer numbers did not evoke an optimistic sense that transition was on the horizon. Of the 1,600 trainer billets authorized in ANP personnel rolls, only 306 were filled, and none of those had reached senior instructor levels.³²

A police deep dive on 6 May offered some sense of optimism but also reflected the complicated state of training. Afghans now occupied 79 percent of the 1,300 police instructor positions. On the other hand, only 34 percent of those instructors were actually qualified to assume those positions. At the meeting, Beare noted that the Professional Development Board had approved a certification system that should improve the number of qualified instructors. Additionally, EUPOL Afghanistan and the German Police Training Team had in-

creased their training capacity. The German Police Project Team (GPPT) was completing its second pilot course, with full production to begin in May, while EUPOL Afghanistan was augmenting its central training in Kabul with three mobile training teams. Beare projected that over the next three months, a certification process would be completed for Afghans to instruct in specialty courses and that German courses would be at full capacity. By December, Beare anticipated the completion of a policy of instruction for master instructor, at least 900 Satha 2 and 3 instructors in the training system, and an incentive system in place to attract more police to join the training ranks. Beare also originated an innovative way to deal with at least one of its trainer problems. The availability of driver training school positions, for example, was far below the demand for trained police drivers. To increase the capacity, the police team decided to build a cadre of trainers from training centers in Kabul, Jalalabad, and Wardak who would then be sent to fielded units to do mobile training. Beare was optimistic that by May 2012 an estimated 40,000 trained drivers would be in force.³³

The driver training initiative was well needed, at least given a visit to an ANP vehicle salvage yard in Kabul. The idea was to help the Afghans develop a reclamation and salvage capacity for vehicles damaged beyond use. What was of even greater interest was the number and extent of damaged vehicles. According to the USAF lieutenant colonel advising the Afghans at the facility, about 316 vehicles were on the yard. All were completely destroyed. I assumed and asked if they were destroyed in combat action. The officer surprisingly revealed that enemy action accounted for damage to only four of the vehicles. The remaining 312 had been involved in accidents, just in the Kabul area and only in the past two years. With the vehicles costing approximately \$27,000 apiece, Afghan cops had cost US taxpayers over \$8 million.³⁴

The other major initiative presented during the meeting was indirectly connected to the Dutch trainer issue. While the Dutch may have been somewhat impolitic in their approach, their strategy to extend the Basic Patrolman Course found its way into the deep dive. Beare recommended that the extension of the course begin as early as July. He argued that the uniformed and border police manning levels had reached the point where the added two weeks would not compromise growth. Beare also identified the advantages of extending the course. Literacy instruction, for example, would be increased from 64 to 96

hours. Moreover, subjects could be added that were not normally taught during the six-week course, such as civil policing, rule of law, human rights and gender, and traffic regulations. He also proposed the inclusion of a final examination to validate comprehension.³⁵

The proposed lengthening of the Basic Patrolman Course cut to the core issue of ANSF development and the central argument in this book. The essence of the argument is Western expectations. European Coalition members were concerned with what they believed was excessive emphasis on paramilitary training. Their vision of the trajectory of ANP development was to civil policing.³⁶ To his credit, Beare seemed initially sympathetic to their cause. His last deep dive for 2010 included a slide entitled “AUP Basic Patrolman—Modernization of Training.” It took an AUP patrolman through a three-stage development process, beginning with “soldier-type cop” with combat-oriented skills to survive and effectively fight insurgents and ending with “policeman” with no combat-related duties but instead “serving the people—community policing.” Six months later, UK secretary of defense Liam Fox echoed similar concerns when he told Caldwell that police driving up-armored Humvees and brandishing heavy weapons was not the image being sold to his parliament.³⁷ Nevertheless, Caldwell the soldier was adamant that ANP survival in the current fight trumped all. Extending the patrolman course to eight weeks was as far as he would go. Beare’s civil policing slide disappeared from subsequent deep dives and command briefings.

Not surprisingly, Afghans also had a say. Caldwell’s trip to the US in June eased the normally frenetic pace of prep sessions, deep dives, and command briefings. The pause proved fortuitous, as the police team discovered a personnel problem that eclipsed the ANA’s exaggerated personnel rolls. At issue were Afghan uniformed and border police manning in the patrolman and NCO ranks. Greater fidelity in interior ministry reporting revealed glaring discrepancies in the May personnel statistics. While originally reporting 6,334 assigned officers, the MOI in fact had an additional 3,291 officers as well as 5,957 patrolmen inexplicably serving in NCO billets. The revised report also identified over 13,000 untrained patrolmen in the force. Comparing that data with the assumed percentages across the force, NTM-A found that the police force was at nearly 100 per cent of its required officer strength—114 per cent for patrolmen—but at only 43 percent of its NCO requirement. While the personnel discrepancies for the border police were not as striking when it came to officers and

NCOs, its personnel statistics also revealed a sizable number of untrained patrolmen in the force.³⁸

A breakdown of the personnel data showed no consistent explanation for the problems, except perhaps in the south and southwest parts of the country. In those regions, it appeared that the imperative for increased police presence undermined force-level management. What the new data identified, though, was a conspicuous NCO shortage as well as untrained patrolmen. The issue had reached General Petraeus, who directed that NTM-A get the untrained policemen identified and in training. Beare saw that there was plenty of capacity in the training system to resolve the problem. The MOI needed only to redirect efforts toward providing basic training for untrained patrolmen and identifying qualified patrolmen who could be immediately detailed to NCO training programs. However, Beare reported that Afghan leadership showed no interest in reforming the process and restoring police to their rightful assignments, citing a remark from Afghan chief of training Lieutenant General Atmar that “it is not my problem.”³⁹

The Afghan Public Protection Force: Priorities Misalign

While there was a glimmer of a way ahead for the police manning issues, the police team’s success in its train-the-trainer program was also somewhat mixed. The Afghans were on the way to achieving their December 2011 goal of 900 new Satha 2–qualified instructors. Still, as Beare remarked, no Afghan leader was willing to take the initiative to certify and incentivize instructors. Nor had there been any movement to develop a certification process for Satha 3 instructors. Finally, as somewhat of a surprise, German Police Training Team representatives at the meeting acknowledged that their offer to begin training civil order police instructors was still in a formative state. But there was a catch. While the GPPT members on the ground were willing to start the training, they had yet to receive permission from their state secretary before proceeding.⁴⁰

Building literacy and vocational skills constituted another area of concern for the police team. Approximately one year after NTM-A implemented mandatory literacy training, disparities began emerging between command and training center reporting. For example,

from November 2010 to May 2011, NTM-A's force integration department reported that 611 ANCOP personnel had achieved the required third level of literacy. Yet during the same period, the training centers had graduated over 4,800 total ANCOP members. The problem seemed to lie with a lack of oversight and quality control for the literacy program. General Beare provided a way ahead that entailed investigating why the program was not working, validating that training centers were indeed provided the requisite training, and implementing remedial programs to recover those policemen who had not received literacy training.⁴¹

The challenges with police manning, training slot vacancies, and inaccurate training data demonstrated the other side of the expectations paradox. No amount of prodding by NTM-A could move the Afghans in a direction they did not want to go. The police manning situation was particularly revealing, as it demonstrated the consequences of applying Western solutions to Afghan problems. To NTM-A, instituting a hierarchical organizational structure for the police made perfect sense. The Afghans, however, made no distinction between officers, NCOs, and patrolmen. They simply filled the buckets without consideration of qualifications.

A third area provided some interesting perspective on the future of police training sites. While a rocket attack during the ribbon cutting for the new National Police Training Center in Wardak Province made the event more auspicious than intended, the opening of the first national police training center marked a notable move in the direction of training consolidation. The construction of the remaining regional police training centers would considerably reduce the overall training footprint, but the training capacity would increase by December 2013 to over 15,000 seats. Of even greater consequence was the prospect of cost savings from the proposed consolidation. As the capacity of the German police training centers in northern Afghanistan was over 2,100 students, it made good fiscal sense not to proceed with the proposed construction of a new NTM-A facility in the north. Recognizing the shifting winds from the US Congress, Caldwell decided to cancel the project—saving \$52 million.⁴²

One aspect of the police development program that remained in a state of flux was the Afghan Public Protection Force. Afghans planned to replace the private security companies protecting government institutions and infrastructure, ISAF bases, and convoys. The Afghan government would own the program and certainly benefit from the

revenue source. But along with the funding came the responsibility for establishing the force. The APPF was viable in concept, yet in execution the program demonstrated once again the security paradox in the country. Afghans happily adopted a security model they had neither the resources nor expertise to build, let alone implement. Kabul had yet to produce the business model for the state-owned enterprise. It also had insufficient funds to hire personnel and no funds to develop the recruiting, training, and infrastructure for the force. Newly arrived US Army major general Walter “Wally” Golden, who had recently replaced Beare, also noted the “barren” conditions at the APPF’s only training facility⁴³

Given the APPF’s status, NTM-A had to move with exceptional care to avoid the legal entanglements of a US DOD organization supporting a for-profit Afghan government enterprise.⁴⁴ The Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan—the funding mechanism that channeled US and foreign monies to support ANP development—was already being used to develop the headquarters infrastructure and personnel positions. However, the impending disbanding of private security companies forced NTM-A to cautiously accept a limited role in building and training APPF zone headquarters personnel. By spring 2011, NTM-A’s role expanded to developing and implementing an initial train-the-trainer course for 42 students, with US contractors overseeing the first course for security guards. The responsibilities highlighted the need for more trainers than the 13 originally assigned. At the same time, the increasing immersion of NTM-A into the APPF pointed to classic mission creep—perhaps what the Afghans desired all along.⁴⁵

The APPF faced a difficult road ahead. The Ministry of Interior was identified as the lead agency to resolve five of the six program “challenges.” That it had done little thus far was perhaps due to the program’s embryonic state. A more cynical (and accurate) analysis is that the ministry was in the midst of a game of chicken with the coalition. With March 2012 set as the end of the bridging period extension, the longer the Afghans could hold out, the better chance that the coalition would pay the establishment costs for the program. Golden presented Caldwell with a timeline to the end of the bridging year in March 2012, with assessment points in late September and February 2012. Extremely skeptical that the Afghans could pull off the timeline, Caldwell asked whether the assessment scheduled for 20 September could be moved up to convey the sense of urgency to

the interior ministry. Golden replied cynically that moving the date earlier would only give the Afghans the opportunity to accuse NTM-A of undermining the program.⁴⁶

To no one's surprise at NTM-A, the first six-month evaluation of the Afghan Public Protection Force revealed obstacles. On the one hand, the assessment team found that the APPF had a marginal ability to support the necessary government and nongovernment security missions. On the other hand, it also determined that the APPF lacked the competencies to perform the business functions inherent with the state-owned enterprise, the necessary management expertise, and the "processes, procedures, structure, and capabilities to meet force generation, sustainment, and command and control functions." The report also outlined key tasks that needed to be completed, such as designating a deputy minister, establishing the necessary budget, and recruiting and integrating functional advisors. With little chance of the Afghans completing these tasks themselves, and with the imminent March 2012 deadline for completion of the bridging strategy, the ISAF was considering forming a team of US experts to come to Afghanistan to push the APPF in the right direction.⁴⁷

By late October, the prospects of the APPF becoming a reality reached a critical juncture. Afghan leadership had yet to sign the charter that would establish the state-owned enterprise. At stake were billions of dollars in infrastructure, the protection of bases and construction sites, and the security of convoys that moved food, fuel, and other essential coalition supplies around the battlespace.⁴⁸ Ultimately, any ISAF solution also had to be acceptable to all stakeholders, including the US and Afghan governments. The answer pointed to an independent organization of subject matter experts in program development that could generate the momentum to fulfill the bridging strategy, while also avoiding all the legal entanglements of ISAF and NTM-A oversight of a foreign state-owned business. The problem called for a technocratic solution, so the ISAF established the Joint Program Executive Office (JPEO). Comprising US officers with programs expertise, the JPEO would conduct the necessary planning to develop and execute business practices that the Afghans would not only accept but implement themselves by March 2013, when all PSCs would be eliminated and the APPF would assume full responsibility.⁴⁹

The proposed organizational model, however, was inherently complex. While the JPEO would be staffed with military and government service experts, all paid by the US government, NTM-A was still in the

mix—covering expenses, pay, and logistic support for APPF guards for an unspecified time. The Afghan government would eventually assume responsibilities for APPF expenses through seed capital, which would end when the APPF began to generate enough revenue to sustain itself. Key to the JPEO construct was an important subordinate organization. The JPEO's responsibilities lay primarily with developing business practices for the APPF. At the operational level, risk management consultants (RMC) would be established to offer expertise within the training base. The RMCs were envisioned as small groups of experienced security service personnel that would provide advisory services, command and control at training sites, and training for Afghan staff. Although members would be armed, they would not be permitted to conduct security services themselves. Rather, the RMCs would manage risk and also teach the Afghans how to manage risk themselves.⁵⁰

While the JPEO was set to begin its work in early December, its concept reflected the tenuous nature of the APPF. In question was how the organization would train the tens of thousands of security guards required to implement the bridging strategy by March 2012. A second, yet no less important, question centered on the legal implications of an organization largely composed of US military officers and DOD employees working to develop a for-profit business for a foreign country. A third challenge was financing. Initial outlays for the project were estimated at approximately \$100 million. While funding may have fallen within the letter of the law, the failure of the JPEO to stir the Afghans to action would not go unnoticed by a US Congress becoming increasingly skeptical of the monies being spent in Afghanistan. The final piece of the puzzle was the Afghans. It remained an open question as to whether the Afghans, who had demonstrated intransigence in taking any initiative for their program thus far, would exert the effort to make the APPF a reality or simply hold out and force the coalition's hand.⁵¹

Western Means but Afghan Ends

At the time of NTM-A's establishment, the Afghan National Police was an inchoate organization. Over the ensuing two years, Caldwell and coalition trainers provided the structure, direction, and tools through which the Afghans could build police forces capable of securing the country from the immediate threat, take the lead for their own training in 2014, and eventually adopt the characteristics of a

professional civil police force. In some ways, the command had achieved considerable success. By October 2011, the ANP surpassed its intermediate goal of 134,000 and was well on its way to reaching its force limits of 157,000 police by the following year. Attrition for the ANP remained relatively steady at around 1.5 to 1.9 percent. Caldwell's insistence on a more stable operational cycle for the civil order police lowered its attrition from 7.4 to 2.6 percent per month. NTM-A had issued the ANP over 28,000 vehicles, including up-armored Humvees, and nearly 320,000 weapons and 123,000 radios. A total of 707 construction projects, costing nearly \$4 billion, had either been completed, were in work, or would begin work in the ensuing fiscal year.⁵²

NTM-A also brought order to what was once a dysfunctional training program. Police training centers across the country were tied together through NTM-A trainers and advisors. The new National Police Training Center at Wardak was operational, albeit in the increasingly violent eastern region of the country. Wardak represented the command's objective of consolidating ANP training at major centers, reducing the overall footprint for police training. Consolidation would standardize the training process and was projected to result in future savings.

Whether these short-term successes would lead to transition was not in question. Implied in President Obama's surge recovery speech was that transition was going to occur by the end of 2014—period. The structure and tools were in place to make transition occur. But to NTM-A, transition also meant that the ANP had developed a level of professional competence that would keep the organization from falling back into its old ways. Here the evidence was mixed. Caldwell and his trainers had placed over a thousand Afghans into training positions, filling 77 percent of the available positions. Despite this effort, only five Afghan police had achieved a Satha 3 designation, while none had reached the top two tiers of Master Skills or academy instructor. Of those Afghans currently filling training positions, 561 had yet to be evaluated to determine their actual qualifications. The Basic Patrolman Course was on its way to extension. Yet the command's emphasis on growth, ISAF Joint Command's prioritization of combat operations, funding constraints, and thousands of untrained police in the field undermined any meaningful movement toward civil policing. Nor did the coalition, dominated by US military personnel, seem comfortable with the concept. "The military," noted NTM-A's liaison officer to nongovernmental organizations, "tended

to assume that community outreach programs were ‘soft’ and should wait until after security had been established.” A shortage of 217 POMLTs, with 88 of those in ISAF Joint Command priority districts, pointed to the accuracy of the officer’s criticism. Without partnering in the field, any notion of follow-on development was moot.⁵³

Afghans themselves were also to blame, as the interior ministry showed little enthusiasm beyond simply populating the country with uniformed police and acquiring weapons and equipment at coalition expense. The MOI’s National Police Strategy rhetorically supported NTM-A’s vision of a professional police force that complied with the rule of law. But the ministry was also accountable for the gross mismanagement of its personnel. Whether through simple negligence, or perhaps more due to money extorted from police for their positions, the explicit message was that the MOI saw no advantage to embracing civil policing initiatives—particularly if its NTM-A benefactors seemed indifferent or failed to resource them.⁵⁴

The final open question was whether the Afghans could even adopt Western standards of civil policing. Like their army counterparts, the interior ministry, with NTM-A guidance, fashioned its own code of conduct in which every Afghan policeman promised to respect the International Declaration of Human Rights, to never engage with drug cartels, and to never violate the rights of citizens. Similarly, the National Police Strategy obligated the ANP to “uphold the Constitution of Afghanistan, . . . enforce the prevailing laws of the country to protect the rights of all people of Afghanistan,” and behave in a “professional, non-discriminatory, accountable and trustworthy manner.” But the document also acknowledged the persistent corruption in the force, its “militaristic manner,” ethnic and gender imbalance, and focus on counterinsurgency at the expense of civil policing. Nowhere in the document did the minister of the interior explain how to get an Afghan cop to habituate the virtues necessary to achieve the strategy’s end state. Literacy training was not education. No formal or standardized training existed once a policeman arrived at his precinct. Additionally, the interior ministry had made little progress toward increasing roles for women. Despite a near doubling of female representation in ANP ranks to 1,204 in two years, it was still far from the goal of 5,000 in the force by 2014—which even then would account for only 3 percent of the total force. Finally, the coalition had few mentors in the field to keep the Afghans from falling prey to corruption,

no mechanisms to stop it, and in some cases, no alternative but to work with senior Afghan police leaders with questionable résumés.⁵⁵

Although Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, identifies the police, and not the army, as “the primary frontline COIN force,” only four pages of the chapter on developing host-nation security forces are dedicated to explaining how to develop them. The guidance remains rather general in scope. A review of the manual’s bibliography provides some explanation, as it includes neither specific DOD or service doctrinal publications on policing nor any civilian manuals specifically for developing police department policy or law enforcement procedures.⁵⁶ Consequently, to NTM-A, numbers became the most critical metric of ANP quality. “Professionalism” became more rhetorical than realistic. Any conception of moving Afghan cops toward a European model of civil policing was little more than aspirational. In fairness, factors outside of NTM-A’s control also conspired against any meaningful development of the ANP beyond fighting insurgents. Americans were increasingly skeptical of the war. Anxiety over national deficits and debt informed a rising chorus of congressional angst over the billions of dollars flowing into Afghanistan. The president’s surge-recovery speech sent the clear message that transition was nonnegotiable. The Ministry of Interior seemed indifferent to managing its soon-to-be force of 157,000. Rule of law was at best a vague concept for an Afghan government that historically had limited control beyond the cities. Finally, ISAF’s partnering strategy would leave tens of thousands of policemen without follow-on training or oversight. In the end, short-term imperatives trumped the long-term modernist vision. This security paradox remained unresolved as Caldwell prepared to turn over command.

Notes

(All notes appear in shortened form. For full details, see the appropriate entry in the bibliography.)

For NTM-A historical documents cited, contact the US Army Center of Military History, Fort Lesley J. McNair, Washington, DC.

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2. Carter and Clark, *No Shortcut to Stability*, vii–ix, 30–32. See also Lau, *Islamic Law and the Afghan Legal System*; Pietro, *Afghanistan’s Police*; Legon, “Ineffective, Unprofessional, and Corrupt”; Wilder, *Cops or Robbers?*; International Crisis Group, *Reforming Afghanistan’s Police*; and International Crisis Group, *Policing in Afghanistan*.
3. NTM-A, “2011 Vision and Objectives Deep Dive.”

4. The Afghan Border Police was later known as the Afghan Border Force.
5. NTM-A, "ANSF Update to COMISAF," PowerPoint presentation, 14 January 2011.
6. NTM-A, "ANSF Update to COMISAF"; "Annual Assessment/Way Ahead for DCOM-Police," 21 November 2010; and NTM-A, "Police Deep Dive to COM-NTM-A," PowerPoint presentation, 7 January 2011.
7. NTM-A, "2011 Vision and Objectives Deep Dive."
8. Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, MOI, "ANP Basic Patrolman Course," 13.
9. Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, MOI, 13; and NTM-A, "2011 Vision and Objectives Deep Dive." While AUP and ABP were close to the projected attrition rate, ANCOP attrition for 2010 was approximately 36 percent. Those attrition figures, however, may not have been entirely accurate. During a preparatory briefing for the 22 January security *shura*, the police team briefed Caldwell that the MOI had never factored into attrition the figures for the number of police returning from AWOL. Nor was the ministry subtracting police dropped from the rolls (DFR) for failure to return. Had these variables, included in future attrition figures, been incorporated in 2010, attrition figures may have been significantly lower.
10. Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, MOI, 13; and NTM-A, "2011 Vision and Objectives Deep Dive."
11. Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, MOI, 13; and NTM-A, "2011 Vision and Objectives Deep Dive."
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13. NTM-A, "Police Deep Dive to COM NTM-A," 11 February 2011.
14. NTM-A, "NTM-A COM ISAF Assessment Brief," PowerPoint presentation, 21 February 2011.
15. Ferrari to Felker, email; and CCSTC-A (Commander, CSTC-A) / ACG-PD (Assistant Commanding General for Police Development) to Felker, email.
16. NTM-A/CSTC-A CMD GRP to Felker, email.
17. NTM-A, "Meeting with Minister of Interior on 13 MAR 11." The official bridging strategy was signed with the two-year proviso.
18. The capability milestone (CM) system is a readiness rating tool used to measure the progress of ANA and ANP operational units as well as MOD and MOI offices toward transition. The rating system begins at the lowest level of capability, or CM-4, where the unit exists but cannot accomplish its mission, to CM-1A, where the unit can operate autonomously. The transition decision point is reached when a unit is ready to move from CM-2A (capable of functioning with minimal coalition assistance) to CM-1B (capable of executing function with coalition oversight only). Caldwell alone had the authority to approve the move to CM-1B.
19. CJ2, Information Paper, 17 January 2011. Although untitled, this document deals with leadership changes and ethnic diversity efforts in the MOI.
20. Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, *Afghan National Police Strategy*.
21. Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, *Afghan National Police Strategy*.
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23. "ANSF Monthly Progress Report, February 2011." By August the ANP was still 217 POMLTs short, with 88 priority districts left uncovered. By contrast, the IJC was partnered with 173 of 180 ANA units.
24. NTM-A, "Police Deep Dive to NTM-A," PowerPoint presentation, 11 February 2011.
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26. Inspector General, Department of Defense, *Government Efforts to Train, Equip, and Mentor the Expanded Afghan National Police*, 49.

27. NTM-A, “ANCOP UPDATE COM ISAF,” PowerPoint presentation, 22 February 2011.

28. NTM-A, “ANCOP UPDATE.”

29. NTM-A, “ANCOP UPDATE.”

30. NTM-A, “DCOM-Air Deep Dive,” PowerPoint presentation, 18 March 2011.

31. NTM-A, “DCOM-Air Deep Dive”; NTM-A DCOM-P (Police) to Felker, email; and “BFC EXSUM—RSC North (6 April 11)” (Battlefield Circulation Executive Summary—Regional Support Command North).

32. NTM-A, “COM-NTM-A Assessments CUB [Command Update Brief],” PowerPoint presentation, 23 March 2011.

33. NTM-A, “Police Deep Dive to COM NTM-A,” PowerPoint presentation, 6 May 2011; and NTM-A, “The Afghan Instructor,” PowerPoint presentation. The “Satha” 3-level training construct permitted Afghans to teach in specialty (or branch) schools. The Satha 2 designation permitted basic instruction under the supervision of a master instructor (Satha 4).

34. Command historian, battlefield circulation, April 2011.

35. Command historian, battlefield circulation.

36. Friesendorf and Krempel, *Militarized versus Civilian Policing*, 22–29.

37. “Police Deep Dive to COM-NTM-A,” 31 December 2010; and NTM-A command briefing to Rt. Hon. Liam Fox.

38. NTM-A, “Afghan National Police Manning Issues.”

39. NTM-A, “Commanding General Return to Work Brief, Police Team.”

40. NTM-A, “Return to Work Brief.”

41. NTM-A, “Return to Work Brief.”

42. NTM-A, “Return to Work Brief.”

43. NTM-A, “DCOM Police Deep Dive for Commander NTM-A,” PowerPoint presentation, 12 August 2011.

44. While NTM-A was the NATO umbrella organization for the training mission, Caldwell also commanded CSTC-A or the Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan, the original US-led command established to develop the ANSF. When NTM-A was established, CSTC-A remained in place to streamline the flow of US funding and DOD personnel to ANSF development.

45. NTM-A, “DCOM Police Deep Dive,” 12 August 2011

46. NTM-A, “DCOM Police Deep Dive.”

47. NTM-A, “DCOM-P Update,” briefing to Gen John Allen, ISAF commander, 27 September 2011.

48. ISAF, “Transition from Private Security Companies (PSCs) to the Afghan Public Protection Force (APPF), Update,” PowerPoint presentation, 24 August 2011.

49. ISAF, “Transition from Private Security Companies.”

50. ISAF, “Transition from Private Security Companies”; and ISAF, “Transition from Private Security Companies (PSCs) to the Afghan Public Protection Force (APPF),” rev., n.d. The revised presentation was based on the 24 August 2011 ISAF document of the same name used for presentations to Afghan leadership.

51. The issues surrounding the APPF also found their way into the sights of the press. Rivera, “Obstacles Hinder Formation of Afghan Security Force.” Having received a copy of the APPF midyear report, Rivera painted a grim picture of the APPF’s prospects for reaching the March 2012 bridging strategy milestone.

52. NTM-A, “November ANSF Progress Overview,” PowerPoint presentation, 14 November 2011; and NTM-A, “Command Presentation to Ambassador Claudio Glaentzer,” PowerPoint presentation.

53. Coyne, “Analysis of Democratic Policing Program at NTM-A”; NTM-A, “ANP Instructor Status, PowerPoint slide; and NTM-A, “DCOM ISC: POML Status,” PowerPoint slide.

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56. Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, 6-19. See also Municipal Research and Services Center of Washington, “Police and Law Enforcement Services Policy and Procedure Manuals.” This website references documents such as Chief W. Dwayne Orrick, *Best Practices Guide: Developing a Police Department Policy and Procedure Manual* (Alexandria, VA: International Association of Chiefs of Police, Smaller Police Departments Technical Assistance Program), <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu>; Don Morrison, *Model Law Enforcement Service and Operations Guide* (Tacoma, WA: Local Government Institute, 1996); National Law Enforcement Policy Center, International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), *Model Policy Documents*, <https://www.theiacp.org/>; Chief of Police, *Seattle Police Department Manual* (Seattle, WA: Seattle Police Department, Compliance Department, 2018), <https://www.seattle.gov/>; and other manuals from police departments across the US.

Chapter 9

Conclusion

Craig C. Felker

In its October 2011 report to Congress on the state of the Afghan war, the Department of Defense noted that in the last six months the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) had demonstrated “significant growth in quantity, quality, and operational effectiveness.” The report, released just weeks before Army lieutenant general William Caldwell’s departure, delineated the metrics used to draw this conclusion. Army and police force levels had grown to 305,000 personnel and were on track to reach their final goal of 352,000 by the next year. The ANSF literacy training program had produced its 100,000th graduate, all Afghan National Army (ANA) branch schools were in operation, and two of the 84 departments in the defense and interior ministries were on their way to functioning independently. Additional indicators of movement toward “professionalism” included the ANA Core Values Statement, the implementation of a computerized human resources management system, and a retirement law that resulted in the forced retirement of 18 army generals. For the Afghan National Police (ANP), the report points out the role of the ANP Professional Development Board in standardizing training instruction with an increased focus on “professionalization.”¹

Although the report was a DOD product, NATO Training Mission–Afghanistan (NTM-A) had provided the information on ANSF development, with little in the way of revision from either the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) headquarters or Washington. Certainly, much had been accomplished in the last two years. Under Caldwell’s command NTM-A had experienced impressive support from the international community, which by November had reached 37 contributing nations. Seventy facilities across 30 provinces were training approximately 30,000 soldiers and police daily. The literacy training program had been revitalized and expanded beyond the training base. Both the army and police were receiving equipment capable of dealing with the threat, affordable to the coalition, and within the capability of the Afghans to sustain.²

Caldwell had established an industrial-scale recruit-train-assign-equip process in a country where such magnitude had no precedent.

More importantly, NTM-A had created a predominantly indigenous system; Afghans were for the most part trained in their own country. Yet while the foundation of an enduring ANSF was nearing completion, the road to transition was still in question. The October report indicates several warning signs. Losses from attrition, particularly in the army, would be well beyond what the Afghans could sustain after 2014. The inability of NTM-A to solve the attrition issue implied that loyalty to the Afghan state was not high on many soldiers' hierarchy of values. And the failure of the Ministry of Interior (MOI) to accurately account for its personnel implied incompetence, corruption, or some of both. Additionally, the logistics, maintenance, and engineering capability of the army and police remained nascent. The fielded forces continued to rely on coalition air support, logistics, intelligence, and medical support. And while the report uses the term "professionalism," it makes no mention of attempts to impose a professionalization program on the Afghan Air Force or whether Kabul air wing maintenance personnel were working more than five hours a day. Finally, with the surge recovery gaining momentum, there was no telling how many American service personnel that NTM-A might lose. Such losses would certainly affect NTM-A's ability to oversee the final stages of transferring control of training to the Afghans.³

The 2011 DOD report also notes issues above the operational level. Though reflecting the best of American pragmatism, ministerial development efforts had moved only two of 84 departments close to autonomy in the Ministry of Interior (MOI) and Ministry of Defense (MOD) combined. To help the Afghans navigate the process, NTM-A had established a Ministerial Development Board to provide the necessary leverage to move the Afghans forward as well as to identify deadwood in the ministries.⁴ Each department in the MOD and MOI was scrutinized across a wide array of factors and charted in a graph, which became known as the "chicklet chart," to convey a methodical path to independence from coalition control. The road map, however, was easier to chart than implement. Underlying the charts were limiting factors that Western organizational skills simply could not overcome. These included the Afghan penchant for close-hold decision-making and patronage throughout the ministries, which made hiring skilled civilians difficult and stymied efforts to remove inept or corrupt officials. It should have been no surprise that ANSF general staffs had shown little improvement in logistics, planning, and budgeting. The Afghan proclivity for results over process rendered the chicklet

chart, and ministerial development for that matter, more the ideal than achievable.⁵

NTM-A was similarly incapable of moving the ministries to fully embrace gender diversity. Despite women comprising less than 1 percent of the ANSF and being restricted from combat operations, the staff viewed continued integration of women—even in small numbers—as key to a long-term goal of full acceptance of women in the security forces. The graduation of the first females from the ANA Officer Candidate School in September 2010 should have marked a significant shift in gender integration. Expanding the ranks of women, however, proved to be a difficult row to hoe. Only about 1,200 women were in the ranks of the ANP, due in large part to the proscription on men conducting personal searches of females. The MOD fared far worse: only 320 women served in the army. While the MOD had signed a decree to increase the number of women in the force to 19,500, NTM-A also acknowledged the ministry's lack of political will.⁶ Despite the command's best intentions and efforts to drag the MOD into compliance with the Afghan constitution, the bleak prospects of fully integrating Afghan women into the country's security forces reflected the difficulty of applying Western progressive standards to a patriarchal culture.⁷

Similarly, while NTM-A's literacy program was unquestionably an important building block in the development of the ANSF, the command's leadership conflated literacy with education and professionalism. The program played particularly well with visiting delegations from the US Congress and international community. Command briefings declared literacy to be “essential to professionalizing the force.” Nonetheless, there remained deficiencies that NTM-A could not correct and impeded any hope of professionalizing the ANSF.⁸ The problem was education. Aside from the National Military Academy of Afghanistan, NTM-A did not have any program to provide an education commensurate with literacy training. The removal of the Taliban from power released Afghanistan's education system from the shackles of extremist ideology. The number of children attending schools over the ensuing nine years of coalition presence was dramatic.⁹ But the young Afghans entering the army and police had spent much of their youth under the Taliban's oppressive restrictions on education.

One thing that loomed certain, though, was that transition would be complete by the end of 2014. It was into this environment that US Army lieutenant general Dan Bolger entered, with clear command guidance to move NTM-A into the second phase of its mission. This

execution phase would be marked by an emphasis on keeping expectations within the practical ability of the Afghans to meet them. In a memorandum, Bolger stated, “Throughout, we’ll seek to see the Afghan National Security Forces as they are: operating forces, generating forces, and the Ministries.” Bolger’s emphasis would be to prepare the Afghans at the small-unit level, believing that the war was being fought and would be won at the *kandak* (battalion) level and below. Accordingly, he outlined three guiding principles for the command. The first was that all NTM-A personnel were combat advisors and had a responsibility to help the Afghans fight and win. Second, Bolger emphasized the basics, which would endure changing circumstances. Perhaps more importantly, sticking to the basics would avoid making things too complicated. The new commanding general highlighted the importance of setting the example and showing the human side of leadership. Bolger’s efforts would reflect reasonable goals based on what the Afghans could do, not what NTM-A would like them to be able to do. In no case, though, would he permit the Afghans to derail ISAF’s campaign plan.¹⁰

Along with the new guidance came a significant reorganization of the command to meet Bolger’s objectives. Bolger immediately disbanded the commander’s action group and also eliminated any essence of strategic communications. The most profound change involved the role of the regional support commands. Bolger formally recognized the regional commanders as essentially advise-and-assist brigade commanders. Just as for a brigade combat team, commanders would now have direct control over all NTM-A elements and personnel in their regions. The final organizational revision folded most of the existing organization under two separate two-star deputies. A deputy commander for operations would lead the “advise” effort and oversee all aspects of ANSF development, including the regional support commands. A second two-star would assume responsibility for the “assist” mission, leading all organizations responsible for supplying the ANSF.

The new commander’s priorities and staff reorganization reflected the acknowledgement that transition was at hand, but no one could predict whether the pace of transition would permit the flexibility to methodically carry out any plan to the end of 2014. In fact, press reports suggested that the Obama administration was considering a change in strategy that would accelerate the shift from combat to advise-and-assist operations.¹¹ Accommodating that shift, though,

would require a commensurate acceleration in the development of the ANSF. Bolger appeared ready to transform the command to deal with uncertainty by using the worst-case scenario as the baseline. The imperative of time finally came to the forefront of the NTM-A mission. Yet only time would tell whether the command would have sufficient room to develop the most vulnerable weaknesses within the ANSF. At stake was the difference between “Afghanization” of the war and a transition to an Afghan security lead that would offer the best chance of enduring after the departure of coalition forces.

Even with a successful transition, there are misgivings about whether the efforts of thousands of coalition trainers—and those Afghans in the army and police also committed to transition—can be sustained after the last coalition soldier leaves. The further drawdown of coalition forces will increasingly expose the Afghans to the reality that they own the war. It was theirs to begin with, but for over a decade outsiders did most of the fighting and the paying in the hope that the Afghans would one day be strong enough to stand their ground. Again, there is simply no way to predict the outcome. There was no moment of victory in 2011—no point at which it was apparent that the Afghans, either in the training schools or in the field, had turned the corner. Consequently, there may be no final victory in this war. The coalition will draw down; the Afghans will be responsible for the fight. A strategic framework signed between the US and Afghanistan may ensure monetary support and even some limited advising assistance. The reality is that no amount of money or coalition personnel can sustain a government unable to provide even basic services to all its people or to protect them from internal and external threats.

At best the future is uncertain, which in itself should prove a cautionary tale to a future administration pondering war in a place inhabited by people whose culture is alien to ours. There have been many failures in the first decade of America’s longest war. Perhaps the greatest has been the conviction of US policy makers that military and economic power applied through the aperture of a secular, rational, modern, and democratic West could reform the Afghans. But Kabul is not Westphalia. “Nation” was a useful tool for Afghan leaders when fighting foreign invaders. But when the occupiers left, geography, tradition, history, and other cultural forces took over, and Afghanistan returned to its natural state. A society may be influenced from without, but change can only occur from within. Afghans are a people with their own history and culture. As it turns out, so are we.

Notes

(All notes appear in shortened form. For full details, see the appropriate entry in the bibliography.)

For NTM-A historical documents cited, contact the US Army Center of Military History, Fort Lesley J. McNair, Washington, DC.

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2. DOD, 13–54.
3. DOD, 4.
4. DOD, 50–52.
5. Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*, 302–9.
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Epilogue

Our reason for being assigned as command historians to the NATO Training Mission–Afghanistan (NTM-A) was to document, examine, and explain the command's efforts to build security forces capable of relieving the coalition's responsibility for security in Afghanistan. The final product, *No Moment of Victory*, is a history in real time. We collected as many documents as we could, sat in as many meetings and talked to as many people as possible, and traveled around the country as often as opportunities and the security situation permitted. We use the term "history in time" because, as historians, we knew that historical context was essential to explaining events from 2009 to 2011. We also knew that as important as historical context would be for the book, the context in real time would also be important. This perspective is even more challenging in the digital age, where PowerPoint is the preferred medium of information transmission for the US and NATO. While such documentary evidence can be revealing, too often it fails to add explanatory depth. The only way to get that perspective was to be in the room, which we were, nearly every day for the two years we were in country.

As we were writing during our time in Afghanistan, it did not take long to pull together a draft manuscript for review by prospective publishers. What took longer than anticipated was finding a publisher committed to getting this book out. After multiple attempts at doing so, co-author Dr. Martin Loicano approached Dr. Ernest "Doc" Rockwell, then serving as the Air University Press (AUP) managing editor and director. Dr. Rockwell then spearheaded getting the manuscript before the Air University Publication Review Board, whereafter it was accepted for publication. The book has cleared its last hurdles and culminates our years of recording history as we were in the midst of it.

Eleven years after Dr. Loicano arrived in Kabul and nine years after I departed Afghanistan, this project is on the verge of release. In 2009 Lt Gen William B. Caldwell and a skeleton crew arrived in Camp Eggers to build a training command that would create lasting security forces that would transition security of Afghanistan to Afghans. Building such an undertaking in a combat theater was often described as building an airplane while it is flying. That was an accurate description. And by the time that I arrived, Caldwell had built an immense training establishment of over 6,000 coalition and civilian personnel

that spanned the entire country. It was an effort that Caldwell expected would remain largely untouched beyond the planned beginning of the transition in 2014. Factors outside Caldwell's control, however, turned that expectation on its head. Transition was placed on an accelerated timeline. And no sooner did Caldwell's relief arrive in Kabul in the fall of 2011 than he dramatically began reducing the scope and scale of the mission.

The question that we examined during our time in Afghanistan was how the coalition went about building and developing Afghan Army and police forces from 2009 to 2011. The answer we arrived at was that NTM-A reached back to history and applied a military version of modernization theory to the Afghans. It was a strategy that seemed to make sense given the urgency of the time and US and NATO military cultures. There was only one flaw. The Western military ethos, honed since antiquity, was imposed on people of a society lacking the historical, political, social, and cultural antecedents of its teachers.

Our time in Afghanistan was consequently fortuitous. We were present for NTM-A's establishment, massive growth, and the beginning of its dismantlement over a two-year period. But what of NTM-A—soon thereafter returned to its original Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan (CSTC-A) designation—in the ensuing nine years since December 2011? That is a good question but outside the scope of this book. It is a question that historians certainly should examine. Unfortunately, that detail will be difficult to provide because the primary sources will be nonexistent or challenging to find. As we noted earlier, digitization was the medium to create and disseminate information. The amount of data created through the command's activities would have dwarfed records collected in earlier wars by orders of magnitude. We kept as many unclassified records as we could. But there were certainly terabytes' and terabytes' worth of documents that never got archived, were erased, or perhaps were archived but are sitting forgotten in basements of military commands. Nor will we be able to access the thousands, perhaps tens of thousands, of personal diaries and notebooks that virtually every member of NTM-A could be seen carrying around. The challenge for historians will be daunting. But as we are still engaged in what is called America's longest war, the challenge needs to be met.

We would, however, be remiss not to provide some connectivity between the past and the present. Below are excerpts from three sources that provide some noteworthy context. The first is *Enhancing*

Security and Stability in Afghanistan published in June 2019. Prepared by US Forces–Afghanistan (USFOR-A), with significant input from CSTC-A, the congressionally mandated semiannual report includes “a description of the strategy of the United States for enhancing security and stability in Afghanistan, a current and anticipated threat assessment, and a description and assessment of the size, structure, strategy, budget, and financing of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces.” The second source is a report from the Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction (SIGAR), *Reconstructing the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan*. Published in December 2017, the report “examines how the U.S. government—primarily the Departments of Defense, State, and Justice—developed and executed security sector assistance (SSA) programs to build, train, advise, and equip the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF), both unilaterally and as part of a coalition, from 2002 through 2016.” The final source, “Unguarded Nation,” is by journalist Craig Whitlock of the *Washington Post*, published 9 December 2019. It is the fifth of six articles collectively titled “The Afghanistan Papers: A Secret History of the War,” based on classified interviews conducted by the SIGAR and released by a Freedom of Information Act request.

The first set of quotes is from *Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan*:¹

The NATO-led RS [Resolute Support] mission advises the ANDSF, the MoD [Ministry of Defense], and the MOI [Ministry of Interior] to achieve and maintain a stable Afghanistan during a period of conflict. The United States continues to consult with NATO Allies and operational partners about RS mission requirements and any follow-on NATO-led efforts to ensure that the U.S. and NATO missions are mutually supportive. (7)

The United States, Germany, Italy, and Turkey serve as the RS mission “framework nations,” each leading a regional Train, Advise, and Assist Command (TAAC) responsible for coordinating support and capabilities within its respective command region. Two regional Task Forces (TF), TF Southeast and TF Southwest, conduct TAA (Train, Advise, and Assist) missions with the ANDSF, one in Paktiya Province and one in Helmand Province. (7)

The regional TAACs cover five of the seven ANA [Afghan National Army] corps and some Afghan National Police (ANP) provincial headquarters. . . . (7)

The Resolute Support Headquarters (RSHQ) structure consists of two base pillars: security assistance and operations. Security assistance emphasizes ministerial advising, institutional development, and ANDSF resourcing,

equipping, and sustaining. Led by Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan (CSTC-A), these efforts enable an effective, lethal, and sustainable ANDSF and build the long-term institutional capacity to secure the Afghan population. . . . (8)

Neither the ANDSF nor insurgent forces have been able to gain a decisive advantage during the reporting period. The ANDSF maintain control of most of the populated areas and the Taliban consolidated gains in rural and remote portions of Afghanistan, as well as of contested lines of communications. Despite the atypical levels of violence during this period, the security situation and the geographical disposition of forces remained largely the same with the ANDSF in control of the population centers and the Taliban controlling or contesting large portions of lightly populated rural Afghanistan. . . . (30)

In 2018, the MoD established the Unified Training, Education, and Doctrine Command (UTEDC). This critical point of TAA has brought together disparate organizations under one three-star command. UTEDC's Initial Operational Capability (IOC) will enable the ANA to reduce 13 separate branch schools to four, increasing affordability and effectiveness. RS identified the Kabul Military Training Center (KMTC), the Regional Military Training Centers (RMTC), and the Regional Training Centers (RTC) as decisive terrain for advising. . . . (31)

The current ANDSF authorized force level remains at 352,000 ANA and ANP personnel plus 30,000 Afghan Local Police (ALP). The United States is the sole international financial supporter of the ALP. . . . (33)

Although ANDSF branch schools and training centers remained a priority, MoD and MoI leaders routinely chose to assume risk in institutional development and soldier and police training by assigning trainers to line units in need of replacement personnel. More coalition forces with the right expertise were assigned to advise these institutions; however, the lack of qualified Afghan instructors again prevented the training centers and schools from operating at full capacity. . . . (34)

During this reporting period, recruiting outpaced attrition, but attrition remains problematic for both the ANA and the ANP. ANA attrition data is more accurate than ANP attrition data due to better personnel systems and higher ANA enrollment rates in APPS [Afghan Personnel and Pay System]. The number of personnel dropped from the rolls (DFR) accounts for the greatest portion of ANA and ANP attrition rates, but DFR rates for both the ANA and the ANP are the lowest levels in four years. DFRs occur for a variety of reasons, including poor unit leadership, low pay or delays in pay, austere living conditions, denial of leave, and intimidation by insurgents. The single greatest contributor to DFRs is poor leadership. Soldiers and police grow disillusioned with leaders who fail to take care of them by ensuring they can take sufficient leave, get promoted, and get paid regularly. (40)

... The Kabul Military Training Center ... made strides to improve its leadership, facilities, and program of instruction under the oversight of the Unified Training, Education, and Doctrine Command (UTED-C); however, lack of trainers largely muted the effects of these improvements. Coalition advisors helped improve the efficiency and quality of the training at KMTC. Advisors assist the MoD and MoI with efforts to make better use of Regional Military Training Centers ... (40)

UTED-C training and education programs operate at 60 percent of capacity due to a shortage of students and trainers. KMTC has the capacity to conduct concurrently training for up to five classes of 1,400 recruits. With a 12 week Program of Instruction, the annual output would be approximately 28,000 soldiers. In 2018, however, ANAREC [Afghan National Army Recruiting Command] was only able to recruit enough soldiers to produce 13 classes, and none of them at capacity. Fifteen of 28 classes [were] cancelled. ... (40)

Progress towards developing institutional training within the ANDSF hinges on MoD leadership's willingness to choose long-term investment in the holistic development of its forces over maximizing its combat power in today's fight. Every soldier or recruit enrolled in or conducting training is a soldier that is not on the battlefield. This dilemma manifests itself in choices like pulling conventional ANA soldiers from the field for continued professional development or reducing the timeline of basic warrior training to get recruits into the field sooner rather than later. The MoD's general lack of discipline regarding soldier training and development demonstrates it is willing to accept long-term risk in favor of increasing its short-term combat power. ... (46-47)

The Kabul Military Training Center ... is the foundational military training pillar of the ANA Training and Education Landscape (ANA TEL) and serves as the MoD's primary facility for Basic Warrior Training (BWT) and advanced combat training, including branch-specific training. In the last reporting period, KMTC came under scrutiny after the facility delayed classes and advisors received reports of unsatisfactory training, poor living conditions, and inadequate trainer support. The conditions at KMTC had deteriorated to the point where trainees were arriving at their units malnourished and poorly trained. RS addressed these issues by increasing their advisor presence at KMTC, adding an additional advisory team called the KMTC Advisory Group to focus on renewed oversight of KMTC foundational military training. ... (47)

Despite persistent TAA during the last nine months, training utilization rates at the ANA branch schools remain low due to a lack of consistent enforcement of ANA training progression, which requires a soldier to attend BWT followed by branch-specific training at one of the 12 branch schools. This demonstrates an institutional-level indifference towards training specialization and a lack of discipline by ANA commanders to keep soldiers in the training pipeline. At times, these issues result in combat units consisting of soldiers without essential advanced combat skills training or unit-level collective training. During this reporting period, enhanced advisor presence at KMTC

revealed significant trained instructor shortfalls due to KMTC personnel backfilling positions in other locations. . . . (47)

Although circumstances have improved for Afghan women since 2001, sexual abuse, harassment, gender-based violence, cultural norms, and certain inequalities threaten the successful integration and long-term retention of women in the ANDSF. The current ad hoc method of recruitment, training, and placement can lead to underutilization or ineffective use of women in the ANDSF. The ANA continues to struggle to recruit, retain, and manage the career progression of women. . . . (50)

The AAF [Afghan Air Force] has 162 aircraft, of which 126 are in-country and available or in short-term maintenance, and eight are in the United States in support of Afghan training needs. The AAF's fixed-wing platforms include C-208s, C-130s, and A-29s, and its rotary-wing platforms include MD-530s, Mi-17s, UH-60A+s, and Mi-35s. Understaffed crew positions, like flight engineers, that the AAF require to assemble fully trained flight crews limit some aircraft platforms. Under the aviation modernization program, DoD is delivering two UH-60A+s per month and five armed MD-530s per quarter to the MoD until program objectives are met. . . . (55)

. . . The AAF relies largely on contractor logistics support to ensure the sustainability of its fleet. With the exception of the Mi-17, for which the AAF conducts nearly 90 percent of overall maintenance, CLS remains critical to platform sustainment. . . . (64)

The MoI's institutional training arena has suffered from shifting visions and priorities for how best to train and utilize MoI police forces. Police training over time has swung from combat training to law enforcement training as the ANP and its employment have transitioned towards typical policing functions, but institutional training remains nascent. Initiatives like the MoD's UTEDC are notably absent within the MoI. The MoI also lacks human resource expertise and career management. . . . (72)

. . . Although women have a higher presence in the ANP as compared to the ANA, women in the ANP face the same organizational, cultural, and structural barriers as women in the ANA. . . . (75)

. . . Leadership across AUP units varies, but generally senior MoI and AUP leaders do not empower lower-level leaders to make decisions. Moreover, local AUP units and leaders are susceptible to influence by local power brokers and government officials. . . . (76-77)

The ANDSF continues to be funded primarily through annual congressional appropriations to the DoD via the Afghanistan Security Forces Fund (ASFF). This appropriation enables the Secretary of Defense, with the concurrence of the Secretary of State, to fund the Afghan Forces. The majority of ASFF funds sustainment and operations of the Afghan forces. NATO Allies and partner nations also play a prominent role in the financial support of the ANDSF by

contributing to the NATO ANA Trust Fund (NATF), which supports the ANA, and the UNDP-administered Law and Order Trust Fund (LOTFA) that pays the salaries of police and builds MoI capacity. . . . The ANDSF will continue to depend on coalition security and advisory assistance and donor financial assistance for 2019 and beyond. . . . (80)

The United States provides the bulk of funding necessary to build, train, equip, and sustain the ANDSF through the ASFF. The ASFF provides the ANDSF with the resources needed to fund ongoing ANDSF operations while developing the ANDSF into an effective and independent force capable of securing Afghanistan, protecting the Afghan people, and contributing to regional security. The majority of ASFF funding is executed through DoD contracts on pseudo-FMS cases; the remainder is provided directly to the Afghan Government primarily to fund ANDSF pay, logistics, and facilities sustainment contracts. Since FY 2005, Congress has appropriated more than \$77 billion for ASFF. (80–81)

In many cases, Afghan nationals are employed in Afghanistan by DoD contractors to support U.S. forces, including DoD sustainment contracts that support Afghan forces. . . . The Department projects that U.S. forces in Afghanistan will continue employing approximately 6,000 Afghan nationals until the next reporting period. . . . (81)

At the 2012 NATO Summit in Chicago, participants agreed that, as the Afghan economy and revenues grow, Afghanistan's annual share of the cost of the ANDSF will increase progressively from at least \$500 million in 2015, with the aim that it can assume, no later than 2024, full financial responsibility for its own security forces. . . . Given the persistence of the insurgency and continued slow growth of the Afghan economy, however, full self-sufficiency by 2024 does not appear realistic, even if levels of violence and, with it, the ANDSF force structure, reduce significantly. . . . (82–83)

. . . It will be years before the Afghan economy would fully generate sufficient government revenues to finance a peacetime force, even if there was no more risk that terrorist groups could use Afghanistan as a safe haven. (83)

This set of quotes is derived from *Reconstructing the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan*.²

The U.S. government was ill-prepared to conduct security sector assistance programs of the size and scope required in Afghanistan. The lack of commonly understood interagency terms, concepts, and models for SSA undermined communication and coordination, damaged trust, intensified frictions, and contributed to initial gross under-resourcing of the U.S. effort to develop the ANDSF. . . . (165)

. . . The United States failed to optimize coalition nations' capabilities to support SSA missions in the context of international political realities. The wide

use of national caveats, rationale for joining the coalition, resource constraints and military capabilities, and NATO's force generation processes led to an increasingly complex implementation of SSA programs. This resulted in a lack of an agreed-upon framework for conducting SSA activities. (167)

. . . Providing advanced Western weapons and management systems to a largely illiterate and uneducated force without appropriate training and institutional infrastructure created long-term dependencies, required increased U.S. fiscal support, and extended sustainability timelines. . . . (168)

Western-style management systems, an all-volunteer force, and a budding air corps capability were imposed upon a largely illiterate population. Educated, literate, and professional members of the ANDSF were often offered positions in specialized units, removing talented junior officers from the ranks of the conventional force. These specialized units were more successful in adapting to the transition to Western-style weapons and management systems, while the conventional units suffered. Conventional forces' reliance on combat enablers and U.S. trainers and advisors resulted in long-term dependency and missed force readiness milestones. . . . (168)

. . . The lag in Afghan ministerial and security sector governing capacity hindered planning, oversight, and the long-term sustainability of the ANDSF. . . . (169)

The importance of governing institutions for the security sector was chronically underappreciated by U.S. officials. Prior to 2008, the U.S. military lacked comprehensive and institutionalized programs specifically tailored to developing and advising on security sector ministerial-level governing capabilities. In 2008, the MODA [Ministry of Defense Advisors] program was created within the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Policy. MODA deployed trained U.S. government civilians to partner with MOD and MOI personnel to train, advise, and assist in the governing and oversight functions of the ministries. The results of the MODA program were mixed. Proper alignment of civilian experts with their Afghan counterparts led to positive results; at the same time, civilian advisors were often either a misfit for the mission or were improperly assigned to missions that were outside the scope of their expertise. Starting in 2015, the U.S. and NATO train, advise, and assist mission focused on ministerial-level capacity and advising at the ANA corps or ANP zone levels. (169)

. . . Police development was treated as a secondary mission for the U.S. government, despite the critical role the ANP played in implementing rule of law and providing static, local-level security nationwide. (169)

The U.S. military aligned its military-to-military engagements with the ANA; however, there wasn't a similar symmetry of engagement between U.S. civilian law enforcement entities and the ANP. This led to gross underfunding, under-resourcing, and less mentoring of police units, as compared to army units. Based on increased insecurity and non-permissive environments, and under

the guise of support to the overarching ANDSF, DOD was forced to adapt SSA programs for military units to fit police units. For example, in 2008 DOD created the MODA program to embed DOD civilians at the MOD to help govern the national army. There was no program to mirror this in the MOI and ANP. MODA advisors were “converted” to MODA billets to support the MOI, despite the differences in overall mission between the ministries of defense and interior. The same phenomenon occurred in the field, where deployed U.S. soldiers assigned to provide field training to the Afghan army were converted to a field mentoring team advising police units, with no additional training in civil policing or rule of law. Furthermore, crime statistics were never collected or analyzed by the MOI, despite the adverse effects that criminality, such as petty theft and non-insurgent related violence, had on the population daily. . . . (169)

. . . ANDSF monitoring and evaluation tools relied heavily on tangible outputs, such as staffing, equipping, and training levels, as well as subjective evaluations of leadership. This focus masked intangible factors, such as corruption and will to fight, which deeply affected security outcomes and failed to adequately factor in classified U.S. intelligence assessments. (170)

The U.S. military relied on tangible measures of success of the ANDSF, such as gross recruiting requirements and force strength targets; however, a focus on aggregate numbers masked important rank and social imbalances that damaged ANDSF performance and perceptions of the force’s legitimacy. (170)

Furthermore, ANDSF readiness measures assumed the U.S. military’s capability milestones system would be able to predict battlefield performance and security outcomes in Afghanistan. These forecasts, however, underappreciated key strategic-level threats, including the will and ability of the Taliban to continue the fight, sustained popular support for the Taliban in Afghanistan, insurgent sanctuary in Pakistan, eroding Afghan government legitimacy, and corruption in the ANDSF. (170)

. . . Because U.S. military plans for ANDSF readiness were created in an environment of politically constrained timelines—and because these plans consistently underestimated the resilience of the Afghan insurgency and overestimated ANDSF capabilities—the ANDSF was ill-prepared to deal with deteriorating security after the drawdown of U.S. combat forces.

U.S. military and civilian personnel surges were designed to reduce the insurgent threat and set conditions for an ANDSF with known limitations to be able to successfully provide national security post-transition. However, the United States, ISAF, and the Afghans did not reduce the Taliban threat to a level that could be contained and eventually defeated by the ANDSF. By 2014, as the ANDSF assumed lead responsibility for security nationwide, Afghan security forces faced far larger threats than they were designed to handle. . . . (171)

. . . As security deteriorated, efforts to sustain and professionalize the ANDSF became secondary to meeting immediate combat needs. (171)

Early decisions concerning the design and development of the ANDSF were largely made in the context of establishing a highly professional force that would be sustainable by the nascent Afghan government. Starting in 2006, as Taliban-initiated violence skyrocketed, decisions concerning the size and capabilities of the ANDSF were made almost exclusively in relation to countering violence and insecurity, with limited concern for the Afghan government's ability to sustain the force in the short- or long-term. The U.S. military was unable to maintain a "gold standard" training program at the speed of politically driven milestones and, therefore, expediency overtook professionalization. This situation continues today, as senior U.S. officials highlight the significant stress placed on the ANDSF due to the increased and sustained operational tempo of the fight, and describe sustainment and operational readiness of soldiers and police in the field as a significant weakness. (171–72)

These findings underscore the significant shortfalls in the U.S. approach to security sector assistance in Afghanistan that contributed to the current inability of the ANDSF to secure the country from internal and external threats and prevent the re-establishment of terrorist safe havens. The United States failed to understand the complexities and scale of the mission to construct the Afghan security forces in a country suffering from 30 years of war, government misrule, and significant poverty and underdevelopment. Since 2002, senior U.S. and international officials have noted that the Afghanistan government's inability to quell local unrest, protect the population from insurgent-related violence or crimes from predatory Afghan security officials, and respond to factional fighting has "continue[d] to impact negatively on the lives of Afghans every day, whittling away at the support for the transitional process." As described by former senior DOD official Marin Strmecki, "It's not that the enemy is so strong, but that the Afghan government is so weak." (172)

Finally, the following is quoted from "Unguarded Nation":³

In one interview, Thomas Johnson, a Navy official who served as a counterinsurgency adviser in Kandahar province, said Afghans viewed the police as predatory bandits, calling them "the most hated institution" in Afghanistan. An unnamed Norwegian official told interviewers that he estimated 30 percent of Afghan police recruits deserted with their government-issued weapons so they could "set up their own private checkpoints" and extort payments from travelers. . . .

Victor Glaviano, who worked with the Afghan army as a U.S. combat adviser from 2007 to 2008, called the soldiers "stealing fools" who habitually looted equipment supplied by the Pentagon. He complained to government interviewers that Afghan troops had "beautiful rifles, but didn't know how to use them," and were undisciplined fighters, wasting ammunition because they "wanted to fire constantly." . . .

On paper, the Afghan security forces look robust, with 352,000 soldiers and police officers. But the Afghan government can prove only that 254,000 of them serve in the ranks. . . .

In the Lessons Learned interviews, officials said the United States and NATO deserved a large share of the blame. They said the training programs for the Afghan security forces— not just the police—were ill-designed, poorly coordinated and thinly staffed.

For starters, only about 2 in 10 Afghan recruits could read or write. U.S. and NATO trainers put them through crash literacy courses, but those lasted only a few weeks. . . .

One U.S. military adviser assigned to the Afghan air force told government interviewers that “Afghans would come to them with ‘pilot wings’ that they found or purchased, claiming to be pilots but having no flight experience.”

The unnamed U.S. adviser said that the air base where he worked was plagued by “shenanigans” and that many Afghans reeked of jet fuel when they left each day because they were smuggling out small containers of it to sell on the black market. . . .

One former U.S. trainer said he was selected for the job because he “had a pulse.” When government interviewers asked him in 2017 which U.S. official was in charge of police training, he replied that no single person was and that he “wasn’t sure who he would say fills a role that could be considered as such. . . .”

Petty corruption was rampant. In a 2015 Lessons Learned interview, an unnamed U.N. official described how Afghan police recruits would undergo two weeks of training, “get their uniforms, then go back to the province and sell them.” Unworried that they might get in trouble, he said, many would reenlist and “come back to do it again.”

Notes

1. Department of Defense, *Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan* (Washington, DC: DOD, 2019), <https://media.defense.gov/>.
2. Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, *Reconstructing the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces: Lessons from The U.S. Experience in Afghanistan* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2017), <https://www.sigar.mil/>.
3. Craig Whitlock, “Unguarded Nation,” *Washington Post*, 9 December 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/>.

Abbreviations

AAF	Afghan Air Force
ABP	Afghan Border Police
ACCC	Air Command and Coordination Center
ACG	assistant commanding general
AHRIMS	Afghan Human Resources Information Management System
AIU	air interdiction unit
ALP	Afghan Local Police
AMF	Afghan Military Forces
AMR	air mission request
ANA	Afghan National Army
ANAF	Afghan National Air Force
ANCOF	Afghan National Civil Order Police
ANP	Afghan National Police
ANPGTC	Afghan National Police General Training Command
ANSF	Afghan National Security Forces
APPF	Afghan Public Protection Force
AUP	Afghan Uniformed Police
CFC	Consolidated Fielding Center
CJSOR	Combined Joint Statement of Requirements
CODEL	congressional delegation
COIN	counterinsurgency
CSAR	combat search and rescue
CSTC-A	Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan
CTAG-A	Combined Training Advisory Group–Afghanistan
CTAG-P	Command Training Advisory Group–Police
DCOM-A	deputy commanding general for Army development
DCOM-ISC	deputy commanding general for international security cooperation

DCOM-P	deputy commanding general for police development
DDR	disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration
DOS	Department of State
DRA	Democratic Republic of Afghanistan
EFT	electronic funds transfer
EGF	European Gendarmerie Force
ETT	embedded training team
EU	European Union
EUPOL-Afghanistan	European Union Police Mission in Afghanistan
GAO	Government Accountability Office
GIRoA	Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
GPPT	German Police Project Team
IJC	ISAF Joint Command
ILON	Inherent Law for Officers and Noncommissioned Officers
INL	Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs
IPCB	International Police Cooperation Board
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
JCMB	Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board
KAIA	Kabul International Airport
KhAD	Khadamat-e Etela'at-e Dawlati
KMAG	Korean Military Advisory Group
KMTC	Kabul Military Training Center
LAS	light air support aircraft
LOTFA	Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan
MAAG	military assistance advisory group
MIC	Mujahideen Integration Course
MICC	Ministry of Interior Coordination Cell
MNF-I	Multi-National Force–Iraq
MOD	Ministry of Defense

MODA	Ministry of Defense Advisors
MOE	Ministry of Education
MOI	Ministry of Interior
MRAP	mine-resistant, ambush protected
MTAG	Medical Training Advisory Group
NATC-A	NATO Air Training Command–Afghanistan
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCO	noncommissioned officer
NMAA	National Military Academy of Afghanistan
NMH	National Military Hospital
NSC	National Security Council
NTM-A	North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Training Mission–Afghanistan
OCS	Officer Candidate School
ODC	operational deployment cycle
OIF	Operation Iraqi Freedom
OMC-A	Office of Military Cooperation–Afghanistan
OMLT	operational mentoring and liaison team
1U	One Uniform
OPT	operational planning team
OSC-A	Office of Security Cooperation–Afghanistan
OSD	Office of the Secretary of Defense
PAI	personnel asset inventory
PDPA	People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan
PeH	Pohantoon-e-Hawayee
POMLT	police operational mentoring and liaison team
PRC	provincial response company
PSC	private security company
RSC	regional support command
RMC	risk management consultant
ROK	Republic of Korea
ROKA	Republic of Korea Army

RVN	Republic of Vietnam
SAO	Security Assistance Office
SEER	System for Evaluating the Effectiveness of RVN Armed Forces
SHAPE	Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers, Europe
TF	task force
2/10	2nd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UN	United Nations
USMA	United States Military Academy
VCoGS	vice chief of General Staff

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No Moment of Victory examines NATO coalition efforts to build Afghan Army and police forces with the objective of transitioning the war to Afghan control. The NATO Training Mission–Afghanistan (NTM-A) grew from a handful of senior officers and enlisted personnel to over 6,000 coalition members training Afghans across the country. Yet there was also a deep historical underpinning to the command's programs and processes. This book examines the influence of Cold War modernization theory on NTM-A from 2009 to 2011 and offers a cautionary account of the limits of Western military practices and culture in security force assistance.



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