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**Sentinels of Afghan Democracy:
The Afghan National Army**

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ABSTRACT

Since the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001, the international community has contributed much in terms of manpower, monetary aid, essential equipment and expertise in rehabilitating this war-torn Central Asian country. The Afghan National Army (ANA) has arguably been one of the leading success stories. This paper explains the current state of the ANA with particular focus on its 'Military Balance', training, and performance in the field. It argues that the ANA in its contemporary ('present' is a better word) state is still not ready to take on responsibility for Afghanistan's security, nor will it be ready in the short-term notwithstanding the progress made thus far. For the ANA to be capable of being sentinels of Afghan democracy, both the Afghans and the international community (and not the Americans alone) must be committed to work in partnership for many years to come.

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Sentinels of Afghan Democracy: The Afghan National Army

“We can help train an army, we can help equip an army, we can help build facilities for the army, but only the Afghan people can breathe a soul into that army.”¹

– Lieutenant-General (LTG) Karl Eikenberry

Since the launch of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in 2001 and the subsequent fall of the Taliban, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan has made great strides towards democracy: a written constitution, a popularly elected president, a representative parliament, the appointment of a supreme court and numerous nation-building ministries. However, the security milieu is still restive in many parts of the country, especially in the southern and eastern provinces bordering Pakistan. While the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) can tackle a determined and resurgent Taliban outfit today, the long-term stability of Afghanistan ultimately rests on the shoulders of its security apparatus, an integral component of which is the Afghan National Army (ANA). After all, the Taliban have reiterated that “the Americans may have all the wristwatches, but we have all the time”.²

There have been various articles on the ANA but they tend to be short and focused on certain aspects of the ANA, thus painting a partial, skewed and/or sometimes negative picture. Even though former NATO Supreme Commander, General (GEN) James Jones has told the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee that “the Afghan National Army is the most successful pillar of our reconstruction efforts to date”, it is clear that there is still a tremendous amount of work to be done.³ Of great concern is the tendency for domestic audiences and indeed some coalition partners to make the premature assumption that “the job is complete” once the ANA reaches a superficial milestone, say, a particular strength or a certain operational capability. This three-part paper aims to fill the gap in the literature by providing a current and holistic picture of the ANA’s progress four-plus years after its birth in November 2002 and as *nawrooz* (spring) ushers in another anticipated “Spring-Offensive” by those seeking to destabilize the country. The first part seeks to provide a snapshot of Afghanistan’s “military

¹ Lieutenant-General Karl Eikenberry, former Commanding General, Combined Forces Command – Afghanistan (CFC-A), speaking to the press on 16 January 2007 in Kabul, Afghanistan.

² David Barno, “Challenges in Fighting a Global Insurgency” in *Parameters*, Summer 2006, pp. 15–29.

³ “NATO Supreme Commander Praises Progress of Afghan Army” in *Washington Files*, 21 September 2006.

balance”. This is followed by an insight into the training of the ANA while the third section contains an analysis of the ANA’s performance in their deployed areas of operations (AOs). Before commencing, it is imperative to take a brief look at the parameters, beginning and desired end state of the ANA.

Parameters of the ANA

Afghanistan has not had a national army since its fragmentation and subsequent disintegration after the collapse of Dr. Mohammad Najibullah’s Soviet-backed regime in 1992. A decade later, in an attempt to rebuild a war-ravaged Afghanistan, the United States was tasked to “[lead] the international effort to train and equip the Afghan National Army”, one with the capabilities to “secure the borders [of Afghanistan] and deter external threats; defeat terrorist forces; disband, reintegrate, or imprison Illegally Armed-Groups (IAGs); and manage internal security threats and emergencies in cooperation with the Afghan National Police (ANP)”.⁴

While constant conflict, harsh terrain and hardihood have moulded Afghans into courageous fighters, this does not mean that the U.S. and its various coalition partners have an easy task. There is a large pool of combat veterans but almost all had been guerrilla fighters and a large majority had never served in an organized and professional army loyal to the state, as opposed to the strongmen, religious parties, ethnic or tribal affiliations that they had fought for. The chaos in the 1990s also meant that military norms such as institutions that provide regimentation, professional training and education were non-existent, as was any form of an Order of Battle (ORBAT). Furthermore, historical, social and contemporary factors such as the limited influence of a central government, ethnic rivalries and provincial strongmen contribute to the arduous task of building the ANA.⁵

Indeed, the various challenges of building the ANA were clearly articulated by Ali Jalali, former Afghan Minister of Interior and now Distinguished Professor at the Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies, National Defense University, who reflected that “the major

⁴ “Five-Year Strategic Benchmarks – National Defence” Website of the President of Afghanistan, accessed at www.president.gov.af/english/security.msp; and Office of the Spokesman, “Afghanistan National Security Forces” United States Department of State, www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2006/60086.htm, accessed on 31 January 2006.

⁵ Ali A. Jalali, “Rebuilding Afghanistan’s National Army” in *Parameters*, Autumn 2002, pp. 72–86.

challenge is to create a military loyal to the state ... a nationally oriented, ethnically balanced, morally disciplined, professionally skilled, and operationally coherent Afghan army”.⁶ Recognizing the truisms of Afghanistan’s contemporary environment, Combined Security Transition Command – Afghanistan (CSTC-A), the headquarters “responsible for manning, equipping and training the Afghan National Army”, defined the end state of the ANA as “a respected, multi-ethnic, affordable, sustainable, loyal, and competent ministry of defence, general staff, and sustaining institutions capable of directing, commanding, controlling, training and supporting operational forces that have the capability to conduct internal counter-insurgency operations with limited international assistance”.⁷

Afghanistan’s Military Balance

At the end of 2006, the ANA stood at 30,128 fully equipped and trained soldiers, almost midway to meeting the figures agreed “at the Bonn conference and affirmed in a Presidential Decree (stating that) the armed forces will be no larger than 70,000 members”.⁸ As of April 2007, the ANA had grown to 35,000 and was ethnically balanced.⁹ The majority of the soldiers fill the ANA’s five corps headquartered in Kabul (201st ANA Corps), Gardez (203), Kandahar (205), Herat (207) and Mazar-e-Sharif (209), with the remaining strength assigned to the Afghan Air Corps, sustaining institutions, and the Afghan Ministry of Defence.¹⁰

On paper, each ANA corps is assigned three brigades but only the 201 and 205 Corps are fully manned, no doubt a reflection of the need to secure the national capital Kabul and an attempt to address the security situation in the restive southern provinces. The 203 Corps stationed along the eastern border with Pakistan has two brigades, while the corps in the relatively calm western and northern regions currently command one brigade each. As the

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), “DoD News Briefing with Major General Durbin”, U.S. Department of Defense, 13 July 2006; and J5 Branch (CSTC-A), “CSTC-A Key ANA Data Points”, 3 November 2006.

⁸ Ministry of Defence (Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan), “Shaping the Future of the Afghan Nation – The Military Dimension”, Embassy to Australia and New Zealand press release, 20 April 2003, accessed at www.afghanembassy.net/conference_defence.html; and J5 Branch (CSTC-A), “CSTC-A Key ANA Data Points”. The full Presidential decree pertaining to the ANA is available on the United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA) website at www.unama-afg.org/docs/_nonUN%20Docs/_International-Conferences&Forums/Bonn-Talks/decree%20on%20army.pdf.

⁹ Jim Garamone, “Pace Pleased with Progress at Afghan Training Center”, *American Forces Press Service*, 23 April 2007. Accessed at www.defenselink.mil/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=32901; and J5 Branch (CSTC-A), “CSTC-A Key ANA Data Points”. Ethnic Balance defined as $\pm 5\%$ of targeted goal to reflect ethnic composition of Afghan society.

ANA is primarily an infantry-centric force, most of the brigades consist of three light infantry *kandaks* (Dari for “battalions”), one combat support (CS) *kandak* and one combat service support (CSS) *kandak*. The only exception is the 201 Corp’s Third Brigade, which has been designated a Quick Reaction Force (QRF) comprising of one commando *kandak*, one mechanized infantry *kandak* and one armoured *kandak* in place of the three infantry *kandaks*. Speaking on the type of units required to take on Afghanistan’s anti-government forces, LTG Sher Mohammad Karimi, the ANA’s Chief of Operations and a graduate of the U.S. Army’s Ranger and Special Forces courses, said, “This is not a question of using a big force against this enemy ... In fact, it is very important to use a smaller force, well-trained, professional for the special operations to deal with this enemy.”¹¹ To further enhance the ANA’s strike capability, it is envisaged that each corps will eventually have a commando *kandak* under its ORBAT.¹²

Since its inception, the ANA has taken on more responsibilities in major operations, including planning joint operations with coalition forces. However, the young force is still very much dependent on coalition forces for combat support (e.g. artillery, engineers and communications) and combat service support (e.g. medical, logistics). In an academic report to the Department of Social Sciences leadership at the United States Military Academy (USMA), GEN (retired) Barry McCaffrey, highlighted the plight of the ANA, stating: “The Afghan Army is miserably under-resource. This is now a major morale factor for their soldiers ... Army field commanders told me that they try to seize weapons from the Taliban who they believe are much better armed ... Many soldiers and police have little ammunition and few magazines ... no body armour or blast glasses ... no Kevlar helmets ... no up-armoured Humvees or light armour tracked vehicles.”¹³ GEN McCaffrey also suggested that amount required for the ANA to become a “well equipped, disciplined, multi-ethnic, literate and trained ... first-line counterinsurgency force” is approximately US\$1.2 billion annually for 10 years—the ticket to be fully out of Afghanistan in the year 2020.¹⁴

¹⁰ J5 Branch (CSTC-A), “CSTC-A Key ANA Data Points”.

¹¹ Al Pessin, “Afghan General Wants Special Forces To Fight Terrorists”, *Voice of America*, 4 May 2006, accessed at www.voanews.com/english/archive/2006-05/2006-05-04-voa62.cfm?CFID=65293472&CFTOKEN=64585192.

¹² Marelise Wood, “Afghan National Army Designates First Commando Battalion”, *American Forces Press Service*, 29 November 2006.

¹³ Barry R. McCaffrey, “Academic Report – Trip to Afghanistan and Pakistan (19–26 May)” in *Memorandum for: Colonel Mike Messe and Colonel Cindy Jebb*, 3 June 2006, p. 6.

¹⁴ *ibid*, p. 7.

Based on figures released by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), American aid to Afghanistan in 2006 totalled US\$3.26 billion: USD \$2.48 billion (76 per cent) to the development of the ANA and ANP, US\$587 million (18 per cent) for reconstruction, US\$120 million (four per cent) for humanitarian and other assistance, and US\$73 million (two per cent) for democracy and governance.¹⁵ Indeed, since OEF started, military operations have received US\$82.5 billion compared to US\$7.3 billion for development and reconstruction.¹⁶ Even though the ANA has made progress, it also suffers from the “absence of a self-sustaining operational budget. Therefore, it continues to depend on military support from the Coalition forces and U.S. underwriting for its costs.”¹⁷ Professor Jalali reiterated this point during his testimony before the Committee on Armed Services, U.S. House of Representatives, saying the “despite the U.S. donated vehicles, small arms and other equipment in 2005–2006, the ANA suffers from insufficient fire power, the lack of indigenous combat air support and the absence of a self-sustaining operational budget. Therefore it continues to depend on military support from ISAF and Coalition forces.”¹⁸ The continual reliance of the ANA on foreign military support for the foreseeable future is apparent on the ground, prompting Major-General (MG) Rahmatullah Raufi, Commander of the 205 Corps, to remark: “I confess, we can’t do it ourselves. We are a poor country.”¹⁹

The 2003 invasion of Iraq may have taken the spotlight away from Afghanistan. However, a resurgent Taliban outfit and internal friction among NATO members has once again drawn attention back to the impoverished state, and highlighted the requirements for aid. Speaking at a congressional testimony in February 2007, LTG Karl Eikenberry, then-commander of CFC-A, and Mary Beth Long, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Affairs, both said that while NATO has made a lot of progress in Afghanistan, there is still a lot of work ahead and improvements to be made. “NATO countries must do more to fulfil their commitments to provide sufficient forces and capabilities to the mission,” said LTG Eikenberry, “and increase their level of support to the training and equipping of the

¹⁵ “Three-quarters of U.S. aid to Afghanistan going on security”, *Agence France-Presse*, 10 August 2006.

¹⁶ Jason Motlagh, “Taliban viewed in a new light”, *Asia Times (Hong Kong)*, 11 October 2006.

¹⁷ Ali A. Jalali, “The Future of Afghanistan” in *Parameters*, Spring 2006, pp. 4–19.

¹⁸ Transcript of testimony provided by Professor Ali Jalali, Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies, National Defense University, to the U.S. House of Representatives’ House Armed Services Committee on 30 January 2007, accessed at www.ndu.edu/nesa/docs/webfile/jalalitestimony30jan07.pdf.

¹⁹ Scott Baldauf, “A ‘half full’ Afghan army”, *The Christian Science Monitor*, 10 February 2006, accessed at www.csmonitor.com/2006/0210/p06s02-wosc.html.

Afghan national security forces.”²⁰ In an effort to increase its level of support, the U.S. Department of Defence budget request included US\$5.9 billion in Emergency Supplemental funds for the fiscal year 2007 while US\$2.7 billion will be included in the FY2008 global war on terror budget request. “Our focus in the out years will then shift to sustainment which we estimate at approximately US\$2 billion annually,” Long told the House Armed Services Committee.²¹

As the first few *kandaks* formed in early 2003 complete their three-year enlistment cycle, retention rates of the all-volunteer army are slightly above 35 per cent, short of the Afghan government’s goal of 50 per cent.²² In mid 2006, with the ANA’s strength increasing by 1,000 a month, indicating that it would have taken another three years (i.e. mid 2009) to meet its planned strength, MG Robert Durbin, CSTC-A’s Commanding General, is confident that this rate is “appropriate to retain the quality and establish the quantity that we feel is effective”.²³ This, though, was inadequate for the Afghan civilian leadership. Recognizing that “the formula for success in Afghanistan is to enable the Afghan forces to defend the Afghan people”, Afghan Defence Minister Abdul Rahim Wardak announced the acceleration of the ANA’s growth during a visit to Washington in late 2006.²⁴ Minister Wardak’s intentions were reiterated when he appeared before the Security and Defence Commission in February 2007 and told members of the Afghan Parliament’s Upper House that “each month we recruit 600–2,000 soldiers. By the end of March we will have 46,000 and in March 2008 we will have 65,000 soldiers.”²⁵ Even so, Minister Wardak stressed that much work remained, with the enemy becoming bolder believing “that if foreign troops suffered many more losses, the international community would leave Afghanistan”.²⁶ Strategically, even after reaching the plateau of 65,000–70,000 troops, the number may not be the final strength of the ANA. Addressing the press, Minister Wardak expressed that “the minimum number we

²⁰ Sara Wood, “U.S. Leaders: NATO Must Do More in Afghanistan”, *American Forces Press Service*, 13 February 2007, accessed at www.defenselink.mil/News/NewsArticle.aspx?id=3045.

²¹ Transcript of testimony provided by Ms. Mary Beth Long, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defence for International Security Affairs to the U.S. House of Representatives’ House Armed Services Committee on 13 February 2007, accessed at armedservices.house.gov/pdfs/FC_Afghan021307/Long_Testimony021307.pdf.

²² Jim Garamone, “Afghan Security Forces Making Strides, Addressing Problems”, *American Forces Press Service*, 13 July 2006, accessed at www.defenselink.mil/news/Jul2006/20060713_5649.html.

²³ AFP, “Afghan Army Needs Three More Years: U.S.” in *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, 15 July 2006, pp. 1 & 6.

²⁴ “Afghanistan to Get Bigger Army”, *CBC News (Canada)*, 21 November 2006, accessed at www.cbc.ca/world/story/2006/11/21/afghanistan-army.html.

²⁵ Makia Monir, “Minister acknowledges strength of Taliban”, *Pajhwok News Agency (Afghanistan)*, 18 March 2007, accessed at www.eariana.com/ariana/eariana.nsf/allDocs/0F3A31ED1093FF40872572A300090645?OpenDocument.

²⁶ *ibid.*

can survive on within this complex, strategic environment ... [is] 150,000 to 200,000, which should also be well-trained and equipped, with mobility and firepower and logistical and training institutions ... We want to survive and be able to defend ourselves against external and internal threats.”²⁷

An important question to ask is whether Minster Wardak’s desire to make the ANA 70,000 strong by 2008 instead of “late 2010 or early 2011” a realistic expectation. Operationally, Colonel David Enyeart, Deputy Commander of Task Force Phoenix V, says that recruitment numbers have swelled to a point where training “had to split off from our Kabul military training centre, where most of the basic training is going on, and added two more basic training areas”.²⁸ Similarly, the *Washington Post* reported that the number of U.S. soldiers mentoring the ANA would be increased from 2,900 to 3,600 by April 2007, bringing the total training force to 5,200 in a “move to comply with an Afghan government directive to increase recruiting to 2,000 Afghan soldiers per month”.²⁹ There are currently 8,700 recruits at KMTC going through basic training.³⁰ Strategically, NATO’s Secretary-General Mr. Jaap de Hoop Scheffer envisaged that “effective Afghan security forces would be gradually taking control” in the spring of 2008, meaning that the ANA has less than a year before gradually assuming control for their own security.³¹ How then are they working toward achieving this goal? The next section examines the training of the ANA with a particular focus on teething and ongoing problems, and how these are being resolved.

Training the Afghan National Army

The training and mentoring of the ANA falls under the responsibility of CSTC-A but this does not mean that it is solely an American effort. Various coalition partners are also actively involved in the training, education and mentoring of ANA units and personnel at various stages. These partners include the United Kingdom, France, Canada, Germany, New Zealand,

²⁷ “Defence minister says Afghan army must be 5 times larger”, *The Associated Press*, 12 July 2006, accessed at www.cbc.ca/world/story/2006/07/12/afganistan12072006.html.

²⁸ Tim Kilbride, “As Afghan Troops Build Capacity, Decisive Battles Loom”, *American Forces Press Service*, 2 March 2007, accessed at <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=3238>.

²⁹ Jim Krane, “Afghan Army to Strike Taliban in Winter”, *Washington Post*, 19 November 2006, accessed at www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/11/19/AR2006111900418.html; and Donna Miles, “Afghan Official Urges Faster Timetable for Training, Equipping Afghan Forces”, *American Forces Press Service*, 21 November 2006.

³⁰ Jim Garamone, “Pace Pleased with Progress at Afghan Training Center”.

Romania, Bulgaria and Mongolia. The majority of formal ANA training courses are conducted in Kabul at the Kabul Military Training Centre (KMTC), the National Military Academy of Afghanistan (NMAA) or the Command and General Staff College (CGSC), but learning does not stop there as ANA units are continually monitored and mentored by coalition forces operating in their respective corps AOs.

The first step in the career of an ANA soldier begins at KMTC where an Afghan recruit finds himself and the rest of his cohort assigned to a *kandak* for seven weeks of basic training under the watchful eye of ANA instructors and U.S. mentors. After this initial period, recruits with leadership potential are removed from the *kandak* to attend a U.K.-led Non-Commissioned Officers (NCO) course before joining the next *kandak* as section leaders, while the remaining recruits continue with another six weeks of Advanced Individual Training (AIT). At the conclusion of the 13 weeks of training, the recruits become ANA soldiers and are joined by NCOs (from the previous cohort) and officers. As the ANA soldiers, NCOs and officers are trained separately and by different nations, there is a need to consolidate their training so that they can perform as a cohesive *kandak*. The validation process comes in the form of a two-week Collective Lanes (CTX) programme conducted by the Canadian Afghan National Training Centre Detachment (C ANTC Det). The CTX validates ANA units based on various tactical scenarios faced in the field such as “raids, ambushes, hasty attacks and hasty defence to framework operations commonly called “Operations Other Than War” (OOTW)”.³²

On the training of officers, Minister Wardak remarked that the West Point-modelled four-year NMAA programme is meant for non-university graduates and the French Officer Academy provides continuation training for officers currently in service. However, the ANA needed a faster expansion of its officer corps, especially the junior officers. The solution came in the form of a six-month officer cadet course for university graduates based on the

³¹ Michael Evans, “Afghan security handover is on track for 2008, says NATO”, *The Times (U.K.)*, 29 November 2006, accessed at www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/article653193.ece.

³² Raymond Brown, “Canadian Soldiers Train the Afghan National Army”, National Defence and the Canadian Forces Website, 13 June 2005, accessed at www.forces.gc.ca/site/Feature_Story/2005/06/13_f_e.asp; and André Desrochers, “First Afghan Soldiers Graduate Canadian-run Training Centre”, National Defence and the Canadian Forces Website, 25 July 2005, accessed at www.forces.gc.ca/site/Feature_Story/2005/07/25_f_e.asp.

British Military Academy at Sandhurst.³³ The introduction of the 23-week officer cadet course at Officer Cadet School (OCS) was the only solution to the issues with the other two sources of commissioned officers. The NMAA has the capacity to commission up to 300 officers a year. However, current class sizes indicate that numbers will fall way short. By the end of 2006, the Class of 2009, which started with 120 cadets, had only 91 remaining, and the Class of 2010, which started with 270, had shrunk to 239.³⁴ As for the French Officer Academy, some critics pointed out that it provided “continuation training, however, it did not produce consistent results” and “was training the officers to control all the aspects of the company”, the latter of which the ANA is trying desperately to distance itself from.³⁵

Besides domestic training institutions, the need for more officers has witnessed around 8,000 eligible professional and former *Mujahideen* officers who had been either disarmed or made redundant, being given the opportunity to join the ANA through competitive examinations held in key cities across the country.³⁶ In addition, ANA officers and cadets have also received training outside Afghanistan, in countries such as the U.S. and Turkey.³⁷ At Fort Bliss, Texas, Afghan aviators have been trained on Mi-17 helicopters in support of anti “narco-terrorism” operations.³⁸ “Throughout history, there has been a friendship between Afghanistan and Turkey,” said Colonel Haydar Ateş, Turkish Task Force Commander in Afghanistan, “Turkey has been providing training to the Afghan Army since the 1920s. In the last four years, 172 Afghan officers have been trained in Turkey, with now 24 officers and 31 military students are being trained.”³⁹ Reports have also recently surfaced that India, a non-ISAF and non-NATO member, could provide training to the ANA. An Indian military team is expected to be deployed in Afghanistan by mid 2007 to conduct infantry and education corps

³³ Author’s conversation with Afghan Minister for Defence, Abdul Rahim Wardak, at the Ministry of Defence, Kabul, Afghanistan on 23 July 2006.

³⁴ J5 Branch (CSTC-A), “CSTC-A Key ANA Data Points”.

³⁵ Danny O’Connor, “Sandhurst in the Sand”, Afghan National Army Officer Training Team (ANAOTT) and Officer Candidate School (OCS), 2006, accessed at www.army.mod.uk/linked_files/gurkhas/ANAOTT1.doc; and Charles Di Leonardo, “Training the Afghan National Army”, *Infantry Magazine*, 1 March 2005, accessed at www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-141213072.html.

³⁶ “Former Afghan Military Officers take test to rejoin Army”, *Afghan State TV*, 21 November 2006.

³⁷ Eric S. Bartelt, “Afghan National Ready to Begin West Point Experience”, *Pointer View (United States Military Academy)*, 24 June 2005, accessed at www.usma.edu/Publicaffairs/PV/050624/afghancdt.htm.

³⁸ Virginia Reza, “Afghan Aviators Train in Texas”, *Soldiers Online*, 12 June 2006, accessed at www4.army.mil/soldiers/view_story.php?story_id_key=9154.

³⁹ “Turkey Donates Military Equipment”, ISAF Public Information Office, Release # 2007-210, 20 March 2007, Accessed at www.nato.int/isaf/update/press_releases/newsrelease/2007/pr070320-210.htm.

related training that includes teaching English, weapon handling, map craft and battalion-level staff work.⁴⁰

Initially, one of the main concerns that had plagued the ANA was the high dropout rate during initial screenings attributed to miscommunication, bogus promises and recruits being “forced to join under quotas imposed by local militia commanders”.⁴¹ During the initial recruitment drive for the ANA’s first *kandak*, “more than 500 showed up ... but nearly half of them dropped out due to misunderstandings, among which the pay rate, and the belief that trainees would be taken to the U.S. for training, be taught to speak English, and to read and write ... Some of the recruits were under 18 years of age and most were illiterate. Recruits who only spoke Pashto had difficulties because instructions were given through interpreters who spoke Dari.”⁴² Even OCS was not spared as one instructor testified, “We began on day one at 0730 with 189 students, and by 1000 hours we were down to 111, give or take a few (13 would randomly turn up over the next two days). The ANA deciding that some of these university graduates were not up to the required education standard,” said British Army Captain Danny O’Connor, a former OCS instructor.⁴³ Another trainer gave similar insights, saying that “connecting with the Afghans is not always easy, although they are cooperative”.⁴⁴

Ground realities indicate that “Afghan commanders and soldiers complain of poor pay, faulty weapons, ammunition shortages and lack of protective gear. U.S. trainers, while praising Afghan soldiers for their bravery, complain of slovenly appearance, lack of discipline, petty theft, mistreated equipment and infiltration of the army by Taliban spies or soldiers who sell information”.⁴⁵ Despite the ANA’s stringent screening process, three anti-government infiltrators have been caught “trying to get information that was inappropriate for their job descriptions” but thus far there have been no known situations where infiltrators have

⁴⁰ “Indian Army to Train Afghanistan, Uzbekistan Armed Forces”, *India Defence*, 24 April 2007, accessed at www.e-ariana.com/ariana/eariana.nsf/allDocs/53AF0A109DA7602E872572C700687F76?OpenDocument.

⁴¹ Ann Scott Tyson, “Desertions Deplete Afghan Army”, *The Christian Science Monitor*, 17 December 2003. Accessed at www.csmonitor.com/2003/1217/p06s01-wosc.html.

⁴² “Afghanistan – Army”, GlobalSecurity.org, 7 August 2005, accessed at www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/afghanistan/army.htm.

⁴³ Danny O’Connor, “Sandhurst in the Sand”.

⁴⁴ Annie Fernandez, “Afghan troops in peril”, *The London Free Press*, 26 October 2006.

⁴⁵ David Zucchini, “It’s Starting to Look a Lot Like an Army”, *The Los Angeles Times*, 22 August 2006.

obtained information that have compromised an operation.⁴⁶ To prevent undesirable elements infiltrating the ANA, more stringent security checks were implemented. “Previously, there was a need to produce large numbers of soldiers,” said KMTC’s commander Brigadier-General (BG) Mohammad Amin Wardak, “but now we focus on quality instead of quantity.”⁴⁷

Besides the initial screening problems faced by trainers, various other learning points included the requirement for training and familiarization on the plethora of Soviet-bloc weapons in the ANA’s inventory, such as the T-62 Main Battle Tank.⁴⁸ At other times, instructors were faced with decrepit training aids, incompatible, inconsistent and incomplete equipment like the “lack of zeroing tools, mortar tubes from three different countries, no compasses, SPG-9s missing [aiming] sights, and having no plotting boards or aiming circles”.⁴⁹ Even higher echelons were not spared the absence of quality equipment. Colonel Abdul Raziq, an Afghan brigade commander, said he spent \$250 of his \$400 monthly salary on phone cards because his personal hand phone was his only reliable means of communicating with his commanders.⁵⁰

The other issue that transcended all facets of the ANA was the Officer-NCO divide. U.S. Army Captain Charles Di Leonardo, who mentored an ANA weapons company, observed in one instance that “the NCOs in the company had no power, and the ISG was there for making *chi* tea and bringing it for the officers ... There were also trust problems between the officers and the NCOs.”⁵¹ This divide was further highlighted during a field training session: in the mortar platoon, “the platoon leader was controlling all the soldiers and that the NCOs would just stand there looking around like overpaid privates”; in anti-armour platoon, “except for the platoon sergeant, there was little NCO involvement”; and in the scout platoon, “soldiers took off their helmets, boots, and blouses and went to sleep” when the platoon leader was not in their immediate vicinity. However, when it came to Physical Training (PT),

⁴⁶ David Zucchino, “Afghan Army could Help Unify a Nation”, *The Los Angeles Times*, 13 November 2006, accessed at www.latimes.com/news/printedition/front/la-fg-afghanarmy13nov13,1,1955015,full.story?coll=la-headlines-frontpage&ctrack=1&cset=true; and Jim Krane, “Afghan Army to Strike Taliban in Winter”.

⁴⁷ Scott Baldauf, “A ‘Half Full’ Afghan Army”, *The Christian Science Monitor*, 10 February 2006, accessed at www.csmonitor.com/2006/0210/p06s02-wosc.html.

⁴⁸ Jonathan Byrom and Aaron Parker, “The First Afghan National Army T-62 Tank Gunnery” in *Armor Journal*, January–February 2004; and Charles Di Leonardo, “Training the Afghan National Army” in *Infantry Magazine*, 1 March 2005, accessed at www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-141213072.html.

⁴⁹ Charles Di Leonardo, “Training the Afghan National Army”.

⁵⁰ David Zucchino, “It’s Starting to Look a Lot Like an Army”.

“not one officer showed up for PT” but this was beneficial because the NCOs were thrust into leadership positions and slowly gained confidence in all facets of training.⁵²

The reasons for the Officer-NCO divide is due to “cultural and societal problems”, said Command Sergeant-Major Daniel R. Wood of Combined Forces Command – Afghanistan (CFC-A), who noted that “typically, NCOs didn’t get a lot of respect under the old regime ... Lieutenants and captains made all the decisions at the unit level, and they had captains or majors doing what we would consider NCO work at higher levels.”⁵³ With such traditions seemingly immutable, “many officers remain reluctant to accept an expanded role for NCOs” and the development of a professional NCO corps was met with initial scepticism.⁵⁴ The case in point being the appointment of Roshan Safi as the first Sergeant-Major of the ANA, a move that was made “to please the Americans”, said CSTC-A’s Command Sergeant-Major Thomas Gills. Since then, the 34-year-old, who attended the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy and graduated as the best international student (Class 56), has been “fixing issues that the corps commander hasn’t been able to fix”.⁵⁵ Living up to his name, (*roshan* means “light” in Dari), Safi has been a shining light in the NCO development of the ANA and a valuable adviser to GEN Bismullah Khan, the ANA’s Chief of Staff.

To compound hardship and military-cultural issues that plague the ANA, the individual soldier also faces problems with the most basic benefit taken for granted in many First-World militaries—salary. An ANA company commander “said that he was starting to see attrition among his forces. He said that because it was volunteer army, the soldiers would occasionally leave, never to return, and that he was currently at about 70 per cent strength. He also [said] that a lot of the soldiers were barely literate, and the reason a lot of the soldiers were leaving was that the pay was extremely poor.”⁵⁶ Over the summer of 2006, the Taliban exploited this weakness and stepped up recruitment efforts by offering three times the daily pay of the ANA—the Taliban is offering up to US\$300 a month whereas a first-year soldier in the ANA earns only US\$70 a month. An Afghan official who spoke on condition of anonymity said

⁵¹ Charles Di Leonardo, “Training the Afghan National Army”.

⁵² *ibid.*

⁵³ Jim Garamone, “Afghan Sergeant Major Shows Way Ahead for Fledgling Army”, *American Forces Press Service*, 11 August 2006, accessed at www.defenselink.mil/News/NewsArticle.aspx?id=429.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

⁵⁵ Kathleen T. Rhem, “Afghan Sergeant Major Making Inroads for NCO Corps in Fledgling Army”, *American Forces Press Service*, 23 November 2006.

that the “basic pay of \$70 a month was a lot of money three years ago but it is harder to recruit people to fight in a bitter insurgency now”.⁵⁷ Moving up the chain of command, the monthly salary for the top enlisted man is US\$180, US\$160 for a second lieutenant, while a general takes home US\$850.⁵⁸ In many instances, general-grade officers have not been paid in months but still continued to serve.⁵⁹

To bolster their numbers, the Taliban often recruit tribesmen and farmers on a “seasonal” basis with a variety of offers in different provinces including “piece-rates of US\$10 to US\$20 a day for joining a given attack on Western forces”, US\$15 to launch a single mortar round into nearby coalition military bases, and US\$1,000 for the head of a government worker or a foreigner.⁶⁰ Colonel Myuddin Ghouri of the ANA’s 205th Corps attributes the Taliban’s source of cash as coming from Pakistan and the flourishing drug trade. In addition, Afghan defence ministry officials believe certain Arab countries are also funding the insurgency.⁶¹ Beyond the lure of cash, Lieutenant Colonel David Hammond of the British Parachute Regiment also highlighted the intangible benefits offered by the insurgents: “If you were a lad in the hills and you were offered US\$12 to stay local or you could take US\$4 and fight miles away from home, which would you do?”⁶² Fighting miles away from home also brought certain operational disadvantages. Afghanistan’s Minister Adviser for Tribal Affairs, and former governor of Uruzgan, H. E. Jan Mohamed Khan, commented that certain ANA units have not performed well because “they are from the north”, and are unfamiliar with both the terrain and people of Uruzgan.⁶³ Coalition forces, though, would argue that in many instances non-local units are the only way to combat corruption because they have no connections in the province.⁶⁴ Lastly, the Taliban is also said to have fielded better and bigger weapons in recent fighting, including heavy machine-guns and mortars and perhaps

⁵⁶ Di Leonardo, “Training the Afghan National Army”.

⁵⁷ Rachel Morarjee, “Taliban goes for cash over ideology”.

⁵⁸ Branch (CSTC-A), “CSTC-A Key ANA Data Points”.

⁵⁹ Author’s conversation with ANA Chief of Operations, Lieutenant-General Sher Mohammad Karimi, at the Ministry of Defence, Kabul, Afghanistan on 26 November 2006.

⁶⁰ Nelofer Pazira, “Return to Kandahar: The Taliban Threat” in *The Independent (U.K.)*, 22 August 2006; and Max Hastings, “The World Cannot Walk Out on Afghanistan” in *The Guardian (U.K.)*, 12 September 2006.

⁶¹ Rachel Morarjee, “Taliban Goes for Cash Over Ideology”, in *Financial Times (U.K.)*, 25 July 2006; and “Taliban Offers Fighters More Money”, *United Press International*, 26 July 2006.

⁶² *ibid.*

⁶³ Author’s conversation with Minister Adviser for Tribal Affairs, H. E. Jan Mohamed Khan, during the latter’s visit to the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (CAPS), Kabul, Afghanistan on 17 July 2006. Translation from Pashto to English by Mr. Hekmat Karzai, Director, CAPS.

⁶⁴ Interview with LTC Nick Crosby (USA) and LTC Jeff Waechter (USAF), J5 Branch, CSTC-A at Camp Eggers, Kabul, Afghanistan on 15 September 2006.

even recoilless rifles.⁶⁵ In the meantime, ANA units that have not received improved weapons have to make do with ‘recycled’ weapons from the disarmament of militia, with some rifles lacking even the basic aiming sights.⁶⁶

In addition to pay issues, there are a multitude of reasons why ANA soldiers desert their post and go AWOL (absent without leave), including “a reluctance to fight alongside foreigners against countrymen and a need to bring money to families in remote villages or help at harvest time”, all reasons exacerbated by “poor conditions and fierce resistance from the Taliban [and] the absence of a banking system [that] prevents them from sending money to their families”.⁶⁷ Besides the “monthly AWOL tendencies”, there are also two seasonal events that cause the mass exodus of soldiers to their hometowns. The first is during the holy month of Ramadan, especially the week following *Eid-il-Fitr* (the end of Ramadan), where families gather for celebration and feasts marking the end to the fasting period. The other is winter, when the cold, poor supplies and scant living conditions make field conditions inhabitable.⁶⁸ The result is that, on average, each *kandak* has 611 billets but are manned at 70 per cent (428 men) strength at best, and of this personnel pool, only 70 per cent (300 men) turn up. CSTC-A and coalition partners are working hard to improve the manning rate to 85 per cent, of which 80 per cent would turn up for duty.⁶⁹

To solve these issues, both the “carrot” and the “stick” approaches have been utilized in tandem. LTG Karimi acknowledged the important issue, saying that “we have problems, particularly the problem of attrition and desertion”, and proposed a regimental solution to ensure that those who go AWOL be caught and face military justice instead of being let off the hook.⁷⁰ Mr. Zahir Azimi, spokesman for the Afghan Defence Ministry, said that “the government had enhanced the salaries of ANA soldiers from 80 to 100 dollars per month [and] soldiers who wanted to renew their contract would get another raise of US\$35 in their

⁶⁵ “Tanks, More Troops to Afghanistan”, *Canadian Press*, 15 September 2006.

⁶⁶ Interview with LTC Nick Crosby (USA) and LTC Jeff Waechter (USAF).

⁶⁷ Roland Buerk, “Desertions Blow Hits Afghan Army”, *BBC News*, 9 June 2005, accessed at news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/4078118.stm; and Jim Krane, “Afghan Army to Strike Taliban in Winter”.

⁶⁸ Kathleen T. Rhem, “U.S. Soldiers Work With Afghan Army to Fortify, Instil Discipline”, *American Forces Press Service*, 24 November 2006, accessed at www.defenselink.mil/News/NewsArticle.aspx?ID=2211.

⁶⁹ Remarks by Major-General Robert Durbin at the Joint PRT Commanders Meeting at HQ ISAF on 13 November 2006.

⁷⁰ Ann Scott Tyson, “Desertions Deplete Afghan Army”, *The Christian Science Monitor*, 17 December 2003, accessed at <http://www.csmonitor.com/2003/1217/p06s01-wosc.html>.

monthly salaries”.⁷¹ In an effort to address the question of reliable equipment and to provide greater protection in the field, the U.S. transferred 213 Humvees to the ANA in early 2007, marking the beginning of more than 800 various up-armoured vehicles scheduled for delivery. “This is only the tip of the mountain of deliveries ... you will see many things the U.S. is committed to give Afghanistan in order to support the defence force,” said Afghan President Hamid Karzai. “Let’s take care of these vehicles and weapons bought with millions of U.S. taxpayer dollars,” Karzai continued, “we should be grateful for the delivery of this equipment and use them in the correct way.”⁷² President Karzai’s gratitude was further echoed by Minister Wardak who commented that the equipment “dramatically increased ANA mobility, assault and survivability ... these vehicles and weapons will help us defend the country and challenge all threats in the most hazardous area of the Asian continent.”⁷³

With the steady delivery of aid and soldiers, recognizing the improvement of their welfare, the overall absentee rate was reduced from the peak of 38 per cent to an average of 12 per cent today.⁷⁴ Still, senior ANA officials are not resting on their laurels. On 7 March 2007, ANA Corps Commanders convened for a three-day conference in the western city of Herat where mission objectives, new goals and current obstacles were discussed. Recognizing the need to increase retention rates and curbs absenteeism, the ANA’s Chief of Staff proposed the creation of a flexible schedule that would incorporate active duty, training and liberal leave such that ANA soldiers would be given time to visit families, stay closer to home and maintain unit cohesion by remaining with their designated units. “In the ANA, we have a commitment to each other,” said GEN Khan, “If the soldiers can learn to follow orders and do what we ask, then we must do what we can to care for our subordinates, which means finding a better way for our men to serve their country ... It is our job to make their choice as a soldier easier.”⁷⁵

To date, the ANA “has really been struggling onto its feet, and it’s probably not even now fully on them. But there is potential,” said Colonel Paul Farrar, a British Officer with 32

⁷¹ “Sixteen ‘Foreigners’ Amongst Killed in Clash in South Afghan Province”, *Pajhwok News Agency (Afghanistan)*, 26 September 2006.

⁷² “U.S. Transfers Humvees, Weapons to Afghan National Army”, *American Forces Press Service*, 6 February 2007, accessed at www.defenselink.mil/News/NewsArticle.aspx?id=2944.

⁷³ *ibid.*

⁷⁴ Testimony of Ms. Mary Beth Long to the U.S. House of Representatives’ House Armed Services Committee.

⁷⁵ “Corps Commanders Convene at Herat Conference”, ISAF Public Information Office, Release # 2007-173, 11 March 2007, accessed at www.nato.int/isaf/update/Press_Releases/newsrelease/2007/pr070311-173.htm.

years of service and no stranger to training foreign armies, “the basic material is as good as I’ve seen anywhere in the world.”⁷⁶ A similar sentiment is echoed by Colonel David Enyeart, who said that “the best thing that’s going [for Afghanistan] is the Afghan National Army ... the Afghan National Army itself is growing not only in size, but it seems that they’re growing smarter in the way they do things.”⁷⁷ Even though progress is being made, the development of a full professional army requires much more patience. Staff Sgt. George Beck, Jr., a U.S. military adviser, says “It’s all about crawl, walk, run. Right now, the Afghan army is at a crawl. In a few more years it will walk, and in 10 it will run. Then we can all go home.”⁷⁸ Indicators show that the quantity of the ANA is growing steadily and material aid is flowing in, mainly from the U.S. However, to gauge the quality of the ANA, reports from the field must be examined to obtain a current operating picture and to see if the 70,000-strong ANA expected to take responsibility for security is indeed a capable force, or merely a paper army.

Current Operating Picture

Today, more than two dozen ANA battalions have achieved a standard whereby that they are capable of “operating on their own with minimal support from U.S. or coalition forces” whereas two years ago, no ANA unit was even close to that.⁷⁹ However, despite the efforts of trainers from first-class armies, some quarters still report that the ANA “remains an ill-disciplined force weakened by drug abuse and desertion”.⁸⁰ According to these reports, “young and poorly-equipped Afghan troops have either broken under fire during battles with superior Taliban fighters or were ‘trigger happy’ soldiers who shot at the slightest excuse”.⁸¹

The British Army, which has a 4,600-strong contingent in the restive southern province of Helmand, has taken on the role of training and mentoring ANA units in their area of operations (AOs).⁸² To date, feedback on the ANA from certain members of the British Operational Mentoring Liaison Team (OMLT) have been mixed. Some OMLT operatives

⁷⁶ Sue Bailey, “Afghan Army ‘Wafer Thin’”, *Canadian Press*, 5 November 2006, accessed at www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20061105.wafghhh1105/BNStory/Afghanistan/.

⁷⁷ Tim Kilbride, “As Afghan Troops Build Capacity, Decisive Battles Loom”.

⁷⁸ Aryn Baker, “Can the Afghans Defend Themselves?”, *TIME Magazine*, 3 January 2007, accessed at www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1573742,00.html.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

⁸⁰ Thomas Harding, “Afghan Army ‘is Weak Under Fire’”, *The Telegraph (U.K.)*, 15 August 2006.

⁸¹ “Afghan Army ‘Is Weak Under Fire’” and “Afghan Army ‘Taking Drugs’ Says British Soldier”, *Daily Mail (U.K.)*, 14 August 2006.

have reported cowardice under fire, a dislike for patrols, extortion of locals and smoking illicit substances. A local tribal elder estimated that on any given day, as many as half of the ANA soldiers in Helmand are stoned on hashish.⁸³ One NCO even claimed that “one guy threatened to shoot me. We had no powers to discipline them.”⁸⁴ At the time of writing, U.S. and Afghan authorities had just opened investigations into the fatal shooting of two U.S. servicemen by an ANA soldier outside a top-security prison at Pul-e-Charkhi, east of Kabul.⁸⁵ Another soldier spoke about the non-readiness of the ANA, saying that “at the moment, the Afghan army is not trained to the degree where they can manoeuvre around the place and when our troops are attacked, they aren’t in a position to come and help us”.⁸⁶ Further up the chain of command, Afghanistan’s internal intelligence services, the National Security Directorate, arrested several Afghan officers, including BG Abdul Faqir, the former chief of weapon depots in Khirabad, south of Kabul, for trafficking “150 boxes of Kalashnikov rounds and other arms” from Kabul to the Taliban in the neighbouring province of Logar.⁸⁷ Such instances have no doubt contributed to accusations that “increasing corruption in the government and the national army are spreading the power base of the Taliban”.⁸⁸

Yet, others have reported that the ANA was keen to learn and had performed gallantly in certain instances. Captain Matthew Williams, who was also based in Helmand and who recently completed a six-month tour in early 2007, was impressed by the ANA’s progression. “The highlight of my tour has been finding out that the ANA that we had helped train had captured a key Taliban leader; this really shows the progress that has been made,” said the British Royal Marine. “We trained them and then they completed the operation on their own; it is really gratifying to see.” However, there were also teething problems, including cultural

⁸² “Operations in Afghanistan: British Forces”, *Defence Factsheet (U.K.)*, 6 November 2006. accessed at www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/FactSheets/OperationsFactsheets/OperationsInAfghanistanBritishForces.htm.

⁸³ Aryn Baker, “Can the Afghans Defend Themselves?”.

⁸⁴ “Afghan Army ‘Is Weak Under Fire’” and “Afghan Army ‘Taking Drugs’ Says British Soldier”, *Daily Mail (U.K.)*.

⁸⁵ “Afghan Soldier Kills 2 U.S. Troops Outside Top-security Jail”, *CNN*, 6 May 2007, accessed at www.cnn.com/2007/WORLD/asiapcf/05/06/afghan.us.soldier.ap/index.html.

⁸⁶ Patrick Bishop, “We’re on the Way to Defeating Taliban”, *The Telegraph (U.K.)*, 12 September 2006.

⁸⁷ “Afghan Officers Arrested for Smuggling Weapons to Taliban”, *Xinhua News Agency (China)*, 22 September 2006.

⁸⁸ David Loyn, “Travelling with the Taleban”, *BBC*, 24 October 2006, accessed at news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/6081594.stm.

differences, misunderstandings brought on by different work ethics, the language barrier, and the average Afghan soldier's ability to absorb and act on information.⁸⁹

Even though the ANA is young and plagued with many problems, it is still the only effective tool of the central government. Prior to the presidential elections in September 2004, the ANA deployed two *kandaks* to the western province of Herat in a show of force to keep rival factions that threatened the pre-election stability. Based on the outcome of the operation, an optimistic ANA Lieutenant said, "The Afghan National Army is the spine of this country and of our president. The central government can defend itself now." However, another officer threw caution to the wind and provided a more sombre assessment, saying, "A few months of training are not going to make an illiterate young Afghan boy a soldier. It takes time to build an army. The U.S. military is the backbone of the ANA. Without them, the ANA couldn't stand alone."⁹⁰ The former statement highlights the optimism among the ANA but the latter speaks the uncomfortable truth. The tenets required for the ANA to obtain operational readiness and assume control of Afghanistan's security include eradicating seeming "immutable" traditions like the NCO-Officer divide, receiving substantial and constant material aid, and the coalescence of two essential ingredients on the part of the international community—patience and mentoring of the ANA.

Thus far, close partnerships and mentoring between ISAF members have enabled the ANA to gain valuable skills and insights into how professional militaries conduct operations. In the Afghan capital of Kabul, joint operations carried out between the ANA and the French Battle Group enabled mixed ISAF and ANA units to practise security procedures that included the manning of checkpoints, and personnel and vehicle searches.⁹¹ In Uruzgan province, the Dutch OMLT conducted Train-the-Trainer Programmes in partnership with selected ANA training instructors, who in turn will take over the responsibility of mentoring future ANA soldiers. "The ANA instructors are more than qualified to deliver and run this course," said Dutch Major Marloes Visser, "this is another strong indication of the growing strength of the

⁸⁹ "Marine Ends Tour Impressed by Afghan Army He Helped Train", *Defence News (U.K.)*, 21 March 07, accessed at www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/DefenceNews/PeopleInDefence/MarineEndsTourImpressedByAfghanArmyHeHelpedTrain.htm.

⁹⁰ Halima Kazem, "New Afghan Army Asserts Itself", *The Christian Science Monitor*, 23 August 2004, accessed at www.csmonitor.com/2004/0823/p06s01-wosc.html.

⁹¹ ISAF Public Information Office, "Joint ISAF, ANA Training in RC-C", ISAF Press Release # 2007-118, 21 February 2007, accessed at www2.hq.nato.int/isaf/update/press_releases/newsrelease/2007/pr070221-118.htm.

ANA.”⁹² A similar echo is heard in Kabul where “it is not the coalition training Afghans, but Afghans who train their countrymen”, says U.S. Major Arnold V. Strong. “All of the classes are Afghan-led ... the exception is the Kandak Commanders Course. Contractors teach that course.”⁹³

Elsewhere in the south-eastern province of Zabul, partnership and mentoring between Romanian and Afghan Forces has resulted in hundreds of joint-security patrols and the establishment of a combined Quick Reaction Force, created to provide immediate assistance when needed throughout the province. “Even though there are differences in tactics, languages, equipment and culture, our overall mission—providing a secure environment for the people of Zabul—is the same. It is this overall goal that binds us together,” states Romanian Captain Mihai Marius.⁹⁴ Where mentorship has been lacking, the growth of the ANA has slowed, halted and, in some cases, backtracked. U.S. Army Engineers have trained ANA sappers “with an emphasis on mine warfare, basic demolitions and combat construction [focused on wire obstacles and survivability positions]”.⁹⁵ However, problems began to surface when the sappers were deployed to their respective AOs and, due to a lack of collective training and the shortage of project management skills, their ability to contribute to the overall mission was severely restricted. Thus, the engineer companies ended up being utilized as infantry, a move no doubt compounded by the shortage of manpower due to staffing and AWOL issues.⁹⁶ Continued mentorship is thus an intricate and utmost essential component in the maturity of ANA

The hands-on approach has also allowed Afghans to see their own army in action and show the locals the great strides that the ANA has taken. “If a squad of our guys goes out, a platoon of their guys goes out; if a platoon of our guys goes out, a company of their guys goes out,” says Sergeant-Major Bryan Gran of Connecticut’s National Guard. “We will not go into a compound by ourselves. We do not kick down doors any more; those days are over ... They

⁹² “Afghan National Army Training Takes Place at Camp Holland”, ISAF Public Information Office, Release #2007-204, 19 March 2007, accessed at www.nato.int/isaf/update/press_releases/newsrelease/2007/pr070319-204.htm.

⁹³ Jim Garamone, “Pace Pleased with Progress at Afghan Training Center”.

⁹⁴ “ISAF’s Romanian Forces Working Closely with ANSF”, ISAF Public Information Office, Release # 2007-278, 7 April 2007, accessed at www.nato.int/isaf/Update/Press_Releases/newsrelease/2007/pr070407-278.htm.

⁹⁵ Eric Nichols, “Engineer Mobile Training Team: Standing up the Afghan National Army Engineering School” in *Engineer*, July–September 2005.

⁹⁶ Remarks by Brigadier Dickie Davis, Chief Engineer, ISAF IX, at the Joint PRT Commanders Meeting at HQ ISAF on 13 November 2006.

kick the door down or knock on the door. We're providing the additional security, the big guns so nobody messes with them."⁹⁷ With war-fighting just one of a number of skills expected of militaries, the ANA has also been exposed to OOTW. Early in 2006, the 203 Corps conducted the ANA's first Medical Civilian Assistance Programme (MEDCAP) in the eastern province of Khost, with the aim of testing the ANA's support system, and for the locals to put trust in the ANA and its abilities.⁹⁸ Senior commanders were also been taught "to see how they fit into the international political and military environment and how to effectively integrate non-governmental organizations and media with the full spectrum of military operations, from humanitarian relief to counterinsurgency". Formal training is conducted through a six-month course at the Afghan Command and General Staff College (ACGSC), which welcomed its first class on 28 October 2006 and is modelled after the U.S. Army and NATO Command and General Staff Colleges.⁹⁹

For the ANA, the weight of upholding security is amplified by an unprofessional and corrupt ANP. During the Kabul riots in May 2006, there were reports of ANP officers abandoning their posts, with some even taking off their uniforms and joining the rampaging looters. While enraged rioters took over the streets, "Interior Ministry officials in charge of the police took their phones off the hook, while [President] Karzai failed to make a public statement on TV until the riots, lasting some eight hours, had run their course".¹⁰⁰ Ultimately, it was the ANA's presence that calmed the situation with Kabul residents agreeing that the formation of the ANA is the only "decent thing" President Karzai has done in four years. "Now the soldiers are here, the police can't steal and hassle people and we feel safe," said a shopkeeper in Kabul.¹⁰¹ Indeed, in the "single largest, most comprehensive public opinion poll ever conducted in Afghanistan", conducted by the Asia Foundation between June and August 2006, 87 per cent of the 6,226 respondents indicated that they trusted the ANA, leading the ANP (surprisingly at 86 per cent), electronic media (84 per cent), print media (77 per cent), NGOs (57 per cent), political parties (44 per cent), justice system (38 per cent) and local

⁹⁷ Kathleen T. Rhem, "U.S. Military Operations Evolve as Afghan Army Becomes More Capable", *American Forces Press Service*, 24 November 2006, accessed at <http://www.defenselink.mil/News/NewsArticle.aspx?ID=2210>.

⁹⁸ Dan Huvane, "ANA, CTF Devil Team Up for MEDCAP", *Desert Devil Dispatch (Newsletter of the 82nd Airborne Division, U.S. Army)*, 15 February 2006, accessed at www.bragg.army.mil/82dv/desert%20devil%20dispatch.

⁹⁹ "Command and General Staff College Opens", Combined Forces Command – Afghanistan, 30 October 2006, accessed at www.defendamerica.mil/articles/oct2006/a103006wm1.html.

¹⁰⁰ Rachel Morarjee, "Where does Karzai Go from Here?", *The Christian Science Monitor*, 2 June 2006, accessed at www.csmonitor.com/2006/0602/p04s02-wosc.html.

militias (31 per cent).¹⁰² Concurrently, among the inundation of Afghanistan's institutions in a well of corruption, the ANA is the least corrupt institution in the country.¹⁰³

Friction between the ANP and the ANA has also resulted in armed confrontation and blows between the two main groups of the state security apparatus. In the northern province of Parwan, an accident involving ANP and ANA vehicles sparked a heated argument and resulted in a gun battle, during which soldiers shot a policeman dead. Five ANA soldiers were subsequently arrested.¹⁰⁴ A month later in the Andar district of Ghazni province, the ANA and ANP almost came to blows when an ANP officer accused of stealing from a shop keeper got beaten up by locals. The ANP took sides with the accused officer while the ANA sided with the locals. The tension escalated with the gathering of more members from both sides, followed by warning shots, and peaked when "the yelling increased, followed by the unmistakable sound of numerous rifles being locked and loaded".¹⁰⁵ A gun battle was narrowly averted due to the actions of U.S. soldiers in the vicinity. However, there have also been praises for ANA and ANP cooperation. Colonel Matiollah Khan, a fearless fighter with a wealth of experience in securing the main highways in the dangerous provinces of Uruzgan, Helmand and Kandahar, says that the ANA and the ANP are partners and there has never been a hint of friction during any operation that he has taken part in.¹⁰⁶ Whilst the degree of ANA and ANP animosity is difficult to gauge, the undeniable truth is that in places where Afghan security forces are ineffective in protecting the population from bandits and ensuring the peace, anti-government forces are able to create a parallel infrastructure of governance. When coupled with corruption in the government and the people's ever-increasing lack of trust, this trend places the future of Afghanistan in a perilous situation.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*

¹⁰² "Afghanistan in 2006: A Survey of the Afghan People", *The Asia Foundation*, 2006, p. 30, accessed at www.asiafoundation.org/pdf/AG-survey06.pdf.

¹⁰³ Renée Montagne, "Afghan Army Making Progress, Still Reliant on NATO", *National Public Radio (NPR)*, 17 November 2006, accessed at www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=6499377.

¹⁰⁴ "NATO Says Taliban Use Hezbollah Tactics", *The Associated Press*, 15 August 2006.

¹⁰⁵ Nancy Montgomery, "Friction Between Afghan Army, Police Boils to Surface", *Stars and Stripes*, 18 September 2006.

¹⁰⁶ Author's conversation with Colonel Matiollah Khan, during the latter's visit to the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (CAPS), Kabul, Afghanistan on 23 November 2006. Translation from Pashto to English by Mr. Hekmat Karzai, Director, CAPS.

¹⁰⁷ Robert Densmore, "How Fervent is Taliban Support?", *TIME Magazine*, 7 March 2007, accessed at www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1596851,00.html.

Will the ANA be ready to take over responsibility for security and fulfil its role as the sentinels of Afghan democracy? The jury is still out, with reports of heroics in the battlefield and the genuine eagerness of its young recruits to make a difference in their country's future, intertwined with accusations of drug abuse and dereliction of duty, portraying the ANA as a trigger-happy and ill-disciplined force. On the possibility of the ANA having to stand on its own without coalition support due to the withdrawal of ISAF-troops, the Commander of Canadian Forces in Afghanistan provided a realistic assessment. "Can we fix them in two years? I'm not sure," commented BG Tim Grant, "[but] we can certainly make them much better than they are in two years, and that's where our focus is right now."¹⁰⁸

Conclusion

The ANA has been a beacon of hope and a shining example of what Afghans can achieve through cooperation and ethnic cohesion. However, even with the tremendous improvements made since its formation, there are still many issues that have to be addressed in order for the ANA to be the protector of Afghan democracy and territorial integrity. Not surprisingly, the solutions to these issues lie in the hands of both the Afghans and the international community.

For the Afghans, they often find themselves in all-too-familiar catch 22 situations—wanting to increase the salary of its soldiers but are constrained by budgetary restrictions; seeking to take on more operational responsibility but finding that their forces are undermanned and often outgunned; and fine-balancing the quantity and quality of the ANA. These are factors that the Afghans may not be able to change. However, there are various facets that only they can. It is only the Afghans themselves who can impact the retention rates of soldiers reaching the end of the enlistment period and further decrease absentee rates. Similarly, discipline and professionalism can only be instilled into an institution by the very people who define the institution—the officers and the men of the ANA. Finally, only Afghans themselves can eradicate the cultural norms that are detrimental to the ANA's operational capability such as the NCO-officer divide and the seasonal exodus of personnel.

¹⁰⁸ James McCarten, "Commander Uncertain if Afghans can Go It Alone by '09", *CNews (Canada)*, 23 April 2007, accessed at cnews.canoe.ca/CNEWS/War_Terror/2007/04/22/4102939-cp.html.

As for the international community, it must realize two very important truths. Firstly, the ANA will require mentorship and partnership for many years to come. Three decades of fighting have made the country what it is today, and it may take an equal number of years of peace to turn it around. No superficial milestone or achievement of capability in the near future will be able to hide operational deficiencies should coalition forces expedite the size of the ANA and leave the Afghans to “go it alone”. Mentorship of the ANA transcends telling or showing Afghans what needs to be done; it also encompasses mutual respect, in-depth preparation of soldiers to be mentors, and knowledge of local culture, religion and social norms. As for the partnership between coalition and ANA soldiers, a large amount of patience is required. All too often, soldiers from militaries with a long history expect their counterparts from an army that’s only five years old to possess values that take at least a generation to take hold. It is only through mentorship and patient partnership that the newly-minted second lieutenants and the fresh-face privates of today will be able to lead the ANA professionally as the flag officers and senior enlisted personnel of tomorrow. Rushing the ANA to assume too much responsibility while it is still unprepared is not an exit strategy. It is a recipe for disaster and an invitation to “do it all again” sometime in the future.

Secondly, the effort in creating, mentoring and partnering an operationally ready ANA is not the sole responsibility of the United States. It is the responsibility of all coalition partners to play an active role, from joint training with ANA units operating in the various provinces to the contribution of equipment and training courses. Importantly, contribution transcends the will to give, but also to give so that the ANA will benefit from what is received. Irrelevant or non-compatible aid simply creates more friction and hinders the progress of the ANA. Perhaps what is required to “get the job done” is mostly aptly summarized by U.S. Secretary of Defence Robert Gates, who reiterated that “going forward, it is vitally important that the success Afghanistan has achieved not be allowed to slip away through neglect or lack of political will or resolve”. After all, Afghanistan is a “mission in which there is virtually no dispute over its justness, necessity or international legitimacy”, one where “our failure to do so would be a mark of shame”.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Linda D. Kozaryn, “Gates Urges NATO Allies to Honor Commitments”, *American Forces Press Service*, 11 February 2007, accessed at www.defenselink.mil/News/NewsArticle.aspx?ID=3012.

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