

Transition in Afghanistan through an Enduring Afghan National Security Force

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Resumo

A Transição no Afeganistão Através de uma Força Nacional Afegã de Segurança

Quando em Novembro de 2009 foi criada a NATO *Training Mission – Afghanistan*, os programas de treino de forças de segurança afegãs eram dispares não existindo planos com vista a uma adequada transferência de competências para a *Afghan National Security Force* até 2014. Na verdade, o enfoque baseava-se na intenção de inverter tendências negativas no plano da segurança nacional e na formação de militares e polícias em quantidade necessária à condução de operações de contra-subversão. Qualidade e quantidade eram dois princípios não co-pagináveis – ou se criava uma força profissional pequena ou uma força grande com capacidades limitadas resultantes de um treino igualmente limitado. No entanto, dada a dimensão geográfica do Afeganistão e a necessidade do Exército e da Polícia em garantirem a segurança e a estabilidade do país, a qualidade não podia ser comprometida em nome da quantidade.

Consequentemente, a NATO *Training Mission – Afghanistan* conduziu um processo deliberado de formação e treino de uma força profissional, auto-sustentável e duradoura. O progresso registado nos últimos dois anos requereu um empenho e investimento significativo por parte dos Estados Unidos, da NATO e de outros países da coligação. Através de uma parceria, as forças de segurança afegãs estão a caminho de assumirem responsabilidades de segurança que competiam até agora à NATO.

Abstract

At the time NATO Training Mission – Afghanistan stood up in November 2009, security training programs were disparate and there were no plans to transition security lead to the Afghan National Security Force by 2014. Instead, the focus was simply on reversing the negative growth trends and producing soldiers and police to meet a quantitative goal for counterinsurgency operations. Quality and quantity were then seen as two mutually exclusive principles – you could either produce a small, professional force or a large force with limited training, but not both. However, given the size of Afghanistan and the necessity of the Army and Police to provide security and stability, quality could not be compromised for the sake of growth. Consequently, NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan embarked on a deliberate process to produce a professional force that is self-sustaining and enduring. Progress over the past two years has required significant investment from the United States, NATO and other coalition countries. Through partnership, the Afghan security forces are on a path to assume security lead from NATO.

Ten years ago, Afghanistan was politically fractured, economically irrelevant, and socially repressive.¹ The Taliban government, recognized by only three countries at the time, reduced the nation's GDP per capita to under \$170, almost completely destroyed public infrastructure, and ruptured Afghanistan into a conglomeration of belligerent localities, geographically isolated from one another. With just a few years in power, the Taliban furthered the regression of Afghan society increasing insecurity and fear. Through the Taliban's alliance with al-Qa'ida, we soon learned what the 2011 National Military Strategy of the United States later underscored, "In this interdependent world, the enduring interests of the United States are increasingly tied to those of other state and non-state actors" (Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2011).

While Taliban totalitarianism attempted to destroy Afghans' future, the international community has begun to reverse the devastation of decades of war. Afghanistan still has many challenges, but it is also not the fragmented society it once was either. Insurgent groups still conduct attacks, primarily in the south and east, but much has changed in ten years - Afghanistan is now sovereign, the international community is heavily invested in the future of Afghanistan, and society is slowly recovering. GDP has increased to \$1,000 per capita, almost all Afghans have access to basic health services (only nine percent did in 2002), school enrollment increased from 900,000 (mainly boys) to almost seven million (37 percent girls), women serve in government. Most of the country is now connected via mobile phones, highways, and common purpose - assume responsibility for its own security, governance, and development.

To be sure, progress is dependent on international support for Afghanistan, but as agreed at the NATO summit in Lisbon in fall 2010, Kabul will increasingly assume lead responsibility for its development and security. This process started in July 2011 when the first seven areas began to transition security responsibility from NATO to Afghanistan. The geographic transition process will continue until December 2014 when Afghan forces assume lead responsibility for security for the Afghan people. Far from signaling international withdrawal, over the next several years and beyond 2014, NATO forces will shift from combat operations to training, advising, and assisting the Afghan Army, Air Force, and Police. By rebuilding the Afghan forces into a professional military and police, Afghanistan will have the tools to provide security and stability for its people and the region. As the Minister of Defense told the men and women of NTM-A on July 4, 2011, Afghanistan can and will be a contributor to international security some day.

1 Parts of this essay appeared as "Beyond the Tenth Year: Building Partnership Capacity and International Security," *Foreign Policy Research Institute E-Note*, September 2011 and "Return on Investment," *Armed Forces Journal*, August 2011.

Rebuilding the Security Force

What was true generally for Afghanistan during the past 30 years was particularly true within the Afghan Army, Air Force, and Police. The post-9/11 Afghan military and police inherited a hodgepodge of Soviet and Western equipment, doctrine, and training. Exacerbated by decades of war, limited resources, and disparate international programs to rebuild security, history took its toll on the military and police. Attrition, illiteracy, and corruption negatively impacted force development, effectiveness, and undermined the bonds between security forces and the Afghan people. This view was widely known and continues to influence perception of the Afghan military and police.

In 2009, the force was underpaid, untrained, poorly equipped, illiterate, and poorly-led. At 97,000, the Afghan Army could not confront Taliban resurgence, which precipitated a surge of Coalition combat forces in 2010. The 94,000 Afghan police were in an equally poor state; patrolmen earned less than half that of a soldier and used their positions to extort funds to ensure they had a living wage. In spite of these challenges, NATO committed to grow the force and rebuild the Afghan Army, Air Force, and Police into a professional force loyal to the Afghan people. These efforts would take place under the aegis of the ISAF surge, which would provide the time and space to build indigenous forces. Accompanying the ISAF surge was a surge of resources to support the training mission, which had suffered from a culture of poverty prior to 2009. In 2009, for example, there were just 30 NATO trainers. By the end of 2011, there will be about 1,800 NATO trainers. Financial resources also surged from \$2.8 billion in Fiscal Year 2008 to \$11.6 billion in Fiscal Year 2011. As infrastructure builds taper off, the annual budget will fall substantially to cover sustainment costs currently estimated at \$6 billion a year.

Since fall 2009, international efforts have focused on growing the Afghan military and police to meet the immediate needs of the security deficit in Afghanistan. The Afghan military went from negative growth of 1,200 soldiers in September 2009 to adding more than 6,000 per month since 2010. Where there was once a disparate Army of 97,000, a unified and ethnically-balanced force of 171,600 stands today. During the same period, the police grew from 94,000 to 135,000. The growth is not only a testament to the strength of partnership between the international community and the government of Afghanistan, but also Afghans willingness to heed the call to defend their country and determine their future. U.S. Senator Carl Levin welcomed this. "For years, I have strongly and repeatedly advocated for building up Afghan military capability because I believe only the Afghans can truly secure their nation's future" (Levin, 2011).

What Senator Levin notes is embraced in Afghanistan. Former Minister of Interior Ali Jalali wrote in *Prism* in September 2010, "The key to future success is a shared vision for the endstate in Afghanistan, and the building of indigenous capacity to achieve this goal." (Jalali, 2010) or former Afghan presidential candidate and President Karzai's Transition Coordinator Dr. Ashraf Ghani wrote in the same issue of *Prism*, "The success of the counteroffensive will be judged by its role in the larger project of counterinsurgency - creating the enabling environment for a stable political and economic system that can turn both Afghan citizens and regional players into stakeholders in its success" (Ghani, 2010). Building a capable Afghan Army, Air Force, and Police enables geographic transition, which realizes Afghans' goals for a sovereign country with the capabilities to control its borders, protects its people, and respond to man-made or natural disasters. Afghan army commander for northern Afghanistan Zulmai Weesa made this point when Mazer e-Sharif began the geographic transition process in July 2011: "This is the start of a process. I will make sure that our sons and brothers will fulfill their duty to take over all security responsibility that is now on our shoulders" (Hakar, 2011).

An underappreciated fact is that this is the Afghans' war. Every day, Afghan soldiers and police are conducting patrols in Helmand, interdicting insurgents in Paktika, and recovering weapons caches in Khost. ISAF forces are essential to these efforts today, but it is with Afghans that combined operations protect the population, build institutions, and deprive insurgents the support they need. Unlike ISAF forces, Afghan forces know the languages, cultural traditions, and geography where they patrol. Once properly trained, equipped, fielded, and partnered, Afghan soldiers and police can protect the population and support local governance and economic development. With growth and professionalization on track, efforts are underway to make the Afghan military and police independent and sustainable as ISAF forces transition lead responsibility for security.

Beyond Growth

Over the next two years, the Afghan Army, Air Force, and Afghan National Police will continue to grow from 305,000 and reach their combined authorized end strength of 352,000. At the same time, Afghan infantry *kandaks* (battalions) replace ISAF combat forces, the Afghan force will also develop the critical enabling and supporting capabilities to ensure sustainability. With its own logistic capability, the army can deliver supplies to forward deployed units. With its own explosive ordnance disposal units, the army can remove mines left from the Soviet era or im-

provised explosive devices left by insurgents; and with its own air force, Afghanistan will have the capability to support its forces in the field or assist with regional disaster relief operations.

Afghan police are making progress too. Initially saddled by disparate training programs and lacking civilian police trainers and advisors, the Afghan National Police did not grow as easily as the Army did. Prior to 2009, police recruits were assigned as patrolmen without any training. Being untrained and poorly equipped made them vulnerable to attack by insurgents. Being poorly led and underpaid led them to prey on the population. Through unified international assistance, these trends are slowly being reversed and the Afghan police are learning what it means to serve and protect the population. Key to this is introducing civil policing; the Ministry of Interior recently revised its training program to develop an Afghan curriculum based on best practices from the European Union Police, German Police Project Team, NATO countries, and non-NATO countries. The curriculum advances Afghan civil policing through various topics such as: criminal investigation fundamentals, human rights, and gender issues. That training was extended from six to eight weeks during a time of war is a positive sign that the Ministry of Interior has budgeted the time and values the additional two weeks. The impact of better training, better equipment, better pay, and better leaders will be apparent over time.

In addition to the immediate needs of training, equipping, fielding, and partnering with Afghan forces for counterinsurgency operations, it is also essential to build enduring institutions and self-sustaining systems. This was obvious as we reviewed the Soviet experience in Afghanistan and visited NATO and Afghan units throughout Afghanistan. The lack of sustainment capabilities was evident in the ubiquitous derelict buildings and abandoned armored vehicles that cover the Afghan countryside. The lack of a logistics system hampered military operations and undercut unit morale. Regular reports from think tanks and international organizations highlighted challenges like these, yet the international community committed to building the security capacity for Afghanistan and developing institutions to ensure the force could endure beyond 2014.

The progress of these efforts and growing confidence in their forces are evident in our daily activities with Afghan policymakers, military, and police leaders. For example, Commando Brigadier General Lawang (2011) said:

"My message to Afghan Commandos and Special Forces is we are Afghan, we are Muslim and sons of this country, we should fight bravely with honor and show professionalism in our work and conduct ourselves, do our duty with honor and integrity, if it is during the day or night time we should prove it to our people, that we can defend our country's security and defend our

motherland. My message to our people is please send their sons and brothers to ranks of the ANA and Commandos to make this force stronger so we will be able to fight against the international terrorism and the enemy of our country and our religion".

Minister of Interior Mohammadi agrees, he told the Afghan National Police Symposium in January, "To win the support and confidence of the people and provide for the personal security of the citizens, we are determined to concentrate more on developing civilian policing capacities of the ANP" (Reveron, 2011). Similar efforts are underway within the Army and Minister of Defense Wardak sees having a professional force "To take over our security and defend our country" (Caldwell, 2011a). And President Karzai told an audience at the March National Military Academy of Afghanistan graduation, "We understand that the people of Afghanistan no longer want to see others defend for them... The transition is the answer to the long held aspirations of the people of Afghanistan" (Caldwell, 2011b). For this to occur, recruited forces need to be trained, equipped, fielded, and partnered.

Recruit and Train

While NATO countries value training for their own militaries and police, it was surprisingly disparate or absent prior to 2010. Afghan National Police, for example, were recruited and then assigned with the intent to train later. The ill-effects of assigning untrained, underpaid, and poorly-led patrolmen were evident in Afghan and international perceptions of the police. Simply, those assigned to protect used their authority to prey on the people they were supposed to defend. While negative perceptions still exist, there has been substantial progress and improvements in the training base.

Every day, more than 32,000 Afghan personnel are in training at 70 sites across 21 provinces in Afghanistan, and in selected courses in the United Arab Emirates and Turkey. The results are evident. In just two short years, the Afghan National Army went from using Soviet-era equipment to more modern NATO weapons. Weapons qualifications rates increased dramatically and Afghans learned to conduct convoy operations. Soldiers once unable to count or read are now enrolled in mandatory literacy training. Within the Afghan National Police, patrolmen are not only enrolled in literacy training, but have a career track through leadership development opportunities at a non-commissioned officer course, an officer candidate school, and the Afghan National Security University.

Literacy has become the essential enabler for supporting Afghanistan to grow its security forces. Those eligible for military and police service had their educations stolen by decades of war. Entry-level testing shows that only about 14 percent of the new police and army recruits are functionally literate. To make up for the shortfall, all illiterate Afghan soldiers and police recruits are enrolled in literacy programs to ensure they reach the international standard for literacy. Currently, about 3,000 Afghan teachers are following Afghan Ministry of Education guidelines to help recruits overcome the illiteracy barrier. As of September 2011, over 150,000 have received literacy training and the literacy rate within the security forces is on a path to be twice that of the population in 2012.

Literacy training has become a major component of the lives of Soldiers and Police officers. Now mandatory in Basic Warrior Training for the Afghan National Army and Basic Police Training for the Afghan National Police, literacy is the building block for professionalizing the force. Literate soldiers and police can now account for the gear they are issued, know that they are receiving their full pay, and inspire their families to study. Literate soldiers can verify security credentials at base entry control points. Numerate police can be on the lookout for stolen vehicles. For just \$33 per person, the literacy program gives the “lost generation” opportunities for further training and professionalization.

Professionalize and Sustain

Professionalism is a defining characteristic of any effective military or police organization. While manning and equipping the army, air force, and police are important, it is the quality of the force that is critical. Although it is relatively easy to train a new Soldier or Patrolman, it takes much more time and effort to train, educate, and develop leaders. Leader development in the institutions and force development in the systems are all elements of a professionalized Afghan National Security Force that will help to close the credibility gap between the Afghan National Security Force and the Afghan people. This is all the more important considering that in many cases, Soldiers and Police provide the only connection between the people and their central government.

Institutions such as the National Military Academy of Afghanistan, the Combined Sergeants Major Course, the Police Academy, and NCO leader development courses will soon be unified as part of a broader institution call the Afghan National Security University. This consolidated institution of professional education will educate officers and noncommissioned officers in professional values and a spirit

of service, pride and patriotism to transform their force for generations, since it will simultaneously educate multiple generations of Afghans across the force - from cadet to Colonel and recruit to Sergeant Major. Institutions like these are the key to making the Afghan National Security Force enduring.

Creating Enduring Institutions

Since 2009, the focus has been on fielding trained infantry and police to meet the needs of counterinsurgency with additional combat fighting formations. While the combined force will continue to grow another 47,000 by October 2012, emphasis has shifted to specialty skills and vocational training. Lessons from other conflict-prone societies suggest that sustainment is essential to secure long-term gains and give a war-stricken society a chance to recover. Given the investment made over the last ten years and the priority of supporting Afghanistan's stability, the international community and the Afghan government reaffirmed a long-term commitment to a better future for the Afghan people at the 2010 NATO summit in Lisbon. Specifically, NATO and Afghan leaders agreed to "Sustaining and improving their capacity and capability to counter threats to the security, stability and integrity of Afghanistan effectively, and contributing to regional security; and doing so with full respect for Afghan sovereignty and leadership, in a manner consistent with and supportive of the Afghan constitution and international law and recognizing the sacrifices and the ongoing endeavors of the Afghan people for achieving peace" (NATO, 2010). To realize these goals, army and police professionalization continues apace.

With the establishment of twelve specialty schools over the past year, NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan is now imparting skills and training units that will enable Afghan forces to perform critical combat service and combat service support functions themselves. This is part of a phased development effort that includes advanced training in logistics, finance, communications, human resources, intelligence, artillery, engineering, and other important functions. As the fielding of these support units and specialists continues for the Army and Police, the force will be carefully and deliberately balanced with increased capability to give the ability to support and sustain itself, which will lead to independent operations.

Advanced skills and professionalization are essential to fully transferring security responsibility from NATO to Afghan forces. The critical pillar in the professionalization strategy is to ensure there are enough certified Afghan trainers, who are beginning to take the training lead for recruits at numerous Army and Police

training centers. As of September 2011, there are over 3,000 Afghan instructors who are trained and certified in five *satahs*, or levels, of instruction, and represent the ability of Afghans to sustain an enduring training capacity. At Basic Warrior Training, this has already happened; Afghans are training Afghans. The trend will continue through 2012 when Afghan trainers will lead all training efforts. At that point, coalition forces will provide oversight, assist in curriculum development, and ensure Afghans can run the training centers. Having an indigenous training base will give Afghanistan the ability to sustain its force over time.

At the same time army, air force, and police units are trained, equipped, fielded, and partnered, there is a substantial effort to develop sustainable systems and functioning ministries that can plan, program, budget, and execute ministerial goals. In support of this effort, there are about 500 NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan advisors who work at the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Interior. These advisors support their Afghan counterparts to ensure the necessary policies and systems are in place to implement strategic guidance from the President of Afghanistan and the ministers. This work includes everything from creating a modern personnel system that can identify, track, and manage personnel across the military and police to a comprehensive recruit screening process that vets, validates, and certifies Afghans' eligibility for training. Additionally, as Afghanistan assumes more programmatic authority over the next three years, providing budgetary oversight is important. In the current solar year of 1390, for example, the Minister of Defense has direct budget authority for \$900 million, while the Minister of Interior directs \$800 million.

NATO-led international efforts to develop the Afghan military and police have produced progress. President Karzai's Transition Coordinator Dr. Ashraf Ghani said, "The Afghan national army has had an enormous change both in quality and in numbers. For the seven locations which have been selected for tranche one, we are completely confident that the Afghan army will have the capability" (Croft, 2011). U.S. Major General Daniel Allyn made a similar point, "A huge part of this [partnership] is demonstrating to the Afghan security forces that they're as good as they are; in some cases they don't realize how capable they have become in the last couple of years. So we are enabling them to take the lead and supporting them where they need to achieve success" (Ardolino, 2011). Most importantly, the Afghan people agree. In a November 2010 Asia Foundation poll, 92 percent of Afghans viewed the Afghan National Army favorably, while 84 percent viewed the police favorably. In a May International Council on Security and Development poll, 82 percent of northern Afghans saw the army as effective compared to 67 percent of southern Afghans (Asia Foundation, 2011).

There are regional differences, but with international support and training, Afghan soldiers and police are beginning to enforce the rule of law contributing to Afghan people increasingly trust and value put on their soldiers and police. This is evident in the thousands of Afghans who report to military and police recruiting stations every month, which is the surest sign that Afghans want to take charge of their future and relieve NATO forces of lead security responsibility. The challenge remains to make the gains enduring and the Afghan forces sustainable.

Essential Partnership

The progress made over the past two years would not have been possible without the generous support of the international community through partnership. Before the creation of the NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan in November 2009 there were insufficient resources – just two contributing countries and 30 international trainers. This force was augmented by a substantial commitment of U.S. trainers and U.S.-funded contractors, but the mission lacked adequate resources and expertise. For example, since the United States does not have a national police force, it could provide little practical advice to the Ministry of Interior or since the United States does not fly the Mi-17 helicopter, little help could be offered to assist the fledgling Afghan Air Force.

In spite of the difficult start, NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan is truly an international command. Today, there are 37 countries providing about 1,800 trainers who are training both new recruits and Afghan trainers to take their places. Now, it is Italian Carabinieri, French and Romanian Gendarme, Spanish Guardia Civil, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and other professional civilian police officers who train and advise the Afghan National Police, or in the case of the Air Force, it is trainers from the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Croatia who advise and assist the Afghan Mi-17 helicopter program. The depth of international partnership is proving NATO Secretary General Rasmussen's idea that, "NATO can act as a matchmaker, bringing nations together to identify what they can do jointly at a lower cost, more efficiently, and with less risk" (Rasmussen, 2011).

Countries increasingly recognize that training Afghanistan's police and military is essential to long-term stability in Afghanistan and Central Asia. Further, developing, employing, and sustaining the Afghan National Army, Air Force, and Police ensures Afghanistan can be a net contributor to international security rather than a consumer. With an indigenous training base, the government of Afghanistan will not be dependent on foreign trainers and endeavors to become a regional hub for peacekeeping

training, pilot training, and vehicle maintenance. Just as we work with trainers from the formerly war-torn Balkan countries of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, we can envision Afghanistan deploying peacekeepers or trainers in the future.

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Reflecting on ten years of United States involvement in Afghanistan, we recognize the greatest long-term effect we can have is through partnership. Through ISAF, nearly a quarter of the world's countries are working with the Afghan government and the depth of the partnerships has grown over the last ten years. When it comes to Afghanistan, it appears a special relationship has emerged. While rocky over the last ten years, former Secretary of Defense Gates signaled in early 2011 that the U.S.-Afghanistan relationship "Is bonded in the blood of our sons and daughters" (Daniel, 2011). Gates' Afghan counterpart Defense Minister Wardak said, "I strongly believe that our greatest tribute to them [coalition forces who were killed or wounded in Afghanistan] will be to realize the objectives of those brave soldiers who paid the ultimate price" (Daniel, 2011). While Usama bin Laden brought the United States to Afghanistan, an enduring and self-sustaining Afghan National Security Force will preclude the use of Afghanistan as a base for terrorism in the future and is the greatest threat to the Taliban.

Implications for NATO's Future

While NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan personnel are working hard to develop Afghan security forces, we are reflecting on the challenges, successes, and opportunities the mission created. Among these is the importance of international cooperation, which undergirds efforts in Afghanistan. This is apparent in listening to the different languages spoken from Kandahar to Kabul. International cooperation is essential in Afghanistan today, but the experience must inform future thinking about the roles and missions of western militaries to embrace what NATO Secretary General Rasmussen's (2011) observation that, "The transatlantic partnership

remains the main engine of global security. The partnership has been successful in sharing common goals and values, while boasting interoperable and rapidly deployable forces”.

With this in mind, western militaries appear to be at a new, albeit familiar crossroads. In the 1980s, the United States recognized the importance of joint operations and worked to improve cooperation among its Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps. In the 1990s, coalition warfare became the norm and interoperability took on an international character. NATO was at the forefront of these efforts in the Balkans. In the 2000s, military operations began to incorporate interagency capabilities, which leveraged a whole of government approach to counterinsurgency and stability operations. In the 2010s, it is imperative we recognize security force assistance is a core function of military operations. NATO again is at the forefront of these efforts in Afghanistan.

It is time for all nations in NATO to evaluate the shift from combat operations to training and work together to consider the implications for the size, shape, scope, and doctrine of their future forces as we move to sustainment operations in Afghanistan. Ten years since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, we must be ready to enable partners through security force assistance to eliminate security deficits that threaten international peace and security. As reaffirmed in NATO’s Strategic Concept, “The Alliance will engage actively to enhance international security, through partnership” (NATO, 2010a). To be fully prepared, we must reflect on the lessons of partnership in Afghanistan and ensure NATO has the appropriate strategy, training, and doctrine to enhance international security.

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