

James M. Dubik

Lieutenant General

U.S. Army, Retired

Senior Fellow, the Institute for the Study of War

31 July 2012

Development of the Afghan National Security Forces

Developing security forces, military and police, during an active insurgency where the outcome remains unclear and government proficiency and legitimacy are still emerging is no simple task—harder still in the face of strategic deadlines. Yet the task is not impossible. During my tenure as the Commanding General of Multi-National Security Transition Command and NATO Training Mission, Iraq, we did accelerate the growth of the Iraqi Security Forces in size, capability, and confidence and improve the capacity of the Ministries of Defense and Interior as well as the Headquarters of the Iraqi Joint Force such that when the counteroffensive of 2007 and 2008 ended, the Iraqi forces were large enough, capable enough, and confident enough for Coalition combat forces to first withdraw from the cities, then all together. I tried to capture our approach to accelerating this growth in an August 2009 publication, “Building Security Forces and Ministerial Capacity, Iraq as a Primer.”

I recognize that Afghanistan’s situation has several significant relevant differences from Iraq. That said, however, some of the lessons from Iraq do apply to Afghanistan. I explained some of what I thought was applicable from Iraq to Afghanistan in a December 2009 publication, “Accelerating Combat Power in Afghanistan” and an October 2012 publication, “Creating Police and Law Enforcement Systems.” Below is a summary of four of the key lessons:

1. **The goal must be a sufficiently large, capable, and confident set of security forces—military and police.** Numbers matter. The U.S. offsets size with the highest quality leadership, recruits, training, and equipment. Nations like Iraq and Afghanistan use size to offset poorer leadership, recruits, training, and equipment. Size is also a function of threat; the parts of the country where the threat is less require fewer ANSF. Certainly size is also related to Afghanistan's ability to sustain its forces, but too small of a force puts too much at risk. Finally, an often overlooked aspect of security force size is related to the social function of a nation's security forces. Right now one of the highest improvement rates in literacy is within the Afghan National Security Forces. Improved literacy is hugely important to the long term development of Afghanistan. Because of the "social function," the ANSF may be larger than the nation's immediate security needs.

Capability, combat power, is a function of fighting skill and supporting systems. Fighting skill is the easiest to develop. It involves leadership plus the skill to return accurate fire and the will to maneuver against the enemy. The systems that support a soldier or policeman—intelligence, indirect fires (ground and air-based), logistics (supply, transport, medical, maintenance, and personnel and equipment replacement), and command/control—are as important as fighting skill. The better the skill in returning accurate fires (direct and indirect) and supporting systems, the better the will to maneuver against the enemy.

Confidence comes in three varieties. First, the ANSF's confidence in itself. The security force's confidence is a function of capability. Second, the people's confidence in their security forces. The people's confidence is a function of success in *imposing* security (a job of the military and paramilitary police) and fairness in *enforcing* security

(a job of the military, paramilitary and local police) once imposed. Last, the government's confidence to use their security forces. The government's confidence is a function of reliability and "replace-ability."

2. **Three types of partnerships are key to accelerated development.**

- a. Partners in Training. Initially the training base contains an imbalance of foreign trainers. Over time the imbalance should shift to more indigenous trainers. The shifting imbalance, however, is uneven: faster in basic-type training; slower in leadership, staff, and larger unit collective training.
- b. Embedded Partners. The "trainer/advisers" who live and work with their Afghan units are bridges. Their presence provides an indigenous force a kind of "instant" capability and confidence. The embedded trainers/advisers presence offsets fledgling leadership **and** weak supporting systems. The number of embeds and their placement shifts over time: first becoming less necessary at the lower levels, then less necessary "up the chain of command" as units become more capable and confident and as their area of responsibility become less hostile. Improved indigenous supporting system capability also drives embed requirement down.
- c. Unit Partnerships. All units require two types of training—one type from the training base; the other, on the job. Unit partnering focuses on the latter. The unit partnership requirement also shifts over time. With less proficient and confident units (like those newly created), a 1:1 ratio is often required—foreign battalion-to-indigenous battalion, for example. The ratio grows as indigenous capacity and confidence grows. As an illustrative example, perhaps 1:1 to 1:3, then 1:6, then only at the senior headquarters.

One final note on partnership, the relationship between ISAF forces or NATO Training Mission, Afghanistan and their Afghan partners must be one that is very open. The project of developing security force is primarily an Afghan project in which ISAF and NATO play important parts. But we cannot grow their force. Helping another nation grow its security forces is an exercise in collaboration, and quite often, compromise. (NOTE: I could have included “Ministerial and Senior Headquarters Partnerships” as a fourth type, but choose to address the institutional aspects in the next section.)

3. **A self sustaining Afghan National Security Force requires more than just money.**

Four aspects of self-sustainability are important:

- a. The human element: leadership and recruiting. Darwin has a way of identifying good tactical leaders. Beyond that, developing leaders is a function of selection, training/education, and promotion. Selection and promotion must become more merit-based and apolitical. Training/education must become progressive. Sufficient numbers of leaders are important, but sufficiency is the key. A sufficient number of satisfactory leaders are more important than a full complement of bad leaders. And with respect to recruits, Afghanistan must be able to refill the ranks of its security forces to the standards it sets.
- b. The equipment element. Afghanistan must be able to re-equip its forces' battle losses and extend the life of its equipment by proper maintenance.
- c. The funding element. The cost of sustaining the ANSF must reduce over time. That reduction will not go to zero any time in the foreseeable future. First, Afghanistan must drive down the costs of foreign sustainment requirements.

They can do this by way of the several shifts mentioned above—slowly increasing the number of Afghans training themselves, slowly reducing the need for embedded trainers and partners, and better maintenance of the equipment they receive. Second, Afghanistan may be able to contribute more to its security budget. Even small improvements will help. I am merely suggesting that increased percentage of Afghan money to its security might be more easily offset by other nation’s contributing to Afghanistan’s non-security budget needs. Third and I think importantly, ISAF and NATO Training Mission, Afghanistan should develop, and then apply, *AFGHAN Cost Factors* in determining sustaining costs.

- d. The institutional element—ministries and selected senior ANSF headquarters.

Unit supporting systems at the tactical and operational levels ultimately have their roots at the strategic level, in ministerial and senior headquarter capacity to execute basic functions: force management, acquisition, training, developing, distributing, sustaining, separating, programming and budgeting, and leading/managing. Developing indigenous capacity in these functions takes the longest of all. Without such development, however, and success at the tactical levels is short-term and fleeting. (I have described the relationship among the tactical, operational, and strategic levels in a recent publication, “Operational Art in Counterinsurgency, A View From the Inside.”)

4. **Literacy and corruption are conditions that cannot be ignored, but need not impede progress toward security force development.**

In Afghanistan, insufficient literacy is a national condition, not an obstacle to security force development. Growing the literacy rate will be a multi generational activity. The

ANSF can play—and I would say in the last two-to-three years has played—a huge part in improving this national problem. As I suggested earlier, improving literacy—something that over time will play a very important part in the kind of nation Afghanistan becomes—may be a reason that parts of the ANSF are really larger than the security threat demands. That said, illiteracy rates do affect growth rates in both leadership and technical skills. Therefore, aggressive literacy training for recruits, as part of advanced skill training, and as a key element of leader training and education will have to continue for some time.

Corruption, also a national condition, is not going away any time soon. But an Afghan/U.S. alliance requires anti-corruption organizations, systems, and actions. For the ANSF this means, for the military, a robust Inspector General and sufficiently independent Criminal Investigations Divisions. For the police it means sufficiently independent Internal Affairs organizations from the ministerial to the district level. We cannot expect these kinds of anti-corruption measure to be immediately effective. There will not “quick turn around,” but we can expect that they exist, that their “case loads” expand, and that cases are closed with some sort of satisfactory action.

I have addressed the development of the Afghan National Security Forces as if such development was an independent activity. It is not. Rather it is very much a dependent activity. First, success depends upon a sense that the Government of Afghanistan will prevail over the Taliban. Prevail does not mean complete defeat and annihilation. We did not do that in Iraq, and we need not do it in Afghanistan. Second, and related to the first, the capability of any security force is always relative to the enemy it is fighting. The ISAF requirement, therefore, is to drive down the capacity of the Taliban, the Haqqani Network, and others to a level that the

Afghan National Security Forces can, in fact, handle. Finally, success depends upon continued US and NATO commitment. Afghanistan will need help after 2014. Withdrawal of conventional combat forces does not equate to mission success. It equates to change of mission only, and part of that changed mission will include continued tactical, operational, and strategic civil-military partnership with the Afghan National Security Forces *and* their associated ministries and senior headquarters.