



Afghan soldiers prepare to enter a building in July 2018 during an exercise at Camp Shorabak in Helmand Province, Afghanistan. According to the special inspector general for Afghanistan reconstruction, the country's forces are preventing the Taliban from capturing more territory but are finding it difficult to extend their own area of control. (Photo by Sgt. Luke Hoogendam, U.S. Marines)

# The Development and Creation of the Afghanistan National Army Territorial Forces

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On 4 February 2018, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani signed a presidential decree establishing the Afghanistan National Army Territorial Forces (ANA-TF).<sup>1</sup> This decree represented the culmination of seven months of joint planning between the Afghanistan Ministry of Defense (MOD) and planners within NATO's Resolute Support (RS) headquarters. Conceptualizing, planning, and executing the creation of the ANA-TF is a significant demonstration of the growing ability of the Afghan MOD to develop and execute complex logistical and structural change. The ANA-TF is the first new pillar of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) created since the beginning of the RS mission, which replaced the International Security Assistance Force on 1 January 2015. This article discusses the origins and early development of the ANA-TF, including the driving impetus behind establishing this force and the lessons learned from earlier programs that were applied to its creation.

In July 2017, Ghani discussed the possibility of creating a force modeled on the Indian Territorial Army with the commander of the NATO Resolute Support mission, Gen. John Nicholson. As a result of this meeting, Nicholson tasked his planning staff to explore the concept. A small joint planning team consisting of planners from the RS CJ5 Future Plans section and their counterparts in the Afghan MOD GSG5 was formed to investigate the possibilities inherent in the concept. Based on Ghani's inspiration for this project, this small team of planners began studying the Indian Territorial Forces model to determine its applicability to the unique culture, geography, and political situation in Afghanistan.

## Indian Models

The team started by conducting a fact-finding visit to India in August 2017 to determine the suitability of the Indian Territorial Army, including all of its subelements, and other Indian military and paramilitary organizations, to serve as a model for a similar Afghan structure. The centerpiece of this visit was a working group hosted by the Indian Center for Land Warfare Studies and led by its director, Indian Lt. Gen. Rameshwar Roy, with senior representatives from across the Indian Army present. These included current and former senior leaders of the Indian Territorial Army, Assam Rifles, Central Reserve Police Force, Indo-Tibetan Border Police, Kashmir Home and Hearth Battalions, and the Rashtriya

Rifles. From these meetings, it quickly became apparent that an exact replica of the Indian Territorial Army structure would be a poor fit for Afghanistan's situation.

The Indian Territorial Army is a reserve force with short initial entry training built around the harvest season in rural areas and around the normal workweek in urban areas. Its duties are primarily to relieve the regular army from static security duties, act as a reserve force to the regular army, and assist in disaster relief; these had carryover potential to Afghanistan, but the structure was a poor fit. The Indian Territorial Army is formed in battalion-level structures with a small cadre of regular officers that includes the commander, personnel officer, and operations officer. This battalion is expected to become embodied (mobilized) and serve anywhere in the country depending on mission and need.

The planning team determined that while the overall mission set of the Indian Territorial Army had applicability to Afghanistan, the concept of a large, lightly trained reserve force was a poor fit for the immediate needs of a country struggling to establish lasting peace and security.

Two other organizations that the planning team found intriguing were the Assam Rifles and the Home and Hearth Battalions of the Territorial Army. The Assam Rifles are a large paramilitary force with more than sixty thousand personnel operating as a border security force and counterinsurgency force in North-East India's tribal regions.<sup>2</sup> This force relies on a mixture of "sons of the soil" (locals) and recruits from across India with an officer cadre consisting entirely of regular army officers. This force

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uses a light infantry equipment set and receives specialized and extensive training in jungle warfare for up to forty-six weeks at dedicated training centers. It has been extremely successful in suppressing insurgent activity within its area of operations.

The second force that had potential applicability to Afghanistan was the Home and Hearth battalions in the contested Kashmir region of North-Western India. Just three of these battalions exist and are employed in company-sized elements attached to regular army units. Each Home and Hearth battalion is created from local recruits who receive extensive training from a parent regular army regiment. The regular Indian Army provides all officer and noncommissioned officer leadership down to the squad level for this force, allowing for tight supervision. This force provides the regular army units operating in the region with trained locals who act as an interface with

the local population. While soldiers in Home and Hearth units can be uniformed and act as regular infantry, they are rarely used in this role since they are much more useful operating in plain clothes and gathering intelligence to support regular army operations. In addition, great care is taken in some areas to ensure that the identities of the Home and Hearth unit members remain concealed to prevent retaliation and blackmail from insurgent groups.

None of the Indian models studied by the planning team were directly transplantable to Afghanistan, but the team still gleaned useful lessons from them that were applied to the development of the ANA-TF. First, recruits operating in and around their home region know the language, culture, and terrain, which eliminates one of the primary advantages that insurgents have over regular army units in Afghanistan. Second, national rather than local leadership, provided down to the lowest feasible level, provides the necessary supervision and control. Third, full integration into the structure of the regular army ensures adequate operational and logistical support. Finally, the



minimal level of training received by the Indian Territorial Army is suitable only for rear area security. Since rear areas do not truly exist in Afghanistan, a training plan for an Afghan equivalent force would need to be similar to the regular Afghan National Army (ANA).

## Afghan Models

Next, the planning team looked at lessons learned from the Afghan Local Police (ALP). Established in 2010, the ALP is a locally recruited force of approximately thirty thousand members operating under the control of the Ministry of Interior (MOI).<sup>3</sup> The ALP was originally designed to strengthen local security by training rural Afghans to defend their villages against insurgents. Despite some level of success in providing local security, the ALP currently suffers from extremely poor supervision and support from the MOI.<sup>4</sup> Initially created as a strictly local force, the ALP is limited to operating in the village or community where its forces are recruited. This means that it operates in relatively small numbers and requires support from national forces when facing a significant threat. Because the force falls under the command of the Afghan National Police (ANP) district chief of police within the MOI, it is difficult and cumbersome to request support from better equipped MOD forces.<sup>5</sup> The lessons learned from observing the limited success of the ALP included that any new force needs to operate in significant numbers across a larger area than the ALP, and obtaining the proper logistical and operational support requires control by the MOD.

The planning team also looked to the historical precedent provided by the Soviet tribal regiments. The Soviet tribal regiments were an effort during the 1980s to reconcile tribal groups and former mujahedin through the creation of local militia forces responsible for area security with some nominal regular army leadership.<sup>6</sup> At their peak, these regiments consisted of seventy thousand personnel operating in units as large as division strength.<sup>7</sup> These forces quickly grew beyond the control of the central government since regular army leadership proved difficult to provide. They were also given responsibility for their own recruitment, and they

were not required to wear uniforms or integrate with other central government forces. Former mujahedin, who defected to the Soviet-backed central government and formed tribal regiments, blackmailed the government and demanded heavier weapons and more pay by threatening to return to the insurgency.<sup>8</sup> In an effort to regain control of these forces, the central government attempted to incorporate many of them into the Afghan army.<sup>9</sup> Those forces included former Northern Alliance leader and current Afghan vice president Abdul Rashid Dostum's 53rd Division, which continued to avoid wearing regular uniforms, even following incorporation, instead preferring traditional tribal garb.<sup>10</sup> Eventually, a repetitive process of reconciliation and defection led to a situation where these tribal regiments received higher pay and better equipment than the ANA.

The result of this process of government-sponsored militia formation was short-term security gain at the cost of long-term disaster. These tribal regiments had little loyalty to the central government, and their leaders abused their authority to increase their own power at the expense of central government control.<sup>11</sup> In effect, the government created powerful warlords whose loyalty to the government was contingent on the continued receipt of money and weapons. Following the withdrawal of Soviet forces and the cutoff of their support to the government, these militias mutinied and overthrew the central government.<sup>12</sup> What followed was a brutal civil war in which former militia commanders vied for control. Since this civil war gave rise to the Taliban, the creation of the tribal regiments is an indirect cause of the current NATO involvement in Afghanistan. Cognizant of the failures of the Soviet tribal regiments and the weaknesses of the ALP, the planning team presented their findings and recommendations to the senior leadership of the Afghan government for consideration.

## ANA-TF Concept

Relying on the findings of this research, president Ghani—in coordination with RS—directed that four fundamental principles serve as the basis for the formation of the ANA-TF:

1. Locally Recruited: The members of the Territorial Forces (excluding cadre) will be residents of the district in which they will serve.
2. Nationally Trained: Professional forces require sufficient, appropriate, and consistent training based on

**Previous page:** Troops of the Indian Army's Sikh Light Infantry 13 January 2011. (Photo by Jaskirat Singh Bawa via Wikimedia Commons)



a proven model. ANA-TF will receive ANA training by national cadre at ANA military training centers.

3. **Nationally Led:** In order to guarantee its consistency and effectiveness, the ANA-TF will be led by a regular cadre drawn from existing MOD organizations and will be an integral part of the ANA.
4. **Affordable and Sustainable:** Afghanistan must have a national security architecture that is sustainable and affordable over time, solely by the Afghanistan government. The ANA-TF will be significantly less expensive and easier to sustain than the ANA.<sup>13</sup>

These four guiding principles apply the lessons learned from studying Indian models as well as recent Afghan history. Using these principles as a guide, the planning team developed a suitable recruiting, training, and operational employment scheme; and with President Ghani's approval, it began building the ANA-TF early in 2018. A short summary of the tasks, organization, and terms of service for the ANA-TF follows.

## Purpose and Employment

The purpose of the ANA-TF is to support the ANDSF by consolidating its liberation of local districts, enabling the ANA to conduct further offensive operations, and ensuring the protection of the Afghan population.<sup>14</sup> For this reason, the ANA-TF is specifically designed to operate in low-threat environments as a local security force accomplishing the following tasks:

- Connect the local population to the government of Afghanistan (via district governance).
- Provide local security at the district level and below.
- Act as a sensor of insurgent activity for the ANA and the Afghan Special Security Forces (ASSF).
- Deny enemy access and freedom of movement within the district.
- Secure and retain key district infrastructure (including routes).
- Interdict insurgent activity and buildup within the district.
- Secure ASSF/ANA-cleared areas to prevent insurgents from returning.
- Defend assigned area for limited duration (reinforced by the MOD).
- Support humanitarian/natural disaster relief.
- Provide local event security where required.<sup>15</sup>

The duties of the ANA-TF specifically *do not* include the following

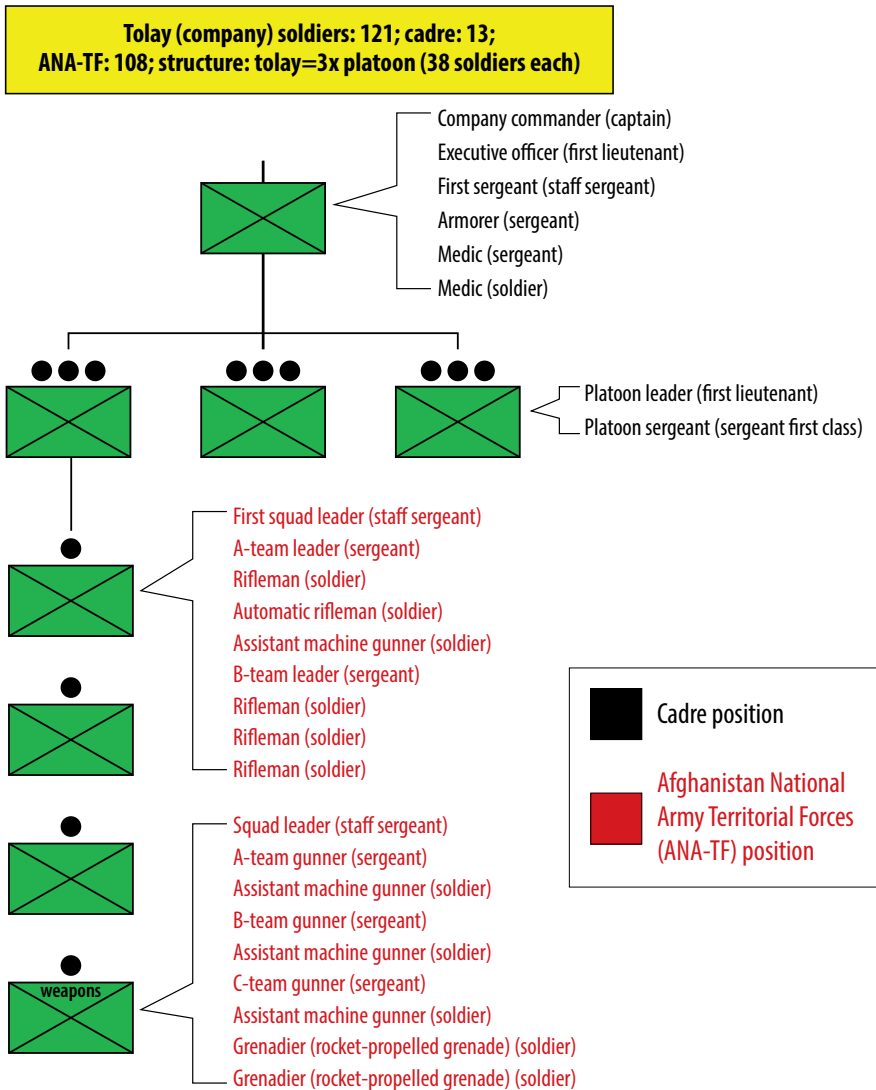
- operating in insurgent-controlled or ISIS occupied districts
- serving as a regular maneuver force
- deploying to conduct tasks in other provinces/districts
- engaging in offensive operations against large groups of insurgents
- replacing ANA in base security roles
- acting as a quick reaction force for other district forces
- conducting precision strike/capture/rescue operations
- conducting civil policing

Essentially, the ANA-TF leverages local knowledge of the people and terrain to provide security in areas that lack a substantial insurgent presence. They are specifically excluded from conducting the civil policing role, as that responsibility belongs to the MOI within the Afghan government.

A further purpose of the ANA-TF is to provide security that is cost effective relative to the security conditions. In accordance with the Warsaw Summit Declaration on Afghanistan, the Afghan government must be able to assume financial responsibility for its security by 2024.<sup>16</sup> Utilizing regular ANA forces to provide security in areas without a substantial insurgent presence is inefficient and expensive. When ANA is not present, the ANP usually assumes the local security mission; however, the ANP are equipped to conduct policing, not local security. The ANA-TF fills this capability gap between the ANA and the ANP at less than half the cost of a regular ANA soldier. This combination of affordability and effectiveness in areas with only a small insurgent presence gives the MOD a force capable of holding areas cleared by the ANA and the ASSF.

## Organization and Structure

The ANA-TF is organized into *tolay* (company)-level structures designed to operate within a single district as an integral part of the ANA. Each *tolay* receives light trucks for mobility as well as a comparable equipment set to the ANA—with the exception that the ANA-TF does not have a mortar section at the *tolay* level (see figure, page 79). For ease of interoperability with the ANA, the ANA-TF is organized along company and platoon lines



**Figure. Afghanistan National Army Territorial Forces (ANA-TF) Structure and Organization**

(Figure by author)

rather than using an alternative structure. After significant debate, the MOD decided that local recruits would be limited to serving at the squad level and below.<sup>17</sup> All positions above the squad leader would be filled entirely by officers and NCOs drawn directly from the ANA.

These ANA-TF tolay are intended to operate attached to regular ANA *kandaks* (battalions) who have tactical control of the local ANA-TF when operating in their area.<sup>18</sup> Administrative and operational control is retained at the ANA brigade level to ensure uninterrupted logistical support. This relationship structure is necessary because the ANA-TF is geographically limited

to operating within its home district, while ANA *kandaks* are not. Once the program expands and an appropriate density of ANA-TF tolay exist within a given region, ANA-TF *kandaks* may be formed.<sup>19</sup> These *kandaks* will consist of a regular ANA *kandak* headquarters with four to five ANA-TF tolay assigned depending on local conditions.

### Terms and Conditions of Service

The ANA-TF operates under very specific terms and conditions in order to ensure professionalism and minimize any tendency towards militia behavior. The first control on the ANA-TF is the strong presence of ANA leadership within each tolay. However, this ANA leadership—assigned as cadre for the ANA-TF—cannot be from the district in which they will serve.<sup>20</sup> This is designed to ensure that national-level control is retained and localism is reduced. There is also a pay differential to ensure that ANA-TF recruiting does not harm ANA recruiting. Assigned as cadre, ANA soldiers continue to receive full pay and benefits, while the local recruits

only receive 75 percent of ANA pay for their equivalent rank and years of service. Former members of the ANA and other branches of the ANDSF may join the ANA-TF if they meet the residency requirements, but they cannot retain any rank they may have previously earned above staff sergeant or serve as cadre.<sup>21</sup> Recognizing the potential for mobility between the ANA-TF and the ANA, any recruit who successfully serves one year in the ANA-TF may advance into the ANA and retain rank earned in the ANA-TF. However, a former ANA-TF soldier cannot serve as ANA cadre for the ANA-TF in his or her home district and must serve elsewhere. Upon completion of



their enlistments, regular ANA are also permitted to transfer to the ANA-TF if an appropriate billet exists in their home district, though they will receive reduced ANA-TF pay and benefits.

## Recruiting

The first principle specified that the forces would be locally recruited and would operate in the district from which they were recruited. District-level recruiting and operations represent a middle ground between the village level—where the ALP operates—and the provincial level. Districts are usually between thirty and fifty kilometers across and often represent a single tribal grouping. If recruiting was expanded to the provincial level, the bulk of recruits would likely come from the provincial capital and would be as unfamiliar with the terrain and tribes in the rural districts as if they had come from Kabul.

Due to the unique nature of the district level of ANA-TF, the normal ANA recruiting process was not feasible. The ANA conducts recruiting from its National Afghan Army Volunteer Centers (NAAV-C), which are run by the Afghan National Army Recruiting Command (ANAREC). There is usually one NAAV-C in each province that receives and processes interested

Ktah Khas Afghan female tactical platoon (FTP) members perform a close quarters battle drill 29 May 2016 at Camp Scorpion outside Kabul, Afghanistan. The females work closely alongside the males on operations to engage and interact with women and children. The FTPs are trained in marksmanship, language, fast roping, and other combat-related skills. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Douglas Ellis, U.S. Air Force)

volunteers before sending them to Kabul for centralized screening. This is normally a passive process that is unsuitable for the ANA-TF. To ensure an appropriate number of recruits from a specific district, the regional corps commander coordinates with ANAREC as well as the provincial and district governor to conduct targeted recruiting over the course of several weeks. These recruits, between the ages of twenty and forty, are brought from the target district to the regional NAAV-C and then transported to ANAREC in Kabul. In Kabul, they receive the same medical and background screening that regular ANA recruits receive before beginning training.

## Training

Following screening by ANAREC in Kabul, recruits are transferred to the Kabul Military Training Center



(KMTC) to complete basic warrior training (BWT) in line with the second core principle for the ANA-TF: they must be nationally trained. BWT is the standard twelve-week initial entry training that all ANA recruits receive. The ANA-TF trainees enter BWT as the full tolay recruited from their home district and train together as a group. During BWT, recruits receive the same training flow as regular ANA, which is conducted by a dedicated training cadre at KMTC. After the completion of BWT, the training cadre select the highest performing recruits to serve as team and squad leaders. These team and squad leaders are not automatically promoted to NCO rank. They continue to serve in their newly assigned role as basic soldiers until they complete the same centralized NCO training courses as the ANA, unless they have previous rank from prior service.

While recruits are undergoing basic training, the MOD-assigned ANA cadre conduct a three-week leadership refresher course at KMTC where they are educated on the role, concept, and mission of the ANA-TF. Following the completion of that course, they are integrated with the newly graduated ANA-TF soldiers for transport to the Regional Military Training Center (RMTC) nearest their home district. These RMTCs serve as the collective training centers for the ANA in each of the corps areas in Afghanistan and so are the preferred location for training on squad- and platoon-level security tasks for the ANA-TF. This training at the

RMTC lasts five weeks, using a tailored training curriculum designed specifically for the unique equipment and mission of the ANA-TF. Following this training, the freshly formed and trained ANA-TF tolays return to their home district to take over local security duties.

## Conclusion

Building a new force from fundamental conception to execution demonstrates the growing ability of the Afghan government and the MOD to execute complex logistical and structural change. The fact that within nine months the MOD was able to successfully overcome the administrative hurdles and conduct the planning necessary to create an entirely new force structure is a testament to the growing maturity of Afghanistan's institutions. Despite this success, the task is far from complete, and planning continues. The MOD is currently conducting an initial proof of concept for several ANA-TF tolays in various locations across the country. This proof of concept is testing the operational concept as well as exercising the training and recruiting process. Ultimately, the ANA-TF is expected to grow to at least 36,652 soldiers over the next several years.<sup>22</sup> A successful outcome will mean that the Afghan government has a locally recruited, nationally trained, nationally led, effective, and affordable force capable of filling the capability gap between the ANA and the ANP. ■

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## Notes

1. "Creation of the Afghanistan National Army Territorial Forces," (Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 4 February 2018).

2. Government of India, *Ministry of Home Affairs Annual Report 2016-2017* (New Delhi, India: Royal Press, n.d.), 173, accessed 10 December 2018, [https://mha.gov.in/sites/default/files/annual\\_report18082017.pdf](https://mha.gov.in/sites/default/files/annual_report18082017.pdf).

3. Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) 16-3 Audit Report, *Afghan Local Police: A Critical Rural Security Initiative Lacks Adequate Logistics Support, Oversight, and Direction* (Arlington, VA: SIGAR, October 2015), 1.

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Ibid.*, 5–6.

6. Olga Oliker, "Milicias and Other Forces," in *Building Afghanistan's Security Forces in Wartime: The Soviet Experience* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2011), 55–56, accessed 10 December 2018, [https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2011/RAND\\_MG1078.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2011/RAND_MG1078.pdf).

7. *Ibid.*, 57.

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Ibid.*, 56.

10. *Ibid.*, 57.

11. *Ibid.*, 58.

12. *Ibid.*, 57.

13. "Creation of the Afghanistan National Army Territorial Forces."

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*

16. Heads of State and Government of Afghanistan and Allies and their Resolute Support Operational Partners, *Warsaw Summit Declaration on Afghanistan*, U.S. Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 9 July 2016, accessed 10 December 2018, <https://nato.usmission.gov/warsaw-summit-declaration-afghanistan/>.

17. "Creation of the Afghanistan National Army Territorial Forces."

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Ibid.*

20. *Ibid.*

21. *Ibid.*

22. *Ibid.*