



Surging Security Force Assistance in Afghanistan

Lieutenant General William B. Caldwell, IV, with
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WHEN THE UNITED States surged an additional 30,000 troops to Afghanistan in 2009-10, they enabled the training of an additional 113,000 Afghan soldiers and police, a corresponding “Afghan surge.” Together, the combined force of 150,000 NATO troops and 305,000 Afghan National Army, Air Force, and Police has enabled the start of geographic transition, which began in July 2011 and will be complete by December 2014. Through the geographic transition process, NATO transfers lead security responsibility to Afghan forces and shifts from a combat role to an advise and assist role.

As Afghan forces train to assume security lead, combined NATO-Afghan operations are also clearing insurgent strongholds in Helmand, Kandahar, and Kunduz Provinces. Normalcy is slowly returning to areas that once only knew war. Local militias are integrating into the formal security structure, commerce is returning, and schools are opening. Afghanistan’s gross domestic product has increased from \$170 under the Taliban to \$1,000 per capita in 2010. Almost all Afghans now 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 now serve in government, and female officers are even training to become pilots. Further, most of the country is now connected via mobile phones (15 million Afghans use mobile phones), highways, and a common purpose—to assume responsibility for its own development, governance, and security.

While the Afghan surge is incomplete and still reversible, it was by no means pre-ordained. Though the international community had been supporting the Afghan government, military, and police for several years, efforts suffered from limited resources and poor unity of effort. In 2009, the Afghan security force was underpaid, poorly trained, ill-equipped, illiterate, and poorly led. The Afghan National Army could not conduct counterinsurgency operations, and soldiers were deserting faster than could be recruited. The Afghan police were employed before being trained and lacked the armor needed to survive in a counterinsurgency environment.

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PHOTO: Afghan soldiers conduct air mobility training with the Afghan Air Force. (NTM-A Public Affairs)

Their limited capabilities, poor morale, and leadership deficit could not prevent the Taliban from regrouping and conducting attacks. Numerous government and nongovernment studies documented rising violence rates and the shortcomings in the Afghan National Security Force. In spite of these challenges, the international community committed to grow the force in 2009 and rebuild the Afghan army, air force, and police through a “security force assistance surge.”

Investing in Unity of Command

Recognizing the shortcomings of the past and the challenges for the future, a concerted effort was made to unify international action when NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan (NTM-A) was created in November 2009. The command linked the resources of the U.S.-led Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan (CSTC-A) with the depth and expertise of a NATO command. As a dual-hatted command, critical professional gaps could be filled by NATO countries. At the same time, NTM-A was organized to support the Afghan ministries it was charged to advise and develop. For example, a single intelligence director was responsible for both providing intelligence to the command and partnering with the Afghan army and police intelligence to train, advise, and assist. The same was true across the J-coded staff, which is matrixed to deputy commanding generals responsible for developing the Afghan army, air force, and police.

The true benefit of the unified command of CSTC-A and NTM-A, however, was evident when it came to police training. For years, think tanks documented the poor results of police training efforts by disparate organizations. However, as a NATO command, NTM-A was able to leverage the expertise from national police forces like the Italian Carabinieri, French Gendarme, Spanish Guardia Civil, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Thus, through a NATO command it was an Italian Carabinieri general who was responsible for police training; having a professional civil police officer responsible for training police was clearly superior to a U.S. military officer. At the same time, the NATO command could also bring together different training programs and harmonize actions with other multilateral organizations like the European Union Police and German Police Project team through a newly established International Police Coordination Board.

In addition to unifying international efforts to assist the Afghan security forces, the NTM-A also served as a focal point for international donations of equipment, funds, and trainers. In 2009, for example, there were just 1,400 U.S. trainers and 30 NATO trainers. This created poor conditions for training. By March 2012, there will be 3,400 U.S. trainers and 3,100 NATO trainers. When an additional 4,400 Afghan trainers are added, the trainer/recruit ratio will fall to levels conducive to good training. Further, the development of Afghan trainers enables coalition forces to shift focus to professionalizing the force and developing systems that will endure past transition at the end of 2014.

With a surge of trainers also came additional financial resources, which grew from \$2.8 billion in Fiscal Year 2008 to \$11.6 billion in Fiscal Year 2011. With the lessons of the past as a guide and the availability of additional resources, NTM-A directed its energy to invest in Afghanistan’s greatest resource—its people. This included literacy training, leader development, and direct investment.

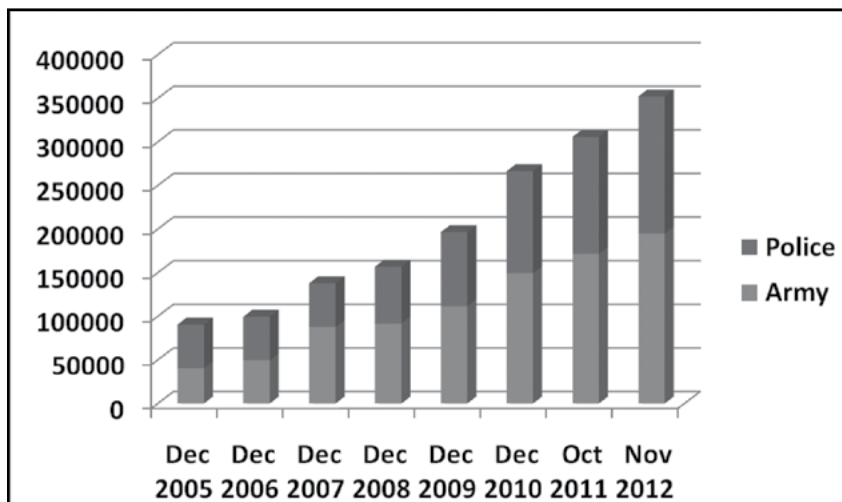


Figure 1: The Afghan Surge

After the large number of infrastructure projects are completed over the next three years, U.S. contributions are projected to fall to \$4 billion.

Enabling Literacy

At the time NTM-A was created, literacy programs were not viewed as essential. After all, with a growing insurgency, trained and equipped Afghan military and police were considered necessities. Illiteracy was accepted as a fact rather than a challenge to overcome. However, with counsel from Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, we soon learned that literacy was the essential enabler. Literacy enables soldiers to account for the equipment they are issued and count their pay that is disbursed, plan operations and write orders, and investigate crimes and analyze reports.

Once started, the value of the literacy program proved itself on the battlefield, when wounded soldiers had the ability to read a map to call in medical evacuation, and in the training centers, where police could study the Afghan constitution and learn about community policing. Given that Afghanistan is considered one of the most corrupt countries in the world, literacy can also serve as an inoculation to corruption.

Through international support and the newly established NATO Trust Fund for Literacy, NTM-A employs about 3,000 Afghan teachers. The investment is beginning to show results. In July 2011, the 100,000th literate recruit was recognized; with continued support, the military and police will have a literacy rate twice that of the population in 2012. This will continue to reap benefits for the military and police as Afghans assume responsibility for logistics and maintenance. Literate service members can maintain inventories, develop maintenance schedules, and read service manuals. In the long run, promoting literacy will give hundreds of thousands of Afghans new opportunities that were destroyed by decades of war. As post-Taliban Afghan children receive the benefits from the civilian education system, the illiteracy challenge among recruits will dissipate over the next decade.

Developing Leaders

We know from our own experiences in the military that leaders matter. Good leaders make the most of the resources they are given. Good leaders

understand their soldiers' needs and help them solve problems. And good leaders inspire their forces to excel. The same is true in Afghanistan. What is different, however, is the leader gap, which gave rise to an urgency to develop leaders to support the growing force. In 2011, for example, the officer fill rate in the army is 87 percent, while in the police it is 76 percent. Among noncommissioned officers, the fill rate in the army is 83 percent and 85 percent in the police. The impact of the leader deficit is evident in the attrition rate, readiness levels, and combat effectiveness, so overcoming the deficit remains a priority.

To reduce the leader deficit, there is considerable international emphasis on leader development. This includes a police officer candidate school in Turkey, army noncommissioned officer training in the United Arab Emirates, pilot training in the United States, and a robust leadership development program within Afghanistan. For example, the National Military Academy of Afghanistan is a four-year undergraduate program that leads to a commission in the army, air force, or police. Modeled after West Point, the program is extremely competitive and has attracted Afghanistan's best and brightest. Additionally, there are officer candidate schools for both police and army. Now that leadership schools are in place, the officer and NCO deficits should continue to decrease, but growing senior NCOs and field-grade officers takes time. In the interim, coalition partnering takes on additional significance; partnering reinforces good conduct, imparts on-the-job training skills, and supports force professionalization.

Stimulating Economic Activity

A key element of creating a self-sustaining military is developing a defense sector to support the army, air force, and police. Through the "Afghan First" program, NATO is supporting the establishment of indigenous industries to supply uniforms, equipment, and services to the Afghan military and police. The program reduces overall costs to equip the Afghan forces and positively impacts the Afghan economy by reducing imports. Under the Afghan First program, more than 17,000 Afghans are making combat boots, uniforms, individual load bearing equipment, tents, and furniture. Further, the program uses international donations to Afghanistan

more efficiently than using funds for imports alone. For example, 125,000 boots made in the United States costs about \$15 million (\$110/per pair, \$775,000 to ship, and \$552,000 admin fee). Under the Afghan First program, the same quantity costs almost half at \$7.75 million (\$62/per pair with no other fees). Through initiatives like these, we save about \$168 million annually.

In addition to replacing imported uniform items, Afghan First is expanding to support infrastructure development projects. To support the growing force with training facilities, barracks, and logistic depots, the international community has committed about \$11 billion to construction projects. When possible, Afghan companies are contracted to produce building materials such as doors and electrical supplies. In the long run, we anticipate the Afghan First program supporting the export of consumable military items and factories diversifying from combat boots to casual footwear. Finally, by purchasing locally produced items for the military and police, the program facilitates the development of legitimate commerce,

reduces cross-border transactions, and institutionalizes transparent procurement mechanisms.

The Afghan Military and Police Beyond 2011

Without a doubt, many advances have been made over the past two years; geographic transition is progressing, the army and police met their 2011 growth goals, and the systems are in place to support the addition of 47,000 more soldiers and police in 2012. Army attrition remains stubborn, but the force is growing and professionalizing. International investment in the Afghan forces has helped to improve quality and public confidence in the Afghan army, air force, and police. This is evident in international opinion polling and the number of young Afghans who volunteer for national service every month.

However, if there is any lesson to be learned from the past decade, it is that gains can easily be reversed. Volunteers can go AWOL and resources can be misused or unaccounted for. Without



(NTM-A Public Affairs)

A U.S. soldier teaches marksmanship shoulder-to-shoulder.

good leaders to manage the force, attrition can under-mine progress. Even with proper training and equipment, mission success will be based on the ability to build sustainable capacity and capability within the Afghan National Security Force. This includes effective leaders managing

well-developed ministerial and institutional systems. To safeguard the gains and reap the return on investment, continued emphasis is required on developing specialty skills, instilling stewardship, and implementing sustainable systems. **MR**

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