



**BEYOND THE TENTH YEAR IN AFGHANISTAN:  
SECURITY FORCE ASSISTANCE  
AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY**

**By William B. Caldwell, IV. and Derek S. Reveron**

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Ten years ago, Afghanistan was politically fractured, economically irrelevant, and socially repressive. 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. Afghanistan hosted al-Qa'ida and we soon learned what the latest National Military Strategy of the United States underscored, "In this interdependent world, the enduring interests of the United States are increasingly tied to those of other state and non-state actors." Afghanistan is no exception.

While Taliban totalitarianism attempted to destroy Afghans' future, the international community has attempted to reverse societal regression. To be sure, 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 their society is slowly recovering. With international assistance, GDP has increased to \$1,000 per capita, almost all Afghans have access to basic health services, and school enrollment increased from 900,000 (mainly boys) to almost seven million (37 percent girls). Women now serve in Parliament and even train to be pilots in the Afghan Air Force. Most of the country is now connected via mobile phones, highways, and common purpose—assuming responsibility for its own security, which remains threatened by various insurgent groups.

Internationally, Afghanistan is not the pariah it once was and it is on the verge of helping to link Central and South Asia along a new Silk Road. India is providing \$2 billion worth of assistance; Uzbekistan is building rail links in the north; and China is investing in the east. In short, Afghanistan is attempting to normalize its international relations and is on a path that President Obama outlined at West Point on December 1, 2009 to "deny al Qaeda a safe haven...reverse the Taliban's momentum and deny it the ability to overthrow the government... and strengthen the capacity of Afghanistan's security forces and government so that they can take the lead responsibility for Afghanistan's future." In contrast to other ethnically-diverse countries wracked by years of war, Afghans overwhelmingly favor a unified, multi-ethnic country where ISAF members are welcomed as guests.

To be sure, progress is dependent on international support for Afghanistan, but as agreed at the NATO summit in Lisbon last fall, Kabul will increasingly assume lead responsibility for its development and security. This process started in July of this year when the first seven areas began to transition lead security responsibility from NATO to Afghanistan. Far from an anomaly, this international approach to enabling other governments to provide security for their people is a contemporary feature of U.S. national security. As former secretary of Defense Robert Gates wrote, "building partner capacity: helping others defend themselves or, if necessary, fight alongside U.S. forces by providing them with equipment, training, or other forms of security assistance...[because] building the security capacity of other countries must be a critical element of U.S. national security strategy." These ideas are being practiced in Afghanistan every day and have enabled the Afghan Surge.

## THE AFGHAN SURGE

When the United States surged an additional 30,000 troops to Afghanistan, they supported the training of Afghan soldiers and police that now number 305,000. 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. Taken together, the combined NATO-Afghan force provides security "shoulder-to-shoulder," in Dari *shohna ba shohna*, and in Pashtu *ooga-pa-ooga*. NATO forces are partnered with Afghan units at many levels and make the ultimate sacrifice too (last year Afghan security personnel were killed at a rate one and half times greater than coalition forces). This unfortunate fact is both a reminder of the dangers insurgents pose and the Afghans' heavy engagement in the fight for control of their country. But the costs are beginning to show progress. In July, NATO transitioned lead security responsibility to Afghan forces in seven areas. The transition process will continue through 2014 when NATO will shift to a supporting role and underscores the importance of training, equipping, and fielding a self-sustaining and enduring Afghan Army, Air Force, and Police.

Former Minister of Interior Ali Jalali wrote in *Prism* in September 2010, "the key to future success is a shared vision for the end-state in Afghanistan, and the building of indigenous capacity to achieve this goal." Afghan presidential advisor Dr. Ashraf Ghani wrote in the same issue, "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." An underappreciated fact is that this is the Afghans' war. Minister of Defense Wardak, Minister of Interior Mohammadi, Chief of General Staff Karimi, Ground Force Commander Murad Ali, and Sergeant Major Roshan are its leaders. Every day, Afghan soldiers and police are conducting patrols in Helmand, interdicting insurgents in Paktika, and recovering weapons caches in Khost. ISAF forces are certainly 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. And over the next three years, ISAF operations will yield to Afghan-led operations. This process coupled with increased growth and professionalization is enabling the Afghan military and police to assume greater responsibility for security and self-reliance.

## BEYOND GROWTH

Over the next year, 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 Army will also develop the critical enabling and supporting capabilities. With its own logistic capability, the army will be able to deliver supplies to forward deployed units. With its own explosive ordinance disposal units, the army will be able to defuse improvised 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, the Afghan National Police did not grow as easily as the Army did. With the importance of civil policing to assist social recovery, the Ministry of Interior 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. Given the security environment and its starting point, it will take several years to impart civil policing norms, but Afghan police are benefiting from partnerships with organizations such as Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Italian Carabinieri, French Gendarmerie, and other members of the European Gendarmerie Force.

The progress of these efforts is evident in our daily activities with Afghan policymakers, military, and police leaders. Minister of Interior Mohammadi 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." 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." For this to occur, recruited forces need to be trained, equipped, fielded, and sustained.

### *Recruit and Train*

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.

An unfortunate reality is that those eligible for military and police service had their educations stolen by decades of war. While Afghans have a proud warrior ethos and tactical intelligence, they lacked the ability to write their names or count to ten. To make up for the shortfall, all illiterate Afghan soldiers and police recruits are enrolled in mandatory 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. We see the effect in the force and see literacy as the essential enabler. Literate soldiers and police can now account for the gear they are issued and know that they are receiving their full pay. And soldiers subjected to graft now receive a living wage through electronic banking. Finally, literate soldiers can read the service manuals for the equipment they are issued and perform the necessary services and repair equipment to ensure the significant investment in vehicles and equipment is maintained and accounted for properly. The international investment in the literacy program is showing progress; the literacy rate in the army and police will be twice that of the population in 2012.

### *Professionalize and Sustain*

Since 2009, international focus has been on fielding trained infantry to meet the needs of counterinsurgency with additional combat fighting formations. Attrition in the Army remains stubborn, but the force will continue to grow another 47,000 over the next year with increased emphasis on specialty or vocational training. Today, Afghans are studying to be mechanics, engineers, and personnel specialists. There are now 12 vocational schools that provide Afghans the skill sets they need to sustain the force the international community invested so heavily in. Shifting from an ISAF-enabled infantry to a professional and self-sustaining Afghan force will occur over the next several years, but with an indigenous training base, a process that is on-going.

Since the NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan was created in November 2009, investing in Afghan human capital has been a priority. Through the “Afghan First” program, NATO is supporting indigenous industries to supply uniforms, equipment, and services to the Afghan military and police. Under the Afghan First program, about 17,000 Afghan jobs were created; this facilitates the development of legitimate commerce, reduces cross-border transactions, and institutionalizes transparent procurement mechanisms. Further, supporting local industry reduces international dependency and lays a foundation for sustainability.

Building enduring systems and institutions is a central feature of the NATO strategy in Afghanistan. Lessons from other conflict-prone societies suggest that sustainment is essential to secure short-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 last fall’s 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.” To realize these goals, army and police professionalization continues apace.

The effects are evident. Dr. Ashraf Ghani, who now oversees the security transition process for President Karzai, noted, “The Afghan National Army has had an enormous change both in quality and in numbers.” He told us that perceptions of the Afghan Army and Police are at least two years old. More 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. There are regional differences, but with international support and training, Afghan soldiers and police are beginning to show progress. And the Afghan people increasingly trust and value 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 self-sustaining.

### **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 there were disparate efforts with insufficient resources to properly train and equip the Afghan Army and Police. Today, there are 35 countries (Ukraine and El Salvador are the newest) providing trainers who are training both new recruits and Afghan trainers to take their places. This is a clear sign that the international community is committed to giving Afghanistan the tools to control its borders, provide security for its people, and contribute to regional security.

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 a growing

**indigenous training base, over the next several years, 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.**

**Reflecting on ten years of United States involvement in Afghanistan, we recognize the greatest long-term effect we can have is through partnership. Through partnership, the training base has expanded and the benefits of partnership are evident in the fielded force. Our Afghan counterparts know the languages and terrain of Afghanistan and share unique cultural insights with NATO forces. Most importantly, we see hope here that was not here two years ago; with the proper resources, Afghans can do this mission, which is supported through security force assistance.**

## **INSIGHTS FROM COMMAND**

**Our experience in Afghanistan resonates across conflict from the last 20 years and informs our thinking about future military operations. While NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan personnel are working hard with Afghans 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. Far from an anomaly, partnership remains a key feature of efforts in Afghanistan and more broadly for international security.**

**The collective international experience in Afghanistan must inform future thinking about the roles and missions of the U.S. military. U.S. Army Chief of Staff General Martin Dempsey pointed out in the Army Operating Concept that, “future Army forces require the capability to conduct security force assistance and civil military operations (such as military support to governance, rule of law, and institutional capacity building) in a multinational environment with partners and among diverse populations to support allies and partners, protect and reassure populations, and isolate and defeat enemies.” While we practice this daily, we continue to redefine the configuration and employment of conventional assets to build the capacity of Afghanistan’s security sector. We must capture the lessons and deliberately incorporate them into U.S. thinking and doctrine.**

**The U.S. military appears 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 the military services. In the 1990s, coalition warfare became the norm and interoperability took on an international character. In the 2000s, military operations incorporated 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. It is time to evaluate the shift from combat operations to security force assistance and work together to consider the implications for the size, shape, scope, and doctrine of future forces. Ten years since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, we must be ready to enable partners through security assistance to eliminate security deficits that threaten international peace and security.**

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