

International Team Training Afghan Forces

Seeking a stable Afghanistan

The future of the NATO-led mission in Afghanistan became clearer when the United States announced in December 2009 that it would send 30,000 more troops to the country.



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Afghan village elders of Nezen Khel in the Hindu Kush mountains meet in December 2009 with Afghan and French troops.

The United States said Afghan forces will start providing their country's security after July 2011, when U.S. troops will begin pulling out of the country. After the announcement, NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen of Denmark said two dozen countries would send more than 7,000 additional troops to Afghanistan.

The NATO mission, in addition to combating Taliban and al-Qaida insurgents in the country, is to protect the Afghan people and to help train the country's military and police forces. The announced pullout makes setting a timeline for Afghans to take back full control of securing their country a high priority. Until the pullout begins, the NATO effort must remain in place.

"It is right in my view that eight years since Sept. 11, and after many achievements in Afghanistan ... we look at how we can get the Afghans themselves more involved in taking responsibility for their own affairs," British Prime Minister Gordon Brown told Agence France-Presse in September 2009.

The leaders of Britain, France and Germany agree NATO can help by accelerating and improving the training of the Afghan police and army.

"We should consider increasing the speed, size and quality of training of the Afghan security forces as well as how best to create the proper local environment," the three leaders stated in a September 2009 letter to the United Nations.

The letter underscores the need for "new benchmarks and timelines ... to set our expectations of ownership and the clear view to hand over responsibility step by step to the Afghans, wherever possible." Signs of that policy were apparent during the August 2009 Afghan elections, when Afghan forces took the lead in providing election-day security and NATO forces were on standby to provide support.

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Providing training, mentoring and equipment for the Afghan military and police has been a main objective of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force, or ISAF, mission in Afghanistan. The U.N. Security Council created it in December 2001. The alliance assumed leadership of the force in 2003, at the request of the U.N. and the Afghan government. As of October 2009, the force numbered about 73,000 troops from 43 nations.

The force is helping the Afghan government extend its authority across the country and establish a stable and secure environment for sustainable

reconstruction, development and good governance. That task has proved extremely challenging because of the growing Taliban insurgency and the disputed presidential elections. Opposition parties claimed that fraud marred the elections, which brought into question the legitimacy of President Hamid Karzai's government. The country averted a runoff election and further turmoil when opposition leader Abdullah Abdullah refused to enter into a runoff election.

To address the deteriorating security situation



PETTY OFFICER 1ST CLASS RYAN TABIOS/US NAVY

in Afghanistan, and speed up the recovery process, ISAF raised its troop levels in 2009. However, the troop surge has not yet produced the desired results. The insurgency continues to intensify, causing more civilian and military casualties and leading to widespread disillusionment and frustration among Afghans and the international community. Displaced insurgents moved to other areas, raising

Protecting Afghans is a key NATO goal, as is enabling the Afghan government to secure the war-torn country.

concerns in neighboring nations.

As a result, public support in the nations contributing troops is waning, while the political pressure on their leaders to devise an exit strategy grows.

In this context, professionally trained and effective army and police forces are essential to quelling the insurgency and bringing peace and stability to Afghanistan. Force leaders understand that and are working to train the Afghan military and police.

The Afghan National Army is trying to build a force of 134,000 troops by 2010, but Gen. Stanley

McChrystal, the top U.S. and NATO commander in Afghanistan, said the target should be 240,000. The Associated Press reported in September 2009. McChrystal, in an assessment of the Afghan situation, said the police force needs to grow from the current 92,000 to 160,000, which would raise the total number of military and police security forces to 400,000 by 2014.

“This will require additional mentors, trainers, partners and funds through an expanded participation by GIRoA [Afghan government], the support of ISAF, and the resources of troop contributing and donor nations,” the general’s assessment stated.

Obama ordered 4,000 additional military trainers as part of the 21,000 new U.S. troops he requested in March 2009, the AP reported. Other countries are contributing more trainers as well. Australia sent 450 new troops, in addition to the 1,100 that were already on the ground, the BBC reported in April 2009. Australia is the biggest non-NATO contributor to the force. About 100 of the additional troops are training the Afghan army in Oruzgan province.

Turkey increased its troops from 900 to 1,700 before taking over the international force’s Kabul regional command in November 2009, Turk-

ish Brig. Gen. Metin Gurak told the AFP. Turkey plans to train and equip 450 Afghan Soldiers by May 2010 and continue helping in reconstruction efforts, Gurak said.

The ISAF works with the European Union Police Mission in Afghanistan to monitor, mentor and train the Afghan police. The police agency arrived in June 2007 to consolidate the individual training efforts of EU countries in Afghanistan, which started in 2002.

The EU police trainers support the reform process and work to train a trusted Afghan police force that works within the framework of the rule of law and respects human rights. As of September 2009, there were 165 Afghans and 264 non-Afghans — mainly police, law enforcement and justice experts — deployed to Kabul and regional and provincial areas.

The European Community is the largest contributor to the U.N. Development Program’s Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan, which pays the operating costs of the Afghan police. It has already paid more than \$299 million, according to the U.N. Afghanistan Report 2009.

As of September 2009, there were 5,000 coalition trainers working with the Afghan military and police, the AP reported. Some 256 teams

A German Soldier of the International Security Assistance Force, left, rides with Afghan troops in the Ghurmach district of Faryab province, north of Kabul, Afghanistan, in June 2009. The troops took part in an operation against insurgents.



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work with the Army and 85 with the police, the Combined Security Transition Command Afghanistan reported.

Australia, Canada, France, Great Britain, Mongolia, New Zealand, Poland, Romania and the United States, and private for-profit contractors provide the current training and mentoring, the American magazine *The Nation* reported.

Recruiting, training and equipping security forces is tough in a country of 28 million people, where less than one-third of the adult population is literate, malnutrition is high and the Taliban often pay better wages, the *USA Today* newspaper reported.

“We have a very weak economy and we have been at war for the past 30 years, and it still continues,” Afghan Lt. Gen. Sher Mohammed Karimi told Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty in September 2009. Karimi is the Afghan National Army chief of operations. “We are now moving forward with international help, and over the past eight years we built the military from zero to having 95,000 Soldiers now.”

Moreover, corruption, absenteeism, desertions, lack of discipline, vanishing



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An Afghan Soldier receives instructions from a Turkish instructor, in red helmet, at a training center in southwestern Turkey in December 2009. Turkey said it will increase the training of Afghan security forces.

we all are very impatient and trying to build everything in one day. We cannot build everything overnight.”

Gen. David Petraeus, head of U.S. Central Command, agrees. “No question about the need to develop the Afghan national security forces as rapidly as possible, and likely to higher numbers,” he said at the Association of the U.S. Army conference in October 2009. “But we have to keep in mind that there are limits to how fast you can accelerate that development,” particularly of commis-

2006, “the Iraqi security force effort nose-dived,” he said.

Petraeus is committed to preventing a replay of that situation in Afghanistan. “It is hugely important that the security situation not undermine the Afghan security force effort,” he said.

The deputy commander of the ISAF, British Marine Lt. Gen. Jim Dutton, told a group at the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies in October 2009 that training and equipping the Afghan military and

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supplies and an excessive dependence on their foreign counterparts plague Afghan forces. The task of unifying a force made up of a patchwork of often hostile ethnic groups further complicates the training mission.

Additionally, 90 percent of Afghan Soldiers cannot read or write, which slows down the training of the Afghan security force. Trainers must devote time to literacy classes so recruits can perform basic tasks such as taking notes, filling out forms and reading maps and manuals before they can move on to more complex technical training.

There has been progress, but for many, training efforts are not proceeding fast enough.

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sioned and noncommissioned officer leaders.

The Afghan Army has few operational units. A July 2009 U.S. Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction report stated that only 24 of 559 Afghan police units are ready to operate without help from international forces. The situation is better for the Army: 47 of 123 units are operating independently. However, ISAF conducts more than 90 percent of its operations in conjunction with Afghan troops.

How soon the Afghan Army and police are ready to stand on their own will depend on the security situation in the country, Petraeus said, recalling the problems he encountered as commander of the Multinational Force-Iraq. When violence spiked there in

having Afghan troops on the ground remains a priority. However, he said there’s a need to “resource or even over source with enough troops to get this right” with the ongoing counterinsurgency effort.

The generals agree the answer to solving the nation’s problems is a stable Afghanistan with a functioning military capable of maintaining the fledgling democracy and the rule of law.

“Our plan is to put coalition forces in with as many Afghan security forces as are available into an area and then gradually — as Afghan security forces become more capable and, more importantly, larger in number — we’re then able to pull the coalition forces back,” Dutton said. “That’s some time away, but that is the aspiration.” □