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Security Force Assistance in Afghanistan

Identifying Lessons for Future Efforts

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Summary

The Challenge of Security Force Assistance in Afghanistan

Building new military and police forces from scratch is a difficult enterprise under any circumstances. In Afghanistan, these difficulties are compounded by several factors that make security force assistance (SFA) efforts particularly challenging. These include decades of conflict that have shattered Afghan society, a weak central government that is viewed by a large part of the population as illegitimate, endemic corruption, security forces that are unreliable and in some cases badly trained and corrupt, and high levels of poverty and illiteracy. Perhaps most important, SFA in Afghanistan is being conducted in the midst of a conflict against a well-established insurgency with deep roots in the Pashtun parts of society, large and reliable funding sources, and areas of sanctuary in Pakistan.

Methodology and Approach

Our original project design identified three research tasks:

1. Develop an analytic framework for assessing the effectiveness of security force assistance.
2. Examine the evolution of security force assistance efforts in Afghanistan.

3. Apply the framework to Afghan security assistance efforts and develop recommendations for improvement.

We expected that our research would enable us to identify several different ways in which SFA efforts in Afghanistan have been organized and executed during the past nine years. Unfortunately, given the available data, we found it impossible to identify truly distinct approaches. Although different approaches have been implemented, this has not been done systematically. Units in one part of the country have taken one approach; units in another part a different one—but no one has tracked the results as coalition units rotated in and out of Afghanistan.

We therefore shifted our analytical focus to considering how different approaches could be better developed and tracked in the future and what the key components of a useful assessment in the Afghan context would be. Our analysis draws on political science, defense studies, and defense sector development literature and lessons learned to chart the history of SFA in Afghanistan since 2001, identify key themes, and develop a framework for the future. We also sought to draw key lessons for the Army that could apply to future SFA efforts beyond Afghanistan.

This monograph therefore analyzes SFA efforts in Afghanistan, discusses the requirements for effective SFA assessment mechanisms, and identifies important lessons for that effort as well as for the U.S. Army more broadly. As part of our research, we conducted an extensive literature search and visited key institutions, meeting with U.S., coalition, and Afghan individuals involved with SFA efforts in Afghanistan. RAND team members were able to spend a considerable amount of time in Afghanistan with extraordinary access to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), the NATO Training Mission–Afghanistan/Combined Security and Transition Command–Afghanistan (NTM-A/CSTC-A), and the ISAF Joint Command (IJC) to increase our understanding of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and the coalition’s efforts to develop them.

Overview of Security Force Assistance in Afghanistan, 2001–2009

Afghan forces were initially designed for a relatively benign security context free of Taliban influence, and SFA efforts were therefore designed under the assumption that professional forces could be carefully and deliberately built up over time. Force generation efforts were initially slow and modestly resourced. In 2004 and 2005, efforts to increase the rate of force buildup were undertaken with an eye to securing Afghanistan's presidential (2004) and parliamentary (2005) elections. However, this effort resulted in a decrease in quality that leaders found unacceptable. At the end of the period, the Taliban's resurgence became evident, and additional resources were sought to increase the size of the ANSF significantly. But it was not until 2008 that the need became widely recognized and the resources were provided for such an increase. Table S.1 identifies the increasing end-strength objectives for the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP).

Coalition efforts to develop the ANSF and the security ministries followed a similar trajectory.¹ Efforts were originally split between key coalition countries, with the United States taking responsibility for the

Table S.1
ANA and ANP Authorized End Strength, 2001–2009

Date	ANA End Strength	ANP End Strength
December 2001	50,000	Undefined
February 2002	62,000	
December 2002	70,000	
November 2005		62,000
May 2007		82,000
February 2008	86,000	
August 2008	134,000	

NOTE: This table contains only dates when authorized end strength changed for either the ANA or the ANP.

¹ The ANSF includes the ANA, the ANP, and several smaller security organizations.

ANA; Germany for the ANP; and the UK, Japan, and Italy taking responsibility for key efforts necessary for the ANSF to be effective (counterdrug activities; disarmament, demilitarization and reintegration; and the judiciary; respectively). All of these efforts were originally modest, and U.S. preoccupation with Iraq starting in late 2002 diverted resources away from the Afghan effort.

U.S. SFA efforts in Afghanistan began with the opening of an Office of Security Cooperation (OSC) under the U.S. embassy in Kabul, with U.S. special operations forces playing a role in the field. Additionally, the U.S. State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) hired DynCorp International to assist with police training in 2003. In May 2005, the United States established CSTC-A to oversee ANA development, and it soon took control of ANP development as well. This work included developing the training base and ministries and overseeing the U.S. training teams that were embedded with ANSF units and organizations. The last function passed from CSTC-A to the new operational command, the IJC, when it was established in October 2009. At the same time, CSTC-A, a U.S. command, was combined with the new NATO Training Mission–Afghanistan (NTM-A) under a three-star general.

Observations About Recent SFA in Afghanistan

Our analysis of SFA in Afghanistan includes three key lessons.² First, while the security context in Afghanistan changed radically from one of relative security in 2002 to one of crisis in 2007, changes in the ANSF were not as significant. Increases in the ANSF were authorized, but no fundamental reexamination of the types of forces needed, how they operate together (if at all), and how they work with other important governmental functions, such as the judiciary and corrections systems or traditional forms of justice and security provision, were considered until very recently, if at all.

² The observations presented here are derived from the authors' trips to, and interviews conducted in, Afghanistan in June, July, September, November, and December 2009.

Second, there are no formal assessment tools to provide the feedback to those responsible for developing these institutions that could have clearly indicated that changes of this type were needed. The assessment mechanisms currently in place, the Army Training and Readiness Assessment Tool (ATRAT) and Police Training and Readiness Assessment Tool (PTRAT), provide only unit status report-type feedback. Such feedback implicitly assumes that the forces being assessed exist in a stable and mature security sector framework. These tools are therefore not appropriate for security forces being developed in a highly dynamic security situation under governments that are, themselves, nascent.

Third, the operational environment affects SFA significantly. This conflict has existential implications for the government of Afghanistan, and the United States has deemed it highly important to its own national security. SFA cannot be separated neatly from security operations. Because SFA generates a significant part of the means needed to achieve ends—principally, defeating the insurgency—it is an integral component of the fight. If it fails in the long run, so do operations. Furthermore, most efforts from 2001 through 2009 have sought to build Afghan military forces that closely resemble Western military forces, and have similar capabilities. As a result, SFA efforts to develop the Afghan military have been based on Western models. They have produced forces that can work well at low levels where such characteristics as literacy, technological sophistication, and reliability are either not critical or can be easily overseen or bolstered by ISAF forces, but they tend to fail at the higher levels of organization where systems for planning, personnel, logistics, and other critical functions must function. This lower level of small-unit competency has not been achieved for the police, where the lack of police trainers and expertise has combined with a challenging environment to create considerable confusion on the role of the police and what capabilities they need. The result may be police forces that are built, to a large extent, on a military model, but without military capabilities.

Between 2001 and 2009, there have been a number of different approaches to advising and partnering with Afghan security forces. While we describe these approaches, it is difficult to draw clear conclusions about which ones have been more or less effective, because

there has been no tracking of personnel or units over time based on the training and advising they received. One key lesson, therefore, is that approaches must be developed in ways that support their assessment over time. Another key lesson is that advisors and partners must be better prepared for their mission, including specialized training for those who work with police.

A Framework for SFA and Assessing SFA During Conflict

The current assessment approach in Afghanistan does not provide those charged with helping senior Afghan officials develop the ANSF with adequate feedback. Here, we briefly describe the critical elements of adequate feedback and provide a framework for designing assessment systems that, to some extent, will be unique for each conflict in which SFA is provided.

An effective assessment mechanism for SFA during conflict should start with the goal of the effort and work toward increasingly more specific criteria for success until a point is reached where the performance of individuals, units, organizations and programs can be clearly characterized. This should include information that could lead to judgments about their appropriateness for the task at hand as well. This approach can be viewed as a hierarchy of objectives and tasks that, at the top, addresses whether the end goal of the effort is being achieved and is developed further down the hierarchy through greater levels of specificity. If individuals, units, and institutions are performing their missions as defined but the goals are not being met, then the inescapable conclusion is either that the conceptual approach is flawed or that the means available for performing it (e.g., individuals, forces, institutions, resources) are inappropriate or insufficient.

Effective assessment mechanisms also need to provide those charged with development and training (institutional and unit) with information of a type and format that they can use. The U.S. military uses the acronym DOTMLPF (doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, and facilities) to capture the key institutional functions and systems that must function individu-

ally and together for military institutions to be capable of their missions.³ The same construct, with minor changes, works for police—or any large organization (e.g., police do not have doctrine in the same sense as military organizations but they do have checklists and procedures that they follow). Those charged with building institutions, therefore, need feedback that provides them with insights into the state of, and changes needed in, the component systems of DOTMLPF. This involves establishing an assessments feedback loop that connects measures of effectiveness, measures of performance, and input measures to the elements of DOTMLPF. Current assessment approaches do not provide information that is security sector-wide or focused on DOTMLPF. To facilitate the development of more helpful assessment mechanisms, all major players responsible for SFA should articulate what input they require to design and develop forces, based on the status of the current force and the current conflict.

Implications for SFA in Afghanistan and for the U.S. Army

U.S. Army doctrine for SFA, and stability operations in general, are still developing. Current SFA doctrine (see U.S. Army Field Manual 3-07.1, *Security Force Assistance*) is aimed at providing useful guidance to the brigade combat team (BCT). While doing so is important, the BCT represents only one of several SFA providers in Afghanistan, and it is operating in an environment in which the entire security framework and all of the host nation's security institutions are in development. As such, current doctrine is not sufficient for conflicts such as Afghanistan. A complete doctrine would stipulate that U.S. operating forces working to develop the host nation's fielded forces should give feedback to those charged with providing SFA to such national-level institutions as the security ministries, general staff, logistics command, and training and doctrine command, because these are the institu-

³ As used here, DOTMLPF—appropriately modified for policing components—is meant to also signify aspects of accountability and transparency, human rights, coordination with other security forces, contextualization within the broader justice sector, the rule of law, and other critical issues.

tions that must design, field, and maintain the indigenous security forces. Without this feedback, they have no way of knowing whether their efforts are producing forces of the size, type, and quality that are needed.

In cases in which SFA is being provided in conjunction with U.S. military operations, U.S. military leaders need to understand the interdependencies between operations and SFA and be able to link SFA to success in operations. Alternatively stated, as part of a comprehensive campaign, commanders must not only orchestrate those aspects of the military effort that have traditionally fallen under the operational art but must also include SFA in this holistic campaign plan. This expanded role for U.S. military leaders also includes the ability to understand how the operational environment affects not only operations but how institutions can be built, how they will operate, and how to balance competing priorities between the operational and SFA missions.

In large-scale endeavors, such as those in Afghanistan and Iraq, the U.S. Army will likely be involved in building police forces. Police training is not a primary mission of the Department of Defense (DOD), but in large-scale cases there will likely be no other organization that can take on this mission. To the extent that U.S. political and military leaders believe that such efforts will again be encountered, the U.S. Army will need competent forces, or police augmentation, to take on this mission.

The case of Afghanistan also shows that Western models for forces and ministries may not work in countries with very different societies, requirements, and resources. The ability to understand this fact and to derive reasonable plans for developing and fielding host-nation forces that take the unique context of the country into account will be a critical capability. In particular, the ability to provide SFA to create forces that are distinct from the U.S. model in any and all elements of DOTMLPF, as appropriate, is critical.

All these challenges have implications for the U.S. Army. Among these are the need to provide adequate predeployment training to advisors and planners. Current efforts to train soldiers before deployment are better than those previously in place, but they focus primarily on

advisors, not units, and still have a way to go to be adequate. This observation primarily concerns the emphasis of the Army as an institution on the training mission, not the efforts of the units that are currently training advisors for Afghanistan and Iraq.

The selection of advisors is also critical. Not all Army officers are equally able to work with indigenous forces. The current system cannot adequately capture such critical issues as personality and does not consider such important issues as experience with advising (or other relevant experiences) when advisors are selected. The same argument pertains to the selection of unit commanders whose principal task is developing host-nation units. In this area, lessons may be available from U.S. Army Special Forces because this is what they have traditionally been selected, structured, and trained to do.

Finally, these challenges have implications for the development and education of U.S. Army leaders. Since SFA in different areas will always have unique aspects, leader development and education efforts should provide not only generic skills but, more importantly, flexibility in thought and imagination. There are certainly Army officers who have been tremendously successful in SFA—and in stability operations and counterinsurgency more generally. An examination of the development paths of those officers might yield important insights for the Army as an institution.