

The Afghan National Army: Sustainability Challenges beyond Financial Aspects

Dr. Antonio Giustozzi with Peter Quentin (RUSI)

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Glossary

Jamiat-i Islami - Islamic Society, moderate Islamist party which played a key role in the 1980s jihad in Afghanistan and then in the 1990s civil war.

Hizb-i Islami - Islamic Party, radical Islamist party which played a key role in the 1980s jihad in Afghanistan and then in the 1990s civil war.

Mahaz-i Milli - National Front, royalist party which participated in the 1980s jihad.

Khalq - radical wing of the People's Democratic Party, the pro-Soviet party in power in 1978-1992.

Parcham - moderate wing of the People's Democratic Party, the pro-Soviet party in power in 1978-1992.

Taliban - shorthand for the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, as the insurgents who want to re-establish the Taliban government call themselves.

IED - a hand made mine.

Acronyms

AAF	Afghan Air Force
ANA	Afghan National Army
ANAOA	ANA Officer Academy
ANP	Afghan National Police
ANSF	Afghan National Security Forces (ANA+ANP)
AWOL	Absent Without Leave
CSTC-A	Combined Security Transition Command - Afghanistan
GPS	Global Positioning System
HQ	Headquarter
ICG	International Crisis Group
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
IJC	ISAF Joint Command
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
KIA	Killed-in-Action
MoD	Ministry of Defence
Mol	Ministry of Interior
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer
NDS	National Security Directorate
NTM-A	NATO Training Mission - Afghanistan
OCS	Officer Candidate School
SALT(P)	Special ANSF Leave Travel Program

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The author wishes to thank the researchers who helped him gather the information utilised for this volume, as well as those Afghan and non-Afghan officers who collaborated by accepting to be interviewed for this study. Without their availability, this study could not have taken place. Because some of the contents of this paper may be judged controversial by some readers, the author decided not to mention any name of the individuals involved. of course, the content of this paper is exclusively responsibility of the author, who has processed the information gathered during the interviews and has drawn his own conclusions. The one individual whom the author is allowed to mention is Peter Quentin, who carried out interviews in the UK and in Afghanistan with ISAF and NTM-A staff, and has also contributed to analyzing the information and to writing some passages of the paper.

Antonio Giustozzi

February 2014

Executive summary

The ANA is commonly viewed as one of post-2001 Afghanistan's strongest institutions, if not the strongest. However, with the imminent withdrawal of international forces, the ANA's ability to stand on its own and successfully confront its enemies faces its first major test. This study shows that crucial weaknesses and flaws continue to undermine the ANA's readiness; these could derail its efforts to contain or defeat the ongoing insurgency.

The ANA continued to experience high attrition rates in 2013, as has been the case throughout its history, largely due to a high rate of desertions. The desertion rate is attributable to a variety of factors, including the low quality of recruits, but the disinclination to serve in the ANA is inevitably linked to a larger state legitimacy problem. The ANA has been unable to attract recruits from sectors of the population which benefited most from international intervention after 2001 (the urban and peri-urban population), relying instead largely on recruits from the poorest rural areas, who benefited the least from economic and social development post-2001. It is not surprising that motivation among the ANA rank-and-file remains somewhat dubious.

Although the ANA has received considerable levels of investment from donors, particularly in terms of training and mentoring, the effort has made slow progress, in part because of the relatively low quality of human resources attracted to the ANA. The main problem with Western assistance to the ANA has been its tendency to import external models into a country which lacks the structural and educational capacity to implement them. Capacity substitution afflicted the ANA until 2013, when the gradual withdrawal of international mentors forced ANA officers and combat support to develop their own capacity. While there have been encouraging signs that this effort is finally making headway, by the end of 2013, it was far from clear that the ANA had enough time to catch up before being having to confront major challenges.

The extent to which the ANA might require additional components, such as strong artillery or an air force, is still under debate. Afghans generally support the idea that more heavy equipment is a necessity, as is a strong air force. ISAF and NTM-A have argued that heavy equipment is counter-productive in fighting a counter-insurgency. Furthermore, the fact remains that the ANA has been trained to fight with strong air support, which it will no longer have after 2014. The Afghan Air Force is still in an early stage of development and there is no plan to equip it with anything more than a transport fleet and a handful of counter-insurgency aircraft.

Logistics is probably the ANA's most crucial weakness. Despite a 2013 rush to develop it, the ANA lacks experienced logisticians to handle complex tasks essential for supporting tens of thousands of troops deployed away from their bases. As such skills cannot be improvised, the lack of logistical capability may force the Afghan government to depend increasingly on unreliable irregular forces to fight in areas far from the main cities and the highways.

Although by 2013 the ANA was a much more professional force than it was in 2005, nepotism and political factionalism have continued to undermine it, and external interference in its chain of command has been common. While the extent of ethnic friction might be exaggerated in some press reporting, frequent contact between ANA officers and politicians has exacerbated inefficient allocation of human resources within the organization. Despite some progress in improving discipline (for example, the crackdown on narcotics use), the overall level of discipline in the ANA remains poor.

In conclusion, the ANA faces major challenges in the near future. Some of these are the result of long-term neglect and cannot be quickly rectified. Others, however, are the result of political interference and patronage network building, which could be addressed if there was the political will to do so. As of 2013, the Afghan political elite seemed more concerned with their own petty struggles in Kabul than with whether the ANA was prepared to meet threats on the battlefield. Although the ANA and the Afghan political leadership have some reason to complain about the under-equipping of the ANA, by 2013 it was clear that there was little that could be done about that in the short term. Assuming that any country was willing to provide additional equipment, as Afghanistan cannot afford to buy any, it would still take a long time before such equipment would enter service because of the training required. Instead, the ANA would do better to make the best use of what it has and manage it as efficiently as it can in 2015, in order to gain sufficient credibility to persuade external donors to keep investing in it. For the same reason the ANA needs a realistic deployment plan, in order to avoid exposing its greatest weaknesses, including logistics. To speed up the development of components such as logistics and administration, the ANA should devise incentives to attract more high school graduates. The high number of applications to the Military Academy suggests that high school graduates are not averse to serving in the ANA in principle, but need to see what advantages would derive from it. It should also be clear that a serious political crisis at the top (for example, following the 2014 presidential elections) would weaken state legitimacy further and seriously damage morale in the ANA.

1. Introduction

The Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Air Force (AAF) stand today as products of the 2001 war and Western intervention in Afghanistan. This is not only because they were established in 2002 by the government brought to power by that intervention, but even more importantly because they were funded, designed and trained by the intervening forces. It was perhaps inevitable therefore that the question of their sustainability should arise.

The debate on the sustainability of the Afghan armed forces has focused mainly on financial concerns. Even in the early years of the post-2001 era, institutions like the World Bank rang alarm bells about the cost of the maintaining the armed forces, structured as they were according to decisions largely taken by donors, with little regard for the likely capacity of the Afghan state to raise revenue in the future. At that time, the ANA was still planned to number no more than 70,000. In later years, as the conflict intensified and NATO countries looked to their own eventual disengagement, the army was expanded to about 185,000, with a target of 195,000. This growth compounded the financial sustainability issue, particularly as the Afghan National Police (ANP) was also greatly expanded at the same time.

With the onset of the 2008 financial crisis, which affected almost all donor countries funding Afghanistan's Ministry of Defence (MoD), the Obama administration initiated discussions in 2011 to determine a sustainable level of future funding for the Afghan armed forces. Based on optimistic reports about the security situation in Afghanistan, at the Bonn International Conference in December 2011 an initial assessment projected that a fund of US\$4.1 billion, with the US contributing the lion's share, and other donors and the Afghan government contributing the rest, would be sufficient to meet the country's needs. This assessment was made on the assumption that the 350,000 combined army and police forces could be trimmed to 228,000. However, within months of that agreement, doubts over the wisdom of reducing Afghan security forces just as foreign forces withdrew called the entire plan into question. Maintaining the force at current levels through 2013 and 2014 entailed an additional US\$2.4 billion, while meeting the proposed US\$4.1 billion has already turned out to be more difficult than expected.¹ As of 2013, the Afghan army's fuel bill alone was US\$500 million, about a quarter of the government's total revenue.² Thus, as of mid-2013, the financial sustainability issue remained unresolved, but its eventual resolution (likely in the shape of a greater US financial commitment) looked easy compared to other, non-financial sustainability concerns. The project leading to the publication of this paper stemmed from this consideration.

This paper aims to assess the ANA in terms of its organisational resilience in the face of adversity or, in other words, will the ANA continue to be viable as an army? The ANA is often trumpeted as the foremost example of institution building in Afghanistan, and the institution most trusted to serve the national interest. But how genuinely mature is it as an institution, and how sustainable is its development? Particularly given that Afghanistan is still at war, the ANA's resilience will be a key issue when the time comes for it to rely on its own capacity. By April 2013, as Afghan forces increasingly took over major combat responsibilities during 2012-13, three-quarters of insurgent attacks targeted the ANA and other Afghan forces, with just one quarter aimed at foreign troops; only six months

¹ Thom Shanker, "NATO Plan Tries to Avoid Sweeping Cuts in Afghan Troops", New York Times, 21 February 2013.

² Interview with NTM-A senior commanders, Kabul, April 2013. See also Graham Bowley, "Records Missing on Afghan Army Fuel Costs", New York Times, 10 September 2012.

earlier the ratio was precisely the reverse.³ This pressure will only intensify, as the transition at the end of 2014 does not appear negotiable, with Western governments openly and decisively committed to it.

Even if the ANA secures necessary financial resources, the problem remains that the MoD is unable to deploy its resources effectively.⁴ A major hindrance was identified as corruption. As one NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan (NTM-A) source put it:

*Therefore the primary threat to the Afghan state is not the Taliban or Pakistan, but its own internal corruption, and unless they can demonstrate a commitment to resolving this, the international community's funding will dry up.*⁵

The following set of benchmarks provides a basis on which to analyse the long-term non-financial sustainability of the ANA. Some of these benchmarks relate to the mobilisation and management of human resources, others to the ability/willingness of the MoD and the political elite to develop and maintain an efficient ANA.

- The mobilisation and management of human resources:
 - Quality of rank-and-file recruitment, relative to the composition of Afghan society;
 - Degree of dependence on external advice and services provided by foreign military forces;
 - Production and management of skilled manpower for the task of providing combat support: indirect fire, close air support, IED counter-measures, etc.;
 - Production and management of skilled manpower for the task of providing logistical support and maintaining units on the ground (the so-called “combat service support”).
- The extent of political interference and its disruptive effects on command and control:
 - The extent of meritocracy within the ANA;
 - Solidity of the chain of command;
 - Factionalism and ethnicism.

The methodology adopted for this study consisted mainly of a mix of free-flowing and structured interviews with ANA officers and troops (42), foreign mentors and trainers (29) and Afghan and foreign observers of the ANA - analysts, commentators, politicians, former army leaders and notables (7). The authors also collated and utilised material available in the public domain (articles, broadcast transcripts, released and leaked documents, etc.). Inevitably a range of methodological issues come up when studying an army in the middle of an on-going conflict. Little official documentation was available; to the extent that it was, it was shared by officials who might have a vested interest in showing only portions of the overall picture. This concern applies even more to oral sources. In order to mitigate the risk of bias, the authors attempted to strike a balance among different interest groups (serving ANA officers / mentors and advisers, and trainers/observers

³ “Afghans pay in blood, losing an estimated 300 a month to take lead in fight against Taliban,” Associated Press, 27 April 2013.

⁴ Interview with members of the ISAF Plans cell, April 2013.

⁵ Interview with NTM-A Senior Commanders, April 2013.

external to the Afghan security establishment). Still, navigating between the optimists and the pessimists presented significant problems for data interpretation, for which the author takes full responsibility.

In addition, relying on these kinds of sources, as opposed to a unit-by-unit survey of the ANA and AAF, may have two unintended consequences. The first is that aggregated data may hide huge variations between units. One aspect of this is the presence within the ANA of both capable officers and utterly incompetent ones, as foreign mentors often report. The second is that anecdotal evidence, drawn from published sources or obtained through interviews, may not represent dominant trends, but rather the negative or positive prejudices of those providing the information. Therefore, unless personal prejudices offset each other, this type of evidence can be misleading if not cross-checked with other sources. While this report uses these sources as carefully as possible, the readers should be aware of the risks.

2. The evolution and impact of attrition rates

Mobilising and managing human resources in an army at war presents a range of problems, particularly in a context of internal conflict, where by definition, territorial control by the state is weak. The information available on this question is uneven and not always reliable, so a rather lengthy discussion of the data is necessary to assess actual trends (2.1). The real issue, of course, is what drives high attrition rates (2.2).

2.1 The facts

While recruitment ceased to be a problem for the ANA in purely numerical terms after the establishment of provincial recruitment offices in 2003,⁶ throughout its existence the ANA has experienced very high attrition rates (Graph 1).⁷ NATO advisers and Afghan MoD have made efforts to address at least some of the factors at the root of the attrition problem. For example, in 2012 a leave policy was formalized, with a 20-day annual allowance written into employment contracts.⁸ The management of the operations-leave-training cycle however remained difficult due to the pace of operations and limited resources available.⁹



Afghan National Army Soldiers exercise during their training in the outskirts of Kabul.

6 Personal communication with UN official, Kunduz, March 2004; personal communication with UN Military Liaison Officer, February 2004.

7 The attrition rate is defined as the sum of the killed-in-action, wounded-in-action and desertion rates.

8 Interview with NTM-A Senior Commanders, April 2013.

9 Interview with members of ISAF plans cells, April 2013.

Although there have been claims that attrition rates declined during 2013,¹⁰ the data available for the period cast doubt on this assertion: in the summer of 2013 the overall attrition rates were higher than in the summer of 2012 (see Table 1). A comparison with the pro-Soviet Afghan army of the 1980s is instructive. That was an army of conscripts, often press-ganged into service. As Table 1 shows, in 1988 (in the middle of a general offensive by the armed opposition) the Afghan army suffered an attrition rate just higher than the ANA in 2011, when ISAF was still fully committed to the military effort. The 1988 figure might also be somewhat over-estimated as it includes all reported injuries, whereas this is not the case for ANA attrition data.

Desertions from the ANA have rarely affected the officer corps, except in special cases such as sudden redeployment from permissive to heavily contested regions.¹¹ They also have only marginally affected the non-commissioned officer (NCO) corps and even that only in 2012-13. Because of this, the high attrition rate is not such a threat to the professional growth of the ANA as some observers have hinted. However, there have always been shortages of professionally prepared officers due to a slow start in officer training.¹² Officer and NCO positions were filled at only 82 percent of their planned strength in March 2013.¹³

The ANA only started taking part in combat operations on any significant scale in 2005. Considering that even from 2005-2010 the ANA as a whole was only partially committed to operations (at least compared to the ANP), the attrition rates shown in Graph 1 appear very high, particularly given the voluntary character of ANA recruitment. Paradoxically, the attrition rates were at their highest in the early, pre-deployment history of the ANA (2002-3). Clearly, what was driving attrition at that time was not the difficult condition of deployment or the heavy casualties. Remarkably, while attrition rates remained roughly stable in 2005-12, the killed-in-action rate has been growing steadily (Graph 1 and Graph 2). This shows not only that casualties represented a relatively small component of the attrition rate at that time (desertions represented the largest part of it), but that the casualty rate has not precipitated desertions.

From 2004 onwards the monthly attrition rates have generally fluctuated between 2-3 percent, occasionally breaking the 4 percent barrier; in practice this has meant that every year at least one quarter to one third of the army has been lost due to attrition. Since 98 percent of desertions and AWOL affect field units, in practice turnover in combat units has been much higher than the average rates suggest.¹⁴ A comparison among field units seems to confirm that although those more exposed to the fighting have been somewhat worse affected (see Graph 3), the units more sheltered from the fighting have had only moderately lower attrition rates. This fact seems to further confirm that exposure to fighting might not have been a major factor driving desertions. To tentatively address the problem, in November 2010 then Defence Minister Wardak decided to hold unit commanders accountable for high attrition rates and also asked police and local authorities to collaborate in the identification of deserters.¹⁵ However, little seemed to have changed in practice by the time this paper went to print.

10 Howard LaFranchi, "Is Afghanistan ready to defend itself?" Christian Science Monitor, 25 June 2013; Interview with senior IJC officer, September 2013; "Afghan TV reports decline in rate of army, police desertion," Tolo TV, 13 August 2013, in Dari 1330 GMT.

11 For an example of a battalion redeployed from Faryab to Kandahar, see Vegard Valther Hansen, Helge Lurås and Trine Nikolaisen, "Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams (OMLT): The Norwegian Army and their Afghan partners", Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, Policy Brief 1, 2012.

12 "Afghan military leader shortage hinders army growth", Reuters, 14 February 2011; John Wendle, "Fighting the Taliban: Afghan Army's Attrition Crisis", Time, 2 March 2011.

13 Department of Defense, "Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan" Washington, July 2013, p. 73.

14 Caroline Wyatt, "Can Afghan National Army survive NATO exit?", BBC News, 9 March 2011.

15 NATO Training Mission Afghanistan, "Ministry of Defense: a year in review", Kabul : NTM-A, 2011.

2.2 The causes

The debate over what is driving high attrition rates highlights a number of problems. A major point of contention has always been the failure to punish deserters, who have been able to live normal lives and even get other jobs such as security guards. This was originally due to the desire to “allow some flexibility during harvest time and to encourage recruiting”, but led instead to desertions and AWOL rates getting out of control.¹⁶

Another factor that has contributed to the high level of desertions has been the weak vetting of recruits, itself a result of a preoccupation with growing the ANA numbers as quickly as possible. There has been little effort to vet recruits even in terms of physical fitness. Physically weak, drug-addicted (see 3.4.3) and under-motivated recruits have often proved unable to withstand even the rather mild 10-week basic training course (at one point reduced to 8 weeks, then expanded to 12 weeks in 2013), let alone military discipline after being commissioned.¹⁷

Coalition and Afghan forces introduced tougher screening for recruits in 2011 and then tightened these again in 2012 following an upsurge in insider attacks.¹⁸ ANA officers interviewed in the south were generally adamant that tighter recruitment rules had made a big difference in terms of discipline in the ranks.¹⁹ Even as of 2012, however, rejecting applications was a relatively rare event. The 18 vetting officers rejected only 962 applicants out of 31,000 in March-September 2012.²⁰ Some in the ANA believed that vetting would only work if the old practice of asking volunteers to be referenced by elders was reintroduced.²¹

In any case, even a more effective and thorough vetting process would not have entirely resolved all the problems leading to high attrition rates. By their own assertion, recruits have been motivated principally by economic interests.²² Among other reasons for high desertion rates mentioned by interviewees, some have been discussed in the press:

- Allegations of serious corruption among ANA officers;²³
- Poor medical care and the tendency to neglect the injured and the families of those killed in the ANA;²⁴
- Intimidation by insurgents;²⁵

¹⁶ Rod Nordland, “Afghan Army’s Turnover Threatens U.S. Strategy,” *New York Times*, 15 October 2012; Joshua Partlow, “More Afghan soldiers deserting the army,” *Washington Post*, 2 September 2011.

¹⁷ Dianna Cahn, “Troops fear corruption outweighs progress of Afghan forces”, *Stars and Stripes*, 9 December 2009; interview with ANA officer in Maidan Wardak province, April 2013; interview with senior officer in Paktya, April 2013; Interview with ANA officer in Shwak District of Paktya province, April 2013; Interview with ANA officer in Kama (Nangarhar), April 2013; Interview with ANA colonel in Daman (Kandahar), April 2013. See Partlow, *ibid.*, for an example of a soldier who complained about being sent on mission to enemy-infested Wardak.

¹⁸ Matthew Rosenberg, “Afghan Army Recruits Face Tougher Screening”, *Wall Street Journal*, 9 February 2011.

¹⁹ Interview with ANA high rank officer in Maywand, April 2013.

²⁰ Nordland, *ibid.*

²¹ Interview with ANA captain in Logistic Department of Defence Ministry, April 2013.

²² Interview with American Advisor, Camp Shorabak, April 2013.

²³ Some deserters still proud of having been in the ANA stated this reason in Nordland, *ibid.*; interview with senior ANA officer in Paktya, April 2013.

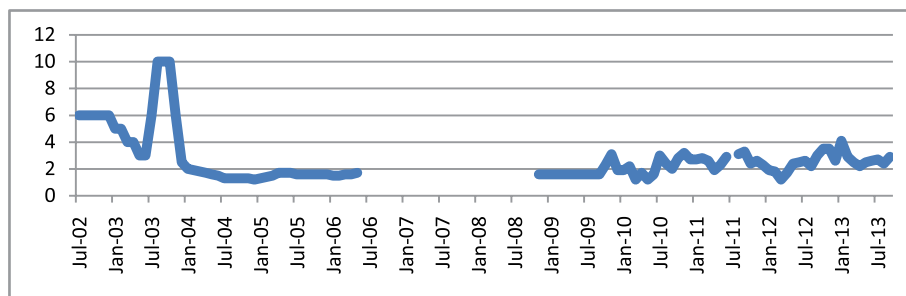
²⁴ Nordland, *ibid.*; interview with ANA officer in Wardak province, April 2013; interview with ANA officer in Baghlan province, April 2013.

²⁵ Nordland, *ibid.*; interview; interview with ANA officer in Wardak, April 2013; interview with senior ANA officer in Paktya province, April 2013.

- Poor living conditions and refusal by officers to grant leave;²⁶
- Posting to remote locations from where it is very difficult if not impossible to go on leave;²⁷
- The tendency to dispatch troops on patrol without adequate training;²⁸
- Weak motivation among young men whose families compelled them to join or who joined to escape family disputes,²⁹ or who were unemployed,³⁰ or who saw the ANA as a way to earn some “easy” money;³¹
- The impending ISAF withdrawal, which from at least 2012 onwards appears to have had a demoralising impact and may have contributed to drive some soldiers out of the ANA.³²

In this regard our interviewees confirmed what was already known. The interviewees also clarified that for many soldiers, the pay rate, while competitive in terms of unskilled employment, is less attractive once they consider the risks and the inconvenience of serving away from home.³³ In addition, some interviewees also mentioned ill-treatment by officers as a factor.³⁴

Graph 1: monthly attrition rates (%) in the ANA, July 2002-September 2013



26 Partlow, *ibid.*

27 Interview with ANA general, Mod central region, April 2013; interview with ANA officer in Khost province, April 2013; interview with ANA officer in Daychopan (Zabul), April 2013.

28 Cahn, *ibid.*

29 Khwaja Baseer Ahmad, “Youth join Afghan army due to family disputes,” *Pajhwok Afghan News*, 6 August 2010.

30 Interview with ANA soldier, Chak (Wardak), April 2013; interview with ANA soldier in Qalat (Zabul), March 2013; interview with ANA officer in Daychopan (Zabul), April 2013; interview with ANA soldier in Kandahar City, April 2013; interview with ANA soldier, Moqur (Ghazni), March 2013.

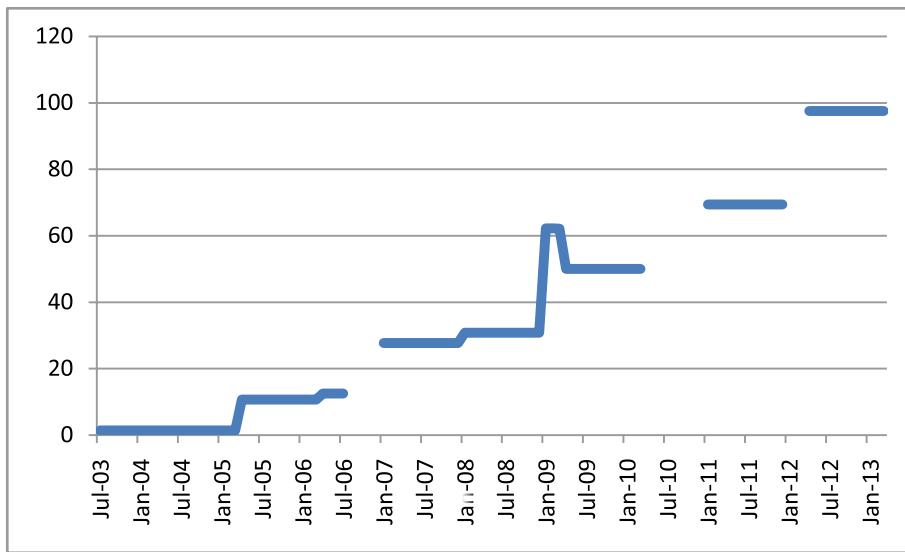
31 Human Terrain System, “ANA and CF Partnership in Khost and Paktiya,” AF01, 4 BCT (ABN) 25th IN DIV, FOB SALERNO, APO AE 09314, 23 February 2012, p. 9; David Zucchino, “Afghan army recruits say they’ll be ready to go solo,” *Los Angeles Times*, 2 January 2013.

32 Nordland, *ibid.*

33 Interview with ANA Colonel, MoD, April 2013; interview with ANA captain, MoD, April 2013; interview with ANA officer in Baghlan province, April 2013.

34 Interview with ANA officer, Kandahar city, April 2013.

Graph 2: monthly KIA rates



Graph 3: Attrition rates by corps

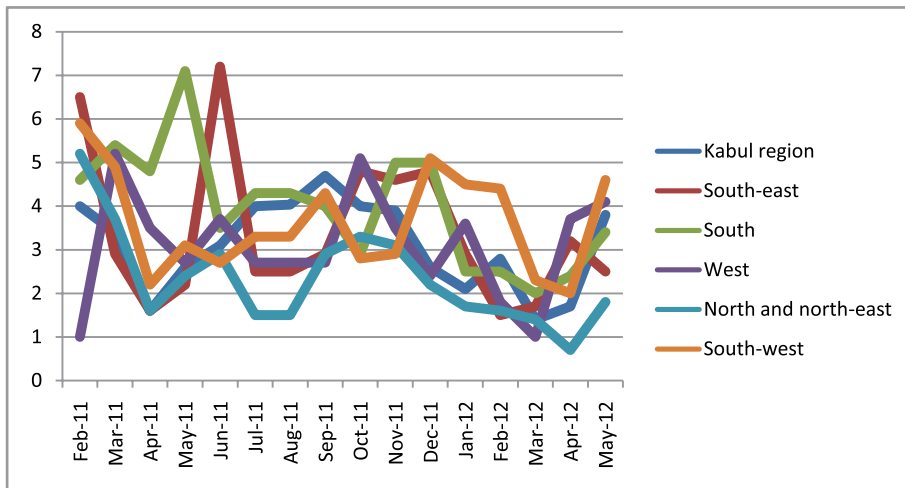


Table 1: Afghan Army attrition rates, 1988 and 2011

Yearly attrition rates	
	% of year start force
1988	36.6
2011	34.2

Sources: A. Giustozzi, *War, politics and society in Afghanistan, 1978-1992*, London: Hurst, 2000; NTM-A.

3. Dependence on mentors

The development of military skills requires a major long-term investment, particularly as far as officers and NCO corps and specialisations are concerned. One way to accelerate such development is to rely on foreign advisers and trainers, which is exactly what the ANA has done since its inception.

A consensus exists among observers that building up the ANA worked out much better than the corresponding effort to develop the ANP, if for no other reason than that the military organisation dedicated to the task was more comfortable dealing with another military organisation (the Afghan MoD) than with the Afghan Ministry of the Interior (MoI).³⁵ In terms of fundamental skills like patrolling, weapon husbandry and basic manoeuvre skills, the ANA appears to have improved over the years, and its mentors certainly contributed to this progress.³⁶ The ANA's evident progress in these areas contrasts with the situation a few years back when ANA units refused to take even garrison duties in the districts without a US presence accompanying them.³⁷

However, this type of “acceleration” does not come without important side effects. One such effect is the tendency towards “capacity substitution” and another is the tendency of advisers to impose models which are not suitable to the local context.

3.1 Capacity substitution

The big question concerning the impact of mentoring carried out primarily by NATO countries has always been its long-term sustainability. The mentors' own reporting suggests that the capacity of ANA units to operate independently grew very slowly up until 2011 (see Table 2)³⁸. By August 2011, just one ANA battalion was rated able to operate independently, that is, without being accompanied by ISAF troops, but still supported by ISAF mentors, ISAF logistics, ISAF maintenance, ISAF medical evacuation, etc. (see Table 2). The fact that by the end of 2012 the number of ANA battalions rated able to operate independently had suddenly jumped to 30 cannot but raise suspicion with regard to the integrity of the assessment.³⁹ It should be noted that a similar surge in the number of “independent (with advisers)” units occurred between mid-2008 and mid-2009, but reverted to previous levels in late 2009 when NTM-A was established to take over the mentoring and training effort from CSTC-A (Combined Security Transition Command - Afghanistan).

By mid-2013, ISAF claimed that 5 of 26 brigades were able to operate completely independently and another 15 brigades to operate independently with advisers, an even more startling progress. It remains an open question whether this progress is genuine or has been dictated by the NTM-A's need to “graduate” brigades more quickly in light

35 Lewis G. Irwin, “Reforming the Afghan National Police,” *Joint Forces Quarterly*, issue 52, 1st quarter 2009, p. 74-5.

36 Jon Boone, “Afghan National Army prepares for life after Nato,” *The Guardian*, 20 July 2011; Daniel Korski and Michael Williams, “The end of NATO and the danger of US unilateralism,” *London : RUSI*, 2008, p. 149; interview with former mentor, London, February 2010. For a different, more negative assessment, see Daniel L. Davis, “Truth, lies and Afghanistan,” *Armed Forces Journal*, February 2012.

37 For the case of Arjistan district see Matt Zeller, *Watches without time* (Charlottesville : Just World Books, 2012), p. 131.

38 Sara Sorcher, “Will the Afghan Army Be Ready?” *Atlantic*, 27 September 2011.

39 See also Anthony Cordesman, “Afghanistan: meeting the real world challenges of transition,” *Washington : Center for Strategic and International Studies*, 2013, p. 44; Larry Shaughnessy, “GAO: Military lowering bar to evaluate Afghan troop progress,” *CNN*, 25 July 2012; Charles Recknagel, “How Ready Is The Afghan Army?” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 20 March 2012.

of the decision to pull outfield advisers/mentors from the brigades, leaving them only at the corps and MoD levels.⁴⁰ Four of the six corps still required advisers to be able to function effectively.⁴¹

Table 2: Rating of ANA units

Date	Independent (with advisers)	Effective with advisers	Effective with Partners	Developing with partners	Dependent	Not capable	Just established	Not assessed
End 2012	30	135	39	11				
Aug-11	1	56	58	29			1	51
Apr-11	0	56	55	32			1	16
Feb-11	0	52	64	27			3	13
Jan-11	0	43	58	32			1	11
Nov-10	0	47	35	46			2	21
Sep-10	0	32	39	41		0	1	16
Aug-10	0	29	40	41		0	0	24
Jun-10	0	24	37	41		5	4	27
May-10	0	27	24	28		5	0	19
May-09	29				21	28	5	29
Dec-08	18				26	26	2	
Jun-08	3				38	18	7	
Mar-08	1				26	26	10	
Jan-08	0				13	37	10	
Jan-07	0				10	35	3	
Jun-06	0				6	39	3	

Source: NTM-A

From 2002 on, the ANA became dependent on external support, in part due to their mentors' readiness to step in and take a supervising and even command role.⁴² As a result even when the ANA had the capacity to provide support to its units, that capacity went unused because it seemed easier for everybody to rely on ISAF capabilities.⁴³

There are indications that it was not until 2011-12 that efforts to reduce ANA's dependency on foreign advisers ("even when they are at risk of failing") started in earnest. In fact, according to ISAF, the first real autonomous ANA brigade-size operation was launched in the summer of 2013.⁴⁴ Even the best ANA officers, however, were far from convinced that they could resist the Taliban without American support.⁴⁵

40 Howard LaFranchi, "Is Afghanistan ready to defend itself?" Christian Science Monitor, 25 June 2013; interview with senior ISAF official and his team, Kabul, April 2013. Another source put the number of ANA brigades able to operate independently at 22, including two new ones (interview with senior IJC officer, April 2013).

41 Interview with senior ISAF official and his team, Kabul, April 2013.

42 Scott Stokoe, "Thoughts on Training for Advise and Assist Brigades", weblog, 8 April 2009 (<http://usacac.army.mil/BLOG/blogs/llop/archive/2009/04/08/thoughts-on-training-for-advise-and-assist-brigades.aspx>). (Accessed -14 November 2010)

43 Stokoe, *ibid.*; Graham Lee, *Fighting season*, London: Duckwork Overlook, 2012, p. 189; Sam Jacobson, "Afghanistan Diaries: Teachers and Doctors," *Dissent magazine*, November 10, 2011.

44 NTM-A sources, Kabul, September 2013.

45 Dexter Filkins, "After America," *New Yorker*, 9 July 2012.

The predominant view among ANA officers is that the ANA depends on foreign support because of its own lack of heavy equipment and close air support.⁴⁶ One officer contended that the ANA could not do without the intelligence (particularly non-human intelligence) that reaches them through ISAF.⁴⁷

Even the idea of partnering, introduced in 2010, has not been conducive to the development of an Afghanised model. Afghan opposition to partnering also derived from the fear that it would not be effective in terms of getting Afghan units to “stand on their feet”, as Minister of Defence Wardak himself observed, a fear confirmed by some CSTC-A officials as well.⁴⁸

Sometimes, the role played by the advisers has represented a form of interference in the Afghan chain of command:

The U.S. took complete ownership of the entire situation. They brought the weapons back here and didn't let the ANA talk to these guys, or make decisions. Then we had the Battalion Commander, myself, the Afghan brigade commander, the American staff sergeant who was in charge of the mission, and the security guy who was the owner of the weapons were all in the same office. And basically, we took all the decision-making away from the Afghan brigade commander and the ANA during this meeting by making directives.⁴⁹

Those who travelled with the mentoring units often gathered the impression that it was the mentors, more than the Afghan officers, who were effectively leading Afghan units.⁵⁰ Doherty reports cases of mentors taking over an ANA unit after their commander had fled, of mentors leading Afghan units in battle, organising ANA firing positions, resolving tactical situations in the absence of ANA commanding officers, saving an ANA company from being overrun, reorganising ANA units, and steadying panicking ANA units.⁵¹ Beattie provides an example of mentors removing an ineffective NCO they judged to be a liability.⁵² Some Afghan officers even complained that mentors have ordered their units into battle without informing them.⁵³ Revealingly, a strike against a mentoring team tends to have a paralysing effect on an Afghan unit.⁵⁴

3.2 The wrong model

The worst form of dependency fostering, at least from a tactical perspective, consisted in the training of Afghan forces in “ground cleaning”, a tactic that depends heavily on close air support and has become a NATO standard.⁵⁵ Many Afghan officers have become addicted to close air support:

46 Interview with Gen. Raufi, Kabul, April 2012.

47 Interview with ANA officer in Nangarhar province, April 2013; Beth Stevenson, “ISAF withdrawal prompts Afghan air power changes,” 18 February 2013 (<http://www.shephardmedia.com/news/digital-battlespace/isaf-withdrawal-prompts-afghan-air-power-changes/>).

48 Jan Erik Haug, “The Operational Mentoring And Liaison Team Program As A Model For Assisting The Development Of An Effective Afghan National Army,” (thesis, Fort Leavenworth, 2009) p. 83.
Human Terrain System, “ibid.

49 Human Terrain System, “ibid.

50 Stephen Grey, *Operation Snakebite*. (London: Viking: 2009), pp. 76, 85.

51 Richard Doherty, *Helmand mission*, (Barnsley : Pen & Sword, 2009), pp. 61, 64, 95, 97, 101, 112, 113, 114, 124.

52 Doug Beattie, *Task Force Helmand*, (London: Pocket Books : 2009), p. 88.

53 Interview with former ANA officer, Kabul, October 2009.

54 Benjamin Tupper, *Greetings from Afghanistan send more ammo*, (New York : New American Library, 2010), p. 15.

55 Interview with ISAF mentoring manager, Kandahar, April 2010.

*I repeatedly told the ANA commander to have his forces return fire on the enemy, and manoeuvre towards their position to outflank them, and he was quick to respond, "No you get planes and helicopters! They can kill the enemy."*⁵⁶

Others too pointed out that many Afghan officers have displayed a tendency to rely excessively on close air support:⁵⁷ As one officer stated:

*We're absolutely ready to take over when the U.S. forces leave ... but because we don't have air support of our own, we will need help from them.*⁵⁸

Western observers concurred:

*Some analysts worry the removal of air power will take a key advantage away from Afghan forces. "It's incredibly important that Afghan security forces have access to this capability and that the Taliban know they have access to this capability," [One analyst] said.*⁵⁹

The delayed development of the Afghan Air Force (see 4.2 below) has had a particularly strong impact on Afghan army combat units trained and mentored to rely on close air support when fighting. Although ISAF had guaranteed continued close air support through the completion of withdrawal in 2014, by the summer of 2012 it had already reduced such support to Afghan army units as mentoring declined.⁶⁰

The provision of close air support was indeed severely limited in 2013; an ISAF general needed to authorise it, and ordnance could rarely be dropped because targets could not be confirmed by ANA officers unable to supply coordinates.⁶¹ ANA troopers who suffered casualties in these battles have not been favourably impressed.⁶²

In fact, through 2013 ISAF deployed air power in support of the ANA when it became clear that Afghan forces could not cope on their own, even outside the so-called "key terrain" areas, for example in Warduj (Badakhshan) and in parts of Helmand. As of summer 2013, about 20 percent of ISAF's engagements were in support of "independent" operations by the Afghan security forces, who had requested assistance.⁶³

Similarly in planning, the tendency of mentors has been to push for a NATO-style decentralised approach combining arms operational planning and conduct, which the Afghans have not been able to implement successfully due to the lack of well-trained and highly educated officers and NCOs.⁶⁴ The result has been, in the words of Amarkhel, that "[W]e do not have a single military expert to draw up a plan".⁶⁵

56 Tupper, *ibid.*, p. 28.

57 Interview with former mentor, London, February 2010; David Zucchini, "Afghan army could help unify a nation," *Los Angeles Times*, 12 November 2006. For an example of how tactical stalemates could only be broken by close air support even in early 2013 see Azam Ahmed, 'With Swagger, Afghan Army Takes the Lead', *New York Times*, 7 April 2013.

58 Carmen Gentile, "Troops balance fighting, mentoring Afghans," *USA Today*, 13 July 2013.

59 Jim Michaels, "Loss of U.S. air power a worry in Afghanistan," *USA Today*, 28 April 2013.

60 Beth Stevenson, "ISAF withdrawal prompts Afghan air power changes," 18 February 2013 (<http://www.shephardmedia.com/news/digital-battlespace/isaf-withdrawal-prompts-afghan-air-power-changes/>).

61 Interview with IJC source, Kabul airport, August 2013.

62 Nordland, *ibid.*

63 Interview with high level IJC source, Kabul airport, August 2013; interview with IJC source, Kabul airport, August 2013.

64 David H. Park, "Identifying the center of gravity of Afghan mentoring," *Military Review*, November-December 2010.

65 "Pundit says Afghan forces unable to ensure security after foreign forces leave," *Tolo News*, 29 October 2012. See also "Chai and combat: French train Afghan army at frontline," *Agence France Presse*, 23 December 2008.

3.3 Prospects

Initially, dependency was not seen as a problem because the original military plan was to continue providing Afghan forces with “everything from intelligence support to air support” even after 2014.⁶⁶ It was not only the Americans who were betting on a long-term relationship. Minister of Defence Wardak (2004-2012) was on board too.⁶⁷ In 2012-13 the approach changed radically, as political decision-making in Washington dictated a greatly reduced level of foreign support. By the end of 2012 it had become clear that decisions taken in Washington would leave the US unable to provide an even remotely comparable level of support after 2014, and possibly even sooner than that.⁶⁸ At this point, there was sufficient political and bureaucratic will to see the ANA become self-sufficient, but little time to achieve the target.



An ANA helicopter taking off from a military base in Kabul.

With the official completion of the security transition in June 2013, Afghan security forces began formally leading all military operations throughout Afghanistan.⁶⁹ One optimistic ANA officer asserted then that the ANA performed much more effectively in the provinces where it was on its own than where it still operated together with ISAF.⁷⁰ Whether that was true or not, the Afghan political leadership’s determination to reclaim its sovereignty, with full military control, certainly had positive effects:

⁶⁶ Sorcher, *ibid.*, quoting Gen. Caldwell.

⁶⁷ Rajiv Chandrasekaran, “Afghan security force’s rapid expansion comes at a cost as readiness lags,” *Washington Post*, 21 October 2012.

⁶⁸ Ernesto Londoño and Rajiv Chandrasekaran, “Some in administration push for only a few thousand U.S. troops in Afghanistan after 2014,” *Washington Post*, 9 January 2013; Paul Adams, “US troops will end ‘most’ Afghanistan combat this spring,” *BBC News*, 11 January 2013.

⁶⁹ Mursal Mansoor, “Afghan Forces to Lead All Military Operations in Few Weeks,” *TOLOnews.com*, 2 June 2013.

⁷⁰ Interview with senior ANA officer, Maywand, April 2013.

*I do hear Afghan officials saying things like “this is our opportunity to take the lead and do this ourselves”, there is a sense that “this is our time”.*⁷¹

To some extent, having to face the insurgents without ISAF’s support forced ANA units to find ways to cope, for example by starting to put in practice the training they had received.⁷² As one senior IJC source put it:

*We have seen even more evidence that they get better the more we get out of their way and that’s only natural human behaviour, when a very capable partner comes in to sit back and let them do everything.*⁷³

During the first half of 2013, the insurgents still avoided direct confrontation with the ANA in most cases, but even the continuous, low intensity skirmishes took a heavy toll on the ANA, with 2,767 killed in 2013 according to official sources.⁷⁴ The question was whether the ANA could be weaned off ISAF support quickly enough to be ready to fight completely alone in 2015. Although ISAF sources claimed that the ANA showed aggressiveness during its first fighting season as an almost independent force, the evidence is still inconclusive.⁷⁵

Reliance on NATO forces, with whom the Afghan troops have fought for years, is not likely to evaporate overnight (see 2.3.2 below). What could be in store was highlighted in February 2013, when President Karzai announced his intention to ban Afghan forces from requesting airstrikes on residential areas.⁷⁶ That political decision created a major backlash, with senators and military analysts criticising the President and highlighting the fact that the insurgents appeared having been emboldened by the decision.⁷⁷

71 Meeting with ISAF political officers, Kabul, April 2013.

72 Human Terrain System, *ibid.*

73 Interview with IJC source, Kabul airport, August 2013.

74 Nordland, *ibid.*, Alissa J. Rubin and Taimoor Shah, “Afghan Forces, Taking Lead, Hold Steady in Violent District,” *New York Times*, 15 June 2013; Ahmad Ramin, “NATO Casualties Lowest in 6 Years, Afghan Numbers Increase,” *TOLONews.com*, 1 January 2014.

75 This point was made by several ISAF, NTM-A and IJC senior officers interviewed in September 2013.

76 “Karzai to Ban Afghan Forces from Requesting Airstrikes,” *VOA News*, 16 February 2013.

77 Rafi Sediqi, “Afghan Forces Need Air Support From Foreign Troops: Senators,” *TOLO news*, 28 May 2013; “People are waiting for Mr Karzai’s response,” *Arman-e Melli*, 17 April 2013.

4. The ability to provide sufficient levels of combat support

As indicated in 3.1 above, many Afghan interviewees identified the main source of dependency in the failure of ISAF to equip the ANA adequately. Foreign advisers by contrast believe that Afghan demands for heavy equipment are driven by pride and competitive reflexes toward neighbouring countries.⁷⁸ It has also been suggested that the predominant attitude in the Afghan MoD, but also in ISAF, underscores the risk of focusing on equipment at the expense of “moral and conceptual components of fighting power that will determine the success or failure of the ANSF”.⁷⁹

Afghan interviewees however remained almost unanimous in calling for the ANA to be properly equipped if it is to stand a chance. There are many aspects to this and cannot all be discussed in detail in this paper. Two case studies have been selected to illustrate the debate: the ANA’s artillery and the AAF.

4.1 Case study: artillery

Since its rehabilitation in 2002, the Afghan MoD has been forced to place little priority on its artillery because of the disinclination of its western supporters to provide the means to develop it. As a result, the artillery component of the ANA was still numerically weak as of 2012: 6-8 howitzers per brigade, for a total (as of end 2012) of 85 D-30s and 24 American-made, World War II vintage M114s, donated by Turkey and mostly used for parades.⁸⁰ The procurement of a further 124 D-30s was ongoing.⁸¹ Afghan forces began deploying the artillery in significant numbers only in the summer of 2013;⁸² that delay compounded the feeling of powerlessness among infantry units. In 2012, the MoD asked donors for more modern, longer-range artillery, but was refused, as the D-30 is easy to maintain and operate compared to the more modern guns produced in the West. In fact, the ANA had problems in fully integrating anything bigger than the 60mm mortars into its way of fighting.⁸³ The centralised command and control system of the ANA, where artillery fire has had to be authorised at the battalion commander level, has further inhibited the use of artillery in many tactical situations.⁸⁴

In general, ISAF/NTM-A have maintained that the artillery supplied has been sufficient for the counter-insurgency tasks of the ANA, provided it is adequately deployed, manned and coordinated. In particular, ISAF has stressed the importance of well-trained spotters, able to direct fire from remote locations. For this reason, a growing stress has been placed on personnel management, in order to make sure trained artillerymen serve in their specialisation.⁸⁵ Developing ANA artillery’s leadership to the point of genuine competence appeared a tall order as of 2013, however.

⁷⁸ Interview with senior ISAF officer and his team, Kabul, April 2013; Interview with senior IJC officers, Kabul, April 2013.

⁷⁹ Interview with senior ISAF officer and his team, Kabul, April 2013.

⁸⁰ *The Military Balance 2013*, London : International Institute of Strategic Studies, 2013, p. 278; Interview with ANA major, Kabul, April 2013.

⁸¹ John Wendle, “Bombs Away: Will Afghanistan’s Artillerymen Learn How to Shoot Right?”, *Time*, 1 November 2012; Nathan Hodge, “Ready or Not, Afghans to Take Over Security Kabul Will Officially Get Handover From Coalition in Coming Week”, *Wall Street Journal*, 14 June 2013.

⁸² Interview with Col. Brito, IJC, ANSF development, Kabul Military Airport, September 2013.

⁸³ Nathan Hodge, “Afghans Seek More Military Hardware”, *Wall Street Journal*, 31 December 2012; Steven Beardsley, “Training Afghan artillery teams a lesson in patience”, *Stars and Stripes*, 18 December 2012; interview with IJC officer, Kabul airport, August 2013. The Afghan media also participate in the campaign in favour of a more heavily equipped ANA: “Afghan pundits stress need to provide security forces with modern weapons”, excerpt from report by privately-owned Noor TV on 3 December 2012, in Dari 1300 GMT.

⁸⁴ Embedded in Afghanistan, “Kandaks”, 23 October 2009 (<http://bc235.blogspot.co.uk/2009/10/kandaks.html>).

⁸⁵ Interview with senior IJC officer, Kabul airport, September 2013.

Another argument put forward by ISAF was that advanced technology and heavy weaponry would be counter-productive in a counter-insurgency effort, as it would bind combat units to the road network and complicate maintenance issues.⁸⁶

The Afghans have responded that ISAF has used air strikes, artillery and even tanks in counter-insurgency throughout the war. They have also argued that the ANA must instil confidence that it would be able to repel a conventional attack from Pakistan if it wants to sustain the morale of troops deployed in remote outposts near the border.⁸⁷

Compounding the artillery deficit, the contract to equip all ANA units with light M224 60mm mortars was not signed until February 2013. Intense training throughout the summer followed; by September ISAF rated the 60mm mortars a major asset for the ANA, a dependable and cheap way to rapidly deliver tactical fire to units engaged by the enemy. IJC sources reported that the mortars delivered a major morale boost for the ANA.⁸⁸

The ANA will also need heavy artillery after 2014, however. To be effective against highly mobile insurgents, accustomed to operating in small units, artillery has to be fired accurately; in order to cover a network of outposts in rugged terrain, the ability to fire beyond visual range is also essential. As of 2012, it was still common to have mortar and artillery crews who could not aim their weapons effectively, relying instead on gradual adjustment of fire based on direct observation.⁸⁹

The lack of properly trained crews has been due to a number of factors. Among them was the fact that NTM-A's dedicated mentoring of Afghan artillery units only started in June 2011, when the first two mentoring teams were assigned to the western and northern Army Corps (207 and 209),⁹⁰ although a number of ANA Corps received training before then.⁹¹

By 2012-13 some ANA units had developed the ability to call in indirect fire, using GPS technology.⁹² Even when artillery units managed to bring the skills of their crews to relative proficiency in indirect fire, the substantial shortage of educated personnel in the ANA has worked against them. In the words of one Afghan officer:

⁸⁶ See for example, "Afghan Army Should be Equipped with Heavy Arms: MoD,"

TOLOnews.com, 20 November 2010; "Afghan commander in north says they need heavy weapons, air force", Text of report by Afghan Ariana TV on 19 June 2012; Sean Carberry, "Afghan Army Seeks Better Equipment, But Lacks Basic Skills," National Public Radio, 28 October 2012; Vegard Valther Hansen, et. al, *ibid.*, Jordan Swears, "Tip of the Spear: Training and Mentoring the Afghan Artillery," Fires, 1 September 2012 (<http://www.readperiodicals.com/201209/2779897681.html#b>).

⁸⁷ Vegard Valther Hansen, et al., *ibid.* See also Abdol Wahed Faramarz, "Tough Job Ahead for Under-Resourced Afghan Forces," Institute of War and Peace Reporting, 1 July 2013; "Afghanistan military forces fighting in mountainous border still face aggressive fight," Associated Press, 4 July 2013.

⁸⁸ "Arsenal gets contract for Afghan army mortars," Timesunion.com, 20 February 2013 (<http://www.timesunion.com/business/article/Arsenal-gets-contract-for-Afghan-army-mortars-4294967.php#ixzz2R0nMj77f>); Interview with senior IJC officer, Kabul airport, September 2013; Interview with Maj. Gen. Dean Milner, NTM-A, September 2013; Interview with Brig. Gen. Howard, IJC, September 2013; Interview with Maj. Gen. McLachan, IJC, September 2013; interview with IJC source, Kabul airport, August 2013.

⁸⁹ Hodge, 2013, *ibid.*, John Wendle, "Bombs Away: Will Afghanistan's Artillerymen Learn How to Shoot Right?," Time, 1 November 2012. See also Michael J. Wood, "82-mm Mortars: Working with Afghan National Army Mortar Teams," Fires, March-April 2010.

⁹⁰ NTM-A, "Ministry of Defense (MoD) and Afghan National Army (ANA) Weekly Assessment," (22 May 11).

⁹¹ Paul Watson, "Time running out to teach Afghan soldiers to be self-sufficient," Toronto Star, 25 October 2010; Kevin K. Parker et al., "Coalition-ANA Partnering," Fires, Jul-Aug 2009.

⁹² David Loyn, "Afghan National Army counts cost of war," BBC News, 14 June 2013.

*It's a problem with our Defense Ministry. It's bad management. We need the right man, at the right time, for the right job. Sometimes they'll send a guy who has logistics training to the artillery and the guy with artillery training to logistics.*⁹³

An IJC source confirmed:

*We have recently done a check on where the people trained in their artillery schools have gone and only 50percent are filling artillery billets and the others have been siphoned off by company commanders who need a clerk or brigade commander who needs a driver.*⁹⁴

4.2 Case study: the Afghan Air Force (AAF)

Developing an air force from scratch is a long and complex process, particularly in post-conflict countries whose educational system has been badly disrupted for many years, as in Afghanistan's case in 2002. The US had reportedly promised that by 2009 Afghanistan would have a professional air force with 8,000 men; however, things moved much more slowly than that.⁹⁵ Until spring 2007 (when CSTC-A got involved), what was then called the Afghan National Air Corps (part of the army) received little if any support.⁹⁶ Afghans almost universally complain about the insufficient assistance extended by western powers to the AAF. Says an ANA officer: "Our seniors requested a capable AAF but the US did not listen".⁹⁷



Two ANA helicopters taking off from a military base in Kabul.

⁹³ John Wendle, *ibid.*

⁹⁴ Interview with IJC source, Kabul airport, August 2013.

⁹⁵ Interview with Atiqullah Amarkhel, Kabul, April 2013.

⁹⁶ Jason Straziuso, "In need of aircraft, Afghan air force struggles to get off the ground," Associated Press, 9 October 2007; interview with senior IJC officer, Kabul airport, August 2013.

⁹⁷ Interview with ANA major, Kabul, April 2013.

While Afghans may underestimate the challenges implicit in creating a new air force, the fact that the assistance programme to the AAF got off to a late start certainly delayed progress by several years. Moreover, aircrews who had been trained in the 1980s were available and could have been trained to fill the gap while a new generation of aircrew and mechanics was developed. Indeed a number of aircrews were retrained and deployed quickly after 2007; this and the training of new personnel could have begun years earlier. Instead, donors' lack of commitment meant that by early 2007 the Air Corps had made very limited progress compared to 2002. If in 2002 Afghanistan had no airworthy planes (at least by NATO standards), by early 2007 it had only 2-3 airworthy cargo planes and a handful of helicopters.⁹⁸

CSTC-A became involved in the air corps training programme in spring 2007, but progress in the rehabilitation of the Afghan Air Force remained slow. Only the creation of a separate AAF (as opposed to a simple air corps of the ANA as it was until June 2010) accelerated the development thanks to the self-concern of its leadership.⁹⁹ The lack of urgency in the development of the AAF would be surprising, except for the fact that there were until July 2011 no plans for ISAF to wind down. As late as November 2010, Gen. Allvin, commander of the NATO Air Training Command, stated that there was no plan to accelerate the process of getting the AAF to the stage where it would be "fully stood up", scheduled then for 2016.¹⁰⁰

Despite Afghan impatience, the foreign mentors defended their careful, stepped approach by pointing to past mishaps that occurred due to poor training, including one that almost killed President Karzai.¹⁰¹ The fact that a large percentage of Afghan airmen sent to the US for training absconded also contributed to slow progress.¹⁰²

What motivated neglect of the Air Force? Seth Jones reported in 2007 that US officers were not

convinced that Afghanistan needs an advanced air force in the short term, given the extraordinary costs of jet fighters. "As long as the U.S. and other NATO countries are willing to provide air power, I think the focus is and should be on building ground capabilities," Jones said [emphasis added, AG].¹⁰³

The expectation of a long engagement in Afghanistan could explain the lack of urgency until 2011; after that, bureaucratic inertia and legal wrangles, as well objective difficulties in finding suitable trainees, might explain why procurement for the AAF was still in a chaos by March 2013. Considering the greater complexity of developing an air force, compared to the army, and given the secondary and tertiary support requirements and demands for greater educational and technical qualifications, it is clear that the Afghan armed forces face a major post-2014 hurdle.

98 Todd Pitman, "At busy air base, Afghan air force commander has no planes to fly," Associated Press, 1 May 2002.

99 Interview with senior IJC officer, Kabul airport, September 2013.

100 "Allvin: no plans to accelerate Afghan Air Force mission before 2016," Inside the Air Force, 26 November 2010.

101 Karzai went back for a period to flying in American helicopters after the accident. See Stewart Nusbaumer, "The New Afghanistan Air Force," Air & Space, January 2011.

102 Ibid.

103 Straziuso, ibid.

4.2.1 Equipment

The initial decision to incorporate the Air Force into the ANA as the Afghan National Army Air Corps (ANAAC) reflected the American inclination to keep the air force in its limited role of assistance to the Afghan Army, hence no real air defence capabilities were planned. Even tactical combat support was largely neglected. The Afghan Air Force's few Mi-35 combat helicopters were for a long time non-operational due to a lack of machine gun ammunition and a crew trained to use the guns.¹⁰⁴ The helicopters were deployed on a combat operation in the summer of 2013 for the first time.¹⁰⁵ Even as late as 2013, as the Mi-35s were approaching the end of their service life; just two of them were operational at any given time.¹⁰⁶

The focus was largely on transport capabilities, but due to a wrong choice of aircraft and the mishandling of maintenance contracts, the AAF was without a significant fixed-wing transport capability until autumn 2013.¹⁰⁷ Even the acquisition of large numbers of newly built Mi-17s proved difficult. The Mi-17s had to be procured in Russia, a complicated matter because of US laws restricting the use of US funds to purchase military equipment abroad.¹⁰⁸ With the delivery of the first C-130Hs in autumn 2013 (out of four planned), some transport capability was re-established, but not enough to impress Afghan authorities, who began discussing purchasing five An-74s from Russia.¹⁰⁹ By spring 2013 ISAF was working on the possibility of a Strategic Airlift Programme (contractors flying aircraft for the AAF) to ease ANSF troop movement from Kabul to the Corps locations, especially in support of leave rotations.¹¹⁰ In fact, as of 2013, contractors were already operating flights to assist the ANA as part of the SALT (P) programme which facilitated soldiers travelling to their homes and back during leave.¹¹¹ The viability of such programs after ISAF's withdrawal is questionable.

In addition, to Kabul's chagrin, ISAF decided to limit AAF's combat capability to 20 small attack planes. Even the procurement of the A-29 turboprop attack aircraft was delayed for a year because of bureaucratic glitches.¹¹² There were also plans, as of summer 2013, to arm some of the Mi-17s to limited ground attack tasks, particularly in mountain areas.¹¹³

104 Ibid. Personal communication with foreign military attaché in Kabul, March 2010; Cid Standifer, "Russian-made chopper faces ironic future in Afghanistan," *Stars and Stripes*, 2 July 2013.

105 Shamshad TV, Kabul, in Pashto, 26 July 2013, 0630 GMT.

106 Department of Defense, 'Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan', July 2013, cit., p. 83.

107 Interview with senior IJC officer, Kabul airport, September 2013; "Afghanistan welcomes cancellation of Italian-made planes," *Khaama Press*, 29 December 2012; Joshua Partlow, "Maintenance faults ground Afghan air force," *Financial Times*, 3 July 2012; Nathan Hodge, "Maintenance Snafu Grounds Afghan Fleet," *Wall Street Journal*, 25 May 2012; Abdul Wali Arian, "US to Purchase Aircraft, Drones for Afghan Air Force," *TOLONews.com*, 14 January 2013.

108 "Mi-17 Helicopter Sale: Mi-17 Helicopters Bought by US from Russia, Draws Criticism," *Associated Press*, 9 December 2013.

109 Sayed Jawad, "Airbus to provide tactical transport Aircraft to Afghan army," *Khaama Press*, 18 January 2013; Andrea Shalal-Esa, "US Air Force aims to transfer C-130 planes to Afghanistan," *Reuters*, 30 January 2013; Gopal Ratnam and Tony Capaccio, "Afghan Military's Illiteracy Complicating U.S. Departure," *Bloomberg*, 31 January 2013; "From Solution to Scrapheap: The Afghan AF's C-27A Transports," *Defense Industry Daily*, 16 January 2013; 'Officials comment on need to equip Afghan air force', Text of report by Channel One TV (1TV) on 2 January 2013 (BBC Summary of World Broadcasts); SayedJawad, "Afghanistan to purchase An-74 cargo planes for Afghan forces," *Khaama Press*, 19 May 2013; "Afghanistan's efforts to establishing air force", *Daily Afghanistan*, 22 May 2013; Shamshad TV, Kabul, 26 July 13 in Pashto 0630 GMT; Interview with senior IJC officer, Kabul airport, September 2013.

110 NTM-A Senior Commanders, April 2013.

111 Interview with high level source in IJC, August 2013; 'Securing Afghanistan's future', *ibid.*, p. 130.

112 Craig Whitlock, "U.S. military criticized for purchase of Russian copters for Afghan air corps", *Washington Post*, 19 June 2010; "USAF issues stop-work order on Afghanistan A-29 aircraft," *airforce-technology.com*, 5 January 2012; Dave Majumdar, "Afghan Light Air Support saga continues," *Flight Global*, 6 December 2012.

113 Interview with high level source in IJC, Kabul airport, August 2013.

By 2016 the Afghan Army is meant to receive small A-29 Super Tucano counter-insurgency turboprops, replacing the ageing Mi-35s. Neither the armed opposition nor Afghan Army troops on the ground are likely to be very impressed with these assets, having become accustomed to the mighty power of the USAF. However, as donors doubted the AAF's capacity to maintain jet fighters for several years to come, the Super Tucanos were judged to be adequate for counter-insurgency purposes as they can deliver guided weapons.¹¹⁴

Some sources hinted that the AAF might receive some small tactical drones of limited capability, like the Raven.¹¹⁵ It appeared that Afghan forces would also receive some simpler balloons and towers, equipped with digital cameras. There is also a plan to deliver 18 electronic intelligence capable PC12 planes, and to equip some of the C-208s with cameras.¹¹⁶

4.2.2 Human resources

Before US involvement in 2007, the AAF's airframes were barely maintained.¹¹⁷ After 2007 there was some improvement; the number of flights increased, but the human resources allocated by MoD to the Air Force were often so poor that effective training proved difficult; trainers recounted having to train illiterate mechanics using colour codes.¹¹⁸ In addition, in 2007, as the US was taking over Air Force training, the average age of the pilots was 43 and most of them had not been flying for several years.¹¹⁹ In 2007-8, these factors contributed to a high accident ratio of six crashes in 18 months (a large portion of the helicopter fleet).¹²⁰ Although the frequency of crashes was then reduced, a new maintenance crisis occurred in 2012, when most of the air fleet had to be grounded for several months to undergo extensive inspections.¹²¹ Problems with careless crews and with lack of maintenance supplies have been regularly reported.¹²²

As of 2013, all the serving pilots were "legacy Soviet-trained", who had to go through refreshment training as standards had deteriorated in the 1990s; there were just 20 combat ready crews.¹²³ New pilot training started in 2007 and saw Afghan trainees attend flight schools in Germany, Turkey, India, the UAE, Czech Republic and the US.¹²⁴ As of spring 2013, 150 pilots were undergoing training, mostly in the US and Czech Republic.¹²⁵ There were also discussions to train Afghan pilots on simulators in India.¹²⁶ In reality, at

114 Abdul Wali Arian, "US To Buy 20 Fighter Planes For Afghan Air Force: Isaf," TOLONews.com, 28 May 2013; "NATO pledges more combat, transport aircraft for Afghanistan", Ariana TV, 22 May 2013, in Dari 1530 GMT; Interview with senior IJC officer, Kabul airport, September 2013.

115 Interview with senior IJC officer, Kabul airport, September 2013; Interview with Brig. Gen. Ballard, IJC, September 2009.

116 Interview with senior IJC officer, Kabul airport, September 2013.

117 Slobodan Lekic, "Afghan air force learns to fly -- and fix aircraft," Associated Press, 18 January 2012.

118 Ibid., Richard Johnson, "An Afghan Air Force," National Post, 21 September 2012.

119 Straziuso, *ibid.*

120 Nusbaumer, *ibid.*

121 Partlow, 2012, *ibid.*

122 For example, an AN-32 crew flying with a malfunctioning oxygen mask: NTM-A, "Afghan Air Force (AAF)/Air Interdiction Unit (AIU) Weekly Assessment," 5 January 2011; the failure of logistics to deliver rotor hub oil: NTM-A, "Afghan Air Force (AAF)/Air Interdiction Unit (AIU) Weekly Assessment," 12 February 2011.

123 House of Commons Defence Committee, 'Securing the Future of Afghanistan', *ibid.*, pp. 173-4.

124 Interview with AAF officer, Kabul, April 2013; "Afghan Military Pilots To Get U.S. Training," RFE/RL, 14 May 2009; Sanjeev Miglani, "Analysis: With an eye on 2014, India steps up Afghan role," Reuters, 9 November 2011; Carol Huang, "Afghanistan's new armed forces receive training in the UAE," The National, 20 October 2011.

125 Frud Bezhan, "Afghan Air Force Struggles To Take Off," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 6 May 2013.

126 Miglani, *ibid.*

least as far as the Czech-trained Mi-17 crews were concerned, the flow of trainee pilots to the Czech Republic was too slow and not all trainees were suitable for the training.¹²⁷

Helicopter and transport pilot training took place in Shindand as well; as of June 2013, 124 pilots had been retrained, with 62 more undergoing training.¹²⁸ However it was not until 2013 that ground training equipment for pilots was delivered to the AAF by the US.¹²⁹ As the older generation of pilots was approaching retirement age, though some still had some years to serve, they would need refresher courses and familiarisation with new planes before flying.¹³⁰ Thus, the NTM-A aim--to bring the crew-to-aircraft ratio from 1-1 to 1.5-1, in line with NATO standards--still appeared a distant one.¹³¹

Much of the delay in training was due to the poor selection of trainees; only in the summer of 2012 did the selection criteria for the air force change: all recruits were to be literate and had to volunteer specifically for the AAF.¹³² As of 2013 there were some signs that the AAF was attracting recruits with a university background.¹³³ Recruitment remained slow and retention problematic, because of the non-competitive salaries,¹³⁴ even as the quality of the mechanics improved, due to the literacy requirement.¹³⁵ However, as of summer 2013 there were still shortages in maintenance supervisors, who, because they needed to be educated to a higher standard and be literate in English, could easily be attracted by civilian employers. As one source put it:

*If you have the technical skills to maintain aircraft you are probably working for Emirates Airlines.*¹³⁶

Despite the presence on the ground of contractors tasked to maintain the newly delivered aircraft, the service rates were modest at best. As of June 2013, only 25-28 of the rugged and easy to maintain 41 Mi-17s in service were in working condition.¹³⁷

Moreover, the ability of the AAF to provide close air support to the ANA is also dependent on the ability of the latter to coordinate with them. The view of the House of Commons was that:

*It will still fall short of a full close air support capability, and with no trained Forward Air Controllers, interaction between the pilots and troops in contact is likely to be rudimentary. A fixed wing platform will also be ill-suited to operations in mountainous terrain.*¹³⁸

127 SIGAR, 'Afghan Special Mission Wing', *ibid.*, p. 7.

128 Haseeb Maudoodi, "U.S. Boosts Afghan Air Force With New Training Equipment," *TOLONews.com*, 3 July 2013.

129 *ibid.*

130 Interview with AAF officer, Kabul, April 2013.

131 Interview with senior IJC officer, Kabul airport, September 2013.

132 Interview with senior IJC officer, Kabul airport, September 2013.

133 Interview with Maj. Gen. Dean Milner, NTM-A, September 2013.

134 SIGAR, *ibid.*

135 Interview with senior IJC officer, Kabul airport, September 2013.

136 Interview with high level source in IJC, Kabul airport, August 2013.

137 Aazem Arash, "US to Purchase 30 Mi-17 Helicopters For Afghan Army," *TOLONews.com*,

18 June 2013; Jim Michaels, "Afghan medical evacuation capabilities improving", *USA TODAY*,

24 June 2013; SIGAR, "Afghan Special Mission Wing: DOD Moving Forward with \$771.8 Million Purchase of Aircraft that the Afghans Cannot Operate and Maintain," Washington, June 2013, p. 9.

138 "Securing the Future of Afghanistan", *ibid.*

By the summer of 2013, the programme to deploy forward fire controllers was forecast by IJC to be able to involve the first Afghan personnel, although “not with laser targeters and sitcom but the ability to coordinate targeting with ground units, ensuring friendly forces and civilians are avoided and the right weapons are being used”.¹³⁹

4.2.3 Prospects

ISAF sources argue that given the unlikelihood that the Afghan MoD would ever develop anything resembling the close infantry-air force coordination of 21st century NATO armies, it made more sense to keep the AAF small and focused on pre-planned operations, leaving most fire support tasks to the artillery.¹⁴⁰ Undoubtedly, given the problems that most ANA officers have with maps, real time close air support seemed a chimera in 2013, even if NTM-A and ISAF trained forward fire controllers.¹⁴¹ By 2013 ISAF air assets were rarely dropping any ordnance because, in the absence of ISAF mentors, the ANA was unable to confirm positions.¹⁴²

In 2013, contractors involved in training the AAF suggested that another 10 years would be needed before the AAF would be fully operational, and that the planned size of the force would definitely be insufficient given the size and geography of the country.¹⁴³ The most optimistic assessment provided by ISAF was that the AAF would not achieve even its initial autonomous operational capability before 2016.¹⁴⁴ As of mid-2013, ISAF estimated that it would realistically take the AAF another 6-8 years to be fully equipped and operational.¹⁴⁵ By spring 2013, the AAF was able to carry out resupply missions, although not in the number required, and medevac missions, as well as a few air assault operations.¹⁴⁶

In sum, it is easy to understand why the Afghans are puzzled: ISAF displayed a high degree of reliance on close air support, “hooking” the ANA on it, but then has discouraged the ANA from pursuing the same path. In fact it could be argued that ISAF has created capability gaps, introducing tactical models that Afghans could not implement on their own and distorting expectations. The level of aid planned for the AAF now is comparable to older efforts for much smaller militaries, engaged in less extensive counter-insurgency efforts, such as the Salvadoran Air Force in the 1980s.

139 Interview with senior IJC officer, Kabul airport, August 2013.

140 Interview with Maj. Gen. McLachan, IJC, September 2013.

141 Forward fire controllers direct artillery fire and air support by providing coordinates, but without being able like forward air controllers to designate targets electronically.

142 Interview with Maj. Gen. McLachan, IJC, September 2013.

143 Bezhan, *ibid.*

144 Saleha Sodat, “Nato to Keep Drone for Post-2014 Support of Afghan Forces,” TOLONews, 24 April 2013.

145 Abdul Wali Arian, 2013, *ibid.*

146 Saleha Sodat, *ibid.*

5. The autonomous logistical capability

5.1 Causes of insufficient development

“Demand-supported inventory in Western doctrine evolved through careful analysis of historic consumption and aims to reduce inventory, which reduces overall cost.”¹⁴⁷ The Soviet system built in the 1990s was the exact opposite: it relied on oversupply to keep the system going. While more expensive to establish, it was also more resilient, especially in times of crisis. In the 1980s the Soviets developed a massive logistical redundancy in Afghanistan, creating three layers of supply systems to face any crisis situation. In normal conditions supplies would flow from Kabul and a few other supply centres, but if that supply line was interrupted, each Corps had two local depots to rely on. One would have six months of supplies, and the other 10 years of stocks; the latter was to be activated only with presidential authorisation.¹⁴⁸ Nothing like that existed in 2013 for the ANA. Of four main ANA supply depots extant in 2009, three were in Kabul and one in Kandahar.¹⁴⁹ One American observer commented that:

*Although Soviet doctrine represents “alien thought,” it presents less of a challenge to conservative Afghan values. In spite of the challenges, MoD’s stated goal still leans to NATO standards in the implementation of Western logistics. The MoD acknowledges that adoption of a U.S. / NATO-based system places significant challenges on the Afghan senior leaders to adjust from their long history of supply point operations and the requirement for additional effort at the policy levels to implement. U.S. doctrine represents an immense challenge since it demands that the Afghan logistician wrestle with strong currents of high power distance and the tendency to establish a group consensus.*¹⁵⁰

One logistics mentor explained that the Afghan army had always used the traditional “push” logistics, a “top-down, centrally controlled system based on relatively fixed rations being distributed through a time-based, predictable resupply system.” In 2007, however, American contractors rewrote the logistic of the ANA in line with the practices of the contemporary American army that is “pull” logistics:

*based on bottom-up requests and the variable needs of the units. It requires a logistics system that communicates well and responds quickly. Pull logistics is more complicated and requires more coordination and integration but, when done correctly, is more efficient and effective, delivering the right supplies to the right place at the right time.*¹⁵¹

The result has been a largely ineffective hybrid.¹⁵² An ANA officer serving in remote Kunar told a journalist that he was getting only 10 percent of what he needed from the Afghan MoD.¹⁵³ Valeski estimated it at less than 20 percent overall, and believed that in the end the ANA would return to a predominantly push system once left to its own devices, because it could not afford a predominantly pull system.¹⁵⁴

147 Douglas C. Richter, “Afghan Right: Linking a Stable Economic and Industrial Base to a Self Sustaining ANA Logistics Adjusted to Afghan Culture,” Fort Leavenworth : U.S. Army School of Advanced Military Studies, United States Army Command and General Staff College, 2011.

148 Interview with Atiqullah Amarkhel, Kabul, 10 April 2013.

149 Interview with Col. Wade Sokolosky, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas : Combat Studies Institute, Operational Leadership Experiences interview collection, 19 June 2009.

150 Douglas C. Richter, *ibid.*

151 Steven Valeski, “ANA Logistics System,” *Military Review*, May-June 2012, pp. 22-3.

152 *Ibid.*, p. 23, Richter, *ibid.*, SIGAR, “Assessment of U.S. Government and Coalition Efforts to Develop the Logistics Sustainment Capability of the Afghan National Army”, Washington, 9 December 2011, pp. 61-2.

153 Gentile, *ibid.*; interview with ANA Colonel, MoD, Kabul, April 2013.

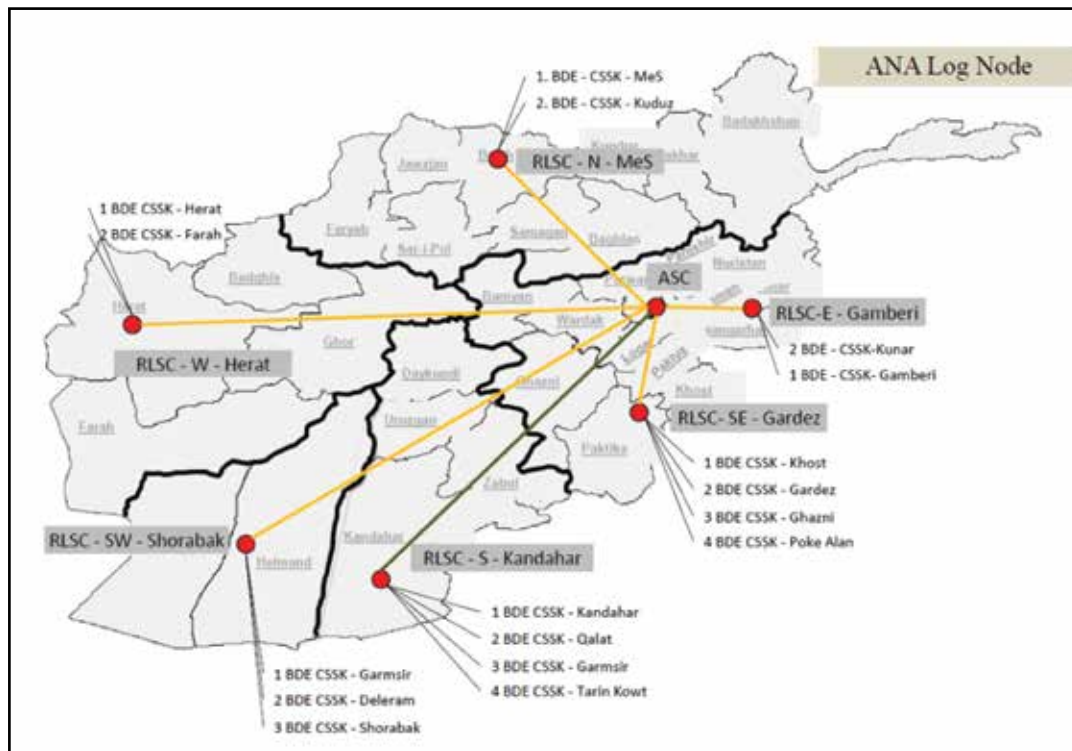
154 Valeski, *ibid.*, p. 24.

ANA logisticians and commanding officers have coped with the uncertainties of a logistical system they have not fully understood by hoarding supplies as much as possible, despite resistance from ISAF mentors.¹⁵⁵ In addition, the centralised character of logistics has also slowed the flow of supplies, as superior officers have tended to be reluctant to release material.¹⁵⁶

Competition from the private sector has compounded the problem; logistical units have felt this most keenly:

The current compensation incentives for ANA personnel with logistical and information technology skills and experience necessary to support logistical functions and operations was [sic] not competitive with comparable private sector opportunities. For example, an ANA sergeant with over three years of experience earned \$215 monthly, while a master sergeant with over 24 years of experience was paid \$415 per month. However, if an ANA soldier at the end of his first two or three year ANA contract is a skilled logistician or mechanic, he can reportedly earn \$600 - \$700 per month in a civilian occupation. At Depot 0, U.S. trainers had 50 ANA soldiers complete training as computer operators. When their ANA contracts were completed, 47 of them left for higher paying civilian jobs.¹⁵⁷

Map 1 ANA Logistical Centres, 2013



Source: “Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan”, Washington, July 2013.

155 Richter, p. 21.

156 Richter, pp. 21-22.

157 SIGAR, p. 116.

As of 2006, ANA units could not rely on their own logistics even for short-term missions, including those of 24 hours.¹⁵⁸ By 2010-11 things had not improved much: requests for supplies seldom succeeded, the rule was that mentors would request them through their own supply system. Some Afghan voices stressed the need to create a logistical system more to Afghanistan's measure and not so dependent on quick air deliveries.¹⁵⁹ Moreover, the early training/mentoring effort in logistics was ineffective, not least because it lacked an overall plan.¹⁶⁰ After a slow start in 2010, the Combat Service Support School was still unknown to many commanding officers, while others who knew were reluctant to send their officers there.¹⁶¹

Some interviewees alleged that the failure to provide adequate logistical support is partly due to embezzlement and corruption.¹⁶² Not all interviewees agreed that corruption is a problem in the ANA, particularly at the field level (some admitted problems at the higher logistical and procurement level); considering that 80-90 percent of logistics was still being delivered by ISAF at the time of the interviews, it might be that field officers were not even aware of the problem.¹⁶³

5.2 The prospects

One mentor supporting ANA logistics offered the somewhat paradoxical hope that the system might revert to old practices after the Western withdrawal.¹⁶⁴ Even that, however, would take time and require some adjustments, at a time which is likely to be very critical for the ANA.

Strategic decisions being discussed in 2012-13 could have a further impact on the viability of ANA logistics. Minister Wardak reportedly took the original decision to deploy the ANA into remote areas, apparently because he wanted to argue for a larger army against those who argued in favour of a larger police force.¹⁶⁵ By 2012, the debate had shifted to deploying the ANA away from the more remote districts, toward a more sustainable line of defence around cities and highways ("key terrains"). ISAF supported this redeployment.¹⁶⁶

An ISAF source pointed out that the onus was on the ANA to plan their deployment according to the resources they effectively control - there is always going to be a limit to the number of outposts that can be supported.¹⁶⁷ The remote corners of the country pose the greatest challenge, one that the ANA would not be able to resolve on its own.¹⁶⁸ Supplying these outposts requires greater air transport capabilities than

158 Interview with Maj. William Woodring, "Operational Leadership Experiences interview collection archives, Fort Leavenworth : Combat Studies Institute, 12 December 2006, pp. 8-9.

159 Jacobson, *ibid.*; SIGAR, p. 25; Boone, *ibid.*; Tom A. Peter, "'Afghan Army's next hurdle: logistics," *Christian Science Monitor*, 3 October 2011.

160 SIGAR, pp. 12, 132

161 SIGAR, pp. 51-2, 63; "Securing the Future of Afghanistan", p. 3.

162 Interview with ANA officer in Nangarhar province, April 2013.

163 Interview with ANA corporal in Qalat, April 2013; interview with ANA Lt Colonel serving in Kandahar, April 2013; interview with ANA Lt. Colonel serving in Kandahar, April 2013; interview with ANA officer serving in Kandahar, April 2013; interview with ANA officer serving in Qalat, April 2013; interview with Lt. Colonel in Arghandab, April 2013; interview with ANA officer serving in Maywand, April 2013; interview with ANA soldier in Zari, April 2013.

164 Valeski, *ibid.*

165 Rajiv Chandrasekaran, 'Afghan security force's rapid expansion comes at a cost as readiness lags', *Washington Post*, 21 October 2012.

166 *Ibid.* .

167 Interview with Brig. Gen. Howard, IJC, September 2013.

168 Interview with ANA Lt. colonel, Kandahar, April 2013; Interview with ANA officer, Qalat, April 2013.

the ANA is scheduled to have.¹⁶⁹ The inclination of the Afghan MoD, however, has been to hold on to the whole defensive perimeter as established at the peak of ISAF's reach in the country.¹⁷⁰



Afghan Pilote flying an old helicopter.

To the consternation of ISAF, in 2012, Minister Mohammadi considered pushing into mountainous Nuristan province, where until 2013 there was no permanent ANA presence but a few, isolated police garrisons; he did deploy small detachments there in 2013.¹⁷¹ Chief of Staff Karimi accepted ISAF's advice, acknowledging that he could not "cover every inch of the country. The Afghan army isn't big enough". He implied that the ANA may have to abandon some outlying areas to the insurgents, although he was later reported to have lobbied in favour of keeping the army in some remote districts of Kandahar.¹⁷² The 2013 experience of deploying ANA units to Berg Matal and Kamdesh in Nuristan may have sobered the MoD leadership to the difficulties involved in supporting such deployments with their own logistics.¹⁷³

In 2013, ISAF and NTM-A began focusing in earnest on logistics, and attempted to get senior ANA generals interested. While 19 of 28 logistics nodes were scheduled to transition to Afghan control in 2013,¹⁷⁴ as the time approached, there was near consensus that ANA remained too heavily dependent on ISAF for logistics.¹⁷⁵ As of summer 2013,

169 Interview with ANA officer, Khost, April 2013; "Afghanistan military forces fighting in mountainous border still face aggressive fight," Associated Press, 4 July 2013; Luke Mogelson, "Which way did the Taliban go?" New York Times, 17 January 2013.

170 Kevin Sieff, "Afghan army ambitions meet limits in violent Pech Valley," Washington Post, 9 January 2013.

171 Interview with Maj. Gen. McLachan, IJC, September 2013; Sieff, *ibid*.

172 Kevin Sieff, 'Afghan army struggles with lack of reach', The Washington Post, 11 July 2013; personal communication with ICG analyst Graeme Smith, Kabul, October 2013.

173 Interview with Brig. Gen. Howard, IJC, September 2013.

174 "Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan," *ibid*.

175 Interview with ANA Colonel, MoD, April 2013; interview with ANA officer in Nangarhar province,

NTM-A and ISAF were still writing most contracts and transferring resources for the Afghan MoD; thus, even in the most optimistic scenario, ANA logistics would not be ready before 2015.¹⁷⁶ As a source at the top of NTM-A put it as late as spring 2013, “logistics are the Achilles heel”.¹⁷⁷ One source described personnel administration and logistics as “simply not being there” in terms of the structures required to make things work. “It is a constant battle to identify who is responsible for paying for food to feed their troops.”¹⁷⁸ Apart from the limited availability of means of transport, the real problem with ANA logistics has been the inefficient, unresponsive administration in Kabul.¹⁷⁹

In ISAF, the assumption has been that the ANA might not need much in terms of logistics to face the existing threat: it was meant to fight an insurgency which itself had limited supplies, particularly away from the Pakistani border. As long as the ANA could out-supply the insurgents, it was bound to maintain superiority on the battlefield. The insurgents rarely have ammunition supplies for more than 24 hours of fighting, which is rarely enough to win a decisive engagement against a resilient adversary.¹⁸⁰ This might be true in the absence of a coordinated, persistent offensive by the armed opposition, but there is no guarantee that the opposition would not become more aggressive and deploy new capabilities once ISAF is out of the country.

In June 2013, ISAF adopted a new approach to developing ANA logistics, forming a team of advisers tasked to help the ANA leadership develop its own processes for improving logistics. This prompted new attention to the reciprocal interaction and integration of the various processes involved, whereas they had previously been the object of training as separate component.¹⁸¹ This effort had an impact, as the Afghan authorities are now fully aware that ISAF’s drawdown and eventual disengagement is no bluff. As a result there has been an effort to clear bottlenecks and reduce the number of signatures required for authorizing supplies.¹⁸²

On the whole, however, as of 2013 ANA logistics was still moving its first steps, the more so given the rugged geography of Afghanistan and the vulnerability of supply lines. Weak logistics was clearly one of the ANA’s key vulnerabilities.

April 2013; interview with ANA officer in Wardak Province, April 2013; interview with ANA colonel in Paktya province, April 2013; interview with ANA colonel in Baghlan, April 2013; interview with ANA officer in Khost province, April 2013; interview with ANA officer in Baghlan province, April 2013; interview with ANA officer in Baraki Barak (Logar), April 2013; interview with ANA officer in Khost province, April 2013.

176 Interview with Mr. Johns (US DoD), NTM-A, 12 September 2013.

177 Interview with senior NTM-A officers, April 2013.

178 Interview with officer at Regional Combat Battle School, Shorabak, April 2013.

179 Interview with ANA officer in Shwak (Paktya), April 2013.

180 Interview with Maj. Gen. McLachan, IJC, September 2013; Interview with senior NTM-A officers, April 2013.

181 Interview with Mr. Johns (DoD), NTM-A, September 2013.

182 Interview with senior IJC officer, Kabul airport, September 2013; Interview with Mr. Johns (DoD), NTM-A, September 2013.

6. The extent of political interference and its disruptive effects

6.1 Meritocracy (or lack thereof)

6.1.1 Promotions

Complaints about the failure of the MoD to promote the most qualified and deserving are frequent.¹⁸³ Officers who served in the 1980s often complain about not being promoted after they re-joined the ANA in the post-2001 era; many of them serve with ranks inferior to what they held in the 1980s, despite being better qualified than most of those who overtook them in terms of promotions.¹⁸⁴ The lack of clear rules concerning appointments and promotions has facilitated the spread of nepotism. In 2008 the Afghan parliament tried to address the issue by drafting a new law on regulations for army personnel (Inherent Law of Officers and NCOs, the Law on ANA Personnel, Sergeants and Officers), featuring among other provisions:

- recruitment and hiring criteria and procedures
- discipline and reward mechanisms
- the assignment of rank
- rules governing transfers

The draft law fixed criteria for giving ranks, in particular granting the rank of lieutenant only to those with bachelor's degrees or with a high school education and officer training course. The law has not yet been approved, and arbitrary appointments continue to be made, however, often under pressure from members of the parliament. One general gave the example of a 26-year-old from a wealthy family, linked to one of the top Afghan political figures, who received the rank of colonel after spending just two weeks in the Military Academy.¹⁸⁵

Even when individuals with a professional background have been appointed, they have not necessarily been the most qualified; cases of very fast promotions have often been reported.¹⁸⁶ While criticism from within the ANA could be dismissed as complaints by people passed over for promotion, foreign advisers and trainers have expressed similar views.¹⁸⁷

There has been progress on this front, but it has been slow. US- and NATO-led training missions have finally started providing courses specifically targeting officers. As of spring 2013, the OCS (Officer Candidate School) completed its final course before starting the ANAOA (ANA Officer Academy), with an increased capacity (up to 600) and course length.¹⁸⁸ In 2013 Minister Mohammadi formed an Evaluation Commission to assess over 500 ANA commanders, from battalion commanders upwards. It identified 30 poor performers, but only 10 of these were re-assigned.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸³ Interview with ANA General, MoD, April 2013; Interview with ANA officer in Nangarhar province, April 2013.

¹⁸⁴ Interview with ANA general, MoD planning, April 2013.

¹⁸⁵ Interview with retired ANA general, Kabul, April 2012.

¹⁸⁶ Interview with ANA general, MoD planning, April 2013.

¹⁸⁷ Interview with adviser at Regional Combat Battle School (RCBS), Shorabak, April 2013.

¹⁸⁸ Interview with KMTC Brig. Gen. Aminullah and Advisory team, April 2013.

¹⁸⁹ Senate Armed Services Committee, "Written Posture Statement Of General Joseph F. Dunford

Overall, these signals of intent to establish a more meritocratic system remain weak. This is all the more apparent with the approaching presidential elections and political horse-trading around them, in the midst of which President Karzai yielded to political pressure and signed a number of new promotions to the rank of general in the MoD. Of the 46 generals then appointed, only 10 were professional military, while several had not even completed high school. Twenty-six of the promotions were reportedly linked to Jamiat-i Islami and to the MoD, while 16 were linked to Hizb-i Islami and only four had no known factional alignment. Among the newly promoted generals, Feda Panjshiri was appointed to head logistics, replacing a predecessor educated in a military academy, Zia Alizai.¹⁹⁰

6.1.2 Nepotism

Former Minister of Defence Wardak himself reportedly complained that he received daily requests to appoint or promote individuals on the basis of their connections to powerful people.¹⁹¹ In 2013, the head of personnel, Gen. Rahimi, was also reported to be under heavy pressure from various sources to twist meritocratic criteria when making appointments.¹⁹² Another general indicated that Chief of Staff Karimi too was also under pressure from powerful individuals to appoint their protégés.¹⁹³ Nepotistic pressure and the inclination of the MoD leadership itself to bring in friends have impelled such appointments. One MoD general even alleged that the practice of selling positions, while not as common in the MoD as in the MoI, was not unheard of in the MoD.¹⁹⁴

*I myself saw lots of people in the ministry who do not deserve that position and that rank but due to having connections with high-ranking officials of the ministry, they get promoted. I can tell you that around 40 percent of the officers in the ministry are appointed because of their connections and friends.*¹⁹⁵

Patronage, nepotism and the fact that not all positions in the MoD and ANA are desirable (particularly the more dangerous postings) have led to considerable rank inflation over the years, albeit not to the same extent as in 2002-4 when the MoD was populated by armies of generals and colonels. As of 2012, there were reportedly 1,400 excess colonels in the MoD/ANA who did not have a position in the tashkil (personnel charts).¹⁹⁶ There are reportedly also excess generals in good numbers.¹⁹⁷ By October 2013 a high level source in the MoD alleged that such “shadow” officers already numbered over 2,000.¹⁹⁸

Commander US Forces-Afghanistan Before The Senate Armed Services Committee On The Situation In Afghanistan”, April 16, 2013; ‘Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan’, *ibid*, p. 71.

190 ISAF and diplomatic sources, contacted in Kabul, October 2013; interview with Afghan MoD General, Kabul, October 2013.

191 Personal communication with foreign diplomat, Kabul, 2011.

192 Interview with Afghan MoD general, Kabul, October 2013.

193 Interview with retired ANA general, Kabul, April 2012.

194 Interview with ANA general, MoD planning, April 2013; interview with ANA general, MoD, April 2013.

195 Interview with MoD captain, MoD, April 2013.

196 Personal communication with former ISAF senior officer, 2012.

197 Interview with retired ANA general, Kabul, April 2012; Interview with ANA officer in Baghlan province, April 2013.

198 Interview with Afghan MoD general, Kabul, October 2013.

In 2012, former NDS chief Amrullah Saleh estimated that over 90 percent of ANSF leaders have been appointed for political and nepotistic reasons:

*The upper and middle echelons of Afghan forces are filled by people who have not risen to their promotions in a democratic system. They are not “secu-crats”: Most of them have been placed in their posts through political consultations and personal connections. This directly affects the loyalty and inspiration of the officers at different levels. [...] Interference in the management of the security forces, be it in the upper or lower levels, slows their growth rate, increases their expenses, and strikes a major blow to their morale. The nepotistic appointment of officers in upper and middle echelons of the security force will at best protect narrow interests instead of national ones.*¹⁹⁹

Mentors confirm nepotistic practices, with officers coming to Corps HQ carrying letters of appointment by MoD heavyweights.²⁰⁰

6.1.3 Impact on the capabilities of the ANA

Nepotism is not exclusive to the ANA. In the words of one British adviser:

*The only difference between us and the Afghans is that they have unenlightened nepotism, whereas ours is enlightened nepotism - desperation to follow the boss's intent for our own career ends, rather than what we know to be right.*²⁰¹

Although nepotism and favouritism might to some extent be universal behaviours, it is also true that nepotism takes different forms. In practical terms, the issue is whether the extent to which nepotism is practiced within the institution leads to dysfunctional forms of behaviour. Nepotism and corruption in appointments mean (in the words of an Afghan MoD general) that many officers are not able to fulfil the most complicated tasks.²⁰² Another effect is waste, as redundant officers receive salaries and small retinues of ANA personnel for no good purpose:

*Most of them don't have the capability to fight, they are very weak and only happy to have a good job, have three or four vehicles and bodyguards, but never think of Afghanistan and of the fighting. I know lots of people in the leadership of the ministry who have got cars from the ministry for their wives, sons and daughters, while there are generals who walk from the their job to home and back to work. I told you that the reason that we don't have a good army is the lack of justice in the ministry and corruption.*²⁰³

The low educational level of the average recruit has compounded the problem: weak officers cannot count on rank-and-file to be alert and capable enough to deal with even the basics.²⁰⁴

199 Amrullah Saleh, “Ending the politicisation of Afghan security forces,” *Aljazeera*, 19 April 2012. See also James Fergusson, *A Million Bullets*, (London : Bantam, 2008), p. 81.

200 Interview with ISAF mentor, northern Afghanistan, July 2012.

201 Interview with ISAF adviser, April 2013.

202 Interview with ANA colonel, MoD, April 2013.

203 Interview with ANA general, MoD planning, April 2013.

204 Charlie D'Agata, “Afghan soldiers' incompetence raises concerns about U.S. withdrawal plans,” *CBS News*, 16 May 2013.

Corruption is a by-product of nepotism; one of the most notorious cases has been one that concerned Kabul military hospital, whose surgeon general Ahmad Zia Yaftali was alleged in 2010 to have sold US\$42 million of medicines on the black market, and to have allowed widespread neglect of injured soldiers. Yaftali was protected by the Minister of Defence until ISAF stepped in and removed him from his job in December 2010.²⁰⁵ Nepotism and corruption affect the morale of the ANA, as political protégés are believed to be favoured in their task assignments, skirting dangerous duty. For example, training instructor positions (a comfort post) are often distributed to inexperienced staff according to patronage criteria, rather than to experienced injured soldiers no longer able to serve at the front.²⁰⁶

6.2 Ethnic friction

In recent years, there has been a greater tendency among officials to acknowledge the problem of ethnically-based patronage in the ANA, as when Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mullen remarked that the Tajik-Pashtun rivalry had the potential to tear this country apart.²⁰⁷ Similarly the head of NTM-A Caldwell recognised that the over-representation of Tajiks in the ANA was a problem.²⁰⁸ Early on, the ANA had introduced ethnic quotas in recruitment and appointment.²⁰⁹ Arguments over the strong over-representation of Tajiks in the MoD in 2002 lead CSTC-A to determine that the ethnic shares of the main population groups should be reflected in the ANA at all levels.²¹⁰ A dedicated appointment board was created, presided over by the Minister and Chief of Staff; other members of the board reportedly had little power and the two leading figures distributed all appointments.²¹¹ The ethnic quota system applied to all levels, from the top to the bottom. Even private soldiers of the tactical units of the army were to be assigned on the basis of ethnic quotas. Assignments were chosen from shortlists of three names, each of different ethnicity: the principle was supposed to be that both merit and ethnicity mattered.²¹²

The quotas were meant to defuse political concerns over the issue of ethnic dominance within the ANA, but it also legitimised patronage-based appointments. The policy of ethnic balancing in the MoD/ANA could only be implemented to some detriment of a full meritocracy (which in truth might not have been implemented even without this example of “affirmative action”). The leadership of each unit was to be mixed as well: “if the unit commander is a Tajik then his deputy will be a Pashtun, or if he is a Hazara then his deputy will be an Uzbek”.²¹³

205 “Afghan ex-army health chief dismisses allegations of embezzlement,” Text of report by state-owned National Afghanistan TV on 25 December 2010; Maria Abi-Habib, “At Afghan Military Hospital, Graft and Deadly Neglect”, *Wall Street Journal*, 3 September 2011.

206 Interview with ANA officer in Nangarhar province, April 2013; interview with Afghan MoD general, Kabul, October 2013; interview with ISAF advisor to Afghan brigade, April 2013.

207 International Crisis Group, “A Force in Fragments: Reconstituting the Afghan National Army,” Asia Report 190, 12 May 2010.

208 Glenn Kessler, “Pay increase for Afghan troops boosts interest,” *Washington Post*, 10 December 2009.

209 Interview with ANA General, Kabul, 12 October 2005.

210 The quotas were 44% Pashtun, 25% Tajik, 10% Hazara, 8% Uzbek (ISAF source).

211 Interview with ANA General, Kabul, 12 October 2005.

212 Interview with ISAF mentor, northern Afghanistan, July 2012.

213 Mir Sediq Zaliq, “A military melting pot,” *Afghanistan Today*, 18 October 2011.



Afghan National Army Soldiers take a oath during graduation ceremony at the Military base in Kabul.

The quotas did improve the distribution of posts at the top levels of the MoD/ANA structure. At the senior field level, managing the ethnic make-up was easier. In 2005, the nine top positions in the four army corps then active were thus divided: 3 Pashtuns (33 percent), 3 Tajiks (33 percent), 2 Uzbeks (22 percent) and one Hazara (11 percent).²¹⁴ At the MoD level, in 2011 the 26 top positions were occupied by 11 Pashtuns (42 percent), 9 Tajiks (35 percent), 4 Hazaras (15 percent), 1 Nuristani and 1 Uzbek (4 percent each).²¹⁵

However, concerns about ethnic balance within the ANA have not disappeared. In 2011 one of the MoD deputies openly expressed his concerns about ethnic balancing.²¹⁶ Opinions about the extent and sources of ethnic friction within the ANA varied considerably among interviewees. Some argued that ethnic friction was pervasive²¹⁷ and others that it was rare and declining.²¹⁸ Middle rank army officers interviewed for this study were mostly dismissive of the existence of any serious ethnic issue within the army.²¹⁹

214 Interview with ANA general, Kabul, 12 October 2005.

215 NTM-A, "Ministry of Defense: a year in review 2011," Kabul 2012.

216 NTM-A, "Ministry of Defense (MoD) and Afghan National Army (ANA) Weekly Assessment," Kabul, 12 February 2013.

217 Interview with ANA General, MoD Planning, April 2013; interview with ANA General, MoD, April 2013; interview with ANA officer, Wardak, April 2013; interview with ANA officer, Wardak, April 2013; Interview with ANA colonel, Baghlan, April 2013; Interview with ANA officer in Khost province, April 2013; interview with ANA officer in Mohammad Agha District (Logar), April 2013.

218 Interview with ANA officer, Moqur (Ghazni), April 2013; interview with ANA colonel, Daman, April 2013; interview with ANA soldier, Kandahar, April 2013; interview with ANA officer, Helmand, April 2013; Interview with ANA officer in Nangarhar province, April 2013; interview with ANA officer, Paktya, April 2013; Interview with ANA officer in Baghlan, April 2013; interview with ANA officer in Khost province, 2013; interview with ANA officer in Kama (Nangarhar province), April 2013.

219 "Wrong information the basis of ethnic analysis," *Hasht-e Sobh*, 21 April 2013.

On the other hand, there is quite a bit of anecdotal evidence to the contrary. One source within the MoD asserted that personal clashes over ethnic or religious issues were often reported to the MoD.²²⁰ A few interviewees even argued that the ANA works better when Pashtuns and other ethnicities are separated.²²¹ Some officers admitted that they have to force their troops to mix ethnically; otherwise they would tend to form ethnic clusters.²²² An example of a platoon splitting along ethnic lines was mentioned by Bishop in 2007.²²³ One ANA captain stated his belief that ethnic conflict within the ANA was being contained by ISAF, implying that it could break loose after ISAF's disbandment.²²⁴ Mentors witnessed the tendency of officers of different ethnic backgrounds to spar with each other.²²⁵

Different ministers and chiefs of staff have regularly been accused of favouring their own ethnic groups.²²⁶ Language issues have often compounded ethnic friction. Pashtuns have sometimes been reprimanded for using Pashto (particularly in written communication) by Dari-speaking superior officers; among the bottom ranks, soldiers who could not speak Dari were humiliated, among them some Uzbeks.²²⁷ The inability or refusal of Dari-speaking ANA soldiers to speak Pashto when meeting Pashtun communities also led to complaints.²²⁸

In reality, as one ANA general pointed out, over-representation at the top levels of the MoD/ANA usually concerned small sub-tribal or sub-ethnic communities: rather than Tajiks, therefore, Panjshiris, Parwanis and Nejrabis; rather than Pashtuns, Wardakis.²²⁹ Among Pashtuns recruitment has been very uneven, with the east (Nangarhar, Laghman, but not Kunar) contributing most recruits and the south, Ghazni and Farah, almost nothing. Modest numbers of Pashtun recruits have come from Baghlan, Kunduz, and Herat, while Loya Paktia contributed significant numbers in 2002-5, but few after that.²³⁰ Thus, the best represented groups have not been those recruited in the largest numbers. In general it has been the better organised groups that have been able to exploit the opportunities offered by the quota system; with most Pashtuns tribes being politically fragmented, they have reaped fewer benefits.²³¹

Throughout the ANA's recent history, there has been a tendency to ethnicise problems. The common practice of commanding officers demanding cash payments from soldiers before granting leave is sometimes attributed to ethnic prejudice.²³² When recruits

220 Interview with ANA captain, MoD, April 2013.

221 Interview with ANA officer in Shwak (Paktya), April 2013; interview with ANA colonel, Baghlan province, April 2013.

222 Anne Nivat *Les Brouillards de la Guerre*, (Paris :Fayard, 2011), p. 62.

223 Patrick Bishop, *3 Para*,(London : Harper, 2007),p. 211.

224 Interview with ANA Captain, MoD logistics, April 2013.

225 Interview with ISAF mentoring manager, Kandahar, April 2010; interview with ISAF mentor, northern Afghanistan, July 2012; "Interview with Maj. Thomas Fuller," *ibid*.

226 Meeting with NATO country MoD official, Europe, March 2013.

227 Interview with official of international organisation, Kabul, October 2009.

228 Antonio Giustozzi, "Auxiliary force or national army?" *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, March 2007.

229 Interview with retired ANA general, Kabul, October 2009; interview with ANA general, Kabul, October 2005; Interview with ANA colonel, Kabul, April 2013.

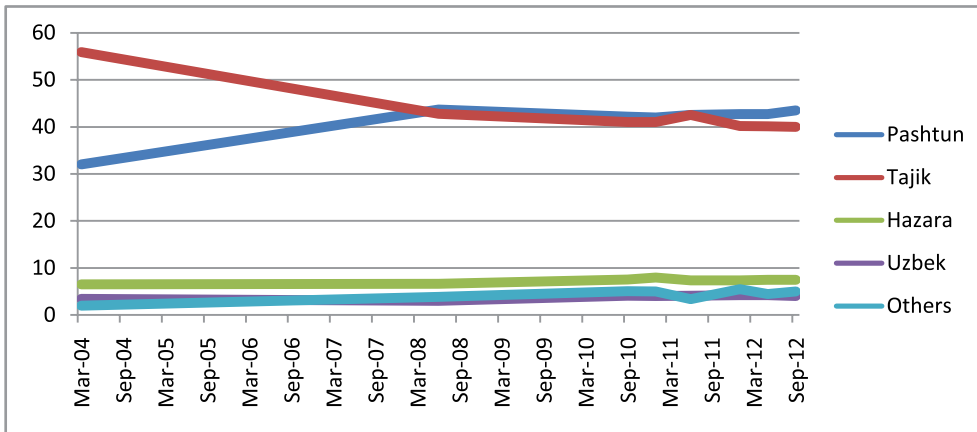
230 Interview with former army general, Kabul, April 2013.

231 Interview with retired ANA general, Kabul, October 2009.

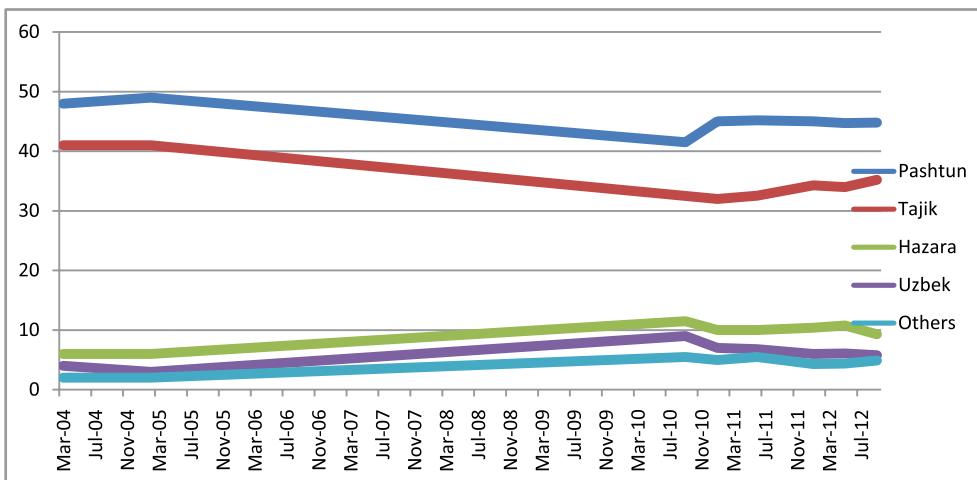
232 For complaints of Hazara and Tajik soldiers against their Pashtun commanders, see Claire Truscott, "Ethnic discrimination infests Afghan army, soldiers say," *Agence France Presse*, 2 January 2011; meeting

faced unexpectedly tough training courses, they would sometimes accuse the trainers of ethnic bias and of trying to weed out particular ethnicities.²³³ When Pashtun senior officers argue for restraint in the pursuit of Taliban into Pashtun communities, they are often accused of ethnic bias; southern Pashtuns have been accused of protecting specific Taliban targets. Ethnic tensions also flared over the 2011 Dand-e Ghor incident, during which an ANA operation caused significant collateral damage to Pashtun communities. Afterwards, the Hazara Corps Commander was replaced by the more cautious Pashtun, Gen. Wesa.²³⁴

Graph 4: ANA officers of all ranks by ethnicity (%)



Graph 5: all ANA personnel by ethnicity (%)



with foreign diplomats, July 2012.

233 Giustozzi, *ibid.*

234 “Afghan National Security Forces: Afghan Corruption And The Development Of An Effective Fighting Force,” Hearing Before The Subcommittee On Oversight And Investigations Of The Committee On Armed Services House Of Representatives One Hundred Twelfth Congress, Second Session, Hearing Held, August 2, 2012; interview with ISAF mentor, northern Afghanistan, July 2012.

6.3 Political factionalism

A common refrain among ANA officers, particularly Pashtuns, has been that it is political factionalism, not ethnicity that drives ethnic favouritism in the MoD.²³⁵ Those named are usually Tajik, Hazara and Uzbek politicians and strongmen.²³⁶ However, some Pashtuns also mention political favouritism among Pashtuns:

If this problem was not present in national army, why are people who were with me at graduation employed in the Ministry of Defence, while the people like me who do not have relationship with any Jamiat and Mahaz[a largely Pashtun organisation, to which Minister Wardak used to belong] are sent to the provinces and districts? We saw once that our commander was receiving calls from the parliament and other places and he was told whom to employ...²³⁷

Some interviewees have alleged that officers with a jihadi background have monitored the activities of colleagues with a professional background.²³⁸ Rivalry among factions has apparently disrupted decision-making at MoD's highest level. The tension peaked when Rahim Wardak was minister and Bismillah Mohammadi (Khan) was chief of staff; the two frequently argued over policies and personnel and rarely agreed.²³⁹ In 2010, the International Crisis Group (ICG) estimated that 50 percent of the MoD's 118 top positions were held by officers loyal to Mohammadi.²⁴⁰ Some MoD insiders believe that the rivalry between Wardak and Mohammadi ran much deeper than the old Khalq-Parchami rivalry in the 1970-80s, because there was no ideological element to hold the two together.²⁴¹

Mohammadi was transferred to the MoI in 2010 but came back to the MoD in 2012 as the Minister of Defence. Throughout this time, Karimi remained in his job of Chief of Staff. Although Karimi has reportedly had a difficult relationship in the past with Jamiatis in the MoD, he and Bismillah seemed to work together reasonably well from 2012 onwards—at least when compared to the shouting matches that took place between Mohammadi and Wardak.²⁴²

Political factionalism within the ANA has meant that the ANA has been in no position to confront militias and illegal armed groups when the need has arisen. This was the case in Kunduz in April 2012, when the ANA pulled back from a confrontation with a militia linked to Jamiat.²⁴³

235 Interview with ANA general, MoD planning, April 2013; interview with ANA captain, MoD, April 2013.

236 Interview with ANA captain, MoD, April 2013.

237 Interview with ANA officer in Khost province, April 2013.

238 Interview with retired ANA general, Kabul, April 2012.

239 Interview with ISAF mentoring manager, Kandahar, April 2010.

240 Crisis Group, *ibid.*

241 Crisis Group, *ibid.*

242 Interview with senior NTM-A officer, September 2013.

243 Dexter Filkins, *ibid.*

6.4 The solidity of the chain of command

As no system of command and control is perfect, the ANA should not be judged according to abstract standards, but in line with what could be expected in terms of appropriate comparisons in time and space. As an ISAF officer involved in training the ANA commented:

*We bang on at the ANA about unity of command etc., but our own C2 [Command and Control] is hideously complicated and competitive.*²⁴⁴

The real issue therefore is whether the ANA will be able to perform effectively in an increasingly challenging environment, and behave with discipline and with unified command and control, while at the same remaining loyal to political authorities.

The system established after 2001 is more centralised than at any time in the past. Corps commander no longer have the right to replace a simple NCO after 2001; in the past they even had the power to replace colonels. The battalion HQ does not have the built-in capacity to plan and carry out independent operations, but only to take orders from above.²⁴⁵ In the absence of a commanding officer, deputies typically avoid taking initiatives or making decisions.²⁴⁶

Centralization has had some positive effects, when implemented properly. The Azra operation of summer 2013, carried out under MoD leadership with little ISAF support, and featuring the first combat deployment of the AAF, was generally hailed a coordination success by various security agencies.²⁴⁷ This represented progress on 2011, when the command structure of the ANA was barely functional above battalion level. Foreign advisers, rather than Afghan officers, remained responsible for most planning, although the exact role of advisers varied depending on the assertiveness of the corps commander.²⁴⁸ However, progress made after 2011 has come late, leaving little time to institutionalise professionalism within the ANA before the crucial 2015 test.

6.4.1 Loyalty

In early 2011, President Karzai for the first time openly discussed his worries about political interference in the MoD, referring not to his own attempts to interfere in appointments, but to the existence of a strong network within the MoD, linked to a political party of questionable loyalty to the president (Jamiat-i Islami).²⁴⁹ In June 2012, he reiterated his demand that, as specified in article 153 of the Afghan constitution, ANA officers should not have any party or factional affiliation.²⁵⁰ The signs of political affiliation were sometimes quite obvious, as when pictures of late commander Ahmad Shah Massud (one of the leaders of Jamiat) were displayed in the barracks and even on vehicles.²⁵¹

²⁴⁴ Interview with adviser to Regional Combat Battle School (RCBS), Shorabak, April 2013.

²⁴⁵ Sean M. Maloney, *Enduring the freedom*, (Washington : Potomac Books, 2005), p. 144.

²⁴⁶ Toby WoodBridge, *Sangin - A Glance Through Afghan Eyes*, Amazon Digital Services, 2012, location 738ff.; Gavin Keating, "Advising the Afghan National Army at the Corps Level," *Australian Army Journal*, 8: 3, 2011.

²⁴⁷ Meeting with Lt. Gen. Lorimer, Dep. Com. ISAF, September 2013.

²⁴⁸ Maloney, *ibid.*, p. 144.

²⁴⁹ Abbas Daiyar, "Karzai's Concerns and Afghan Army," Wordpress, 16 January 2011 (<http://kabulperspective.wordpress.com/2011/01/16/karzais-concerns-and-afghan-army/>).

²⁵⁰ "Afghan president calls for major army reforms," National Afghanistan TV, 24 June 2012.

²⁵¹ Ben Anderson, *No worse enemy*, (Oxford: Oneworld, 2011) p. 27; Leo Docherty, *Desert of death*,

A landmark speech by President Karzai in 2013 signalled the extent to which he was concerned about the unity and loyalty of the ANA.²⁵² Western officials took note because President Karzai, upset about an airstrike in Kunar which had killed 14 civilians, announced that he would ban the Afghan security forces from requesting ISAF close air support. Karzai also aimed criticism at Pakistani intelligence services, whom he accused of deeply penetrating Afghan security forces, the ANA in particular.²⁵³ The wave of green-on-blue attacks of 2012 had already shaken Western faith in the ANA.²⁵⁴ One interviewee pointed out that the proliferation of militias in northern Afghanistan was itself an admission of distrust in the capacity of the ANA.²⁵⁵ The NTM-A and ISAF officially dismissed such concerns as unfounded, but a US Marine Corps advisor predicted that the core state was likely to “rot” through corruption, and that the ANSF would erode around it, to be manifest initially by early retirements for “ill health”, after which the Corps would fracture and junior ranks break, taking their weapons and equipment with them.²⁵⁶



Afghan National Army Soldiers march during their graduation ceremony.

(London : Faber, 2007), p. 87.

252 “Maintaining unity of government security forces to safeguard achievements,” *Cheragh*, 20 February 2013.

253 “Afghan president makes emotional speech to senior military officials,” National Afghanistan TV, Kabul, 16 February 2013 in Dari and Pashto 1025 GMT.

254 Interview with member of Badakhshan’s Provincial council, September 2012.

255 Interview with member of High Peace Council of Baghlan, October 2012.

256 Interview with ISAF Advisor, Camp Shorabak, April 2013.

6.4.2 Disruptions to the chain of command

The role foreign mentors have played in influencing the distribution of supplies has also disrupted the chain of command, “as many commanders became more loyal to US than to their superiors”.²⁵⁷ There have been cases of ISAF or Enduring Freedom units bypassing the MoD chain of command and getting ANA units to deploy on operations which had not been authorised through the Afghan chain of command.²⁵⁸ Afghan politicians and government officials have also interfered in the process; when an Afghan army corps commander in Kandahar tried to move some units from Zabul to Kandahar and Helmand, the Kandahar governor lobbied against him.²⁵⁹

Centralization maximises the negative impact of nepotism. When senior officers want to replace incompetent subordinates, suggestions for replacements are sent to the MoD for decision, often without follow-up. Political appointments have also disrupted the chain of command; in the words of one general, “political appointments make it difficult to make subordinates take us seriously”.²⁶⁰ At a time when the ability of the ANA to face battlefield crises was still very much in doubt in 2013, the Warduj incident, in which an ANA battalion was ambushed and almost disintegrated, saw Minister Mohammadi trying to handle the crisis directly from his mobile phone, bypassing the entire chain of command. The obvious question is what will happen when the ANA confronts a large scale insurgent offensive and has to cope with several crises at the same time.²⁶¹

6.4.3 Indiscipline

The problem of indiscipline and insubordination was greatest in the early years of the ANA, when soldiers would often refuse to deploy to remote or risky areas. According to some of the interviewees, the problem abated in 2012-13 as the Taliban had been pushed back, particularly in the south, and deployment there was no longer seen as very dangerous.²⁶² In some areas however, the problem persisted.²⁶³ As one eyewitness noted during a 2012 battle in Nuristan:

*The Afghan commander did not appear to have the support and loyalty of his own brigade. At times, his second in command openly criticized him, shouting at him for not sending enough fighters up to a plateau that was the scene of some of the heaviest fighting.*²⁶⁴

257 Interview with retired ANA general, Kabul, October 2009.

258 Michael G. Brooks et al. (eds.), *Eyewitness to War, Volume III :US Army Advisors in Afghanistan*, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas : US Army Combined Arms Center, 2012.

259 Sean M. Maloney, *Fighting for Afghanistan* (Annapolis : Naval Institute Press, 2011), pp. 57-8.

260 Interview with retired ANA general, Kabul, October 2009; also interview with ANA officer in Wardak province, April 2013.

261 ISAF source, October 2013.

262 Interview with ANA soldier in Wardak, April 2013.

263 Interview with ANA officer in Kandahar City, April 2013.

264 Muhammad Lila, “Taliban Ambush Witnessed,” *AbcNews.com*, 5 July 2012.

Insubordination did occur in earlier years, and battalions who refused to deploy were reported by ISAF and other authorities.²⁶⁵ One ANA officer indicated that insubordination was common in the south until 2010, when pressure from the Taliban was greatest.²⁶⁶ MoD orders to take over and man every outpost and base evacuated by ISAF have been particularly controversial among field officers, who often judge these positions untenable. Some officers complained; others failed to deploy as ordered.²⁶⁷ Overall as of May 2013, of 675 bases abandoned by ISAF, two thirds had been handed over to the ANA and one third had been closed.²⁶⁸

Drug addiction among recruits has also complicated enforcing discipline within ANA.²⁶⁹ Measures have been taken to weed out some, chiefly heroin addicts.²⁷⁰ A 2013 survey suggested that heroin usage had been reduced but not completely eliminated, with 3.4 percent of those tested within ANA found positive for the drug. The same test found that 16.3 percent of the tested soldiers used hashish or marijuana, and 5.3 percent drank alcohol (which is strictly banned in Afghanistan).²⁷¹ Even senior officers reportedly use drugs.²⁷² Particularly in remote outposts, drug usage remains common.²⁷³

Delayed pay has also led to indiscipline;²⁷⁴ one ISAF source acknowledged that as late as 2013, soldiers had complained about late salary payments, but ANA sources stated that was not the only issue.²⁷⁵ In one case, “100 ANA soldiers” in Nuristan reportedly sold their weapons because they had not received their salaries.²⁷⁶ This is not the only instance in which soldiers have sold weapons; the sale of ammunition on the black market has been quite common. For this reason, ANA’s original Kalashnikovs were replaced with M-16s as the ammunition of the latter was not in high demand in the black market.²⁷⁷

265 Doug Beattie, *An Ordinary Soldier* (London : Simon & Schuster, 2008), p. 126; ISAF source, contacted April 2011.

266 Interview with ANA Colonel, Kandahar, April 2013.

267 For a case in Paktika see “Afghan army fails to take over abandoned US outpost,” *Weesa*, 24 May 2013.

268 “Coalition troops are ready to ‘rough it’ while closing Afghan bases,” *Washington Times*, 26 May 2013.

269 Interview with ANA general, MoD planning, April 2013; interview with ANA Captain, MoD, April 2013; interview with ANA officer, Wardak province, April 2013; interview with ANA colonel, Baghlan province, April 2013.

270 Interview with ANA Colonel, Kandahar, April 2013; interview with ANA Corporal, Qalat, April 2013; interview with ANA officer, Kandahar, April 2013; interview with ANA soldier in Zari district, April 2013.

271 “KAP and seroprevalence of HIV HBV, HCV, Syphilis, and Herpes Simplex type II among Afghan National Army Recruits,” forthcoming 2014.

272 Interview with ANA colonel, Baghlan province, April 2013.

273 Interview with ANA officer in Baghlan province, April 2013; Interview with ANA officer in Baraki Barak (Logar), April 2013.

274 Tupper, *ibid.*

275 Interview with senior IJC officer, Kabul airport, September 2013.

276 Interview with ANA officer in Mohammad Agha (Logar), April 2013.

277 Fergusson, *ibid.*, p. 80; Lee, *ibid.*, p. 150.

7. Conclusion

It is clear that the ANA has made important strides from the days of its launch in 2002. It is also clear that the effort to establish the ANA has been very inefficient—despite 11 years of considerable financial expenditure, as of 2013 it was still far from certain that the ANA would be ready to fight its enemies on its own in 2015. Arguably, there was little serious effort to fully develop the ANA before the establishment of NTM-A in 2009, and even NTM-A has had its own challenges coming to “maturity”: ensuring billets were filled and with appropriate personnel, as well as maintaining continuity between locations, contributing nations and rotations over time. The main flaw of the ANA development programme was the presumption that the new army would be able to count on the presence of American combat forces in the country for the long-term, and that it would never have to face a strong opposition. Thus the development of tactical units was privileged over the setting up of a command structure, of logistics, administration, as well as of fire support. Despite the fact that by 2006 a serious insurgency had emerged, it took US President Obama’s July 2011 decision to gradually disengage from Afghanistan to kick-start a process that within a year would lead to major training and mentoring efforts in the logistics and administrative fields. Since these are among the fields most difficult to develop, such a late start turned out to be the largest liability the ANA confronts in 2015.

A number of other factors have undermined the medium- and long-term sustainability of the ANA. The ANA continues to be unattractive option for Afghans educated even at high school level, a fact that compounds the difficulties the ANA faces in improving its logistics and administration. The desertion rate continues to be very high for a volunteer army, even when conditions of service are not bad, except in the most remote outposts, at least for recruits from the poorest villages of the country. This lack of enthusiasm for serving in the ANA might be linked to the weak legitimacy of the Afghan state, but this is not a topic that can be fully developed here.

Another indicator of this weak legitimacy is the persistent tendency of politicians, officials and other influential figures to interfere in ANA appointments, despite the negative impact this has on ANA’s performance in the middle of a major war. Afghanistan’s political elite appears more concerned with the expansion of its patronage network than with the state’s ability to win the war. Although old ethnic and political divisions persist within the ANA, the main factor disrupting the consolidation of ANA’s chain of command and professionalization is interference from the political elite.

Yet another factor subverting ANA’s sustainability is the fact that the model on which it has been based does not properly fit its needs at this stage of the army’s development. Although efforts have been made to bring the ANA model closer to what Afghanistan can afford in terms of human resources, the accumulated delay could leave the ANA decidedly weak in 2015.

The limited (non-financial) sustainability of the ANA derives therefore from two sets of problems, one linked to the flawed approach adopted by donors, and the other linked to flaws in the post-2001 political set-up in Afghanistan. The weak post-2001 political settlement in Kabul undermined the ability of political elite to converge in supporting an organisation ultimately responsible for defending the country from its enemies. The failure of the ANA to recruit sufficient numbers of educated people might also be linked to the de facto exclusion of the middle classes from the political settlement. Various political actors remain rivals for control of the state apparatus and particularly of the security institutions, and thus do not trust their own allies in the coalition government to

use their influence for the common good. In this sense, the flaws of the donors' approach are less damaging for the future of the ANA and of Afghanistan than the consequence of the as yet unachieved consolidation of the political settlement in Kabul. Even if the ANA were to receive all the equipment it needs, the political elite might fail to make good use of those resources in the current situation.

On the basis of this report, two possible post-2014 scenarios for the ANA emerge. In the first scenario, the armed opposition might fail to launch a coordinated challenge to the Afghan security forces, due to internal divisions, lack of coordination and logistical flaws. In such a scenario, the ANA might well be able to hold the line and successfully defend "key terrain", which includes cities, densely populated rural areas and highways, particularly if the MoD adopts a realistic deployment plan, not trying to hold exposed ground in the mountains or too close to the border.

The second scenario features an armed opposition sufficiently cohesive to mount a coordinated offensive throughout Afghanistan. The ANA does not appear to have the capacity to repel such an offensive and might have to surrender key terrain, with the risk that some highways could be cut, isolating important parts of Afghanistan. That could easily create a political crisis in Kabul, as well as a morale crisis within the army, with potential snowballing effects. While risk and uncertainty can never be eliminated in war, arguably the massive investment in the ANA/AAF post-2001 should have led to Afghan security forces less dependent on the (hoped for) internal difficulties of their enemies for their own success and survival.

7.1 Policy recommendations

Some of the challenges the ANA is going to face in the near future are the result of long-term neglect and cannot be addressed quickly. For example, although the ANA and the Afghan political leadership have some reason to complain about the under-equipping of the ANA, by 2013 it was clear that there was little that could be done about that in the short term. Assuming that any country was willing to provide additional equipment, as Afghanistan cannot afford to buy any, it would still take a long time before such equipment would enter service because of the training required. Instead, the ANA would do better to make the best use of what it has and manage it as efficiently as it can in 2015, in order to gain sufficient credibility to persuade external donors to keep investing in it. All that can be done is identify measures that can limit vulnerability, for example recycling into the system as many Soviet-time specialists as possible, which in part has already been done.

Other challenges, however, are the result of political interference and patronage network building, which could potentially be addressed quickly if there was the political will to do so. As of 2013, the Afghan political elite seemed still more concerned with its own petty struggles in Kabul, than with the ability of the ANA to meet threats on the battlefield. The ANA needs competent officers in key positions, and will not in the future be able to rely on Minister Bismillah Mohammadi's micro-management efforts.

The ANA could also limit its vulnerabilities by adopting a realistic deployment plan which avoids exposing the greatest weaknesses of the ANA, such as logistics. The ANA would be taking a great risk if it holds on to the deployment adopted under the joint ISAF/ANA force in 2009-13.

At the same time, the ANA should not neglect the importance of medium and long-term planning. To speed up the development of components such as logistics and administration, the ANA should devise incentives to attract more high school graduates. The high number of applications to the Military Academy suggests that high school graduates are not averse to serving in the ANA in principle, but need to see what advantages would derive from it. It should also be clear that a serious political crisis at the top (for example following the 2014 presidential elections) would weaken state legitimacy further and seriously damage morale in the ANA.

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