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## A long and winding road: Australia's role in building an Afghan National Army

**Raspal Khosa**

The Australian Government has stepped-up its support for President Barack Obama's strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan by increasing its Operation Slipper military commitment.<sup>1</sup> Right now the main focus of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) mission in Afghanistan is to help build a capable Afghan National Army (ANA). This effort is critical to the success of the coalition's new strategic approach to stabilise the volatile region and deny violent extremists a sanctuary along its borderlands. The government's much anticipated troop increase, announced by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd on 29 April 2009, will see a near 50% expansion of the ADF presence in Afghanistan by 2010, with troop numbers rising from 1,090 to 1,550 personnel. The operational goal of sending extra forces to Afghanistan is to raise the effectiveness of an ANA infantry brigade so it can assume primary responsibility for security in Oruzgan Province, thereby creating the conditions for the withdrawal of the ADF over the medium term. This paper examines challenges for the ADF in 'operationalising' the new strategy by conducting security sector reform (SSR)<sup>2</sup> whilst combating the Taliban insurgency in southern Afghanistan.



An Australian Operational Mentor and Liaison Team commander leads Afghan National Army soldiers during a patrol in the Baluchi Valley, southern Afghanistan, 12 January 2009. © Defence Department

## A refocused goal

The Afghanistan–Pakistan strategy clarifies why the United States is intervening in a region President Obama describes as the ‘most dangerous place in the world’. He has invested considerable political capital in Afghanistan and now takes ownership of a conflict inherited from his predecessor. However, President Obama must demonstrate that his new strategy has turned the militant tide before the 2010 mid-term elections in the United States. Otherwise he risks losing backing for the war among many Democrats in Congress who are apprehensive at a sharp

decline in support reflected in US domestic polling as the conflict enters its eighth year.

A stalemate in Afghanistan and a militant advance in Pakistan led the Bush Administration and the US military to undertake three separate reviews into the Afghanistan–Pakistan insurgency in 2008. Upon assuming office, President Obama commissioned a fourth overarching strategic review of US policy in the region chaired by respected South Asia specialist, Bruce Riedel.

Riedel's Interagency Policy Group report sets out a strategy that has as its core goal ‘to disrupt, dismantle and defeat al-Qaeda and



its safe havens in Pakistan, and to prevent their return to Afghanistan and Pakistan'.<sup>3</sup> To achieve this, the strategy asks for increased military and civilian resources for Afghanistan, revitalised regional diplomacy, and a more extensive program of development assistance for Pakistan. Inherent in the new approach is the recognition that the conjoined states constitute one strategic entity with instability in either country undermining security in the other.

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Along with the revised strategy come a newly appointed American theatre commander, General Stanley McChrystal, and an additional 21,000 US military personnel for Afghanistan as US forces are drawn down in Iraq. A 60-day review of the campaign undertaken by General McChrystal at the behest of US Defense Secretary, Robert Gates, is likely to recommend more reinforcements later in the year. Major European states pledged another 5,000 soldiers in the lead-up to the 20 August 2009 Presidential and Provincial Council elections in Afghanistan. By the end of the year around 100,000 coalition personnel will be in the country to protect the population from insurgents and train the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF)<sup>4</sup>—operational activities that together constitute the military dimension of the new strategy.

Somewhat surprisingly, the daunting task of contested nation-building in Afghanistan is not an avowed US strategic goal, but one

of five supporting objectives that includes establishing effective democratic government control in Pakistan. This deliberate policy ambiguity is intended to sell the strategy to a domestic audience in America and war-weary coalition allies in Afghanistan, who are reluctant to contribute further resources to what many increasingly perceive is a flawed enterprise in the midst of a full-blown insurgency.

Afghanistan is the focal point of divisions within the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) which commands the United Nations (UN)-mandated International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). There is still fundamental disagreement among NATO states on whether the ISAF mission in Afghanistan is counter-insurgency (COIN) or stabilisation and reconstruction.<sup>5</sup>

The threat of terrorism from South Asia is seen by the United States as the one focusing issue that cuts across NATO's multi-tiered edifice. Mr Obama was at pains to point out that Europe faces a greater threat from al-Qaeda than does the United States ahead of the 3–4 April 2009 NATO Summit at Strasbourg, France, and Kehl, Germany; where alliance members renewed their commitment to build a secure, stable and democratic Afghanistan.<sup>6</sup>

US diplomatic efforts are directed toward building a consensus behind the counter-safe haven strategy. Australia, among other countries, is mentioned in Riedel's report as a target of Islamist terrorists. The document states that the space from which these groups operate is expanding as a direct result of cross-border insurgent activity in Afghanistan, where extremist groups seek to establish their old sanctuaries.<sup>7</sup> According to President Obama, the United States and its coalition partners must reverse the Taliban's gains and promote a more capable and accountable Afghan government in order to succeed against a common foe.<sup>8</sup>



## Australia's objectives in Afghanistan

Denying a sanctuary to transnational Islamist terrorists that threaten Australian citizens is regarded by Prime Minister Rudd as one of two fundamental issues at stake for Australia in Afghanistan. The other is the Alliance commitment to the United States under the ANZUS treaty, which was formally invoked following the 11 September 2001, al-Qaeda terrorist attacks in New York and Washington.<sup>9</sup>

The centrality of the Alliance with the United States is affirmed by the 2009 Defence White Paper, *Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific Century: Force 2030*, which states that it is in Australia's clear strategic interest to deploy combat forces to Afghanistan.<sup>10</sup> A third major strategic interest behind Australia's involvement in Afghanistan, also laid out in the White Paper, is a commitment to upholding global security and a rules-based international order—ISAF is a 'coalition of the willing' operating under Chapter 7 of the UN Charter.

The Rudd government has recast its mission in Afghanistan in line with the new US strategic goal. Three elements underpin the government's support for the Afghanistan war. First, is strategic denial of the country as a training ground and operating base for al-Qaeda and other terrorist organisations. Second, is stabilisation of the Afghan state through combined civil and military efforts to consolidate the primary interest of strategic denial. Third, is providing military, police and civil government training in concert with coalition partners to hand over to Afghan authorities within a reasonable timeframe the responsibility for Oruzgan Province—the main focus of Australia's national efforts in Afghanistan. Successful implementation of the third element of the mission creates the basis of an 'exit strategy' for Australian forces.<sup>11</sup>

## Comprehensive counter-insurgency

As of mid-2009, the coalition continues to face severe challenges in Afghanistan. A range of insurgent groups interact and cooperate to serve mutual tactical interests and contribute to their overall strategic goal in Afghanistan of deposing the constitutional government and expelling foreign forces. The insurgency has now extended its geographic reach and access to the population across much of Afghanistan south of a line running from the upper part of its eastern border with Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas to Herat in the west.

By conducting a guerrilla war in Afghanistan's rural Pushtun heartland and launching complex terrorist attacks in urban centres, together with an effective propaganda campaign, insurgents are degrading civilian confidence in the Afghan Government and its coalition backers. The 2009 and 2010 national elections<sup>12</sup> present a period of increased risk throughout Afghanistan as insurgents attempt to frustrate the electoral process, whether through direct and indirect attacks, or simply voter intimidation.

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The coalition's military objective is to defeat the insurgency threatening the stability of Afghanistan. A Tactical Directive issued by ISAF commander, General McChrystal, states that gaining and maintaining the support of the Afghan population—the centre of gravity in this conflict—must be the overriding operational imperative in Afghanistan.<sup>13</sup>

The new COIN approach is more population-centric than earlier operational concepts that engaged the enemy directly,

but alienated civilians who were frequently caught in the crossfire with tragic results. Security operations are now intended to separate the population from the insurgents and provide the space and time in which stabilisation and reconstruction activities can take hold.

Described as Comprehensive COIN, the strategy calls for more boots on the ground to conduct integrated shape-clear-hold-build operations in order to reduce an over reliance on air power that resulted from an earlier ‘light footprint’ methodology.

### Regaining the south

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Expeditionary Brigade and the US Army’s 5<sup>th</sup> Stryker Brigade that were earmarked for service in Iraq, will attempt to arrest the Taliban momentum in southern Afghanistan where insurgent activity is most pronounced (see Figure 1 below). A Combat Aviation Brigade from the US Army’s 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division will provide a substantial rotary lift capability for these formations and ISAF units in Regional Command (RC) South<sup>14</sup>, where a shortage

of helicopters has in the past limited the effectiveness of coalition forces.

These deployments do not amount to a ‘surge’ in the same sense as the Iraq conflict in 2007, but instead fill a capability gap in areas of RC-South where military resources were never sufficiently concentrated to implement an effective COIN strategy.

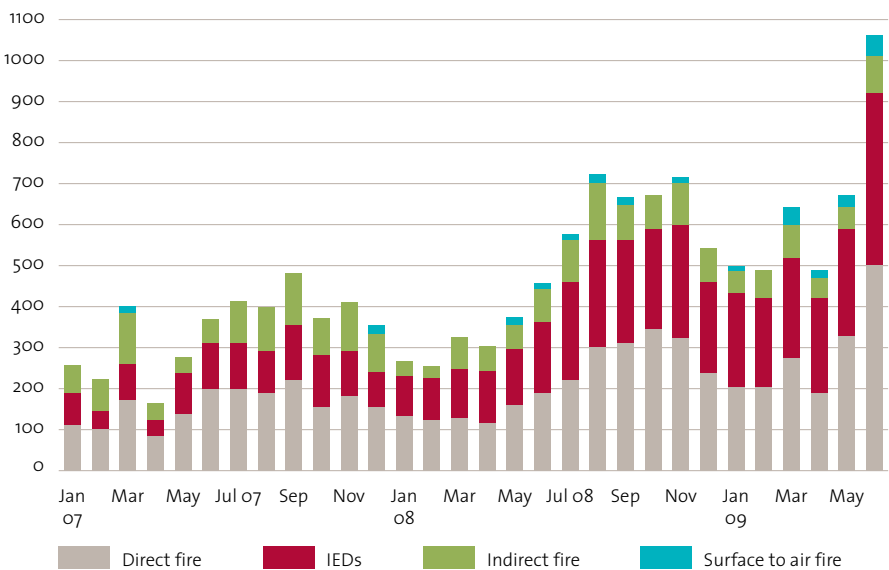
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In early July 2009, 4,000 US Marines and 650 ANA soldiers launched Operation Khanjar (Strike of the Sword) to regain the initiative in Helmand Province by deploying rapidly into the Taliban-dominated districts of Nawah-ye-Barakzai, Garmsir and Rig along a

**Figure 1: Number of daily insurgent attacks in RC-South, January 2007 – June 2009**



Source: NATO/ISAF

lengthy stretch of the Helmand River valley south of the provincial capital, Lashkar Gah.

A parallel operation, Panchai Palang (Panther's Claw), saw British Army units and the ANA move into the contested Nad Ali District that is also in the 'green zone'—the irrigated strip of agricultural land alongside the Helmand River where much of Afghanistan's bumper opium crop is harvested.<sup>15</sup>

The aim of these operations, which cost the lives of dozens of coalition soldiers, was to extend territory controlled by ISAF through the 'ink spot' COIN strategy<sup>16</sup> prior to the

Afghan elections, and to interdict the flow of Taliban fighters and weapons from safe havens across the desert in Baluchistan.

An important feature of the offensive is active coordination with the Pakistani military to prevent insurgents from exfiltrating over the porous 2,430 km Durand Line that separates Afghanistan and Pakistan, to escape coalition pressure.<sup>17</sup> This is despite allegations that the Pakistani security establishment provides ongoing covert assistance to these same Taliban forces it raised in the 1990s in order to wield influence in Afghanistan and to balance regional rival, India.

**Map of Regional Command South showing district boundaries in Oruzgan and Helmand**



Previously operations conducted by the United Kingdom-led Task Force Helmand had also managed to clear insurgents from parts of the green zone. However, these efforts amounted to little more than ‘mowing the lawn’ as enemy fighters reappeared soon after captured vital ground was abandoned due to a shortage of ISAF and ANSF personnel.

The task for coalition forces this time is not so much to fight the Taliban, but to create a secure zone in hostile territory. Operating from hastily prepared fire bases, the Marines are determined to hold their objectives and protect the population by preventing the return of the Taliban to key districts of central Helmand.

The next stage of the COIN process in Helmand will be to extend the influence of the Afghan Government through improved governance and economic activity undertaken by civilian agencies. The problem for the coalition, however, is there are too few capable ANSF units in the field to consolidate territorial gains and demonstrate a tangible central government presence in the province. This remains a critical vulnerability in the overall Afghanistan–Pakistan strategy.

## Building an Afghan National Army

Competent indigenous security forces are critical to attaining coalition objectives in Afghanistan and central to the long-term stability of the national government. They are necessary for defeating insurgents, upholding the rule of law and providing security to the people. Furthermore, local forces aid the legitimacy of the COIN effort among a population long wary of outsiders.

The new strategy demands a well resourced effort to train Afghan soldiers and police, where the best measure of success is to make one’s own forces redundant. Consequently the United States is shifting the emphasis of its military mission to training and increasing

the size of the ANSF. As a down payment on the policy, Washington is dispatching a 4,000-strong brigade of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division to Afghanistan this year to be broken-up into small Embedded Training Teams (ETTs) that make up the bulk of the coalition’s training elements.

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A significant component of the strategy is a qualitative and quantitative expansion of the ANA to take the lead in COIN operations. Efforts to build the ANA have been going on for seven years but have suffered from a lack of international funding and commitment. Initially a modest force of 70,000 was to be raised following the 2001 Bonn Agreement that established the nature of Afghanistan’s post-Taliban political dispensation.

The United States assumed responsibility for building the ANA from the ground-up under the ‘lead nation’ policy to reform security institutions adopted by the coalition. Progress was hampered, however, by an economy of force approach taken by the Bush Administration, later exacerbated by its military resources being diverted to the deepening conflict in Iraq.

The coalition only came to see the need for a large and effective ANA after the insurgency had taken hold in Afghanistan. In February 2008, the Joint Coordination and Mentoring Board (JCMB), which oversees the implementation of the Afghan National Development Strategy covering security, governance and development needs, grew the ANA from 70,000 to 80,000 personnel.

In September that year, the JCMB increased the authorised end-strength of the ANA to 134,000 (including a 12,000 trainee, transient, holding and student component) that was to be reached by 2014.

The resulting ANA force structure called for 20 brigades, a new division headquarters in Kabul, an Afghan National Army Air Corps, artillery, engineer, and quick reaction force assets, and increased capacity in supporting institutions.<sup>18</sup> What is unclear is how the Afghan Government will pay the salaries and sustainment costs of the additional troops—Afghanistan is almost completely reliant on budgetary assistance from the international community.

The ANA is subordinate to the Afghan Ministry of Defence and is divided into five regional corps that align with ISAF's regional command structure, with corps headquarters located in Afghanistan's major cities. Each corps is divided into provincially-based brigades that are generally comprised of three infantry

*kandaks* (battalion equivalents), one combat support (CS) *kandak*, and one combat service support (CSS) *kandak*. Some brigades also have a garrison *kandak* to provide base support functions. ANA commando *kandaks* are under the tactical control of the regional corps commands.

The ANA's objective is to conduct joint operations with coalition forces, and to be increasingly able to undertake independent operations to safeguard Afghanistan's territorial integrity, defeat insurgency and terrorism, and contribute to a secure and stable environment.<sup>19</sup>

As of July 2009, the ANA stood at 91,900 personnel<sup>20</sup> with a 9% absentee rate in combat units. The United States now wants the 134,000 total manpower goal realised by December 2011. The accelerated plan raises questions as to the quality of forces generated and adds to the challenge of providing equipment and infrastructure to the ANA. Moreover, the process of fielding

### Operational Mentor and Liaison Team (OMLT) program

The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) OMLT program has been operating since 2006 and plays a key role in building the Afghan National Army (ANA). Its aim is the targeted development of the ANA so it can take responsibility for the security of Afghanistan. OMLTs fall under ISAF's operational command but work according to guidelines set by the US-led Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan.

An OMLT is made up of officers and non-commissioned personnel who work together as a small embedded team to mentor and train an ANA unit. The OMLT provides ANA unit leadership with

advisory support on all functional activity, and identifies strengths, shortfalls and opportunities to enhance the ability of the ANA to operate effectively. The OMLT also facilitates access for ANA units to coalition resources and combat enablers such as casualty evacuation, quick reaction forces, fire support and close air support.

As of May 2009, ISAF has 55 OMLTs fielded. This is roughly half of 103 OMLTs that will be required in addition to US Embedded Training Teams for the ANA to reach its manpower ceiling of 134,000 by December 2011.<sup>21</sup> Some OMLTs are restricted by national caveats on how they can be employed.



new ANA formations requires many more training personnel than America's coalition partners are prepared to muster over the reduced timeframe. Further compounding the problem, US officials have indicated the ANA may undergo a still greater enlargement to 240,000 personnel.

The Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan (CSTC-A) is the element of the United States' Operation Enduring Freedom that is responsible for planning, programming and implementing ANSF development efforts. CSTC-A receives funding through the Afghan Security Forces Fund to equip, train and sustain the ANSF.<sup>22</sup> The NATO Afghan National Army Trust Fund also provides funding for the development and sustainment costs of the Afghan military, to which the Australian Government will contribute \$55 million annually.

After they are recruited through a national recruiting centre program, most ANA soldiers undertake a 10-week Basic Warrior Training Course as a battalion-sized cohort at the Kabul Military Training Centre that comes under the Afghan National Army Training Command. There recruits are supervised by coalition trainers and taught basic military skills to a uniform standard throughout the entire force. Upon completion of initial entry training, ANA trainees progress to branch-specific Advanced Combat Training before they are posted with their kandak to the regional corps. Each ANA combat unit is accompanied by either a US ETT or an ISAF Operational Mentor and Liaison Team (OMLT).

## ADF operations in southern Afghanistan

Operation Slipper is Australia's military contribution to coalition efforts against international terrorism and, in particular, the ISAF mission to stabilise Afghanistan and prevent it from becoming a safe haven

for international terrorists. The total cost of ADF operations in Afghanistan now stands at \$3.6 billion. The figure for 2009–10 is \$1.4 billion.<sup>23</sup>

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The ADF works to establish security in Afghanistan by degrading insurgent capacity through kinetic military operations and developing local security forces as the means to hold ground. To ensure long-term stability the ADF assists in building Afghan government legitimacy through a reconstruction and development line of operation.

An Australian National Headquarters—Middle East Area of Operations (MEAO) exercises command and control (C2) over Australian forces in Afghanistan.<sup>24</sup> ADF operations in Afghanistan are supported and sustained by logistics assets at several locations in the Persian Gulf.<sup>25</sup> Four Air Force C-130 Hercules aircraft are dedicated to providing intra-theatre lift in the MEAO.

The ADF is deployed to two of ISAF's five regional commands—RC-South and RC-Capital in Kabul. The majority of ADF personnel are in southern Afghanistan where they are supporting a Netherlands task force in Oruzgan Province located at Forward Operating Base (FOB) Ripley outside the provincial capital, Tarin Kowt. The partnership between Australia and the Netherlands, which is the lead-nation in the province, will draw to a close in August 2010 when the Dutch Government ends its military



An ADF Operational Mentor and Liaison Team member instructs Afghan National Army soldiers in the use of M-16 rifles at Forward Operating Base Locke, Chora Valley, southern Afghanistan, 13 December 2008. © Defence Department

commitment to the ISAF operation. There is some hope the Netherlands will continue to maintain the civilian component of its Provincial Reconstruction Team in Oruzgan.

The impending Dutch withdrawal marks a critical juncture for the Australian Government, which has indicated it is not in a position to take over the lead role in Oruzgan. Instead, the government is working with other coalition partners to ensure that a replacement military force will assume provincial lead-nation status.<sup>26</sup> Although it is anticipated that the United States will take up the baton from the Dutch<sup>27</sup>, the still unsettled issue adds a degree of uncertainty to ongoing combined operations in Oruzgan that includes building ANA capacity.

Nevertheless, the operational requirements generated by the new strategy and another round of Afghan elections next year, will alter the troop-to-task ratio for the ADF in Oruzgan Province. As a result, the government is sending an extra 450 Australian military personnel to Afghanistan. The additional

contingent is made up of headquarters, logistics, engineering, and training and mentoring personnel.<sup>28</sup> Most will help to reinforce the ADF Mentoring and Reconstruction Task Force (MRTF) in Oruzgan.

An Australian Election Support Force comprising 120 infantry, combat engineers and cavalry troops is deployed on protective tasks in Oruzgan for a single eight month tour. However, the 330-man Army Special Operations Task Group (SOTG) bears the burden among Australian forces of shaping the security environment in Oruzgan for protected reconstruction and SSR activity to proceed. In the first half of 2009, the SOTG conducted 10 major operations and continues to disrupt insurgent networks.

### The operational environment

With the increased military commitment comes greater risk. Since 2002, eleven ADF personnel have been killed and over seventy wounded while serving in Afghanistan. Between January and July 2009 there

were, on average, 1.6 daily militant attacks in Oruzgan—the eighth highest rate of insurgent incidents in Afghanistan over that period. Oruzgan is one of the country’s most insecure provinces and will likely become a more hostile operating environment for the ADF over the next year.

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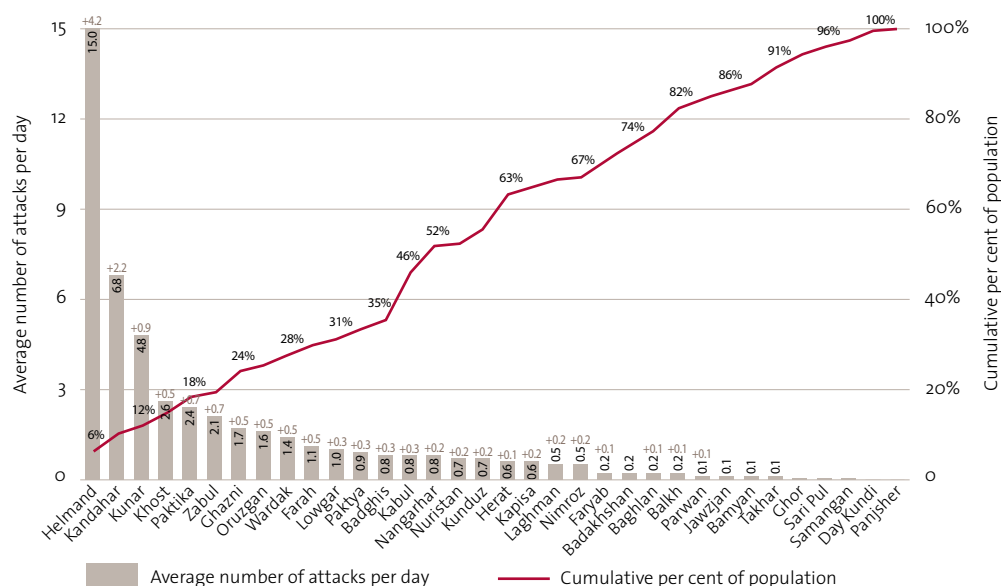
The deployment of US combat brigades to southern Afghanistan over the course of 2009–2010 may result in a ‘balloon effect’ where coalition forces exert pressure in one

area, and insurgents attempt to squeeze out somewhere else. This problem is partially mitigated by the decentralised nature of the insurgency which makes widespread use of local fighters: so-called ‘tier two’ or part-time militants. However, the potential for an insurgent backwash into Oruzgan from adjacent provinces may become more pronounced with the Pakistani military now attempting to prevent Taliban egress from Helmand and Kandahar into Baluchistan.

Oruzgan occupies a unique position at the ‘hinge’ of RC-South and RC-East providing a natural infiltration route between these coalition commands for the Taliban who are known to traverse the 22,700 sq km province. The rural province’s rugged, mostly desiccated topography that is interspersed with green zones, has afforded the Taliban an internal safe haven from coalition operations in the past.

Populated mainly by ethnic Pushtuns, Oruzgan is the birthplace of Taliban leader,

**Figure 2: Number of daily insurgent attacks by province, 1 January 2009 – 30 June 2009**



Note: The black number inside the brown bar indicates average daily insurgent initiated attacks (i.e. Helmand averaged 15 attacks per day from January 2009 to June 2009). The brown number on top of the bar indicates the change relative to last month (i.e. average daily insurgent initiated attacks increased by 4.2 per day in Helmand relative to last month).

Source: NATO/ISAF

Mullah Mohammed Omar, and is where he fled after his regime was routed in 2001. Its more remote districts, which lack a permanent ISAF presence, are retained by the Taliban as an insurgent training ground within Afghanistan.<sup>29</sup> Besides offering sanctuary, Oruzgan also provides a source of capital to the Taliban through the opium trade which saw nearly 10,000 hectares of the province's land under poppy cultivation in 2008.<sup>30</sup>

### Fielding the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade

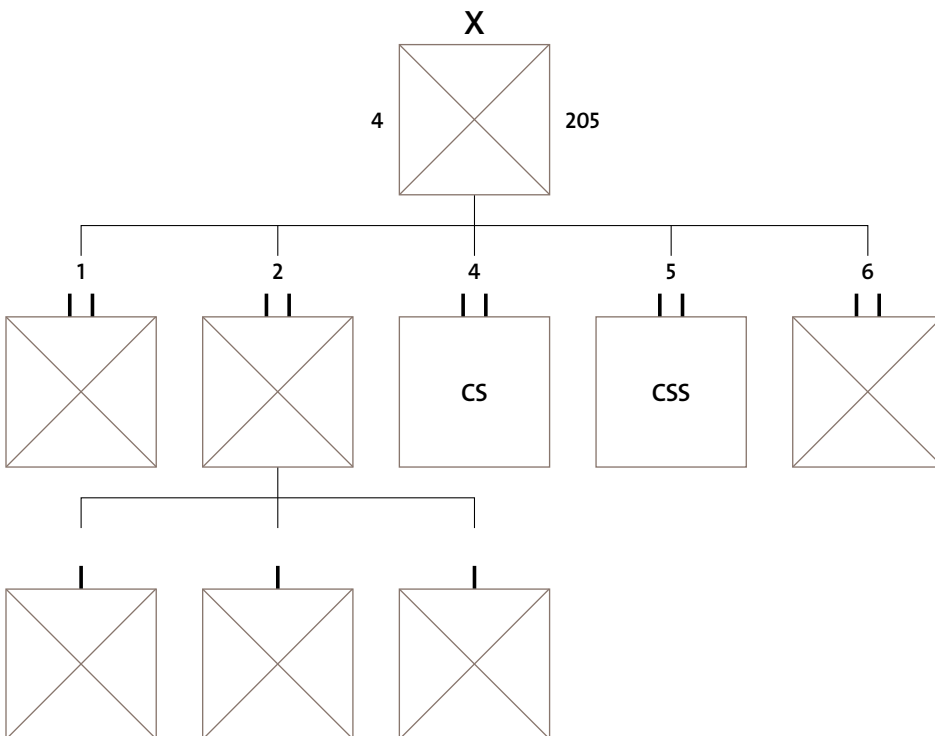
Developing local security forces is a complex and challenging activity described in US military doctrine as one of the highest priority COIN tasks.<sup>31</sup> Until late last year, the ADF's role in SSR in Afghanistan was limited to mentoring small groups of around ten ANA combat engineers and the 'boutique' training of local special forces that accompany the SOTG on operations in and around Oruzgan.

The primary focus of the Australian military mission in Afghanistan now is helping field the Oruzgan-based 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the ANA's 205<sup>th</sup> 'Atal' (Hero) Corps that is located in RC-South. Although the ADF is currently focused on security transition, this may in time change to operational overwatch as in Iraq.<sup>32</sup>

Training the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade is a slow and painstaking enterprise that may take another three to five years before it is successfully completed.<sup>33</sup> A range of variables affect the pace and intensity of the ADF training mission and extend operational timeframes—not the least of these is simultaneously conducting combat and combat support operations amidst a dangerous insurgency.

At the core of Australia's new approach is the recognition that Afghans must take ownership of their country's security. As a result the government has assessed

Figure 3: 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade 205<sup>th</sup> 'Hero' Corps structure as at August 2009





that the MRTF lacked a sufficient training component to build the ANA capacity in Oruzgan within a reasonable timeframe to enable the withdrawal of Australian forces. In order to adequately resource the increased effort, another two ADF training teams will expand the existing capability by joining an Army OMLT that has been mentoring an ANA infantry kandak in central Oruzgan since November 2008.

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The ADF team, together with Dutch and French OMLTs, has been engaged in the focused development of the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade so it can function effectively as an integrated light infantry formation. The 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade will ultimately consist of three infantry kandaks, a combat support kandak, a combat service support kandak, and a garrison kandak.<sup>34</sup>

The concept of operations is for each OMLT to be embedded in one of the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade's constituent kandaks that are deployed in operational areas within Oruzgan. The goal is to close the gap between basic training and the higher military skills necessary to conduct complex company-level and, later-on, battalion-level operations against the enemy. The OMLTs bridge the gap by training their kandaks in bases and mentoring them in the field.

A French OMLT mentors the 1<sup>st</sup> kandak—an infantry unit deployed to the west of Tarin Kowt in the Deh Rawod District bordering Helmand.

The ADF is mentoring the 2<sup>nd</sup> kandak that is based in the Tarin Kowt District. Its three infantry companies are operational

in the Dorafshan green zone, and at a number of forward bases in the Baluchi and Chora Valleys to the north of FOB Ripley.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> kandak was originally raised for the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade but was sent to Helmand by the Afghan Ministry of Defence over a year ago, leaving a gap in the formation's structure. A replacement for this infantry unit is to be located in the Khas Oruzgan District in the eastern part of Oruzgan. It will be accompanied by a Dutch OMLT when it finally arrives.

The 4<sup>th</sup> kandak is a combat support unit originally mentored by the Dutch but handed over to a second ADF OMLT in August 2009. It provides a range of crucial enablers to help build the brigade's overall effectiveness. These include fire support, reconnaissance and combat engineering elements, some of which would deploy with the infantry kandaks. Key skills to be learned are coordinating joint fires, security infrastructure development, and force protection measures such as rendering safe Taliban improvised explosive devices to ensure tactical mobility.

The 5<sup>th</sup> kandak is a combat service support unit mentored by the Dutch. It is currently in a very early stage of development, but in time will play a vital sustainment role for the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade, providing signals, maintenance, transport, logistics and catering capabilities. Sustainment is a major weakness in the ANA which is heavily reliant on embedded coalition forces to fulfill these functions.

The Dutch are guiding the development of the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade headquarters that is responsible for C2 at the formation-level. A third Australian OMLT will take over this task in 2010. Precisely when this happens depends on the Dutch; as long as the Netherlands is the provincial lead-nation it will want to be seen as playing this role. The 6<sup>th</sup> kandak serves as garrison battalion associated with the brigade headquarters located within FOB Ripley.

The use of three separate armed forces to provide OMLT training for the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade, however, has the potential to create a formation that is in effect a collection of units that have been exposed to differing national characteristics. In order to alleviate this problem, which may lead downstream to a poorly coordinated and highly factionalised force, all ANA units are given doctrinal development according to a standard NATO template.

Australia is one of a small group of non-NATO countries accredited with providing training and mentoring to the NATO standard. Nevertheless, OMLT mentoring has exposed ANA soldiers of the 2<sup>nd</sup> kandak to ADF infantry

tactics, techniques and procedures including patrolling in depth to keep the enemy off balance, and responding aggressively when attacked. In addition to combat training, ANA personnel are also taught Australian military values including respect for civilian life and property.

### Benchmarking the ANA

The CSTC-A Capability Milestone (CM) system is the metric by which all ANA units are assessed. Combined Joint Task Force Phoenix, a subsidiary command of CSTC-A, is responsible for assessing whether units undergoing OMLT training are attaining desired output benchmarks.

## Capability Milestones explained

### Capability Milestone 1: Full Operational Capability

- Battalion is fully capable of planning, executing and sustaining operations
- No Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team (OMLT) operational support
- Some external support may be required
- Manning and equipping are above 85%.

### Capability Milestone 2: Partial Operational Capability

- Battalion is capable of planning and executing operations
- OMLT support and guidance
- Capable of sustaining operations
- Manning and equipping are between 70 and 85%.

### Capability Milestone 3: Initial Operational Capability

- Somewhat capable of conducting operations at company level
- OMLT support and guidance
- Capable individual-specialist skills
- Manning and equipping are between 50 and 70%.

### Capability Milestone 4: Training Level

- Unit formed
- Significant OMLT support
- Not capable of conducting operational missions
- Manning and equipping are below 50%.

*Source: Adapted from Obaid Younossi et al., The Long March: Building an Afghan National Army (RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, 2009), p 41.*

When a kandak leaves basic training it is considered to be at CM 4 and requires a high level of mentoring and training support. As the kandak improves in capability and experience, it will gradually progress to CM 1 where only minimal external assistance is necessary. Raising an ANA unit from CM 4 to CM 1 should ideally be a two year process.

The ADF is perhaps one-third of the way through training the 2<sup>nd</sup> kandak, taking it from CM 4 to CM 3. After nine months of OMLT training it is now capable of leading company-level operations and is on the cusp of achieving CM-2, where the unit can undertake battalion-level operations.

Although increasingly effective at the small unit level, the 2<sup>nd</sup> kandak is not yet able to be deployed on larger-scale operations in the more violent provinces in the 205<sup>th</sup> Corps area of operations. This may be a moot point, however, as the entire 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade is required to secure Oruzgan. In any case, sending accompanying ADF OMLTs out of the province may constitute a 'red card' issue for Australia which prescribes the use of its forces. Other ADF force elements do operate elsewhere in RC-South, but under strictly controlled circumstances.

Cordon and search in 'compounds of interest' for Taliban weapons caches and explosives is typical of the confidence building missions conducted by the 2<sup>nd</sup> kandak. This activity validates OMLT training within a controlled environment where MRTF combat teams are able to maintain overwatch, if necessary, in case of insurgent contacts. Major confrontations have occurred this year with groups of up to 40 Taliban. In addition to boosting morale, these operations also demonstrate an active ANA presence that is essential to retaining the densely-populated green zones.

The first ADF OMLT has been praised by ISAF commanders as setting a benchmark for this type of training in Afghanistan. The

OMLT is staffed by Army officers and senior non-commissioned officers (NCOs)—the 'middle management' of an infantry battalion—with considerable operational experience and a sound understanding of COIN principles. OMLT members live, work and fight with Afghan soldiers they are mentoring. In addition to setting standards in military competency, they must be patient, diplomatic and lead by example.

### Training the trainers

ADF personnel prepare for their service in Afghanistan by undertaking up to six months training in Australia prior to their deployment. The larger ADF elements operating in Afghanistan are predominantly Army organisations that utilise the Land Combat Readiness Centre (LCRC) to conduct a final, elaborate mission rehearsal exercise to test forces deploying overseas. The LCRC is also involved in capturing lessons learned from earlier ADF operations and ensuring these are retained and then applied to the preparation of subsequent rotations.

Significantly, ADF personnel are trained in how to operate in an environment where it is critically important to avoid civilian casualties. All coalition personnel must observe the ISAF Tactical Directive that calls for the carefully controlled use of force to mitigate risk to civilians: Pushtuns have a revenge-oriented culture and little tolerance for collateral damage caused by coalition operations. ADF personnel involved in the targeting cycle will also attend a NATO-sanctioned COIN course in Afghanistan.

In addition to combat training, OMLT personnel are exposed to Afghan culture, customs and religion. They are also taught basic Pushtu and Dari in order to communicate with their ANA counterparts and the local people, although translators provided by private contractors generally serve to overcome linguistic hurdles.

## Ongoing challenges

The ethnic composition of the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade and the ANA in general is an enduring concern for the coalition. Afghanistan is a deeply ethnically-riven society and it remains questionable whether soldiers from non-Pushtun communities can provide a vital link to the population of Oruzgan in order to establish trust and communication, and gather intelligence on insurgents.

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*Developing an ethnically-balanced ANA that is a manifestation of the Afghan state is one of the key goals of the training program.*

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Developing an ethnically-balanced ANA that is a manifestation of the Afghan state is one of the key goals of the training program. However, there is still an over-representation of Tajiks from northern Afghanistan in the officer and NCO categories. And whereas the percentage of the majority Pushtun community in the ANA is more-or-less coincident with their proportion of the Afghan community, there is still a paucity of recruits from this ethnic group joining the ANA from Taliban heartland areas in RC-South.<sup>35</sup>

Other manpower challenges also lie ahead for the ADF training efforts. The 2<sup>nd</sup> kandak's cohort is approaching the end of its three-year initial engagement, and personnel must soon decide whether to stay on for another tour of duty. The re-enlistment average in the ANA over the period June 2008 to June 2009 is 63% of NCOs and 57% of soldiers.<sup>36</sup>

Widespread illiteracy among Afghan soldiers presents a particular challenge to building the ANA. This is especially pronounced in training 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade personnel in the more technically demanding combat support skills that the ADF will soon be engaged in. The government

should consider whether the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) can assist in providing educational support for 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade soldiers.

Equipment is also a problematic area in developing the ANA. CSTC-A is in the process of re-equipping the ANA with NATO standard weapon systems. The ANA currently makes extensive use of donated Soviet-style equipment, which has made it harder for Western military personnel to train Afghan soldiers. Many coalition personnel lack experience with these weapons that are often in poor condition or obsolete. Of particular note, the second ADF OMLT must instruct the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade's combat support kandak in the use of former Warsaw Pact D-30 122 mm howitzers.

## Conclusion

The Afghanistan–Pakistan strategy demonstrates a *prima facie* determination by the Obama Administration to succeed in a conflict which it has made a foreign policy priority. The Australian Government shares with the United States a desired endstate of strategic denial of terrorist sanctuaries and a stable Afghanistan that can handle the Taliban threat without a permanent foreign military presence. ADF personnel are contributing to the goal of security transition by improving the operational proficiency of the ANA in Oruzgan Province. Irrespective of their increasing combat effectiveness, the presence of Afghan troops lends legitimacy to the overall COIN effort. Nevertheless, the ANA is a long way from taking responsibility for Afghanistan's security, which will remain dependent on the coalition for the foreseeable future. Australia might need to maintain forces in Afghanistan for many years to come.





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## Endnotes

- 1 The Australian Government has also increased its civilian commitment to the region, including sending a 10-person Australian Federal Police training team to Oruzgan Province and doubling its development assistance to Pakistan to \$120 million over two years.
- 2 The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) defines *security sector reform* (SSR) as a “term used to describe the transformation of a ‘security system’—which includes all the actors, their roles, responsibilities and actions—working together to manage and operate the system in a manner that is consistent with democratic norms and sound principles of good governance, and thus contributes to a well-functioning security framework”. See OECD, *Security System Reform and Governance* (OECD, Paris, 2005) available at <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/8/39/31785288.pdf>
- 3 White Paper of the Interagency Policy Group’s Report on US Policy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan, p. 1, available at [http://www.whitehouse.gov/assets/documents/Afghanistan-Pakistan\\_White\\_Paper.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/assets/documents/Afghanistan-Pakistan_White_Paper.pdf)
- 4 The Afghan National Security Forces comprise the Afghan National Army and the various branches of the Afghan National Police.
- 5 Timo Noetzel and Benjamin Schreer, ‘Does a Multi-Tier NATO Matter?’ *International Affairs*, Vol. 85, No. 2 (2009), p. 217.
- 6 NATO, Strasbourg/Kehl Summit Declaration, available at [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news\\_52837.htm?mode=pressrelease](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_52837.htm?mode=pressrelease)
- 7 White Paper of the Interagency Policy Group’s Report on US Policy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan, op cit., p. 1.
- 8 [http://www.whitehouse.gov/the\\_press\\_office/Remarks-by-the-President-on-a-New-Strategy-for-Afghanistan-and-Pakistan/](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-the-President-on-a-New-Strategy-for-Afghanistan-and-Pakistan/)
- 9 [http://www.pm.gov.au/media/Interview/2009/interview\\_0938.cfm](http://www.pm.gov.au/media/Interview/2009/interview_0938.cfm)
- 10 Department of Defence, *Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific Century: Force 2030* (Department of Defence, Canberra, 2009), p. 44.
- 11 [http://www.pm.gov.au/media/Interview/2009/interview\\_0938.cfm](http://www.pm.gov.au/media/Interview/2009/interview_0938.cfm)
- 12 Afghanistan’s Parliamentary elections will be held in 2010.
- 13 [http://www.nato.int/isaf/docu/official\\_texts/Tactical\\_Directive\\_090706.pdf](http://www.nato.int/isaf/docu/official_texts/Tactical_Directive_090706.pdf)
- 14 For ISAF forces, Afghanistan is divided into five regional commands (RC)—RC-North, RC-West, RC-South, RC-East and RC-Capital—with each region under the command of a different ISAF country.
- 15 Afghanistan produces about 90% of the world’s opium or around 7,700 metric tonnes, with Helmand accounting for 66% of the country’s total cultivation in 2008.
- 16 The *ink spot* counter-insurgency strategy attempts to subdue a large hostile territory by dispersing across it a number of small safe areas. Once established, military units can then push outwards, extending their control and making each safe area larger until they are all linked together.
- 17 A centrepiece of the US diplomatic approach is a new trilateral framework designed to enhance intelligence sharing and military cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan in the fight against the Taliban.
- 18 Department of Defense, *Progress toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, June 2009, p. 28, available at [http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/pdfs/1230\\_June%20AD2009Final.pdf](http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/pdfs/1230_June%20AD2009Final.pdf)
- 19 Obaid Younossi et al., *The Long March: Building an Afghan National Army* (RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, 2009), pp. 6–7.
- 20 International Security Assistance Force Strength and Laydown, 23 July 2009, available at <http://www.nato.int/isaf/docu/epub/pdf/placemat.pdf>
- 21 Department of Defense, op cit., p. 30.
- 22 *ibid.* pp. 26–27.

- 23 Mark Thomson, *The Cost of Defence: ASPI Defence Budget Brief 2009–2010* (ASPI, Canberra, 2009), p. 143.
- 24 Australian Army gunners attached to Task Force Helmand are under United Kingdom command as a result of a bilateral arrangement to further enhance the training and experience of the ADF offensive support capability.
- 25 Australian Government policy is not to name coalition partners in the Persian Gulf which serve as base locations for ADF headquarters and support facilities in the MEAO.
- 26 Chief of Defence Force Media Roundtable, 21 July 2009, available at <http://www.defence.gov.au/media/SpeechTpl.cfm?CurrentId=9297>
- 27 A US Army Air Combat Battalion is currently being established in FOB Ripley that will provide coalition forces and the ANA with a substantially improved airlift, close air support and reconnaissance capability.
- 28 Some of these personnel will be deployed to other locations in Afghanistan, including the Australian National Command Element in Kabul and the ADF Force Level Logistics Asset at Kandahar Air Field, as well as various coalition headquarters.
- 29 'The Dutch model' *The Economist*, 12 March 2009.
- 30 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Afghanistan Opium Winter Assessment January 2009*, p. 36, available at [http://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/ORR\\_report\\_2009.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/ORR_report_2009.pdf)
- 31 See Field Manual 3-24/Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 3-33.5 Counterinsurgency, 16 December 2006.
- 32 Chief of the Defence Force Media Round Table, op cit.
- 33 *ibid.*
- 34 A number of ANA brigades also feature a road security kandak and at this stage it is not known whether the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade 205<sup>th</sup> Corps will incorporate this additional unit.
- 35 Obaid Younossi et al., op cit., pp. 21–22.
- 36 Department of Defense, op cit., p. 31.

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### About the author

**Raspal Khosa** is a Research Fellow with ASPI. He has a longstanding interest in Defence issues and has completed a Masters Degree in Strategic Studies at the Australian National University. Raspal is the author of the ASPI *Australian Defence Almanac* and a number of publications on Australia's counter-terrorism arrangements and the Afghanistan–Pakistan insurgency. His specialist field of study is South Asian security. He has conducted doctoral research into the Kashmir insurgency with the University of New South Wales at the Australian Defence Force Academy, where he was employed as a Tutor in Politics. He also has an Honours Degree in History from the University of Adelaide.

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Tel +61 2 6270 5100  
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