

Reforming the Afghan Security Forces

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ABSTRACT: Given the recent successes of the “Islamic State,” it is unclear how well the Western-trained Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) will perform against a resilient Taliban. This article recommends expanding the Afghan Local Police (ALP) to improve security, compensate for high Afghan Army attrition, and boost Pashtun recruitment in Afghanistan’s south and east.

Some scholars warn the “Afghanistan surge” from 2010 to 2012 fell well short of the positive, albeit short-term results of the 2007-08 surge in Iraq.¹ Since the Taliban threat remains high, its capabilities lethal, and its ideology resilient, the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF – including both Army and Police) continue to face major challenges countering insurgency while protecting the civilian population, particularly in the south and east.

Against the backdrop of the “Islamic State’s” initial successes against the coalition-trained Iraqi Army, there are doubts about the future effectiveness of the ANSF. The ANSF remains deficient in intelligence, logistics, and sustainment capabilities, with a shortfall of non-commissioned officers, a limited air force, and a relative dearth of Pashtun recruits from the south and east of Afghanistan.² To meet these challenges, this article recommends new Afghan leaders adopt a slightly larger target for the ANSF’s overall size than announced at the NATO Summit in May 2012 by bolstering the Afghan Local Police to compensate for high Afghan Army attrition and low Pashtun recruitment. These adjustments would hold the total cost to NATO’s previously agreed upon \$4.1 billion per year by the end of 2017.

Key Challenges

The approach outlined here is designed to address three developmental challenges facing the ANSF. First, the ANSF suffers from roughly 30-percent attrition, 10-percent absenteeism, and inflated recruitment rolls, all of which impede its operational effectiveness and retention.³ Soldiers and police are often recruited from other areas to serve in urban outposts and contested localities, providing space for insurgents to

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1 The Iraqi “surge” recorded a significant drop in violence until sectarian violence reemerged in 2013. Anthony H. Cordesman, *The Challenges to Afghan Transition* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, July 31, 2014).

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid. The attrition rate is also analyzed in the US Department of Defense, *Report on Progress toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, October 2013 (Washington, DC: US Department of Defense, October 2013), 48, http://www.defense.gov/pubs/October_1230_Report_Master_Nov7.pdf.

exploit indigenous populations.⁴ Secondly, the standing ANSF appears to be falling into an unsustainability trap, undermining its long-term viability. The relatively high cost of the ANSF, if not reduced, might not be underwritten by international donors beyond another five years.⁵ Thirdly, the top-down, corrupt practices of the national government could continue under the new “national unity” government, eroding its legitimacy and the ANSF’s will to fight. If new Afghan leaders fail to show flexibility in incorporating their country’s ethnically and tribally diverse populace into a national security architecture, Afghanistan may devolve over time into a political mosaic of different armed groups controlling separatist-like territories.

For these reasons, the United States and other coalition members should encourage new Afghan leaders to stand up a more resilient, inclusive, and localized security structure to deter and respond to terrorist and other criminal attacks, while keeping conventional forces focused on countering larger insurgent concentrations. Like politics, all security is local. Drawing on the personal commitments of Afghan Local Police (ALP) recruits to protect their families, community, and tribal ties, the ALP can improve security in both rural and urban areas.

The approach described here calls for improving the accountability of expanded ALP forces. Local communities must believe police forces can be held accountable, and new Afghan leaders must be convinced ALP forces will not support local or regional strong-men.⁶ To address these issues, Afghan leaders should consider tapping Afghan National Army Special Operation Forces to assume the key tasks of recruiting, supplying, and mentoring ALP forces, while other authorities establish an overlapping monitoring system.

In addition, the ALP approach urges special forces officers to engage with local partners in recruiting and monitoring ALP forces. The inclusion of these partners should make the national government more accountable to the extent that it recognizes the need for stronger grassroots support throughout the country. During this process, international donors should anticipate that Afghan progress towards more inclusive democracy will be as slow, fitful, and inconsistent as it was in their own countries.

Part one below reviews three main ANSF-sizing positions, part two lays out a mid-sizing option relying on ALP development, and part

4 This was the case in most of Afghanistan and Iraq except for the latter’s Sunni triangle and Kurdish region. Thomas E. Ricks, Ricks, *The Gamble: David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq 2006-08* (London: Penguin, 2009), 219-20. Ricks argues the US-led Coalition began working more effectively with Iraq’s tribal and ethnic structure in those areas during 2007, under the leadership of Petraeus and then Brigadier General John Allen. Other observers argue the Sunni Awakening was embraced earlier. Notwithstanding chronology, General Petraeus made similar efforts to draw ethnic forces into the overall Iraqi defense effort in Mosul in 2004. In all cases, sustainability of these forces – both financial and political – became a glaring problem over time since they were mainly seen as potential challenges to the government rather than localized approaches to be incorporated into the government.

5 Because of funding uncertainty, many critics believe a universal draft is the long-term answer to bringing down the cost of the ANSF. Compulsory service was proposed by President Karzai in early 2010 but most scholars have ruled it out mainly because of its potential to alienate local populaces in the very areas where the insurgency is strongest. Jerry Meyerle, et al., *Conscription in the Afghan Army* (Alexandria, VA: Center for Naval Analyses, April 2011).

6 Department for International Development, *Understanding and Supporting Security Sector Reform* (London: Department for International Development, 2002), 27-33.

three assesses two major objections to this option, hinging on ALP accountability.

I. ANSF-SIZING

The US-led NATO coalition in Afghanistan has long regarded the ANSF as necessary to the war-torn country's long-term peace and stability. The ANSF is perhaps the most studied aspect of Afghan government power, the largest Afghan investment made by the US government, and the linchpin of the coalition's exit strategy. What is shaping current thinking on the ANSF's size and structure?

The Zero Option: Setting the Stage for the ANSF after 2014

Afghanistan's international donors have increasingly focused on ANSF planning since President Barack Obama unveiled the US "zero option" decision in May 2014. In light of the ANSF's takeover of the lead security role throughout Afghanistan in June 2013, President Obama decided to draw down US advisors, trainers, and counter-terrorism forces by 2017.⁷ This Presidential decision reflects a prior US (and NATO) political commitment to transition out of Afghanistan while expressing confidence in Afghan-led security efforts after thirteen years of overall support encompassing about \$750 billion in US assistance and the lives of almost 3,500 coalition soldiers.⁸

Three Views on Future ANSF Sizing

Position 1: Reduce ANSF Size to a Financially Sustainable Level by the End of 2017

This first view is defined by official coalition policy announced at the NATO Summit in Chicago in May 2012. The Summit called for reducing the ANSF force from the currently planned level of 382,000 to 258,500 by the end of 2017.⁹ The main reason for this decision appears to be long-term financial sustainability: coalition nations decided the ANSF budget should be reduced from the current \$11 billion to \$4.1 billion per year by the end of 2017. The United States would contribute \$2.3 billion, the remaining coalition nations \$1.3 billion, and the Afghan government \$500 million per year through 2024.¹⁰ The Summit communique emphasized that ANSF size would be regularly assessed in light of the evolving security environment, stating:

The pace and the size of a gradual managed force reduction from the ANSF surge peak to a sustainable level will be conditions-based and decided by

7 "Statement by the President on Afghanistan," *White House*, May 27, 2014.

8 Anthony H. Cordesman, "The U.S. Cost of the Afghan War: FY2002-2013," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, May 15, 2013, <https://csis.org/publication/us-cost-afghan-war-fy2002-fy2013>; and "The Cost of War in Afghanistan since 2001," *National Priorities Project*, <http://nationalpriorities.org/cost-of/>.

9 "Fact Sheet: Chicago Summit – Sufficient and Sustainable ANSF?" *White House*, May 21, 2012. A major recruitment effort has doubled the size of the ANSF since 2009. At the end of 2013, ANSF personnel totaled 334,852 (about 185,000 Afghan National Army and 150,000 Afghan National Police), as reported by NATO, Combined Security Transition Command to the U.S. Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction in January 2014. Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress*, January 30, 2014 (Arlington, VA: Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, January 30 2014), <http://www.sigar.mil/pdf/quarterlyreports/2014Jan30QR.pdf>.

10 *Ibid.*

the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in consultation with the International Community. The preliminary model for a future total ANSF size, defined by the International Community and the Government of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, will be reviewed regularly against the developing security environment.¹¹

To date, NATO's preliminary ANSF target for the end of 2017 has not been formally revised.

The smaller ANSF size proposed at the NATO summit was based on the need to set politically acceptable levels of international financial support to 2024. Since 2012, the ANSF has performed well, holding its own against the Taliban while suffering substantial casualties.¹² Yet, the ANSF still relies heavily on NATO financial and military aid in roles such as air support, logistics, and reconnaissance. Charting a near-term path to make the ANSF more self-sufficient is a key objective of the NATO community.

Position 2: Maintain Current ANSF Size through 2018

The chief representative of this view is the Center for Naval Analyses (CNA) selected by the Department of Defense to make "an independent assessment of the strength, force structure, force posture, and capabilities required to make the ANSF capable of providing security."¹³ Its January 2014 report argues Afghanistan's security efforts through 2018 will require a slight decrease in the current ANSF force structure from the currently planned level of 382,000 to 373,400 personnel.¹⁴ It estimates the annual cost of sustaining these force numbers would be about \$5-6 billion per year at a time of budget constraints for Afghanistan's international donors, including the United States.

This estimate is predicated on assuming the Taliban insurgency will grow beyond 2014. Between 2015 and 2016, the Taliban is likely to keep pressure on the ANSF in rural areas, expand its control and influence in areas vacated by coalition forces, encircle key cities, conduct high-profile attacks in Kabul and other urban areas, and gain leverage for future political negotiations. Between 2016 and 2018, once the insurgency has had time to recover from the past decade and a half of fighting, the expectation is of a much larger and more intense Taliban insurgency effort.¹⁵

Moreover, the report assumes if NATO significantly cuts its commitment to Afghanistan and Pakistan, tensions between the two nations are likely to worsen. The CNA also believes a rapid decline in international financial support could lead to another civil war in Afghanistan, thus implying NATO's policy decision of May 2012 was not only risky, but premature since the Taliban insurgency, a potential civil war, and

11 NATO, "Official Text: Chicago Summit Declaration on Afghanistan," May 21, 2012, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_87595.htm.

12 This assessment is widely shared. William A. Byrd, *Revisiting Chicago: The Critical Need to Maintain Support for Afghanistan's National Security Forces Post-2014* (Washington: US Institute of Peace, June 5, 2014).

13 CNA, "Summary of Independent Assessment of Afghan National Security Forces," January 2014, <https://www.cna.org/research/2014/summary-independent-assessment-afghan-national>.

14 Jonathan Schroden, et al., *Independent Assessment of the Afghan National Security Forces* (Alexandria, VA: Center for Naval Analyses, January 2014). CNA's assessment calls for about 10,000 more ANA personnel than does the current planning target, while reducing the ANP by about 5,000.

15 *Ibid.*

worsening Afghan-Pakistani relations loom as existential threats to the Afghan government. It also contends large-scale spending is required until these threats have been significantly diminished. In short, this view relies on a worst-case scenario to justify a large ANSF size through 2018, and presumably beyond.¹⁶

The financial cost of the ANSF is of particular concern moving forward. If the Afghan government proceeds with an ANSF-sizing trajectory in line with CNA's assessment, international donations will remain vital. As history has shown, however, international donations decline over time in concert with troop withdrawals. If the Afghan force-structure is not revised before this aid pipeline dries up, the Afghan government may be forced to cut back security efforts in rural areas. In such a scenario, a large standing Afghan National Army (ANA) may well be preserved, while dispersed Afghan National Police (ANP) and Afghan Local Police forces are cut. This outcome is likely to present the Taliban and other criminal groups with opportunities to challenge the Afghan national government.

Position 3: A Smaller Military Footprint

One of the prominent advocates of this group is Scott Mann, a retired US Army special operations force officer, who helped design the Village Stability Program and stood up the first Village Stability Coordination Center in southern Afghanistan.¹⁷ Mann argues the ANSF continues to face a serious insurgency whose center of gravity lies in rural community support. The relative lack of ANSF presence in rural areas cedes recruitment and training grounds to Muslim extremists.¹⁸

This view argues for partnering ANSF SOF forces with Afghan Local Police (ALP) units (including irregular local militia) in remote areas to ensure that training and equipment are adequate, local defense capabilities are effective, and the villagers themselves have confidence and buy-in to resist Taliban insurgents. This position identifies Special Operations Forces for this train-and-assist task because of past US history working with Afghan defense groups, going back to the retaking of Afghanistan from the Taliban in late 2001. In addition, Mann believes local ALP unit commanders should be made accountable to their village elders and tribal leaders, as well as national government (or ANSF) leadership.¹⁹

Mann points out the ALP has significant potential to stand up as Pashtun tribal defense forces (*arbakai*) if its members "are truly local, treat the people well, and if the community to which they are

16 Ibid.

17 This position reportedly includes senior-level US administration officials such as Vice President Joseph Biden. Fred Kaplan, "Obama's new policy for Afghanistan tries to steer a middle course," *Slate*, March 27, 2009, http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/war_stories/2009/03/counterinsurgenterrorism.1.html. Also Fred Kaplan, "CT or COIN?," *Slate*, March 24, 2009, http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/war_stories/2009/03/ct_or_coin.html.

18 Scott Mann, "Bypassing the Graveyard: A New Approach to Stabilizing Afghanistan," *Small Wars Journal*, July 30, 2014, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/bypassing-the-graveyard-a-new-approach-to-stabilizing-afghanistan>.

19 Ibid.

accountable accepts them as part of their social structure.”²⁰ Afghan Deputy Minister Tariq Ismati of the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development points out, “If the *arbakai* are put in situations where they are not trusted by the whole population, they will be seen as militias rather than *arbakai*.”²¹

While attuned to Pashtun cultural issues, this view has not proposed a specific number of ANSF Special Operations (SO) commando battalions or ALP forces needed to secure Afghanistan, especially its restive south and east where most of the country’s poor, illiterate, and religiously conservative Pashtuns reside. Nor has it addressed training issues surrounding the merging of the ALP into the ANSF command structure.

II. A NEW SIZING OPTION AT NATO-AGREED COST

Reduce the ANA and Raise the ALP through 2017

This article proposes a new sizing option based on blending key elements of the three options reviewed above. This option embraces a slightly larger target for the ANSF’s overall size compared to the NATO Summit target while incorporating ALP elements, and adjusting internal ANSF component numbers to hold the total cost to NATO’s previously agreed upon \$4.1 billion per year by the end of 2017.

The table below compares the key ANSF numbers proposed in the current Plan of Record, CNA report, NATO Summit, and this article; it breaks down the ANSF’s total size in terms of its major force components:

AFGHAN NATIONAL SECURITY FORCES

	ANA	(SOF)	ANP	ALP	OTHER	TOTAL
PLAN	165,500	(11,900)	139,200	30,000	47,300 ²²	382,000
CNA	175,500 ²³	(11,900)	134,500	29,100	34,300 ²⁴	373,400
NATO		228,500 ²⁵		30,000		258,500
NEW	95,000	(22,000) ²⁶	125,000	60,000		280,000

PLAN = Current ANSF Plan of Record quoted in the CNA study, **CNA** = Center for Naval Analyses, **NATO** = Summit Decision of May 2012, **NEW** = This article, **ANA** = Afghan National Army, **SOF** = Afghan Army Special Operations Forces, **ANP** = Afghan National Police, **ALP** = Afghan Local Police

20 Ibid. Also see Mohammed Osman Tariq, *Tribal Security System (Arbakai) in Southeast Afghanistan*, Occasional Paper No. 7 (London: Crisis States Research Center, December 2008), <http://www.lse.ac.uk/internationaldevelopment/research/crisisstates/download/op/op7tariq.pdf>.

21 Interview with Deputy Minister Tariq Ismati, Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, October 2012. Savannah, Georgia. (Quoted by Scott Mann in Ibid.)

22 Other includes recruits, training staff, and Defense and Interior Ministry staff.

23 The CNA number adds 18,900 logistics and support positions and 2,500 Army Headquarters staff, while eliminating 9,800 infantry and 1,500 combat support soldiers. These ANA changes plus the elimination of funding for 14,600 Afghan Civil Order Police and 12,400 Defense and Interior Ministry staff mainly account for the CNA’s slightly smaller ANSF size compared to the Plan of Record size.

24 The CNA retains all of the PLAN’s “other” categories except 12,400 Defense and Interior ministry staffers, presuming coverage by the Afghan government budget.

25 NATO has not publicly released a more detailed break-down of its ANSF target size announced at the May 2012 Summit.

26 Included in the ANA number.

As the table shows, the approach doubles the size of the ANA/SOF and Afghan Local Police by the end of 2017 to help absorb the relatively high attrition of Afghan Army soldiers. The SOF and ALP personnel hikes as well as improved salaries, can be covered by reducing full-time ANA personnel. This proposal is designed to support a strong, consistent narrative on the financial sustainability of the ANSF. The financial sustainability of the counter-insurgency force is as much a part of effective strategy as the use and reliability of the force itself.

The Right Ratio?

Current estimates put the total number of Taliban fighters around 25,000.²⁷ If this is true, the sizing proposal presented here means one insurgent faces three ANA or six other ANSF personnel. This ratio glosses over a number of important questions including the right tooth-to-tail ratio for the ANA (historical US military averages would put 15 percent of the ANA force in headquarters and 35 percent in logistics), the complementary counter-terrorism roles of the ANA and ANP/ALP, and the degree to which the new ANSF can respond rapidly to a wide spectrum of enemy actions.

Nonetheless, this ratio has proven to be sufficient to counter Taliban strikes so far, mostly consisting of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), suicide bombers, hit-and-run raids, insider attacks, and remote ambushes. To the extent Taliban forces consolidate for conventional operations, ANA Special Operation Forces and ANP Civil Order Police (totaling 26,500 and geared to rapid response) should be sufficient to take point and give advantage to ANA infantry battalions with their superior weaponry and tactics.

Why Reduce the ANA?

The force structure outlined here returns the ANA to mid-2009 levels, while augmenting and improving the ANA SOF, ANP and ALP to serve as the front-line against terrorist attacks by the Taliban and related groups. This sizing proposal is designed to address long-standing strategic challenges including the need for effective counter-terrorism efforts, reduced civilian casualties, a lower ANSF attrition rate, and a solid path toward Afghan self-sustainability. Failure to make progress on these strategic challenges by 2017 may well set up Afghanistan for failure, more so than potential security threats posed by the Taliban and other groups.

Growing Casualties

The ANA's smaller footprint (but larger SOF element) is critical to reduce civilian casualties while countering Taliban terrorist tactics in the future. At present, civilian casualties in Afghanistan are on a significant upswing, particularly in and around Kabul, and in seven provinces in east and south Afghanistan. ANSF positions have sustained small, largely harassing terrorist attacks that nevertheless take a heavy toll in civilian

²⁷ Rod Nordland, "Study Finds Sharp Rise in Attacks by Taliban," *New York Times*, April 19, 2013.

casualties.²⁸ A recent United Nations report indicates civilian deaths and injuries rose 24 percent in the first half of 2014 compared to the same period in 2013.²⁹ This sharp spike in casualties mostly stemmed from escalating ground engagements between Taliban-associated groups and the ANA. Indeed, civilian deaths from mortars, rockets, and grenades more than doubled from the same six-month period in 2013.

It is counter-intuitive to argue fewer Afghan army soldiers on the ground will translate into greater public security. In practice, however, the ANA SOF is more capable of taking the lead in conducting counter-terrorist operations and raids against Taliban leadership and other high-value targets while restraining civilian casualties. Conventional ANA forces should be dedicated largely to what they are trained to do best: respond to conventional direct and complex Taliban offensives once the insurgents act against population centers and other targets. Over time, shrinking the number of ANA bases may also funnel Taliban terrorist attacks to them, further limiting prospects for collateral damage. Reducing civilian casualties, if realized, will help establish a virtuous cycle in which the ANSF receives stronger public support for its security efforts.

High Attrition

The Afghan National Army currently suffers from a high attrition rate.³⁰ Recent statistics indicate almost a third of its trained personnel move on after their first year of service.³¹ More must be done to retain the expertise of these departing soldiers; hence the need for an expanded ALP, as well as ANA, pay incentives. Assuming the current attrition rate remains constant, the ANA size will shrink to a target of 95,000 by 2017. While some observers believe most of these departing soldiers return to peaceful lives in their home provinces, it is reasonable to expect that some join other armed groups including the Taliban, local warlords, and drug-trafficking chiefs. If true, it suggests the ANA could actually be training and, to some extent, equipping internal Afghan power brokers. Down-sizing the ANA (and encouraging retention through pay incentives) will reduce future attrition flows to the ANSF's adversaries, even if the attrition rate itself does not fall.

Civil Strife & Border Security Challenges

Some analysts believe a larger ANA is needed to counter additional threats including regional war-lords operating on ethnic or tribal lines, a Taliban surge swelled by terrorists flooding in from northwest Pakistan, and possibly even Pakistani army units that challenge Afghan border

28 Anti-government elements including the Taliban accounted for 74 percent of the civilian casualties in the first half of 2014, while the ANSF caused 8 percent, according to: United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, *Afghanistan: Midyear Report 2014, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict* (Kabul, Afghanistan: United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, July 2014).

29 Ibid.

30 The ANA also suffers from high absenteeism, apparently stemming from cultural work ethics, inadequate supervision and the lack of cross-checking attendance-taking systems.

31 The attrition rate was 31.4 percent per year as of September 2013, according to US Department of Defense, *Report on Progress toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, October 2013, 48. ANP attrition is also significant but recruitment has compensated for these losses for the most recently reported period from September 2012 to September 2013, according to US Department of Defense, *Report on Progress toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, November 2013 (Washington, DC: US Department of Defense, November 2013).

control.³² Most of these potential threats are likely to emerge in eastern Afghanistan (the provinces of Nangarhar, Kunar, Khost, Pakhtia, and Paktika), and in the south (Helmand and Kandahar). At present, these provinces receive the brunt of attacks by Taliban groups (including the Haqqani Network), and conflict zones are situated along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, strategic transit routes, and river valleys. Conventional ANA units can be efficiently cross-loaded to these regions while operating with a reduced standing force. Of course, the NATO coalition will need to improve the ANA's rapid-response time by providing additional air support assistance.

The current ANSF Plan of Record – similar to the CNA assessment – calls for only 7,800 air force staff out of a total of 382,000 positions.³³ Air capability must be significantly strengthened to protect remote ANP posts adequately over time. Each functional aircraft acts as a force-multiplier in support of the proposed decentralized, local security force structure. It is therefore critically necessary for the coalition to regularly review its support to the Afghan National Air Force, as it has done for the Iraqi Army.

Why a Larger ALP?

Adopting a localized approach to absorbing naturally retiring ANA soldiers calls for doubling the current ALP size from 30,000 to 60,000 by the end of 2017. The ALP component is defined as an ANP reserve that serves under ANA SOF mentors and senior ANP officers. Such a force would act to soak up retired ANA soldiers who wish to return to their homes and continue to serve their communities. Just as importantly, this component would constitute the main channel through which to recruit security officers for under-served regions, notably the south and east of Afghanistan.³⁴ This recruitment effort should be led by ANA SOF mentors and would require input from tribal, village, district, and national government representatives.

The extent to which these recruits can be located around ANP posts in population centers to monitor terrorist activities, the more secure such posts should be. On the other hand, establishing these units in remote rural areas is equally essential to fill a security vacuum, although such posts will remain difficult to staff and defend.

While committed to deterring crime, the ANP and ALP will continue to be first responders to Taliban terrorist attacks in concert with ANA SOF forces. The Afghan Uniformed and Anti-Crime Police (AUP), numbering about 98,000 of the 150,000-strong ANP, constitutes the main crime-fighting force of the ANP.³⁵ Since AUP and ALP units confront both criminal and terrorist organizations, they must continue, in concert with the ANA SOF and ANP's Counter Terrorism Police, to

32 This threat array was derived from the CNA. Jonathan Schroden, et al., *Summary of Independent Assessment of Afghan National Security Forces* (Alexandria, VA: CNA, January 2014).

33 Cordesman, *The Challenges to Afghan Transition*.

34 The ALP approach drawing on *arbakai* appears better suited for this region where tribal traditions persist. Mohammed Osman Tariq, *Tribal Security System (Arbakai) in Southeast Afghanistan*.

35 The ANP consists of the Afghan Uniform Police, responsible for general police duties, and four specialized police organizations: the Afghan National Civil Order Police (ANCOP), the Afghan Border Police, the Counter Narcotics Police of Afghanistan (CNPA), and the Afghan Anti-Crime Police, including a counter-narcotics, a counter-terrorism, and a criminal investigations department.

be trained to handle both threats. By contrast, the ANA is dedicated to holding bases around urban areas and roads (so-called tier one and two areas mainly in the south and east of Afghanistan) where the majority of rocket launches, complex attacks, and hit-and-run raids occur. These ANA formations would continue to respond to major attacks on ANP and ALP forces.

III. TWO MAJOR OBJECTIONS

This restructuring proposal is controversial. Two key objections to this approach stem from the widespread Afghan perception that the ALP is inherently unaccountable, falling under regional power brokers working at variance with national leaders. In fact, Afghan villagers “do not distinguish between the local police, who are formally part of the government, and private militias...(serving) for years as a proxy for weak government forces.”³⁶ As a result, the “accountability” issue must be carefully addressed to undergird any ALP expansion.

Objection One: ALP Units Would Challenge National Sovereignty

There is an inherent knee-jerk reaction among critics to label local security forces as independent militias that could threaten the integrity of the Afghan state. In fact, locally originated village defense groups have been consistently rejected by Afghan national leaders over the past decade – and by NATO Coalition officials who generally regard them as a potential challenge to civilian control of the military and to the state’s monopoly on the use of force.³⁷

Case Study in Nangarhar

A case in point is the coalition’s experience in Nangarhar province in eastern Afghanistan in 2009. One hundred and sixty of the most influential Shinwari tribal elders agreed among themselves to denounce the Taliban in public. They sought help from the coalition and the Afghan government to remove corrupt local officials and to have a say in who served in the local security forces in their tribal area. Both requests are still valid: corrupt leaders remain a major source of instability, and the ANP needs tribal support to be successful.³⁸

Insurgents eventually lost their freedom of movement in Shinwari areas of Nangarhar, whereas the ANP could operate freely. The so-called Shinwari pact – an agreement among the Shinwari themselves and not with the NATO coalition – provided badly needed mutual support for their dispersed villages, as required in a counterinsurgency campaign. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton hailed the pact as an example of “classic counterinsurgency.”³⁹ Additionally, the coalition’s military leadership in Afghanistan viewed the pact as an opportunity to improve subnational governance by drawing in traditional tribal structures.

36 Azam Ahmed, “Taliban are Rising Again in Afghanistan’s North,” *New York Times*, October 23, 2014.

37 Ibid. Ahmed reports that newly elected President Ashraf Ghani has “promised to disarm (local) militias,” chiefly because they collect taxes by force to support themselves.

38 Randy George and Dante Paradiso, “The Case for a Wartime Chief Executive Officer: Fixing the Interagency Quagmire in Afghanistan,” *Foreign Affairs*, June 21, 2011.

39 Ibid.

The US embassy, however, opposed the pact after Afghan senior officials complained it undermined the Karzai administration.⁴⁰ Subsequently, conflicting civilian and military guidance led to confusion among both Afghan and Coalition officials. The US embassy in Kabul forbade US diplomats from meeting with tribal leaders to discuss tribal “pacts,” ruling out on-the-ground contact with local defense groups concerning counterinsurgency and counterterrorism.⁴¹ The opportunity was lost, chiefly out of concern local defense groups might spur inter-tribal conflict and eventually oppose the national government.

Overarching Control

This case underscores the importance of bringing local defense initiatives under overarching ANA/ANP control. First, ALP and ANP reservists should be equipped with a limited load-out of ammunition and weapons (AK-47s and RPGs, and perhaps 1-2 machine guns). This step would prevent these forces from amassing weapons and ammunition to expand their numbers or challenge higher authorities. A close partnership with the ANA SOF is key to preventing these local security forces from being overrun by insurgents or lapsing into exploitative practices.

Second, active ANA SOF forces should take charge of ALP training in public and post protection. An active platoon could rotate through various villages in its area of operations and equip, train, and mentor the reservists. This measure would give the ANA an opportunity to recuperate from front-line operations and facilitates local-national cooperation. The key caveat is the ANA must ensure supplies and training are delivered to local forces. Any disruption in this flow would damage intra-ALP morale and fuel chronic fears in rural areas that the national government does not care about improving ALP accountability or public security.

Objection Two: ANP and ALP are Corrupt, and Inadequately Trained and Supervised

A Corrupt ANP

The ANP and ALP are not positively viewed by Afghans: they are widely seen as corrupt, incompetent, and closely tied to local power brokers.⁴² Why suggest they have any utility as front-line responders? Admittedly, the training of Afghan police officers has been inadequate, complicated by limited training budgets and the need for the ANP/ALP to conduct both counter-terrorism and crime-fighting roles.⁴³ Just as importantly, ANP/ALP corruption appears to be much higher in the south and east of Afghanistan where the Taliban is centered. The ANP is susceptible to bribery by Taliban and other criminal groups operating lucrative drug-trafficking operations.⁴⁴ These corruption issues

40 B. Matta, “Tribal Dispute in Afghanistan Benefits Taliban,” *Voice of American News*, October 10, 2011.

41 Ibid.

42 Steve Bowman and Catherine Dale, *War in Afghanistan: Strategy, Military Operations, and Issues for Congress* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, December 3, 2009), 41-42.

43 Donald J. Planty and Robert M. Perito, *Police Transition in Afghanistan* (Washington, DC: US Institute of Peace, February 5, 2013).

44 See a fuller discussion in Cordesman, *The Challenges to Afghan Transition*.

constitute serious threats to the legitimacy of Afghanistan's national government and call into question any proposal that would identify the ANP as part of the solution to Afghanistan's current instability.⁴⁵

Overlapping Chains of Reporting

Faced with these obstacles, the ANP and ALP have done much more effective work in areas where they have had coalition and ANA Special Forces partners – even though they remain susceptible to local feuds, power brokers, and their own exploitation of the local population.⁴⁶ Since Afghanistan's regional and ethnic divisions have the potential to shift ANP and ALP forces into dominant factions, the proposal outlined here recommends a highly redundant, overlapping system of chains of reporting for both forces. This means ANP and ALP units should be visited frequently by those authorities to whom they report: ANA Special Operations officers, senior ANP officers, village headmen, and district chiefs. These cross-checking visits and overlapping authorities may be confusing to ANP/ALP officers to the extent they receive conflicting guidance. As a result, the chain of command must be clear but dual-use, drawing on SOF officers for counter-terrorism actions and ANP officers for criminal interdiction. On the other hand, the reporting system is diffuse, thereby better informing senior authorities how well ANP and ALP units perform. Such monitoring reports should, in turn, make ALP actions more transparent and effective over time. Just as crucially, if an ANSF general officer or political leader attempts to suborn ALP units, the over-lapping system of reporting authorities should expose the problem and lead to resolution.

Assessment visits tapping into multiple sources and local opinion should make clear to the ANP and ALP their pay is tied to their progress in guaranteeing public security. Assessing police units will permit better funding for those who perform their missions and more training and other corrective actions for those that do not. It is counter-productive to provide additional training for ANP and ALP units without first identifying their shortcomings and making them accountable through multiple-channel assessments.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, the legitimacy of the Afghan national government may determine if the ANSF fights, or falls to the Taliban. Many observers believe international donors saddled Afghanistan with a governmental system in 2001-2003 that was too centralized.⁴⁷ Structuring the Afghan state under an extremely powerful chief executive appears to have retarded the development of checks-and-balances and facilitated corrupt

45 One of President Karzai's brothers, Ahmed Wali Karzai, was identified as such a criminal actor, according to press reports. Simon Tisdall, "Ahmed Wali Karzai, the Corrupt and Lawless Face of Modern Afghanistan," *Guardian*, July 12, 2011. A.W. Karzai was killed by his bodyguard on July 9, 2011.

46 Cordesman, *The Challenges to Afghan Transition*.

47 Aunohita Mojumdar, "Afghanistan: Rethinking the Constitutional Balance of Power," *Eurasianet*, October 1, 2009, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insightb/articles/eav100209a.shtml>. Power in Afghanistan is highly concentrated in the President's office. Governors of provinces are appointed by the president. Provincial councils – whose elections are held concurrently with the presidential vote -- have no powers and barely any role in the management of local affairs. District council elections have yet to be held.

practices. Moving away from this top-down system has the potential to foster positive democratic trends including the election of local-level representative bodies and a more responsive justice system.

Whether or not these democratic reforms can be instituted over the long term, the time is right for the new Afghan leadership to try to boost ANSF forces in areas heavily influenced and contested by the Taliban. Indeed, the Taliban has already adopted its own version of the ALP approach outlined here and continue to forge it into a conventional force. Faced with this adversary (and the relative success of this approach), Afghan leaders should reach out to tribal elders to help protect their home lands. If asked, tribal elders will likely show courage but need to be backed up by an inclusive ANSF.⁴⁸

The alternative to this course appears stark: Afghanistan may again have to resort to its allies to stave off existential challenges to its government. Drawing red lines that trigger the return of international security forces, as in the past, will largely be determined by the national security interests of Afghanistan's allies. On the other hand, a more effective, inclusive, and accountable ANSF depends on the decisions of Afghans alone.

48 Following a six-day battle between the ANSF and Taliban killing over 100 civilians in the Ghazni district of Ajrestan in September 2014, Pashtun villagers hanged four Taliban fighters turned over by the ANSF. Their action demonstrated a strong resolve to resist the Taliban and protect their homeland. Reuters, "Afghan Villagers Hang Taliban Fighters as Battle for District Rages," September 27, 2014.

