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A common refrain among ANA officers, particularly Pashtuns, has been that it is political factionalism, not ethnicity that drives ethnic favouritism in the MoD.<sup>235</sup> Those named are usually Tajik, Hazara and Uzbek politicians and strongmen.<sup>236</sup> 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...<sup>237</sup>*

Some interviewees have alleged that officers with a jihadi background have monitored the activities of colleagues with a professional background.<sup>238</sup> 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.<sup>239</sup> 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.<sup>240</sup> 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.<sup>241</sup>

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.<sup>242</sup>

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.<sup>243</sup>

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.*<sup>244</sup>

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.<sup>245</sup> In the absence of a commanding officer, deputies typically avoid taking initiatives or making decisions.<sup>246</sup>

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.<sup>247</sup> 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.<sup>248</sup> 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).<sup>249</sup> 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.<sup>250</sup> 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.<sup>251</sup>

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

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

<sup>246</sup> 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.

<sup>247</sup> Meeting with Lt. Gen. Lorimer, Dep. Com. ISAF, September 2013.

<sup>248</sup> Maloney, *ibid.*, p. 144.

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

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

<sup>251</sup> 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.<sup>252</sup> 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.<sup>253</sup> The wave of green-on-blue attacks of 2012 had already shaken Western faith in the ANA.<sup>254</sup> One interviewee pointed out that the proliferation of militias in northern Afghanistan was itself an admission of distrust in the capacity of the ANA.<sup>255</sup> 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.<sup>256</sup>



*Afghan National Army Soldiers march during their graduation ceremony.*

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(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”.<sup>257</sup> 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.<sup>258</sup> 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.<sup>259</sup>

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”.<sup>260</sup> 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.<sup>261</sup>

## 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.<sup>262</sup> In some areas however, the problem persisted.<sup>263</sup> 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.*<sup>264</sup>

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.<sup>265</sup> One ANA officer indicated that insubordination was common in the south until 2010, when pressure from the Taliban was greatest.<sup>266</sup> 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.<sup>267</sup> 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.<sup>268</sup>

Drug addiction among recruits has also complicated enforcing discipline within ANA.<sup>269</sup> Measures have been taken to weed out some, chiefly heroin addicts.<sup>270</sup> 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).<sup>271</sup> Even senior officers reportedly use drugs.<sup>272</sup> Particularly in remote outposts, drug usage remains common.<sup>273</sup>

Delayed pay has also led to indiscipline;<sup>274</sup> 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.<sup>275</sup> In one case, “100 ANA soldiers” in Nuristan reportedly sold their weapons because they had not received their salaries.<sup>276</sup> 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.<sup>277</sup>

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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