U.S. Marine Corps Advisors in Afghanistan, Part 3 Report

Evaluation Criteria for Afghan National Security Forces and Implications for Advisors and Advisor Training

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Cover photo: Chief Warrant Officer 2 Jason G. Smith, the Police Advisory Team 1 officer-in-charge with 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, with Afghan Uniformed Police Lt. Col. Mahfuzallah, the Kajaki District Chief of Police, March 2012. Photo by Sgt. Jacob Harrer, USMC.

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Executive Summary

This report, the third and final in a series, is intended to assist I Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF) in strengthening its advisor training for Marines bound for Afghanistan, and to add further clarity to evaluations of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), based on our analysis of a large number of significant activity reports (SIGACTS) for the December 2010-February 2012 period. This analysis used seven yardsticks to assess the ANSF:

- Independent ANSF patrolling

- IED responses by the ANSF

- Detainees captured by the ANSF

- ANSF and insurgent casualties

- Dismounted and mounted patrols

- Patrol radius

- IED-related tips from local nationals

Several of these findings are of particular relevance to I MEF. First, the analysis shows that the ANSF conducted an increasing percentage of independent patrols in key districts. Typically, that increased patrolling took place after the arrival of Marine advisor teams. Such patrolling is an indicator that ANSF units are working toward the NATO/ISAF transition goal of independent Afghan operations. Second, the percentage of IEDs found and cleared grew considerably and coincided with the presence of advisor teams. Growing independence with respect to counter-IED suggests progress toward achieving important NATO/ISAF goals. Third, in most of the districts we examined, the ANSF detained significantly more individuals over time. Given the importance of developing such sources of information, this yardstick gives a good indication of Afghan progress. Another, more general, finding of our study is Marine advisor training should provide instruction on how to impart tactical skills in the Afghan context.

The metrics used in this study can help Marine advisors develop a more finely grained picture of the Afghan units they are advising and tailor their approach accordingly. The yardsticks can serve as a diagnostic tool for senior military leaders and help them identify which Afghan units require particular advisor attention and in what areas.

Key findings

This report presents the findings from phase 3 of our research. Key findings are as follows:

- On average, the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan Uniformed Police (AUP) units conducted considerably more patrols during and after the period they were advised by Marine teams than they did before those advisors arrived. This increase was particularly significant with respect to dismounted patrols.

- Some Afghan army and police units expanded their patrolling radius during and after the period in which they were advised by their respective Marine teams. In the case of the AUP, two units pushed out beyond the relatively comfortable confines of the district centers.

  — AUP patrolling outside the district center is a concrete indicator that the unit is improving, since a visible and active police presence is central to effective civilian policing.

  — Conversely, a shrinking AUP patrol radius indicates that the unit is underperforming and requires additional attention and support from Marine advisors.

- The percentage of independent patrols by the ANSF increased significantly in key districts and did so after the arrival of Marine advisor teams. Independent patrolling is an indicator that ANSF units are working toward the NATO/ISAF transition goal of independent Afghan operations.

- The percentage of IEDs found and cleared by the ANSF increased considerably in most districts following the arrival of advisory teams. IEDs represent a major security challenge in Helmand province. As with patrolling, growing independence in terms of finding and clearing IEDs suggests progress toward NATO/ISAF goals.

- Some but not all AUP units received a higher percentage of IED-related tips from local nationals during and after the period they were advised by their respective Marine teams.

  — This "tip percentage" is an important indicator in two ways. First, it measures an important aspect of AUP effectiveness, namely, the ability to act on information about a critical threat. Second, it serves as a proxy for public confidence in the police.

  — Marines should be particularly alert to those Afghan police units whose percentage of local national tips is at the low end of the spectrum.

- In most of the districts we examined, the ANA and AUP detained significantly more individuals over time. On average, coalition forces played a decreasing role in capturing detainees over time.

- In addition to training Marine advisors to implement counter-IED procedures, detainee operations, and conduct patrols, the advisor course should include segments on *how* to impart these skills to the ANSF.

  — Our evaluation criteria can be employed as a diagnostic tool and can be used to make decisions about where and how advisor teams should be employed.

Introduction

The commanding general, I Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF) asked CNA to conduct a study on how I MEF can best organize and train Marine teams to advise the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan Uniform Police (AUP), known collectively as the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF).[1] As part of this project, CNA has also considered the closely related issue of evaluating the performance of Afghan army and police units.

The research has been conducted in three stages. In the first phase, we identified criteria for judging the success of Marine advisory teams. Advisory team progress is inexorably linked with the performance of ANSF units.[2] These evaluation criteria therefore focus on the ANSF and the ability of police and army units to operate at a reasonably professional, independent, and sustainable level—the paramount North Atlantic Treaty Organization/International Security (NATO/ISAF) goals for the Afghan security forces during the transition period that ends in 2014.[3]

Using a wide set of data, including original interviews with Marine advisors, academic and policy studies, and historical accounts, we identified six ANSF performance yardsticks: (1) basic skills; (2) ac-

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[1] The AUP is the single largest component of the Afghan National Police (ANP), which also includes specialized units such as the border police and the paramilitary Afghan National Civil Order Police (ANCOP). The focus here is on the AUP and the army, although the study includes one ANCOP unit.

[2] CNA, "Determining Best Practices for ANSF Advising," core project proposal for I MEF, 9 December 2011, p. 1.

[3] North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "ISAF's Mission in Afghanistan," http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_69366.htm, accessed May 20, 2012.

countability, pay, and administration; (3) logistics and maintenance; (4) intelligence; (5) presence; and (6) public confidence.[4]

Building on phase 1 research, phase 2 examined more closely the organization, size, and skill sets of the teams that advised the Afghan army and police. Understanding linkages between team composition and ANSF performance can help I MEF evaluate and strengthen its processes for building and training Marine advisory teams. At the heart of the second phase of the study was a quantitative analysis of 11 ANSF units and the 15 Marine teams that advised them. Almost all of these teams were deployed in 2011. The key findings from phase 2 of our research are as follows:

- Our analysis showed that overall, the advisory teams had a positive impact on their respective ANSF units.

- Twelve of the 15 teams had a positive effect on Afghan army and police units.

- No team had a negative impact on ANA or AUP performance, although three teams had no measurable effect.

- Logistics, intelligence, and independent operations/presence were areas of significant ANSF improvement.

- There is a strong correlation between the presence of military police (MPs) on advisory teams and Afghan police performance.

- Augmenting advisory teams with MPs is likely to enhance the performance of the AUP.

- There is no apparent correlation between the size of the teams and ANSF performance; nor is there a correlation between the rank of the Marine officer in charge (OIC) and Afghan army or police progress.

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[4] William Rosenau and Carter Malkasian, *Criteria for Measuring U.S. Advisor Effectiveness in Afghanistan*, CNA Interim Report, CME D0026827.A1/PV1, February 2012, p. 1.

- However, our statistical analysis suggests that on average the advisory teams were composed in a way that contributed to the progress of Afghan police and army units.[5]

The third stage and final stage of CNA's research scrutinized the performance of the Afghan security forces in greater depth. Using a significant activity (SIGACT) database, we examined incidents involving direct and indirect fire, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and detainees.[6] By examining the narrative portion of incident reports, quantifying the information therein (as required), and subjecting the data to analysis, we developed a more detailed understanding of ANSF performance over time. In this phase of the study, we developed and applied a set of seven yardsticks for measuring the Afghan army and police:

- Independent ANSF patrolling

- IED responses by the ANSF

- Detainees captured by the ANA and AUP

- ANSF and insurgent casualties

- Mounted and dismounted patrols

- Patrol radius

- IED-related tips from local nationals

We believe that our approach makes three noteworthy contributions:

- First, it creates a more finely grained picture of ANSF performance than is available elsewhere. It also allows us to identify in greater detail the contribution of Marine advisors. Specifically,

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[5] William Rosenau and Thoi Nguyen, "U.S. Marine Corps Advisors in Afghanistan: Team Composition and Afghan Police and Army Performance" CNA draft report, June 2012, p. 2.

[6] As defined by one researcher, SIGACTs are "reported violent incidents ranging from threatening letters to key leaders to major assaults on coalition outposts. SIGACTs are captured at various levels of command in both Iraq and Afghanistan and then consolidated in a central database (CIDNE)." Ben Connable, *Embracing the Fog of War: Assessment and Metrics in Counterinsurgency* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2012), p. 161.

we can bring into sharper focus the effect of the arrival of advisor teams on the ANSF.

- Second, CNA's method can serve as a diagnostic and planning tool for Marines by helping to identify ANSF units that require particular attention from advisors. This approach can also help Marines highlight those aspects of ANSF performance and capabilities that need additional consideration by advisors.

- Finally, our approach identifies areas of advisor training that should receive additional emphasis. We can do this by highlighting specific areas of ANSF performance that advisors appear to affect.

Report outline

The remainder of this report is divided into three main sections. In section 1, we describe our research approach. In section 2, we present our findings in greater detail. In section 3, we suggest a set of implications for the way that I MEF organizes and trains advisors who will be deployed to Afghanistan. Detailed supporting data is included in the classified annex to this report.

Research approach

A quantitative analysis of SIGACT reports lies at the core of our research during this phase of the study. Because our interest was in the performance of the Afghan army and police, we focused on security incidents involving direct and indirect fire, IEDs, and detainees during the period from December 2010 to February 2012.[7] Using these data, we explored subjects such as levels of independent ANSF operations; AUP presence outside district centers; and local national perceptions of the security forces. Beginning with roughly 16,000 incidents, we filtered the reports by unit and by district and plotted incidents by three-month intervals. In addition, we grouped activities

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[7] We focused on this period for two reasons. First, it was a reasonably significant length of time; second, outside of this period data was extremely scarce.

by level, that is, low, medium, and high.[8] Finally, we identified when and where Marine teams conducted their advisory missions.[9]

Using these data, we evaluated ANSF performance according to four yardsticks:

- Level of independent ANSF patrolling

- IED responses by the ANSF

- Number of detainees captured by the ANA and AUP

- ANSF and insurgent casualties

Because of limitations in the data, our analysis using this group of metrics had to be conducted on a district-by-district basis. We evaluated the ANSF in six key districts: Sangin, Nawah, Garmser, Musa Qal'ah, Kajaki, and Marjeh. The constraints imposed by the data meant that while we could identify particular AUP units and their Marine advisors (a relatively simple task, since AUP are district based) it was impossible to identify the specific Afghan army units (and their Marine advisors) operating in the four districts.[10]

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[8] Combined Joined Task Force (CJTF)Paladin provided much of this data, which we processed and displayed in Microsoft Excel using a pivot table method.

[9] For example, to develop a more complete picture of ANSF patrolling, we filtered direct fire/indirect fire and plotted patrols conducted by the Afghan army and police either independently or with coalition forces. The numbers of patrols for ANSF units were coded as low, medium, and high. Because of differences in their areas of operation and the nature of their missions, we applied different scales to the Afghan army and police. For ANA: low = 0-9 patrols; medium = 10-30 patrols; and high, over 30 patrols. For AUP: low = 0-3 patrols = medium 3-6 patrols; and high, more than 6 patrols. In some instances, however, it was easier to the express the relative contributions of the ANSF, combined, and coalition forces in terms of percentages. With some yardsticks, the data compelled us to track progress on a quarterly basis. With others, the data in some cases permitted a month-by-month evaluation.

[10] We analyzed the same group of Afghan police and army units that we examined in part 2 of the study: Sangin AUP; Nawah AUP; Kajaki AUP; Marjeh AUP; Garmser AUP; Musa Qal'ah AUP; 2/2/215 ANA; 2/1/215 ANA; 3/1/215 ANA; 1/1/215 ANA; 3/2/215 ANA.

But while we do not know which ANA unit or units operated in a given district, we do know with certainty from SIGACT reports that the Afghan army was there. Our analysis of reports generated as a result of incidents involving the ANA—although mute on the subject of any particular army unit— provides a new and more inclusive picture of Afghan army capabilities and performance by bringing in the the yardsticks of independent patrolling, number of detainees, and casualties.

In some instances the data permitted the analysis of specific units and the identification of the Marine trainers who advised them. The data allowed us to evaluate particular ANA and AUP units using the following three criteria:

- The number of dismounted and mounted patrols

- The radius of those patrols

- The percentage of IED-related tips from local nationals that resulted in the clearing of IEDs

Before beginning, two caveats are in order. As in any armed conflict, the quantitative data are spotty and incomplete, and should be treated with care. Although certainly numerous, SIGACT reports have noteworthy limitations. For example, to be recorded as an "incident," the event must have been observed. Improvised explosive devices that are planted but never found are necessarily unrecorded. Similarly, "direct-fire rounds shot at friendly vehicles that miss" are not recorded.[11] In other words, the SIGACT reporting can never provide anything like a complete depiction of battlefield reality.

Second, analysts may reasonably disagree with at least one of our yardsticks, namely, the percentage of casualties. Absent a more complete understanding of the capabilities of the insurgents the ANSF encountered, it is difficult to say with any certainty whether casualty figures (either friendly or enemy) suggest tactical prowess or weakness.[12] Moreover, using enemy casualties as a crude metric invites

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[11] Connable, *Embracing the Fog of War*, p. 164.

[12] The authors thank their CNA colleague, Gary Lee, for this insight.

comparisons with the notorious "body-count" problem during the Vietnam War.[13]

That said, casualty figures, if combined carefully with intelligence data, and considered alongside other metrics, could offer a clearer picture of the ANSF at the tactical level. As it is, our analysis does show the ratio of friendly and adversary casualties per incident and before, during, and after the arrival of Marine advisory teams.

Of course, this is not anything like a total picture. But our findings about casualties could serve as a jumping-off point for subsequent analysis. Put another way, considering casualties in this way tells us more than we knew previously about what the ANSF was doing on the ground during the December 2010-February 2012 period.

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[13] Gregory A. Daddis, *No Sure Victory: Measuring U.S. Army Effectiveness and Progress in the Vietnam War* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), chapters 4 and 5.

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Study findings

For the sake of simplicity and narrative flow, the seven indicators listed above have been grouped into the following categories:

- Patrolling

- IEDs

- Detainees

- Casualties

Our findings in each of these categories are discussed in turn below.[14]

Patrolling

NATO/ISAF considers the ability of the ANSF to conduct independent operations a major indicator of success.[15] Afghan police and army patrols—and in particular, dismounted and mounted patrols—conducted independently of coalition forces, are a key performance measurement.[16] Getting the police out of their precinct headquarters has been an important priority for Marine advisors.[17] Among other things, the degree to which the Afghan units patrol and they extent

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[14] The findings are presented in greater statistical and graphical detail in the classified annex to this report.

[15] See for example NATO/ISAF, "Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF)," n.d., http://www.isaf.nato.int/images/stories/File/factsheets/1667-10_ANSF_LR_en2.pdf, accessed May 5, 2012; and statement by Major General Stephen J. Townsend, U.S. Army, U.S. House of Representatives, House Armed Services Committee, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigation, June 20, 2012, http://armedservices.house.gov/index.cfm/files/serve?File_id=ae02cdfa-1181-473a-a596-1b9fd20c5a40, accessed June 21, 2012.

[16] Author's interview with former Marine advisor to the ANA (2011), Camp Pendleton, CA, March 22, 2012.

[17] Author's telephone interview with former Marine police advisor (2011), January 27, 2012.

they do so alone, with less reliance on Marine forces, suggest the extent to which the ANSF is able to "take the fight to the enemy." While admittedly rough and incomplete, this yardstick gives us a grounded way to judge how well the AUP and ANA are operating in the field.
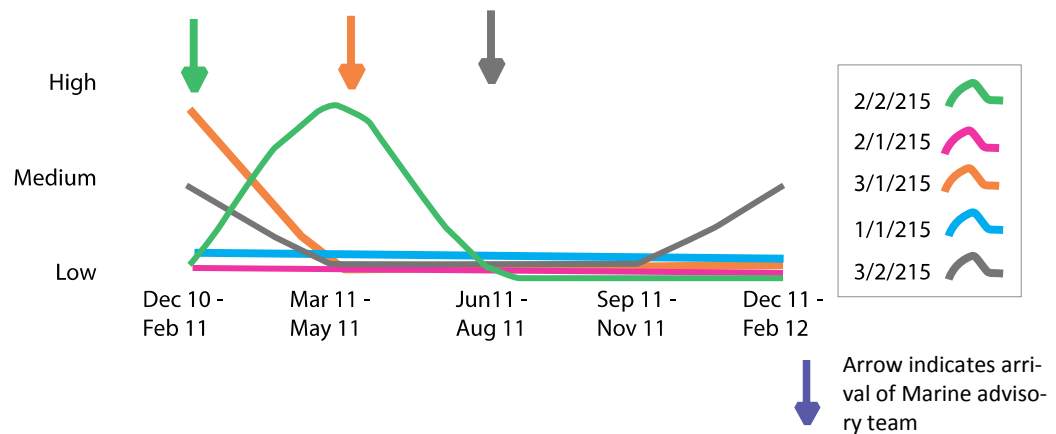
Our analysis shows the following:

- In most of the six key districts independent ANSF patrols increased significantly and did so following the arrival of Marine advisor teams (see the classified annex).

- In three districts the number of AUP patrols increased considerably after the arrival of Marine advisors (see figure 1.)

Figure 1. Number of Afghan police patrols by unit, December 2010-February 2012
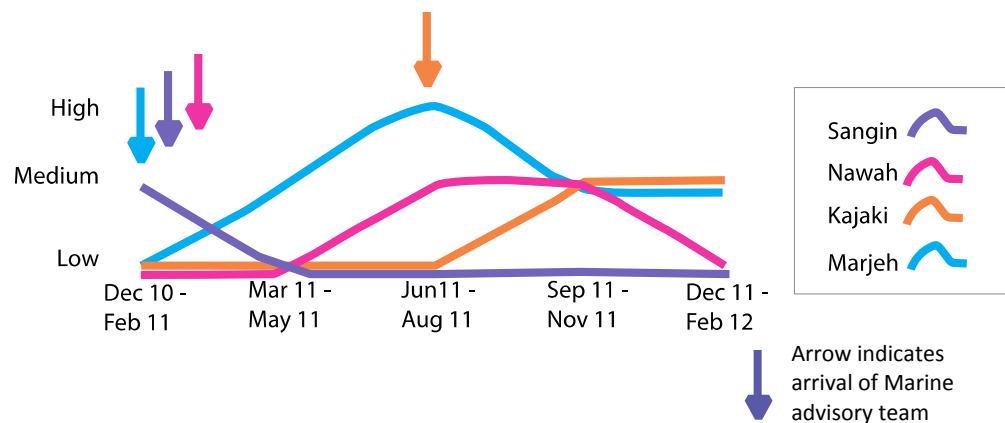
- With respect to patrol radius, the data allowed us to examine two AUP units before and after advisors arrived. In these two cases, the police expanded their patrol radius beyond the district center and did so *after* Marine advisors arrived or were *already* patrolling beyond the confines of relatively built-up areas (see figure 2.)

Fig. 2. Number of Afghan army patrols by unit, December 2010-February 2012

2/2/215				
2/1/215				
3/1/215				
1/1/215				
3/2/215				

High

Medium

Low

Dec 10 - Feb 11   Mar 11 - May 11   Jun11 - Aug 11   Sep 11 - Nov 11   Dec 11 - Feb 12

Arrow indicates arrival of Marine advisory team

- The Afghan army presented a more mixed picture. Only one kandak (ANA battalion equivalent) showed an increase in the number of patrols. In terms of the radius of patrols, one remained at a low level, one held steady at medium, and one increased considerably after advisors arrived.

Improvised explosive devices

Given the scale of threat that IEDs poses to civilians and military personnel, the performance of the Afghan army and police against IEDs is understandably a major focus of attention by NATO/ISAF, coalition forces, and Marine advisor teams.[18] Our analysis compared the percentage of IEDs detected and cleared by the Afghan and coalition forces. Put another way, we sought to determine how well the ANSF was doing on its own with respect to IEDs.

Our analysis also focused on tips from local nationals that resulted in the location and clearing of IEDs. Among other things, local-national tips can serve as a proxy for public confidence in the ANSF—a par-

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[18] See for example Pierre Claude Nolin, "Countering the Afghan Insurgency: Low-Tech Threats, High-Tech Solutions," Spring 2011, NATO Parliamentary Assembly, http://www.nato-pa.int/default.asp?SHORTCUT=2436, accessed June 10, 2012.

ticularly difficult phenomenon to measure.[19] Such confidence is particularly important in the case of the police who should (ideally) rely on the public to give them the information they need in order to protect the public. As with the other yardsticks, we also looked at the ANSF before, during, and after the arrival of Marine advisors.

Our analysis shows the following:

- The percentage of IEDs found and cleared by the ANSF increased considerably in most districts following the arrival of advisory teams.[20]

- In two districts (Garmser and Marjeh), the ANSF played a dominant role in finding and clearing IEDs.

- The percentage of local-national tips provided to the AUP (relative to those provided by other sources) is vastly higher than the percentage given to the ANA.

- In some districts, the percentage of these tips to AUP increased considerably after the arrival of Marine advisors (see figure 3).

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[19] For more on this point, see Catherine Norman, "What do Afghans want from the Police? Views from Helmand Province," CNA, January 15, 2012, http://www.cna.org/research/2012/what-do-afghans-want-police-views-helmand-province, accessed June 20, 2012. Providing the police with "actionable" information about IEDs reflects some degree of public confidence, since supplying such information poses risks, as the insurgents often respond to such "collaboration" with threats and physical violence.

[20] Our analysis focused on the ratio of IEDs found and cleared by ANSF, combined, and coalition forces per IED event, as recorded in SIGACT records. See the classified annex for more details.

Fig. 3. Percentage of IEDs found and cleared by AUP as a result of tips from local nationals, December 2010-February 2012
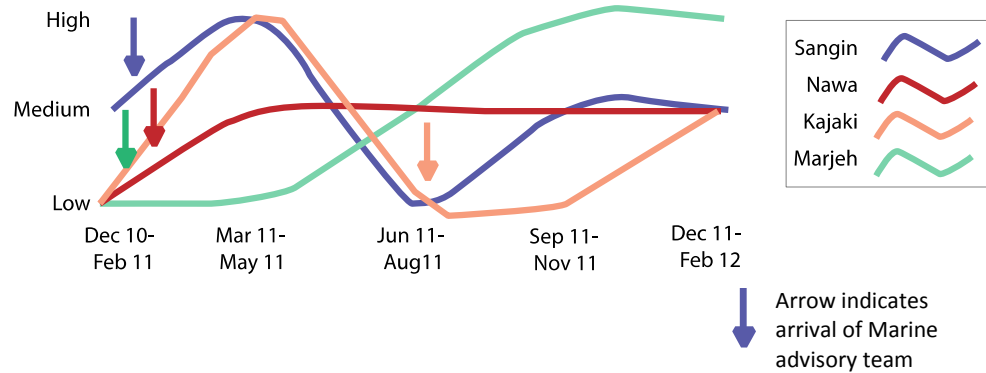
Detainees

The ability of the Afghan army and police to capture and detain suspected insurgents is an important indicator of ANSF capabilities. Detainees can serve as an important source of intelligence about insurgent operations, planning, morale, and motivation.[21] Developing such information sources will be increasingly important for both the ANSF and coalition forces as the latter reduces its presence in Afghanistan. As with IEDs, we examined the question of the independence of ANSF relative to coalition forces.

Our analysis shows the following:

- In four out of the six districts we analyzed, the ANA and AUP detained significantly more individuals over time. The exceptions were Garmser and Kajaki.

- These increases took place after the arrival of Marine advisors.

- The percentage of the combined coalition force/ANSF operations that led to the capture of detainees grew considerably

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[21] Kyle B. Teamey, "Arresting Insurgency," *Joint Forces Quarterly*, No. 47, 2007, p. 117.

over time in every district. The percentage of purely coalition force operations dropped sharply.

Casualties

As discussed in the section on our approach, casualty statistics must be used with caution. By itself, casualty data cannot tell us about the effectiveness of any given Afghan unit. To be more useful, these data should be combined with intelligence information on the enemy and evaluated alongside other measurements. Taken together with this additional data, casualty numbers could bring ANSF performance into sharper focus. Still, with our current data, we can say the following:

- On average, the percentage of ANSF casualties increased over time in the six districts we examined.[22]

- On average, ANSF casualties increased following the arrival of Marine advisor teams.

- In most districts, insurgent killed and wounded made up a significant percentage of total casualties.

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[22] We expressed this as the percentage of casualties per SIGACT direct fire/indirect fire event. See the classified annex for more details.

Implications for Marine advisers and advisor training

The second phase of our research found, among other things, that there was a very strong statistical correlation between Afghan police performance and the presence of MPs on Marine advisor teams. We recommended, therefore, that MPs play a larger role in Marine advisory efforts in Afghanistan. The findings from the third phase of research also raise considerations for deployed advisors, the way teams are composed and trained, and for the way in which the evaluation of the ANSF might be improved.

As many former advisors have emphasized in our interviews, it is highly unrealistic to expect the ANSF to approach the Marine Corps in terms of capabilities, performance, or professionalism. "We understood that they're never going to be U.S. Marines," recalled one captain who advised the ANA in 2011.[23] Given the considerable challenges facing the Afghan army and police, it makes sense for advisors to establish training priorities. Put another way, they should apply their efforts in areas where they are likely to make a difference.

Our research highlights those aspects of ANSF performance that Marine advisors are likely to have a significant ability to influence. In the second stage of this project's research, we identified the following as areas of ANSF performance that had improved in conjunction with advisory team activities:

- Independent operations and presence
- Intelligence
- Logistics

The third stage of research added other areas in which ANSF performance advanced after advisors arrived:

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[23] Author's telephone interview, January 31, 2012.

- Independent patrolling

- IEDs

- Detainees

By directing their work toward these efforts, advisors on the ground are more likely to have a measurable impact on the AUP and ANA. Although critical to ANSF success, intelligence and logistics are more difficult to gauge in quantitative terms than the other areas are. Nor is presence easy to quantify. In these areas, Marines will likely have to rely on gut instincts and "feel" rather than numbers.

However, at least one important aspect of independent operations can be captured by examining patrolling carefully. Although our data on the radius of patrol for the ANSF are sketchy, Marines can nevertheless be alert to any significant changes among the forces they are advising. This is particularly important with respect to the Afghan police. A fundamental question for police advisors is whether the AUP is patrolling routinely and doing so beyond the district centers. Advisors should also work to understand the ANSF with respect to IEDs. Are they receiving and acting on IED-related tips, and are they doing so on their own? Finally, to what degree are they able to capture insurgents on their own?

From this, it follows that advisory team training should stress developing capabilities in patrolling, counter-IED, and detainee operations among the Afghans. All three are currently a component of the Marine Advisor Course (MAC) at Twentynine Palms, California. One's own ability to patrol, detect and clear IEDs, and conduct detainee operations self-evidently contributes to one's ability to teach these subjects to the Afghans.

But effectively influencing the Afghans also requires knowledge about how these tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) should be transferred in the Afghan context. Judging from the program of instruction, there is little in the course to guide students in how specifically to these skills among the ANSF.[24] Therefore in addition to

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[24] Marine Advisor Course (MAC) program of instruction, Advisor Training Group, Marine Air Ground Task Force Training Command, Twentynine Palms, CA, February 23, 2012.

training Marine advisors to implement counter-IED procedures, process and transport detainees, and conduct patrols, the advisor course should include segments on *how* to impart these TTPs to the Afghan police and army.

Finally, the yardsticks we have developed could easily be used by Marines and other military and civilian personnel responsible for judging the performance of the Afghan security forces. Although widely relied upon (including by the authors), the Commander's Unit Assessment Tool (CUAT) has significant limitations and is broadly criticized for its subjective nature.[25]

Our new approach, using SIGACT reports, can help bring the ANSF into sharper focus. When used alongside other analytical instruments, this approach can serve as a diagnostic tool. For example, our method could help identify notably underperforming Afghan units. By doing so, it could help senior leaders pinpoint where advisory resources should be directed and what aspects of the ANSF should receive particular emphasis from advisors.

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[25] See for example Rosenau and Malkasian, *Criteria for Measuring U.S. Advisor Effectiveness*, pp. 3-4. The CUAT's ubiquity makes it difficult for analysts and decisonmakers to ignore.

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Conclusion

Building the capabilities of the Afghan army and police to conduct independent operations is a pillar of NATO/ISAF strategy in Afghanistan. In the words of U.S. Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta,

> our goal all along has been to help the Afghan National Security Forces take the lead for security, and we hope that as the final transitions are made in 2013, the Afghan forces will take the lead in combat operations with ISAF in support and fully combat capable through 2014. Helping the ANSF to develop these capabilities is at the center of the Marine Corps advisory effort.[26]

To assist I MEF in strengthening its advisor training for Marines bound for Afghanistan, and to add further clarity to evaluations of the Afghan National Security Forces, this report has presented findings based on analysis of a large number of significant activity reports from the December 2010-February 2012 time period.

Our analysis used seven yardsticks to assess the ANSF:

- Independent ANSF patrolling

- IED responses by the ANSF

- ANSF and insurgent casualties

- Detainees captured by the ANSF

- Dismounted and mounted patrols

- Patrol radius

- IED-related tips from local nationals

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[26] Leon E. Panetta, "Trip Message: NATO-Munich," February 10, 2012, http://www.defense.gov/home/features/2011/0711_message1/, accessed February 22, 2012.

Several of these findings are of particular relevance to I MEF. First, the analysis shows that the ANSF conducted an increasing percentage of independent patrols in key districts. Typically, that increase took place after the arrival of Marine advisor teams. Such patrolling indicates that ANSF units are working toward the NATO/ISAF transition goal of independent Afghan operations. Second, the percentage of IEDs found and cleared grew considerably and coincided with the presence of advisor teams. Growing independence with respect to counter-IED suggests progress toward achieving important NATO/ISAF goals. Third, in most of the districts we examined, the ANSF detained significantly more individuals over time. Given the importance of developing such sources of information, this yardstick gives a good indication of the Afghans' progress.

Other, more general, findings of our study are also important to I MEF. First, advisor training should provide instruction on how to impart key tactical skills in the Afghan context. Next, the metrics used in this study can aid Marines in developing a more finely grained picture of the Afghan units they are advising and tailor their approaches accordingly. Finally, these yardsticks can function as a diagnostic tool for senior military leaders and analysts and help them identify which Afghan units require particular advisor attention and in what areas.

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