

Advising the Afghan National Security Forces Executive Summary

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Background

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 Uniformed Police (AUP), known collectively as the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). Advisory team progress is tightly linked with the performance of ANSF units.¹ Consequently, this project developed and employed criteria for evaluating selected Afghan army and police units.

Approach

Using both quantitative and qualitative methods, CNA research proceeded in three phases. In the first phase, we identified criteria for judging the performance of the Afghan army and police.² These criteria focus on the ability of the ANSF to operate at a reasonably professional, independent, and sustainable level—the paramount NATO/ISAF goals for the Afghan security forces during the transition period that ends in 2014.

The second phase of our research examined more closely the organization, size, and skill sets of the Marine Corps 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 is a quantitative analysis of 11 ANSF units and the 15 Marine teams that ad-

¹ CNA, “Determining Best Practices for ANSF Advising,” core project proposal for I MEF, 9 December 2011, p. 1.

² William Rosenau and Carter Malkasian, *Criteria for Measuring U.S. Advisor Effectiveness in Afghanistan*, CNA Interim Report, CME D0026827.A1/PV1, February 2012.

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vised them. Our analysis of the data during this stage of research drew from Commander's Unit Assessment Tool (CUAT) reports.³

The third stage of CNA's research focused on the performance of the 11 Afghan police and army units advised by US Marines. Using a significant activity (SIGACT) database, we examined incidents involving direct and indirect fire, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and detainees. By analyzing the narrative portion of incident reports and quantifying the information therein (as required), we developed a more detailed understanding of ANSF performance over time.⁴

Gaps in the CUAT and SIGACT databases and the relatively informal nature of Marine advisor team records make it impossible to reach definitive conclusions at this stage of our research. Our findings should therefore be treated as preliminary. That said, we believe that our approach makes three significant contributions:

1. First, it provides a more systematic way to identify in greater detail the contribution of Marine advisors to ANSF development. Specifically, this approach brings into sharper focus the effect of advisor teams on the ANSF over time.
2. Second, CNA's method can serve as a diagnostic and planning tool for Marines by helping pinpoint where scarce advisory resources should be directed and what aspects of the ANSF should receive particular emphasis from advisors.
3. Finally, our approach identifies areas of Marine advisor training that should receive additional emphasis. We do this by highlighting areas of ANSF performance where advisors appear to have an impact.

Key findings and recommendations

- There is a strong correlation between the presence of military policemen (MPs) on Marine advisor teams and Afghan police performance. In our judgment, augmenting teams with MPs is likely to contribute measurably to AUP progress.
- Advisor team training should stress those areas where Marines can make an appreciable improvement in Afghan army and police performance: patrolling, counter-IED and detainee operations, intelligence, and logistics.
 - The percentage of independent patrols by the ANSF increased significantly in key districts and did so after the arrival of Marine advisor teams.

³ William Rosenau and Thoi Nguyen, *U.S. Marine Corps Advisors in Afghanistan, Phase 2 Report: Team Composition and Afghan Police and Army Performance*, CNA DRM-2012-U-001464, June 2012.

⁴ William Rosenau and Thoi Nguyen, *U.S. Marine Corps Advisors in Afghanistan, Part 3 Report: Evaluation Criteria for Afghan National Security Forces and Implications for Advisors and Advisor Training*, CNA DRM-2012-U-001465-SR1, June 2012.

- In addition, the percentage of IEDs found and cleared by the ANSF increased considerably in most districts following the arrival of advisory teams. The ANA and AUP detained significantly more individuals over time.
- Finally, logistics and intelligence were also areas of significant ANSF improvement.
- To develop capabilities among the ANA and AUP, Marines must make their advice relevant in the Afghan context. The Marine Advisor Course (MAC) at the Advisor Training Group (ATG), Twentynine Palms, should include segments on *how* to impart critical skills to the Afghan police and army since not all Marines who report for training possess this knowledge.
- Under the current Marine Corps Total Force System (MCTFS), it is extremely difficult to track current and former advisors. Designating advising as a free military occupational specialty (FMOS) would be a relatively straightforward and low-cost way to address this important gap.

Next steps

This study offered a new and more systematic approach to understanding ANSF and advisor team performance. But additional research and analysis is required. This is particularly important as the US Marine Corps considers what roles advisors should play in meeting security challenges beyond Afghanistan. Toward that end, we recommend the following:

- A long-term evaluation of Marine advisor teams. Phase I of our study took a preliminary look at Marine advisor missions in conflicts stretching back to the Vietnam War. Additional research should include in-depth case studies that explore how advisor teams were organized, trained, and employed in Vietnam, El Salvador, Iraq, and Afghanistan. This analysis would help senior Marine leaders understand the past and present contributions of advisors and what role advisors might play in emerging or future conflict environments.
- A comprehensive appraisal of advisor teams in Afghanistan. Gaps in the data limited the scope of our analysis. Spotty and incomplete data will always present a challenge. But further research is likely to uncover additional information that could be used to evaluate more ANSF units and advisor teams. Such research would allow for more definitive judgments about the performance of Afghan police and army units and the Marines who advised them.
- An evaluation of a free MOS. As indicated above, creating a free MOS for advisors would allow the Marine Corps to identify and track individuals who have served as advisors. Additional research and analysis should help identify the best way for Marines to establish such an MOS. Exploring the ways in which other such secondary specialties were successfully created could identify institutional pathways for the creation of a new advisor FMOS.