

Ministerial Advisors

Developing Capacity for an Enduring Security Force

BY JAMES A. SCHEAR, WILLIAM B. CALDWELL IV, AND FRANK C. DIGIOVANNI

When asked how long the United States should stay [in Afghanistan], one elder said: “Until the moment that you make our security forces self-sufficient. Then you will be welcome to visit us, not as soldiers but as guests.”

—Senator Carl Levin, Speech on the Floor of the Senate, September 11, 2009

The Taliban and other insurgent elements fighting against the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan are convinced that they will succeed if they simply wait us out. They think if they maintain their influence in key areas such as Helmand and Kandahar provinces, they will be poised to regain control of the entire country when coalition forces begin to drawdown in the next few years.

What these enemies of the Afghan government fail to grasp is that they will not be able to outlast a self-sufficient and self-sustaining Afghan National Security Force (ANSF). As North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Secretary-General Fogh Rasmussen has stated, the Taliban “might think they can wait us out. But within a year or so [of summer 2010], there will be over 300,000 Afghan soldiers and police trained and ready to defend their country. And they can’t be waited out.”¹ The mission to develop these forces, and build the Afghan government’s capacity to sustain them into the future, belongs to the NATO Training Mission–Afghanistan (NTM–A).

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Empowering Partners to Defend Themselves

The NTM–A capacity-building mission is not only a strategic pillar of International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) strategy, but it is also a U.S. national security imperative that has been articulated at all levels of our government. The National Security Strategy charges our military with the responsibility to “partner with foreign counterparts, train and assist security forces, and pursue military-to-military ties with a broad range of governments.”² Reinforcing this theme, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has argued that “the effectiveness

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and credibility of the United States will only be as good as the effectiveness, credibility, and sustainability of its local partners. . . . Building the governance and security capacity of other countries must be a critical element of U.S. national security strategy.”³ Although the Department of Defense (DOD) has made progress in answering the Secretary’s call to improve our partners’ abilities to defend themselves, there is more still to be done—particularly in Afghanistan.

NTM–A has been charged with building Afghan capacity in four primary areas: training and equipping the Afghan National Army and Police, developing the Ministries of Interior (MoI) and Defense (MoD), improving the country’s human capital, and investing in Afghanistan’s physical capital. To establish an *enduring* force that can provide security for its

country’s population over the long term, the most critical task is to develop effective and accountable security ministries. Only after Afghanistan’s security institutions are self-sufficient and self-sustaining will it be possible for the Afghan government to make geographic gains durable.

Sharing Ministry-level Expertise: The MoDA Program

Developing these critical and complex ministries requires a mixture of humility and realism. While technical assistance can help, ministerial capacity must ultimately be home-grown; it cannot simply be “exported” by well-intentioned foreign partners to their host-nation counterparts.

DOD recently tapped its considerable institutional resources to make a vital contribution to advising efforts. Drawing upon its own pool of civilian expertise, the Defense Department established the Ministry of Defense Advisor (MoDA) program in 2009. The program pairs civilian specialists with officials at the Afghan MoD and MoI. Seventeen of these senior DOD civilians deployed to Afghanistan in the summer of 2010, advising their Afghan counterparts in specialized fields such as logistics, financial administration, and human resources. The program marks a significant evolution in the DOD approach to institutional capacity-building. It combines rigorous predeployment training in mentoring skills with a structured reachback capability that allows advisors to make full use of DOD resources. Additionally, the program provides backfill funding for each advisor’s parent organization during deployment and emphasizes the importance of building relationships with partners that will continue long after advisors return home. Recognizing the program’s immediate contributions and the growing need



U.S. Air Force (Efran Lopez)

The Afghan National Police mission is to maintain law and order and support the government's efforts to regain control of the country

for civilian expertise in the development of Afghan security institutions, ISAF Commander General David Petraeus has called for the program to expand dramatically by summer 2011.

The MoDA program, with its emphasis on civilian-led institution-building, is only the latest innovation in the Defense Department's ongoing advisory efforts in Afghanistan. Military advisors began working with Afghan forces in the early days of the war, and their importance grew as building sustainable Afghan-led security institutions became a priority. However, these American advisory efforts were often carried out on an ad hoc basis, utilizing uniformed or contract personnel who did not always possess the requisite experience in the fields where their services were sought, or who lacked sufficient working knowledge of the sociocultural context into which they were being deployed. While filling tactical-level advisory requirements has proved relatively straightforward, if demanding, the sheer diversity of ministerial-level portfolios makes it more challenging to align advisory expertise with ministerial needs.

Ministry-level advising requires diverse yet specialized skill sets. The Afghan MoD slaughterhouse is a prime example. This organization is responsible for procuring meat products to feed the 136,000-strong Afghan National Army. Originally, a U.S. Army colonel was selected as an advisor based primarily on his knowledge of hunting—the battlefield equivalent of a meat-processing background. With the institution of the MoDA program, the Afghan army slaughterhouse now has a civilian advisor from the Defense Commissary Agency with over 20 years of experience providing safe, quality meat. This level of experience cannot be found within the uniformed ranks, and few contract agencies could provide the combination of slaughterhouse

expertise and functional knowledge of a defense ministry.

Bringing Civilian Assets to Partner Capacity-building

With the capability to leverage such specialized skill sets, the MoDA program is an example of the growing DOD capacity to play a reconstructive role in societies transitioning from war to peace. The core objective of these efforts is the development of effective

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security institutions that are accountable to civilian leadership. Putting civilians in charge of the military separates the coercive force within a nation from its political decision-making. This creates a culture in which the armed forces focus on defending the nation while remaining independent of political concerns, leaving civilian-led ministries to navigate the nuanced political landscape. The MoDA program was designed to foster such civil-military partnerships.

In Afghanistan, where the political landscape is still solidifying, civil-military partnership is especially important. Afghanistan's survival as a democracy depends largely on the ability of its army and police forces to provide security to the Afghan population, regardless of political affiliation or ethnic background. After decades of conflict, the Afghan military has considerable control over Afghanistan's nascent security institutions. Many key positions in Afghanistan's MoI and MoD are filled by former army commanders who bring with them a wealth of tactical experience. But in a country

that has not had a functioning central government for many years, their civilian credentials are understandably lacking. This is a key area where MoDA program advisors can be of use.

MoDA civilian advisors have assets that military and contract advisors lack. They deploy straight from positions within DOD and typically have years of experience in those jobs. They will remain in their positions upon their return, bringing close personal and professional relationships with their Afghan counterparts back. These links will help form an important part of the foundation of an enduring security partnership between the United States and Afghan government.

Like military advisors, MoDA advisors have the flexibility to contribute outside their original mandate. This is a benefit that cannot be provided by contract advisors, who must complete their tasks according to a specific contract. Kimberly Ekholm's experiences as an advisor illustrate this capacity for innovation. As a DOD-trained executive assistant and advisor to Enayatullah Nazari, first deputy to the Minister of Defense, Ms. Ekholm was asked to begin training Minister Nazari's staff to use email. However, she found that a ministry-wide lack of computer skills meant that other departments would be unable to access and respond to the messages that the deputy minister and his staff sent. So Mr. Nazari asked her to extend the email training course to the entire ministry. Before beginning, she surveyed staff from all departments to find out what skills they had acquired from past training programs and developed a curriculum based on their needs. Her experience as a civilian opened doors that a uniformed advisor might not have been aware of, allowing her to design and execute a computer training course in coordination with the Afghan Defense

Ministry’s Public Affairs, Communications, and Personnel Training departments.

The MoDA program complements a range of other institution-building initiatives within DOD and beyond. Defense security cooperation programs such as the Defense Institution Reform Initiative, Warsaw Initiative Fund, and Defense Institute of International Legal Studies training program help our allies undertake security sector reforms and strengthen their military capabilities. The U.S. Department of State, Department of Commerce, and other government agencies have their own advisory programs that contribute importantly to capacity-building efforts in Afghanistan and other partner states around the world.

However, the MoDA program is unique in that it builds on deployment mechanisms developed by the recently established Civilian Expeditionary Workforce to recruit the most qualified DOD civilians and provide them the support they need to be effective. Unlike other programs that place staff in U.S. field offices, the MoDA program sends civilians to work directly within a partner government, working inside the country in need. The program’s ability to draw experienced specialists from the Secretary of Defense’s own staff sends an important message of American commitment to our allies.

Putting the Right Advisors in the Right Places

A successful advisory program must address both the supply of qualified advisors and the demand for their services. The MoDA program has developed mechanisms for both, a model that will become increasingly important as the need for civilian defense advisors grows in Afghanistan and around the world.

To meet this demand, the MoDA program works closely with American and NATO forces and the Afghan government to identify the requirements within the security sector that can best be addressed by civilian expertise. Effective identification of the right person for the right advisory position requires flexibility and recognition of the critical role that personality plays in a successful advisory effort. Many MoDA program advisors have taken on unexpected tasks and responsibilities, responding to needs that were only apparent once they were on the ground in Afghanistan. One example is John Gillette, who brought a background in business development and an appreciation for innovative solutions to his role as advisor to Major General Hotak, First Deputy Minister

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of Defense for Acquisition and Training. Mr. Gillette, who was originally assigned to advise another official, impressed General Hotak with his matter-of-fact manner and dedication to finding long-term Afghan-led solutions. After turning down other advisors who could not address the kinds of problems Mr. Gillette had decades of experience solving, General Hotak specifically requested that Mr. Gillette be assigned to work with him, and the two have developed a rapport necessary to accomplish tasks together.

Personal connections such as these are central to forging an enduring partnership between DOD and Afghan ministries. The experiences of MoDA advisors, who have drawn on their individual talents and experiences to break through language and cultural barriers and form



U.S. Navy (Ernesto Hernandez Fonte)

Recruits take oath of enlistment during Afghan National Army ceremony in Regional Military Training Center-Kandahar, October 2010

lasting bonds with their Afghan counterparts, highlight the principle at the heart of DOD civilian advisory programs: people build institutions.

Ensuring a supply of talented and experienced advisors is just as important as matching their individual skills to meet specific demands. The MoDA program was designed to draw on sustainable DOD personnel resources—marking a significant evolution from previous case-by-case military and contracted advising initiatives. The program’s backfill mechanism provides funds to advisors’ parent organizations, allowing them to temporarily fill a position while their employee is overseas. Reducing the strain on the advisor’s employer serves two purposes: It helps attract the most qualified candidates for advisory positions and it ensures that they are able to resume their positions within DOD when they complete deployment. When they return home, MoDA participants bring professional connections to their counterparts in Afghanistan’s security ministries and a new wealth of knowledge and experience back with them to the Department of Defense.

The MoDA program also offers participants considerable opportunities for personal and professional development. Several advisors have asked to extend their year-long deployment to 2 years, and as the program expands, the level of interest from DOD civilians suggests that it is achieving its goal of sustainability while also helping foster a culture in which more and more civilian experts are becoming directly involved in security capacity-building overseas. As demand for DOD constructive capabilities grows, the ability to deploy civilian resources will need to develop further. The MoDA program is an important step in this direction.

Filling a Department-Wide Gap

Intensive predeployment training has helped advisors become immediately effective upon arrival in Afghanistan, and has been key to the program's success thus far. Participants receive 7 weeks of extensive, experiential training in culture, language, and advisory skills, as well as adaptability, resiliency, and personal safety training. Some of the unique aspects of this preparation include a personality inventory that measures innovation and critical thinking skills, along with training that encourages an "adaptive stance" to complex decisionmaking, risk communication, and executive "branding" techniques that provide skills that MoDA advisors can use to help Afghan officials build public confidence in the security ministries.

Although MoDA senior civilians are experts in their functional areas, the training provides some of the additional core competencies needed to be successful advisors. These competencies include mentoring and advisor skills, where participants learn to focus their advisory efforts around the program's four overarching objectives: supporting local ownership; designing projects for sustainability; demonstrating empathy, humility, and respect; and doing no harm. Advisors receive intensive language and cultural instruction, with a ratio of three students to one native speaker for an hour and a half each day for the entire course.

In the first 5-week phase of classroom training, senior-level American and Afghan officials, regional experts, and instructors from the United States Institute of Peace worked closely with the first class of MoDA program advisors.⁴ In the second phase, a 10-day immersive field exercise at the Muscatatuck Urban Training Center introduced advisors to the realities of living on a forward operating base and gave them the opportunity to test their advising

skills—in an academic, controlled environment with native Afghan role players and interpreters—before they were called upon to use these skills with their Afghan counterparts. The trainees also learned about personnel security and were introduced to the Marine Corps' "Combat Hunter" situational awareness course. Subsequent courses will include an increased focus on physical and mental preparedness, more immersive role playing and practical exercises, and an increased emphasis on assessing student progress during the course.

Harnessing Departmental Resources

The MoDA program includes a structured reachback mechanism, making it easier for advisors in the field to draw on DOD resources. This enhances the natural links that advisors have to their parent organizations. These connections are among the most valuable assets that MoDA program advisors bring to their Afghan counterparts. Ms. Ekholm, who worked for the Department of Defense Education Activity (DODEA) before joining the MoDA program, was able to call her former colleagues for help when a staff member from another department in the Afghan MoD asked her for assistance in setting up an English language course. DODEA shared its English as a Second Language program curriculum and instructor training methods with her, which Ms. Ekholm was able to adapt.

Similarly, Rasheed Diallo, who advises officials in charge of audits and personnel for the Logistics Directorate at the Afghan MoI, looked to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Command Supply Discipline Program (CSDP) for a model checklist to use in conducting internal audits of departments, providing critical support to the Afghan National Police. While

the Army's CSDP checklist gave the MoI a template to work from, Mr. Diallo and his Afghan counterparts tailored the checklist for use in an Afghan environment. The fact that it was a joint effort was critical to the project's success. With Afghan buy-in and ownership, this kind of initiative is much more likely to continue to be implemented after the advisors leave.

Ultimately, the goal is to support the Afghan army and police. Mr. Diallo and the other MoDA advisors work with key leaders in the MoI and MoD to increase their capacity and capabilities to generate, train, and sustain forces. They focus on three key areas: structural changes, the crafting of policies and laws in support of Afghan Parliament, and the development of a logistics system. Less than a year into deployment, the advisors' efforts have been translated into tangible results that have a direct impact on the sustainability of Afghan forces. For example, Mr. Diallo's assistance in the development of internal audit mechanisms for the Afghan National Police will help ensure transparency and oversight of everything from the police bakery and laundry services to the explosive ordnance disposal unit. As the senior civilian advisor to the Director of Supply and Sustainment at the Afghan MoI, Rick Pollitt is training his Afghan counterparts to develop systems for weapons accountability and ammunition management—measures that are crucial to keeping weapons out of the hands of insurgents.

Looking Ahead

Ministerial capacity is clearly growing. Structurally, both the MoD and MoI have created Recruiting and Training Commands critical to developing stable systems for recruiting demographically representative personnel and establishing a common standard of training. The ministries have advanced policies and

advocated laws necessary to generating, training, and sustaining Afghan forces. Their successes include the creation of a formal document detailing the size and composition of each force, and they will soon implement a comprehensive personnel system that includes merit-based promotion, established career paths, and retirement systems. To sustain the force, the ministries have developed a regional logistics system, helping push supplies beyond the distribution points in Kabul and Kandahar.

The field of logistics is one in which MoDA advisors have been especially active. Mr. Pollitt has also worked with his Afghan counterparts to develop a transformational logistics reporting tool to track equipment and supplies distributed to police forces in over 300 districts, helping ensure that the Afghan police get needed supplies in an efficient and transparent manner. Soldiers and police in the field are consistently found to be short of food, clothing, and other necessities, making the institutionalization of these kinds of systems essential to the long-term viability of the Afghan security forces. The next step will be to create a “push” system, where logistics planners identify what should be needed at each unit and push it to them, without waiting for a request. This system gets supplies to those who need them before they would otherwise be missed. In the current “pull” system, units wait to request supplies until they have identified a need. Units fail to forecast future shortages—and so they go without. This is unacceptable in any security force, and even more so in one that is consistently in combat.

As the MoDA program prepares to deploy its second group of civilian advisors to Afghanistan in spring 2011, significant challenges remain. Expanding the program will mean addressing the administrative issues that complicate the task of sending a large number

of civilians overseas. New systems need to be designed to make civilians more deployable, and mechanisms for tracking trained specialists within the DOD workforce will become a key element of targeted recruiting.

As MoDA program administrators tackle the supply-side challenges of increased civilian deployment, the demand for defense specialists will grow. With the creation of Afghan infantry and basic police units largely completed by the end of 2010, coalition forces will be able to focus on establishing units specializing in logistics, intelligence, maintenance, and other areas that a professional, enduring force requires. More capable security ministries will be needed as these new units increase the complexity of maintaining Afghan forces. As their need for specialized knowledge increases, ministry officials will require skilled advisors to help them address these difficult issues.

Ultimately, the task of building the capacity of the ANSF is a “duel in strategic endurance,”⁵ with insurgent forces determined to wait us out, and international political support wearing thin. However, while coalition forces will be thinned out over the next few years, NTM–A, in some form or another, will have an enduring presence supporting the ANSF. Whether it evolves into an Office of Security Cooperation similar to those in U.S. Embassies across the globe, or something more robust, the United States and Afghanistan will have a significant military-to-military relationship with strong civilian support for years to come. The MoDA program is ideally positioned to support this partnership today and well into the future.

Recovery from 30 years of warfare does not occur quickly. Political patience and a large initial investment in building Afghan capacity are needed to restart the Afghan economy and provide security to a society that has suffered decades of violence. The payoff will be professional security forces that are able to protect the Afghan population, creating room for the development needed to sustain peace and stability.

No matter how the political winds may blow in the future, and regardless of the international presence remaining in Afghanistan, “we must leave the Afghan people with an enduring capability and force generation capacity” to provide for their own security.⁶ By developing the Afghan National Security Force and the ministries that will sustain it, we are ensuring that Afghanistan will be safe in the hands of its own soldiers and police—forces that Afghanistan’s enemies won’t be able to outlast. **PRISM**

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Notes

¹ Anders Fogh Rasmussen, “Monthly Press Briefing,” North Atlantic Treaty Organization, June 7, 2010, available at <www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_64083.htm>.

² *2010 National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: The White House, May 2010), 11.

³ Robert M. Gates, “Helping Others Defend Themselves,” *Foreign Affairs*, May–June 2010.

⁴ Speakers participating in the 2010 Ministry of Defense Advisor training course included counterinsurgency expert David Kilcullen, Afghanistan expert Sarah Chayes, Ambassadors James Dobbins and the late

Richard Holbrooke, former Afghan Minister of the Interior Ali Jalali, and former National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley.

⁵ Anthony Cordesman, *Realism in Afghanistan: Rethinking an Uncertain Case for the War* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, June 2010).

⁶ William B. Caldwell IV, "Security Force Assistance: A Change in Mindset," *Infantry Bugler*, Spring 2010, 9.