

October 20, 2010

Lieutenant General William B. Caldwell, IV, U.S. Army, is Commanding General of the NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan in Kabul, Afghanistan.

Viewpoints is an occasional series published by Education Quality Improvement Program (EQIP) to contribute to the conversation about education in international development.

Views expressed by the author do not necessarily reflect those of the United States Agency for International Development or the American Institutes for Research.

Why do I, a uniformed military officer charged with building army and police forces to battle an insurgency, care about literacy instruction? The answer is capacity. Building the capacity of the Afghan National Security Force (ANSF) to provide security is key to the country's stability. In order to support the Afghans to build capacity, a solid foundation is required – a foundation of professionalism that can only be created through the development of capable leaders that possess the basics of education, particularly literacy.

When I took command of NATO Training Mission – Afghanistan (NTM-A) almost eleven months ago, the overall literacy rate of the ANSF, which is made up of the Afghan National Police and the Afghan National Army, stood at about 14%. As we assessed training programs for the army and police, it was immediately evident that illiteracy was affecting the speed and depth of instruction. Training had to be provided through hands-on instruction – each element, from Army platoons to Police stations, had to be demonstrated. Without the ability to provide written material to “prime the pump” for instruction means that every new block of instruction starts from scratch. Imagine teaching a class completely devoid of letters and numbers. There would be no homework for the night before. A chalk-board would be useless outside of pictures. How much more difficult would your classes be to complete? How much longer would it take to get through the material? These are the challenges that we face in every training course we provide.

Even more important than improving training, illiteracy affects the professionalization of the ANSF. Key elements of job performance for capable security forces are tied to basic literacy and numeracy. How do we professionalize a soldier who cannot read a manual to properly maintain a vehicle, fill out a form



for the issue of equipment for a unit, read a serial number to distinguish his weapon from another, calculate trajectory for a field artillery call for fire, or write an intelligence report for a higher command? How do we professionalize a policeman that cannot read the laws he is enforcing, write an incident report, record a license plate, or even sign his name to a citation? How can a policeman support the rule of law if he cannot build a case based on written evidence? How can anyone ensure accountability of superiors and subordinates if he cannot read what equipment his unit is required to have or understand a chart of salary grades?

Literacy is also important for increasing recruitment, improving retention, and reducing attrition in the current force.

Afghans who can read are rightfully proud of their ability. In Afghanistan, the ability to read is a badge of honor. A writing pen is seen as a status symbol – an outward sign that by providing this skill to the security forces, U.S.-funded programs are not only increasing their capability to perform their jobs and their credibility among the people of Afghanistan, but also building their ability to provide for their nation after they complete their service.

To provide the tools necessary for professional, accountable, and capable security forces, we are placing a “full court press” on literacy instruction across our training facilities in Afghanistan.

There are three elements that we have instituted to provide immediate reduction of illiteracy within the ANSF, particularly in the development of junior and mid-grade leaders – basic literacy, English language instruction, and Afghan Police Training Teams.

Basic Literacy

To build the confidence of the ANSF and instill a sense of honor and commitment within Afghanistan, we have instituted literacy programs for the ANSF at all levels of training and education. Examples of these are the Afghan National Police (ANP) literacy programs. All police attending basic training are given 64 mandatory hours of literacy instruction. The goal is to bring all ANP trainees up to a level three literacy level (equivalent to a 3rd grade level), a level sufficient enough to conduct day-to-day business, when combined with their experience and mature judgment. Future efforts will be focused on increasing literacy beyond that level, as well as the complete transition of literacy

instruction efforts to the Afghans.



For the Afghan National Army (ANA), the basis for literacy programs are providing soldiers with level three literacy skills that allow them to be trained in more technical and advanced tasks. This will expand the capabilities of the ANA by providing the foundation on which to train mechanics, med-

ics, logisticians, field artillerymen, and others whose support is critical to the ANA mission and requires a higher level of technical skill than the basic soldier.

For both the ANA and ANP, we have created 471 training sites across the country with 647 instructors providing training. Since October 2009, we have educated 12,836 soldiers and police to level 1, 6,268 to level 2, and 4,272 to level 3; with approximately 25,693 currently in training. Our goal is to have 50,000 ANSF personnel enrolled in literacy classes by December 1, 2010, and 100,000 by July 1, 2011. These literacy programs are critical to the professionalization of the ANSF.

In complement to U.S. military-led efforts to improve literacy among security forces, many other entities are working to increase literacy among the general population under the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE) global strategic framework. This coalition includes national governments, non-governmental organizations, civil society, private sector, United Nations agencies, bilateral and multilateral agencies. Additionally, the Afghan Ministry of Education supports a general literacy program that provides nine months of instruction for individuals between the ages of 15-45 who did not previously have access to education and who are not literate, primarily in urban areas. From 2002 to 2007 this program provided literacy training to between 300,000 and 400,000 a year through about 400 teachers. These programs focus on the historically under-educated Afghans, primarily children and women. Our programs, however, are focused on people who volunteer to serve in the ANSF, and are primarily men. The ANSF are made up of Afghans from across the country, rural as well as urban. For many, the availability of literacy training is the first educational opportunity in their lives.

English Language Instruction

In addition to basic literacy, English language instruction is critical to professionalizing the ANSF. English language instruction allows the ANSF to seamlessly participate in NATO exercises and ensures interoperability with international forces since English is the accepted language for the international aviation community. English skills are necessary to attend advanced training classes conducted in English inside and outside of Afghanistan for pilots and the maintenance and ground crews. The majority



of students enrolled in the language classes attend follow-on training courses in countries outside of Afghanistan, making English skills essential. The ability to read, write, and speak English allows them to attend training in their specialization, whether staff colleges, medical courses, or pilot training. We have now established 27 locations across Afghanistan to provide this capability, with approximately 3,257 students currently in training.

Finally, literacy instruction is not a skill that should end with initial basic training. In most cases it takes at least two months of dedicated training to achieve a marginal level of literacy. While most of this instruction is now taking place at training centers before soldiers and police join their units, it continues once they enter the operational force. To assist police officers who are already beyond the training base and did not receive literacy support, Afghan Police Training Teams (APPTs) are being formed that will include a literacy instructor. APPTs operate at the district level and provide literacy instruction two hours per day, five days a week.

While the focus of the teams are providing professional police training, literacy is an important aspect of their services. Needless to say, educating Afghanistan's entire security force to a sufficient level, while also meeting current operational commitments, is a challenge. However, in our eyes the reward for these efforts is significant.

There are some recognized deficiencies in our current literacy and language programs. The lack of a pool of educated and qualified teachers, particularly in remote areas, hinders the expansion and quality of instruction in some areas. Additionally, life support like lodging and food at military camps and police stations are

barely able to support the security forces stationed there. This is particularly difficult at remote locations where commuting to the training site is not an option, requiring the instructors to live on the military base or police facility.

Another issue is the priority local commanders give to literacy training. Some commanders prioritize even non-critical missions like paperwork and cleaning of the police station ahead of literacy training. We must ensure our instructors and commanders find a balance between security operations and literacy training. This is as important for retention as it is for building the capacity of the ANSF. Until the Afghan leadership takes a lead role in promoting and enforcing literacy goals, we will struggle to enroll students in classes.

For example, a decree signed by the Minister of Interior early this year states that “the ANP should accomplish literacy training,” leaving the enforcement and prioritization up to the local commander on the ground. The implementation of this policy has been inconsistent, and requires citizens and assessment teams to compel local leaders to prioritize literacy activities.

In Afghanistan, we are battling more than insurgent forces – we are fighting government corruption, poverty, and decades of oppression. These challenges aggravate stability, feed the insurgency, and hamper development. These enemies cannot be defeated by conventional military tactics, only through the education and empowerment of the Afghan people. By supporting Afghans with literacy and educational opportunities, we are providing them the foundation that will steadily improve the stability and prosperity of their nation. We have begun

the process to implement a system of life-long education for their security forces.

This system is doing more than just educating select soldiers and policemen. Our programs to educate and train the ANSF are transforming an entire generation of Afghan society’s human capital. Hundreds of thousands of Afghans joined the ANA and ANP, and we are providing them literacy instruction, education, and marketable skills such as leadership, planning, logistics, maintenance, computers, medicine, law enforcement, and engineering. To a young generation of Afghans, these opportunities constitute a new way of life. Some may leave the security forces after a short enlistment, while

some may remain in the security forces for a full career. Regardless, all of them will have expanded their education and skills while serving. Once their time in service is complete, they will match the higher expectations for the future with opportunities outside the security forces.

Recovery from 30 years of warfare does not occur

quickly. Political patience and a large initial investment in building capacity are needed to restart an economy ravaged by sustained conflict and decades of oppression. The payoff for this patience and investment are professional security forces that are able to provide security, creating stability and prosperity today while preserving hope and opportunity for generations to come.

