



Winning Hearts and Minds – Eagle Style

By Captain Becky L. Lapidow

The concept of “winning the hearts and minds” is heard so often in the media when discussing the Global War on Terrorism that it has almost become meaningless. Winning hearts and minds can be especially tough in a country such as Afghanistan, where decades of armed conflict have made the rural population leery of armed personnel bearing gifts. Despite this challenge, elements from the Afghan National Army (ANA); Headquarters Company, Task Force Eagle; and Charlie Company, Task Force Eagle, conducted a combined medical assistance and humanitarian assistance mission. By giving supplies such as shoes, food, and clothing and providing medical attention, Afghan and American Soldiers demonstrated the meaning of winning the hearts and minds to the local population and demonstrated the benefits of supporting the Afghanistan government’s efforts to bring security and stability to this area of the Paktika Province.

While medical screenings were conducted and humanitarian assistance packages were provided, ANA and Charlie Company Soldiers provided inner and outer rings of security. The key to this mission was to ensure that the ANA was the lead so the townspeople could see the role their army played in improving their daily lives. Before setup was finished, the townspeople started filtering inside for medical screenings. Symptoms such as burns, pink eye, diarrhea, and skin infections were treated by ANA doctors and Task Force Eagle medics. Female medics and assistants stood by to support the medical requirements of adult women and young girls, while male medics treated adult males in a separate room. More than 50 children came for medical treatment, and with the assistance of two ANA medics,



Photo by Captain Becky Lapidow

A Task Force Eagle Soldier helps local children carry supplies received from the humanitarian assistance mission.

no time was wasted—everyone was treated. The medics worked nonstop and had plenty of supplies on hand to treat everyone who came for aid. As with the ANA security lead, it was critical to have the ANA doctors and medics present to treat patients. Besides showing their lead in the event, it allowed Task Force Eagle medics an opportunity to train their Afghan counterparts. An ANA doctor remarked that a Medical Civil Affairs Program (MEDCAP) is good for the ANA and townspeople alike. It shows a close relationship between the ANA and the locals and that the American Soldiers are here to help. Referral slips with the name of the doctor and location of the new government clinic were provided to patients to demonstrate the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan’s commitment to improving their lives.

Another way Afghan and American Soldiers helped win over the townspeople was to hand out everyday supplies to the children and the adults.


An ANA and Task Force Eagle team provided aid to more than 150 people in desperate need of such supplies. Similar to the combined medical assistance part of the mission, the focus was to ensure that the Afghan soldiers were seen handing out the items alongside the American Soldiers. Most of the items—such as clothes, backpacks, shoes, pens, pencils, and coats—were geared toward the children. Many of them walked away with bundles of items bigger than they were. While the U.S. Army provided most of the supplies, some of the materials were donated by Soldiers’ family members. Adults were provided staples such as rice, beans, flour, and blankets for the cold winter ahead. The town elders were pleased with the humanitarian assistance, because they realize that some of their townspeople have very little as the winter approaches. The mission brought assistance to people in need, and the hope is that Afghan nationals and the government of



A Soldier helps fill a backpack for some local children.

Afghanistan will be able to help themselves for the long term. This is also why it is so important to have the ANA involved in these operations—to develop their ability to execute the missions and provide future assistance on their own.

In addition to winning the hearts and minds of the Afghan nationals, this assistance mission helped build a relationship with them so they'd be more welcoming to Task Force Eagle engineers conducting road construction near their town. This demonstrates an important balance between building needed roads and reaching out to the public, showing the benefits of such infrastructure. This mission was also an opportunity for the Afghan and American Soldiers to work together, proving that

coalition success requires working for the common goal of rebuilding the nation of Afghanistan. Just as important, the Task Force Eagle Soldiers walked away feeling that they made a difference in the country of Afghanistan—illustrating that the term “winning the hearts and minds” is more than a meaningless catch phrase. 

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