

Community Policing: The Cornerstone for a Secure Kandahar City

By First Lieutenant Danelle R. Gamble

Heavy traffic, congested neighborhoods, and crowded retail centers bring to mind thoughts of large cities or growing suburbs in the United States or Western Europe. But add streets lined with debris, nightly gunshots, and a population with little or no sense of the rule of law, and thoughts quickly transition to a city or country in desperate need of change. In the midst of the daily hustle and bustle of Kandahar City, Afghanistan, there is a police force with unlimited potential, a desire for change, and partners who are capable of mentoring them to a level from which they can influence the transition to a stable, self-sustaining society.

Upon arriving in Kandahar City, the 58th Military Police Company, Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, assumed the police mentorship mission of training and partnering with Afghan Uniform Police (AUP). Would the AUP grasp the forward-thinking concepts of community policing and female engagements, and would they be willing to progress? After providing 5 months of dedicated police mentorship, the 58th is beginning to see that Afghan eyes are opening, the light is shining through overcast skies, and the horizon is broadening every day.

At first, the Kandahar City AUP consisted of a paramilitary force—using military tactics and consistently posturing themselves as a hardened force—with little positive interaction with the communities they served. However, in a city riddled with insurgent and criminal activity, the relationship between the community and its first line of defense is critical. Initially, the AUP did not understand the need to transition from combat operations to stability operations—and they did not realize that

the local populace would be their most valuable asset in combating the enemy.

The 58th Military Police Company is responsible for two police substations (PSSs) in the subdistrict, and 70 percent of the PSS leaders have military backgrounds as *mujahideen*¹ fighters or leaders in the ranks of the Afghan National Army. In contrast, less than half of the 220 patrolmen in the subdistrict have received formal police training. Bringing these two extremes—hardened military fighters and laymen—together might seem to be a daunting task. But for the 2d Platoon, 58th Military Police Company, it was an opportunity that extended beyond preparing the AUP for the official drawdown of U.S. troops in Afghanistan by 2014; it was an opportunity to tap into the depths of true policing—reaching out to people who desperately needed protection and structure.

The platoon, which was embedded and partnered with one of the PSSs, and the higher headquarters recognized the need for AUP transformation to an approachable and proactive police force. Small changes were tested before a formal plan was established. During dismounted patrols, squad leaders encouraged street level engagements between Soldiers, the AUP, and the local populace. The engagements began with Soldiers (who showed genuine concern and modeled interpersonal skills) and the AUP addressing security concerns and recent enemy activity within the area of operations. Rather than idly waiting for information to be provided, they actively solicited it. While the squads and platoon worked the streets, the company and battalion commanders encouraged the PSS commanders to

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Coalition community policing

attend community policing conferences and then serve as mentors for implementing the information into daily patrols. As the PSS commanders began to understand the importance of an amiable police force, the platoon developed a formal plan to close the gap between the AUP and the people of Kandahar City. The plan consisted of three phases: assessment, training, and execution.

Assessment

To gauge where the AUP stood with the Kandahar City populace, a community assessment operation was developed and executed in the village closest to the PSS where the 2d platoon was embedded. The village was divided into five sections, the teams visited with people from each section, and the information was consolidated to assess the overall opinion of the entire community. Based on the knowledge gained while performing law enforcement duties at home, coupled with the knowledge obtained from earlier street level engagements in Afghanistan, the platoon developed questions designed to promote open dialogue. During the initial street level engagements, a desperate need to engage the female Afghan population was identified. To address this need, the platoon established female engagement teams consisting of female military police officers and a female linguist. During the assessment operations, the AUP and the platoon spoke openly with the people, identified security concerns, and bridged the gap that had been created by an excessively aggressive police force—the same force that now acknowledges the advantages of evolution.

Training

As a result of the assessment phase, a training plan was developed for the AUP. The training phase began by making basic corrections to the overtly forceful actions that the AUP had grown accustomed to using. By learning to handle stressful situations in a nonaggressive way, the AUP established a friendly atmosphere that encouraged community members to interact with them and provide them with information that proved useful in disrupting enemy and criminal activity. In addition to the basic corrections, each squad used brigade-directed initiatives and personal experience to develop a class on community policing. The incorporation of captivating class scenarios provided the AUP with realistic training that prepared them for the tasks ahead. Platoon leaders acknowledged that some AUP might find the task of engaging people to be an intimidating one—much like a military police Soldier's first experience with performing law enforcement duties. This problem was mitigated through scenarios in which role players ignored or became openly disrespectful toward the AUP and the AUP practiced responding in an appropriate, non-violent manner.

Execution

Thus far, the execution phase has been encouraging. The AUP are becoming more approachable, and PSS commanders are planning their own community policing operations. In a subdistrict with blatant insurgent

support zones, the support of the populace is vital; and the PSS commanders are beginning to understand this. In addition, the 58th Military Police Company is now taking advantage of a program that provides positive-themed pamphlets and “tip cards.” These materials contain information about U.S. and Afghan avenues for reporting insurgent and criminal activity. Furthermore, the 2d Platoon and partnered AUP plan to increase community policing operations in the more dangerous areas of the subdistrict—thereby maintaining pressure on the insurgents and promoting their own support of the Afghan people as well as their desire to create a safer, more manageable subdistrict.

Although the road ahead is promising, barriers remain. For example, during the initial community policing operation, the local populace voiced concerns about health care, education, and municipalities—areas that are beyond the realm and capabilities of the AUP. However, PSS commanders can act as liaisons between the Afghan people and the subdistrict manager, voicing the concerns of the people they serve. The subdistrict manager—who is mentored by the commander of the 58th Military Police Company and the governance noncommissioned officer—can, in turn, encourage the government of Afghanistan to address the concerns of the populace.

Although the security of Kandahar City is desired, the reality is that insurgents are present within the city boundaries. While this knowledge may be discouraging, it has not hindered the 2d Platoon from moving forward with street level engagements and positive relationship building. To account for this threat, the training phase was slightly modified to teach the AUP to split their patrols into two elements—an engagement element and a security element.

The final identified barrier is the difficulty in reaching the significant female population. The unique composition of military police units allows female Soldiers who have already been trained and prepared for combat to conduct female Afghan engagements without the need for additional unit training or rehearsal time. This significantly increases effectiveness and, ultimately, provides a voice to a large portion of the population who previously had no opportunity to express themselves.

The most encouraging part of the 58th Military Police Company mission is recognizing that people are people. No matter where the company has traveled within Kandahar City, smiles, laughter, and generosity are universal. As Soldiers, we often overlook this concept; but as a leader, I am never more proud of my Soldiers than when they put their training to good use and have a positive interaction with a local national.

As battlespace owners, the 58th Military Police Company is mentoring AUP partners and the subdistrict manager—using community policing as the cornerstone to gain advantageous positions with the local populace.

Endnote:

¹*Mujahideens* are Muslims who are self-proclaimed warriors of their faith.



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