



ROYAL DANISH DEFENCE COLLEGE

POLICY BRIEF
December 2015



MENTORING THE AFGHAN ARMY AT THE OFFICER ACADEMY IN KABUL: FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Capacity building of host nation militaries is a central component of current multinational military operations, which is likely to become increasingly vital to future military interventions in conflict settings. Focusing on the mentoring of the Afghan National Army at the British-led officer academy in Kabul, this policy brief stresses the urgency with which Western militaries should improve military capacity building efforts. Based on qualitative data collected at the British Royal Military Academy Sandhurst and the Afghan National Army Officer Academy, the brief outlines five clusters of military-specific recommendations on 'measurements of success', 'local ownership', 'mentoring', 'coalition cultures' and 'Afghan values and visions', which may be helpful in generating sustainable security solutions in Afghanistan and beyond.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Outline and make accessible a clear end-state that resonates with measurements of success.
- Develop a vision for substantive ownership, and specify how this is sought to be achieved.
- Ensure coherence between mentoring policies and practices, and invest in mentoring education.
- Expand cultural pre-deployment training on Afghan culture to include a focus on coalition cultures.
- Integrate Afghan values and visions in the design, implementation and assessment of military capacity building.

MENTORING THE AFGHAN ARMY AT THE OFFICER ACADEMY IN KABUL: FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction¹

The capacity building of the Afghan security forces is a critical element of the current NATO mission in Afghanistan. With the transition to the Resolute Support Mission on 1 January 2015, the success of the NATO mission now solely depends on the self-sustainability of the Afghan forces.² The British-led Afghan National Army Officer Academy (ANAOA) in Kabul, which is modelled on the British Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, is an important marker of this success.

This policy brief presents findings on the current phase of mentoring at the ANAOA, and outlines recommendations on military operational support to this academy. These recommendations centre on measurements of success, local ownership, mentoring, coalition cultures and Afghan values and visions. In a context where security force assistance to a host nation's military is a present challenge, which is likely to become an increasingly significant component of future military engagements,³ these recommendations may be helpful in strengthening the effectiveness of military capacity building missions.

Research methodology

The brief is based on qualitative data collection on the cultural implications of military capacity building. Here, fieldwork has been conducted at Sandhurst between 21-31 May 2014, and at the ANAOA between 11-17 November 2014. At Sandhurst, data collection concentrated on the ANAOA coalition force mentor course, which prepared coalition forces from Britain, New Zealand, Australia, Denmark and Norway for deployment. During the participation in this course, qualitative interviews were conducted with British officers who *had* been deployed to ANAOA and with Danish officers who were *about to* deploy. At the ANAOA qualitative interviews were conducted

with British staff and with coalition force mentors. Simultaneously, observations were carried out during mentoring sessions with the Afghan instructors, and during the training of the Afghan officer cadets. In Denmark, an evaluation seminar and additional interviews have been conducted with Danish mentors and military linguists following their deployment to the academy. Due to military security concerns, one essential perspective is largely absent from this material: that of the Afghan National Army (ANA). This absence significantly limits the possibility to present substantive recommendations tailored to how the ANA perceive of and respond to international capacity building interventions.

In summation, the data material offers insight into the pre-deployment expectations, deployment experiences, and post-deployment evaluations of *Western coalition forces* deployed to ANAOA between September 2013 and February 2015. While this material is limited to the specific context of the ANAOA during a certain time period, it may tell us something about the opportunities and challenges related to military capacity building in other contexts where multinational coalitions are deployed, and will deploy in the future.

Context:

The Afghan National Army Officer Academy

On 19 July 2012 former Afghan President Karzai and British Prime Minister David Cameron signed a Memorandum of Understanding for the creation of the ANAOA. In line with the NATO mission aims, the British government defines the creation of the ANAOA as one of their achievements in strengthening the ANA, and as a success in the sense that it is "an example that Afghans are proving to be confident and capable of taking the lead in providing security and support for their people".⁴

Drawing on inspiration from the military ethos of Sandhurst, the overall ambition for the ANAOA is to build a "capable, sustainable and independent" institution⁵ that produces 'Warrior Officers'. This ambition is sought achieved through project phases of preparation (2012-2013), mentoring (2013-2016), advising (2017) and assuring (2017-2023). The current phase of mentoring

1. This policy brief is based on the article 'Cultural Frictions: Mentoring the Afghan Army at Sandhurst in the Sand' by Christensen & Jakobsen, published in the *Small Wars Journal* on 19 November 2015. <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/cultural-frictions-mentoring-the-afghan-army-at-%E2%80%98sandhurst-in-the-sand%E2%80%99>

2. www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_8189.htm, accessed 13 March 2015.

3. Stephanie Blair: 'Assisting Host Country Militaries: Assessing Lessons from NATO, EU and Member State Experience', Conference Report, Research Division, NATO Defence College, July 2014, p. 3.

4. UK Ministry of Defence, 'A lasting legacy in Afghanistan', 1 November 2014, www.gov.uk/government/news/a-lasting-legacy-in-Afghanistan.

5. Afghan National Army Officer Academy Mentoring Standard Operating Instruction (SOI), *DRAFT* version, October 2014.

is set to implicate the most significant NATO contribution to the academy with around 120 coalition forces deployed.⁶ These coalition forces are tasked to “develop the ANA instructors to be effective trainers of the ANAOA cadets” through the exercise of mentoring.⁷

Key findings

Key findings emerging from analysis of data collected at the ANAOA and Sandhurst relate to the following themes: measurements of success, local ownership, mentoring, coalition cultures, and Afghan values and visions.

Measurements of success should ideally reflect the envisioned end-state of military capacity building. At the ANAOA, coalition force mentors expressed uncertainty of whether a clear end-state had been outlined, and of how their efforts should support visions for the academy. During their pre-deployment training at Sandhurst, it was noted that their task was *not* to produce the best officers, but rather to make the Afghans ‘good enough’. In line with this, British staff at the ANAOA were measuring success against “the number”, rather than the quality of Afghan officer cadets being produced. Yet, the envisaged balance between quantity and quality was not always explicit. Moreover, coalition force mentors expressed uncertainty as to whether the measurements of success were related to the progress made by their individual mentees, or whether it related to institutional capacity building more broadly. In practice, coalition force mentors experienced that what was mainly being measured was the short-term effectiveness of individual coalition forces, rather than their ability to contribute to long-term developments at the ANAOA and to the ambition of building an independent institution.

Local ownership, vaguely conceptualised as Afghan forces taking full responsibility for security, is central to the NATO mission in Afghanistan. Among coalition force mentors, the current phase of mentoring at the ANAOA is influenced by an uncertainty of the vision for ownership, and of the means through which ownership is sought to be achieved. This uncertainty is an outcome of the ambiguous aim of building a Sandhurst-modelled officer academy the ‘Afghan way’ – an apparently contradictory approach structured by an attempted transfer of Western values on the one hand, and by the emphasis on ensuring Afghan ownership, on the other.

Mentoring is a modality of soldiering which is central to the mediation between Western values and local ownership. At the ANAOA, mentoring is practiced in diver-

se ways which do not reflect the approach to mentoring defined in the policy laid out in the standard operating procedure. These divergent approaches are sometimes counterproductive to the mentor-mentee relations and to collaborative relations within coalition forces. When mentoring fails, cultural differences are often employed as the explanation. Moreover, large numbers of deployed coalition force mentors have no previous experience with, and are insufficiently prepared for, the mentoring of foreign security forces during pre-deployment training. As a result, they are uncertain of how productive mentor-mentee relations are achieved in a situation where there is potentially a threat of insider attacks.

Coalition cultures tend to be viewed as a coherent whole, shaped by a Western military ethos, which is shared by all coalition forces. Cultural differences within coalition forces were, however, prevailing at the ANAOA. Here, coalition cultural differences resulted in friction, which presented challenges to effective mentoring and to multinational collaboration. This friction was mainly an outcome of the distance between British and non-British coalition forces, which originated during the pre-deployment training at Sandhurst. Here, personnel and practices at the ANAOA were consistently evaluated against personnel and practices at Sandhurst, and coalition force mentors were asked to act as Sandhurst role models. Among the non-British, who had no association with this British academy, and felt their national military proficiencies were largely ignored, this produced an experience of lack of ownership. At the ANAOA, this resulted in *disengagement* and inaction. Moreover, it gave rise to a production of cultural stereotypes about the British and to an internal critique of the Sandhurst way of doing business in Kabul.

Afghan values and visions are crucial to integrate into the design, implementation and ongoing assessment of capacity building, if sustainable security solutions are to be achieved. At the ANAOA, coalition force mentors experienced that they were imposing the British Sandhurst model on the Afghans, thus neglecting a focus on Afghan values and visions. The British staff, however, emphasised that the Sandhurst model is being ‘Afghanized’ in order to fit the realities at the Afghan academy. At the Sandhurst pre-deployment course, coalition forces were poorly prepared to engage in such process of ‘Afghanization’, as they were equipped mainly with cultural do’s and don’ts, and with moral evaluations of how the Afghan forces culturally diverged from Western forces.

Recommendations

The research findings presented above have significant implications for the extent to which mentoring enables the ANA to take full responsibility for security provision in Afghanistan. In order to support Western militaries in developing modes for effective mentoring, which can

6. The bulk of these mentors (around 87) are British. In addition to the mentors, a force protection team of Australian and British soldiers, and four Danish linguists are also deployed during the current mentor phase.

7. Afghan National Army Officer Academy Mentoring Standard Operating Instruction (SOI), *DRAFT* version, October 2014.

lead to the accomplishment of mission aims, military-specific recommendations are outlined below. These recommendations target operational planners, organizers of pre-deployment training, and international staff. The recommendations can help improve the long-term sustainability of the ANAOA, but may also serve as helpful guidance when planning future multinational military training and capacity building missions.

Measurements of success

- Outline a clear desired end-state, and make it accessible and comprehensible to deployed coalition forces *and* to the Afghan forces.
- Ensure that measurements of success resonate with the outlined end-state.
- Specify whether success is measured by quantity or quality – or how the balance between the two is sought to be achieved.
- Clarify how the mentoring of individuals relates to, and are intended to shape, processes of long-term institutional capacity building.

Local ownership

- Outline a vision for ownership, and specify how this vision is sought to be achieved.
- Clarify the balance between top-down and bottom-up approaches to ownership.
- Ensure cultural contextualisation and involve local stakeholders as active players in a collaborative process.
- Be aware that bottom-up approaches to local ownership may sometimes be challenging, especially in conflict settings where internal competition over what constitutes local values may trigger an escalation of the conflict.

Mentoring

- Ensure that mentoring policies are applicable to practice.

- Nurture productive mentor-mentee relations through consistent approaches to mentoring and ongoing collaborative dialogue.
- Make assessments of what skills coalition forces should acquire to become effective mentors.
- Integrate mentoring education into pre-deployment training.
- Consider implementing a mentoring career path for military officers.
- Regard cultural practices as departure points for nurturing ownership through mentoring, rather than as barriers to collaborative mentor-mentee relations.

Coalition cultures

- Recognise that coalition forces are composed of multiple (military) cultures, which may complement each other and create added value.
- Improve efforts to create mutual understanding and a sense of shared purpose among coalition forces.
- Extend pre-deployment training on host nation culture to include a renewed focus on coalition cultures.

Afghan values and visions

- Integrate Afghan values and visions in the design, implementation and on-going assessment of capacity building efforts.
- Expand pre-deployment focus on do's and don'ts, and the particularities of Afghan culture, to include a focus on what it means to be an Afghan soldier providing security in contemporary Afghanistan, and on how the ANA is perceived by the Afghan population.
- Invest in, and make possible, in-depth research on how the Afghan forces perceive and respond to international capacity building efforts, and how they envision the future of the ANAOA and the ANA.



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Cover photo: Maya Mynster Christensen

ISBN: 978-87-7147-119-9

