



Dress Like Allies, Kill Like Enemies

An Analysis of 'Insider Attacks' in Afghanistan



By Javid Ahmad
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Executive Summary

Insider attacks—attacks by insurgents posing as Afghan police or military personnel against local or international forces—have become an important threat to the American and NATO personnel in Afghanistan. “We’re willing to sacrifice a lot for this campaign. But we are not willing to be murdered for it,” as Gen. John R. Allen, then commander of US and NATO forces in Afghanistan, put it in 2012. Since 2007, insider attacks have resulted in the death of at least 157 NATO personnel and 557 members of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF). The attacks have affected the public narrative of the Afghan war in the United States and partner countries and have sown a degree of distrust between NATO troops and ANDSF as they struggle to fight a common enemy. Despite the last sixteen years of engagement in Afghanistan, the United States and its NATO partners still fumble when trying to communicate with Afghans.

This report makes two claims:

- First, it argues that insider attacks are an outcome of cultural friction. Often attacks are the product of a perceived insult, a cultural gaffe, or a small misstep that in the minds of certain Afghan forces take on much greater significance.
- Second, the report claims that increasingly after 2011, insider attacks became the preferred warfighting tactic of the Taliban, an organization that understood well how to apply limited resources for maximum effect. In fact, despite a reputation for cultural myopia, the Taliban’s use of insider attacks reveals that the group understood US military and political culture and domestic sensitivities far better than some imagined. Using ANDSF personnel to attack American and NATO personnel was in effect a “cultural weapon” that targeted two weaknesses in the US civil-military apparatus: a deep aversion to casualties and the need to believe in benevolent narratives about why Americans fight.

This report explains the scope of the insider threat and its underlying causes, conceptualizes the cultural context of the insider attacks, and examines their impact on the Afghan mission strategy and its implications for future US engagement in Afghanistan.

Background

The war in Afghanistan has entered a fundamentally new chapter in recent years. For the first time in over a decade, Afghanistan's 350,000-strong National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) are in charge of leading security responsibilities across the country. NATO forces have shifted their primary focus in Afghanistan from combat operations and fighting the insurgency to training, advising, and assisting the ANDSF. Afghanistan's future stability depends on the strength and competence of the ANDSF. Building a self-reliant ANDSF with enduring institutional capacity has since become a core element of the United States and NATO's exit strategy. However, it has also placed NATO military and civilian personnel at increasing risk as the Taliban and other militant elements boost their efforts to infiltrate the ANDSF ranks.

The NATO mission in Afghanistan, now in its sixteenth year, is the longest war in US history and has resulted in almost 2,400 American and 1,130 coalition deaths.¹ These have been caused mainly by the Taliban and their affiliates. Currently, the United States performs two complementary missions in Afghanistan—the US counterterrorism mission, or Operational Freedom Sentinel; and the NATO-led train, advise, and assist mission, or Operation Resolute Support, to sustain the ANDSF. In

recent years, NATO efforts have been hindered by a new kind of enemy: "green-on-blue" attacks, also known as "insider attacks." The phrase "green-on-blue" is modeled after an earlier phrase, "blue-on-blue," which the British military is thought to have minted in the late 1970s to refer to friendly fire or fratricide—instances of accidental shootings in which members of friendly military forces engage other friendly forces in warfare. "Blue" indicates friendly NATO (foreign) forces, and "green" denotes friendly local (Afghan) security forces. The formulation of the phrase "green-on-blue" is based on military symbols used to identify various military forces in the operational theater.

In this report, all attacks conducted by individuals claiming to be a member of the ANDSF—the Afghan National Army, Afghan National Police, Afghan Air Force, and Afghan Local Police—are considered "green." All US and NATO troops and civilian personnel are considered "blue." That said, the green-on-blue attacks have come to mean friendly (Afghan) forces engaging other friendly (NATO) forces in warfare. Incidents in which Taliban insurgents infiltrate ANDSF ranks or disguise themselves as ANDSF members with the intent to target either NATO personnel or ANDSF members ("green-on-

¹ "Coalition military fatalities in Afghanistan By Year." <http://icasualties.org/oef/>

green" attacks) are also characterized as "insider attacks."

Although unaccounted for at the time, the first recorded instance of a green-on-blue attack in Afghanistan was in May 2003 after an unknown attacker, allegedly linked to the Afghan National Army (ANA), opened fire and wounded two Norwegian soldiers.² No further such episodes were reported until May 2007 after a member of the ANA opened fire on a US convoy as it drove away from Pul-i-Charkhi prison in Kabul. The incident resulted in the death of two US soldiers and injured two others.³ There are no reliable estimates about the precise number of insider attacks, but based on publicly available data, the frequency of these attacks steadily increased after 2007, from two attacks in 2008 to its peak of forty-four in 2012. Since 2007, a total of 102 documented attacks have killed at least 157 NATO personnel. Total number of attacks have

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dropped since their 2012 peak, the percentage of fatalities attributed to them has risen. Insider attacks accounted for less than 1 percent of overall NATO personnel deaths in Afghanistan in 2008. In 2016, that number jumped to 12.5 percent.⁴ In some months, fatalities from these attacks outnumbered the deaths caused by the

Taliban and other insurgent elements. An unknown number of Afghan soldiers have also been killed in these attacks.

The attacks, though statistically small in number, have had a corrosive effect on the NATO mission in Afghanistan. They have affected morale and operational tempo of NATO troops and physical security of its personnel. More importantly, they have created a degree of distrust between NATO personnel and their Afghan counterparts.⁵ Most insider attacks are conducted by rogue members of the Afghan security forces. Although it is difficult to determine the exact reason and

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ "Green-on-Blue Attacks in Afghanistan: The Data." *FDD's Long War Journal*. Accessed February 2, 2017. http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/08/green-on-blue_attack.php. AND "Number of fatalities among Western Coalition Soldiers involved in the execution of Operation Enduring Freedom from 2001 to 2016" *Statista*. Accessed February 2, 2017 <https://www.statista.com/statistics/262894/western-coalition-soldiers-killed-in-afghanistan/>

⁵ Rubin, Alissa J. "As Afghan Forces Kill, Trust Is Also a Casualty." *The New York Times*. October 20, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/21/world/asia/afghan-insider-attacks-on-west-forces-corrode-trust.html>

motive behind each attack, research suggests that most of the attacks are triggered by cultural frictions and personal disagreements.⁶ The triggers include, among others, anger from night raids and airstrikes conducted by international forces that result in civilian casualties, violations of privacy during searches, disrespect to religious beliefs, cultural misunderstanding and violations of local norms and values, combat stress, and personal differences between Afghan troops and their NATO counterparts. In each case, a disgruntled ANDSF member either personally conducted the attack or assisted a Taliban member in infiltrating Afghan forces to target NATO personnel. One of the most high-profile casualties of an insider attack was a US Army Maj. Gen. Harold Greene, killed in August 2014 at a military training facility in Kabul.⁷

Although the relationship between Afghan and NATO personnel remains strong, the Taliban have used insider attacks to undermine the NATO-Afghan partnership and sow distrust between the two sides, whether the Taliban are behind the attacks or not. The insider threat has the potential to endanger the current NATO mission to train, advise, and assist Afghan

security forces as it leads security responsibilities across Afghanistan. The attacks indicate just how deadly cultural friction can be in counterinsurgency operations and offer valuable lessons for building cross-cultural cooperation in military forces.

Empirical Findings and Context

In past years, insider attacks have killed an increasing number of NATO personnel, especially US troops (see Table 1). Based on publicly available information, there have been an estimated 102 documented insider attacks between May 2007 and February 2017, killing approximately 157 NATO personnel.⁸ Although it is difficult to draw definitive conclusions about the actual causes of these attacks given the small total number of incidents, a few important trends can be discerned:

- There appears to be a relationship between the number in insider attacks and the size of NATO military presence in Afghanistan. Before 2007, the threat posed by insider attacks was minuscule, but escalated significantly after

⁶ R. Hossain, "Afghanistan: Green-on-Blue Attacks in Context," Institute for the Study of War (October 31, 2012); also see "Green-on-Blue Attacks in Afghanistan," Middle East Peace Council.

⁷ Yan, Holly. "Insider attacks: Why do some Afghan forces turn and kill allies?" *CNN.com*. August 6, 2014. <http://www.cnn.com/2014/08/06/world/asia/afghanistan-insider-attacks/>

⁸ "Green-on-Blue Attacks in Afghanistan: The Data." *FDD's Long War Journal*. Accessed February 2, 2017. http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/08/green-on-blue_attack.php

President Barack Obama announced a “surge” of 30,000 US troops at the end of 2009 as part of the counterinsurgency campaign. To be clear, insider attacks did not cause the US troop surge. Nor did the surge necessarily cause more insider incidents. However, the US troop surge *did* provide the ground for more visible NATO targets for insurgent groups, including the Taliban, to exploit. As a result, as Table 1 shows, insider incidents increased from five attacks in 2010 to forty-four attacks in 2012.

- Some of the insider attacks may be inspired by previous attacks, although there is no conclusive evidence to support the claim. For example, in 2012, over fifteen insider attacks occurred within forty-eight hours of a previous incident; however, it is unclear whether a previous event inspired the subsequent attack or not.⁹
- There was a dramatic decline in insider attacks in 2014 after NATO ended its

combat mission and withdrew most of its troops. As Table 1 shows, insider attacks decreased by 88 percent in just three years, from forty-four attacks in 2012 to five attacks in 2015.

- The majority of insider attacks occurred in the eastern, southern, and southeastern parts of Afghanistan, all areas where most of the surge troops had been deployed.
- NATO military and civilian personnel and Afghan troops were identifiable as the direct, intended targets of an estimated 80 percent of all insider attacks. The remaining 20 percent took place during joint NATO and ANDSF patrols and it is, therefore, unclear who the primary targets of those attacks were.
- Nearly three-quarters of the attacks resulted in the death of NATO personnel (military and civilian),¹⁰ causing an estimated 157 fatalities and leaving another 205 injured.¹¹

⁹ Owen, Jonathan & Brady, Brian. "Afghanistan: Can ISAF purge its rising enemy within?" *The Independent*, January 13, 2013, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/afghanistan-can-isaf-purge-its-rising-enemy-within-8449308.html>

¹⁰ See "Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan," July 2013, <http://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/742043/pentagon-report-on-afghanistan-progress.pdf>

¹¹ Some incidents initially seen to have involved only injuries may have later resulted in deaths, so the overall casualty count is likely to be high than those reported by ISAF and other sources.

- Averting insider attacks has been a top priority for NATO commanders and Afghan authorities, and both sides instituted several countermeasures to

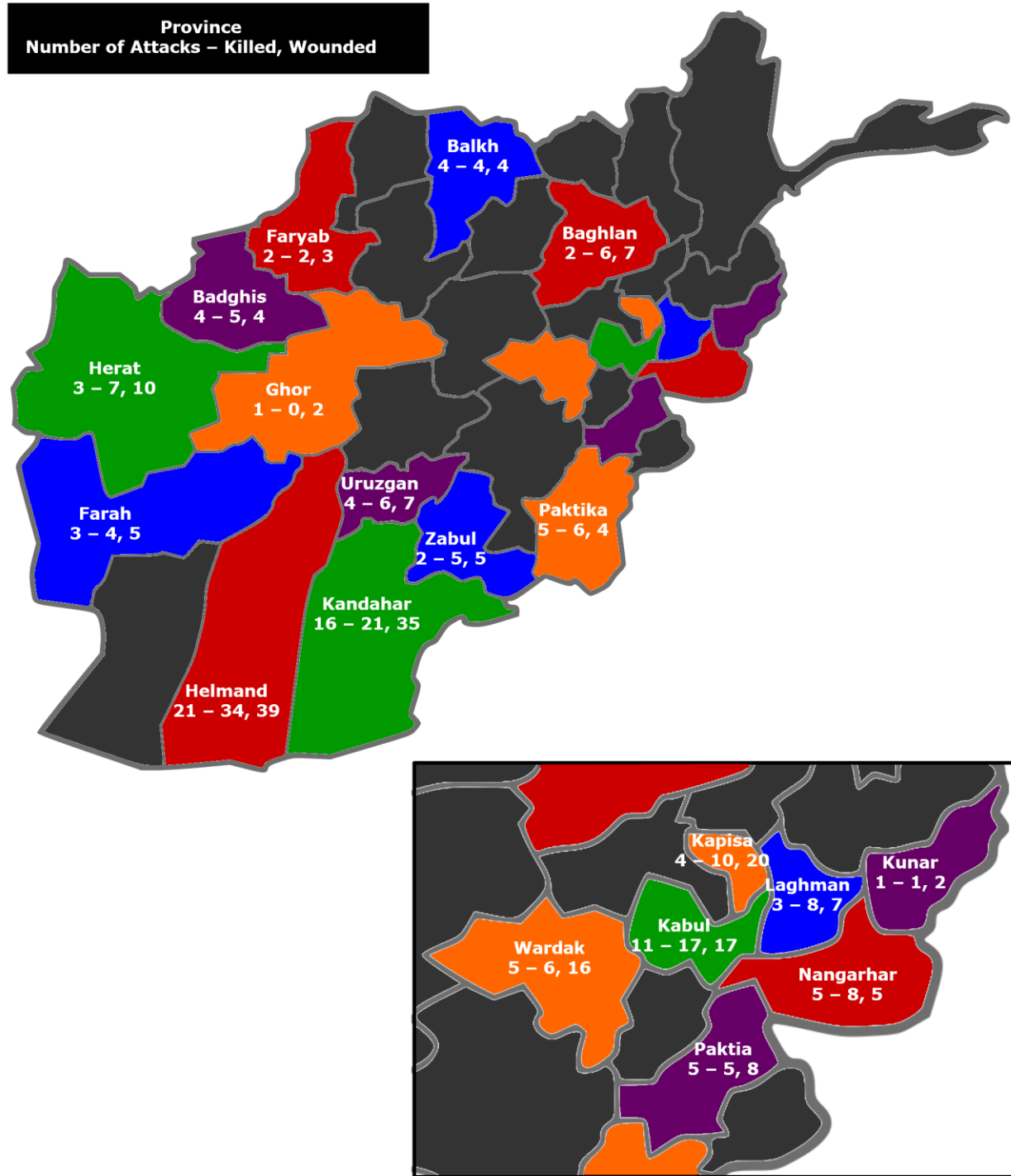
address the issue after the uptick in the attacks in 2012. Although the upsurge in attacks impacted the operational tempo of NATO and ANDSF troops, the rapport between the two sides remains high.

TABLE 1¹²
Green-on-Blue Attacks (2007–2016)

Year	Total US/NATO Forces	Total ANDSF	Number of Attacks	Deaths	% of Total Coalition Deaths	Injured
2007	41,700	125,000	2	2	-	-
2008	51,350	147,910	2	2	1	3
2009	67,700	191,000	5	12	2	11
2010	130,930	270,000	5	16	2.3	1
2011	130,313	323,410	16	35	6	34
2012	102,508	327,037	44	62	15	81
2013	84,271	338,153	13	14	9.9	29
2014	28,360	350,000	7	4	5.3	26
2015	12,905	352,000	5	8	14.8	17
2016	13,332	352,000	3	2	12.5	3
<i>Total</i>	-	-	102	157		205

¹² The data was compiled using several open source materials. This includes the U.S. Department of Defense Reports on Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan to U.S. Congress, the SIGAR Quarterly Reports to the U.S. Congress, the Long War Journal’s data on insider attacks in Afghanistan, Congressional testimonies, unclassified NATO and ISAF reports and press releases, and numerous news articles and think tank reports. The figures listed under casualty and wounded categories include both American and NATO military personnel and civilians or contractors. The percentage of total coalition deaths was calculated by comparing casualty figures caused by insider attacks with total number of coalition deaths that occurred in each respective year and documented by iCasualties which tracks coalition deaths in Afghanistan and Iraq. Total number of US and NATO forces was retrieved from the ISAF archive on February 16, 2017. The total number of deaths attributed to insider attacks in 2012 includes thirty-seven personnel or 11 percent of all US casualties, according to SIGAR report, <https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/quarterlyreports/2013-04-30qr.pdf>. The total number of deaths attributed to insider attacks in 2015 includes three US civilians or contractors, according to SIGAR report, <https://sigar.mil/pdf/quarterlyreports/2016-10-30qr.pdf>.

FIGURE 1
Insider Attacks Per Province (2007–2016)



Motives behind Insider Attacks

Of a total of 102 documented insider attacks occurring between May 2007 and December 2016, at least 25 percent are attributable to Taliban infiltration, influence, or impersonation; 14 percent are assessed as co-option; and over 40 percent are judged to be due to personal motives and grievances.¹³ The rest are attributed to unknown reasons, mainly because the attackers were either immediately killed by NATO or Afghan troops or they committed suicide.¹⁴ While the actual motives behind each insider attack vary, the following narratives explain why and how such attacks happen:

Infiltration

Infiltration of the ANDSF by the Taliban is an important tactic to conduct attacks on Afghan and NATO troops, collect tactical intelligence, create distrust, and disrupt the rapport between Afghan and NATO forces. Any attacks ordered by the Taliban or other insurgent groups such as the Haqqani Network, or instances in which these groups encouraged ANDSF

members to facilitate or execute attacks, are characterized as a type of pre-planned violence. The Afghan government has called such attacks "infiltration by foreign spy agencies"—a common euphemism for Pakistan.¹⁵

Co-option

As it has become increasingly difficult for insurgents to infiltrate the ANDSF ranks due to tightened vetting processes and scrutiny during recruitment, the Taliban co-opt by recruiting rogue and aggrieved ANDSF members to assist or act on behalf of the insurgency. Taliban often coerce ANDSF personnel through financial incentives, ideological pressures, religious appeals, intimidation (including the kidnapping of family members), as well as influences through tribal networks.

Impersonation

Disguise has become an important method for insurgents to pose as an ANDSF member in order to evade

¹³ "Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan." *Report to Congress by the U.S. Department of Defense*, December 2012, http://www.defense.gov/news/1230_Report_final.pdf

¹⁴ Shanker, Thom. "General Notes Taliban Coercion in Some Attacks on Troops," *The New York Times*, August 23, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/24/world/asia/general-notes-taliban-coercion-in-some-attacks-on-troops-in-afghanistan.html?_r=5&ref=world&

¹⁵ Bowley, Graham & Opper Jr., Richard. "Afghanistan, Contradicting NATO, Blames Foreign Spies for Insider Attacks." *The New York Times*. August 22, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/23/world/asia/afghanistan-blames-spies-for-insider-attacks-on-western-troops.html>

scrutiny and conduct attacks. With the availability of counterfeit ANDSF uniforms and identity cards in Afghan markets, it has become much easier for insurgents to disguise rather than infiltrate or co-opt the ANDSF ranks. Impersonation has also often involved some level of facilitation or complicity by rogue ANDSF members, particularly in providing identity cards, access at entry points into military bases, and escorting of individuals into bases and outposts. Rogue ANDSF personnel can also wittingly facilitate attacks on NATO personnel by being aware of the attacker's intent and not doing anything about it.

Personal Motives

Personal clashes and differences between NATO troops and ANDSF dwarf that of infiltration, co-option, and impersonation. According to the US Department of Defense, most insider attacks stem from personal disagreements and cultural grievances rather than Taliban infiltration.¹⁶ In attacks that are triggered by personal disputes, a disgruntled ANDSF member

often acts independently and without any guidance or pressure from the Taliban. Such incidents often occur when an ANDSF member becomes indignant with his NATO counterparts for any possible reason, including personal friction caused by cultural misunderstanding and miscommunication. Grievances rooted in personal insults to one's dignity, self-respect, religious beliefs, or cultural and traditional values, as well as combat stress, can lead to such incidents. To be clear, attacks allegedly triggered by cultural grievances are mostly a function of a strong emotional reaction that leads to rage and anger, rather than a planned or premeditated process that drives the attacks. Combat stress plays an important role in personally motivated attacks. Afghan troops suffer from combat stress like their NATO counterparts, and younger Afghan soldiers are especially vulnerable to the adverse effects of combat stress. The absence of counseling and proper guidance only worsens the situation when emotionally stressed Afghan soldiers feel compelled to conform to

¹⁶ Sisk, Richard. "Taliban Infiltrators Blamed for Insider Attacks," *Military.com*, August 17, 2012, <http://www.military.com/daily-news/2012/08/17/taliban-infiltrators-blamed-for-insider-attacks.html>

societal norms and obligations. Psychological and emotional pressures increase the likelihood of Afghan soldiers becoming violent when they feel insulted or succumbing to the Taliban's pressure and intimidation.

Finally, miscommunication between the two sides has at times created tensions and interfered with building mutual trust. Interpreters and cultural advisors are a conduit between Afghan and NATO personnel, who bridge significant language gaps between the two sides and provide cultural guidance. However, there have been times where translators have not always accurately interpreted or conveyed the full context of a conversation, or only picked a portion of what is being said, creating misunderstanding and bad emotions. In some cases, interpreters have inserted their personal opinions and biases during translation to promote a particular ethnic or factional perspective, creating false impressions and problems.¹⁷

These and other factors help to explain the underlying complexity of the challenges between the two sides, and in many cases, serve as triggers that lead to insider attacks.

The Role of Afghan Local Police in Insider Attacks

Most Taliban infiltration into the ANDSF ranks is performed through the Afghan Local Police (ALP). The ALP program, launched in 2010, is a network of village-defense units funded by the United States and trained primarily by US forces. The ALP program, which is different from the Afghan National Police, has been controversial because of its resemblance to local militia patrols established under the Soviet occupation in the 1980s.¹⁸ The ALP members are mostly recruited from a pool of illiterate and unemployed young men in local villages who are asked to help patrol their communities in return for \$150 in wages per month. The program has become a money-making proposition for many unemployed young men in local villages, including some with ties to the Taliban.¹⁹ ALP members are often used by local strongmen,

¹⁷ Ahmad, Javid. "In Afghanistan, cultural cluelessness can be deadly." *The Washington Post*, October 5, 2012, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/in-afghanistan-cultural-cluelessness-can-be-deadly/2012/10/05/9758635c-0e7c-11e2-bb5e-492c0d30bfff_story.html?utm_term=.035bc6b46212

¹⁸ Sieff, Kevin. "Afghan want withdrawal of village police trainers." *The Washington Post*, January 14, 2013, http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2013-01-14/world/36343635_1_afghan-local-police-afghan-forces-top-afghan-officials

¹⁹ "Afghan National Police Strategy." Ministry of Interior Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, undated, <http://moi.gov.af/en/page/5076>

warlords, and drug traffickers for their personal needs and interests, including as bodyguards, which has damaged the credibility and efficiency of the program.²⁰ The main reason behind the ineffectiveness of the ALP program is because the force was hurriedly raised as the first line of defense by the United States. In doing so, the United States placed an excessive focus on quantity over quality of the force. Even today, for example, the shooting skills of new ALP recruits are rudimentary. Although they receive training from US forces in basic combat skills, new recruits often get two to four lessons with live ammunition at the range, each time firing only thirty rounds from their assault rifles.²¹

Although ALP units do not have a mandate to investigate crimes or arrest local Afghans, many ALP members are accused of rape, human rights abuses, drug use, theft, extortion, and insider attacks.²² In one example,

villagers in southern Afghanistan complained that the ALP "had been beating people and stealing from them nearly every day" and were indifferent when an entire ALP unit was abducted by the Taliban, apparently betrayed by two infiltrators.²³ Additionally, ALP recruits are poorly vetted and receive a mere few weeks of basic combat training. The Taliban have identified infiltration into the ALP as a priority not only to undermine the program, but also to conduct insider attacks.²⁴ Meanwhile, given that ALP members operate in small units of 15–25 men out of its total strength of 30,000 personnel, they have often become the targets of Taliban attacks.²⁵ At the same time, an increasing number of ALP members have defected and joined insurgent ranks in recent years. In May 2016, over thirty ALP members and their commanding officer joined the Taliban, bringing with them their assault rifles and other

²⁰ "Just Don't Call It a Militia," Impunity, Militias, and the Afghan Local Police, *Human Rights Watch*, September 2011, http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/afghanistan0911webwcover_0.pdf, p.5.

²¹ "Ready or Not, Afghans to Take Over Security," *The Wall Street Journal*, July 14, 2013

²² Sieff, Kevin & Hamdard, Javed. "Afghan police officers kills 9 comrades as they sleep." *The Washington Post*, March 30, 2013, http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2012-03-30/world/35447921_1_afghan-local-police-afghan-defense-officials-paktika-province

²³ Rosenberg, Matthew & Shah, Taimoor. "Taliban Seize Police Force in a Hamlet." *The New York Times*, July 25, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/26/world/asia/taliban-seize-police-force-in-a-hamlet.html?ref=asia_r=0

²⁴ "From Arbaki to Local Police: Today's Challenges and Tomorrow's Concerns." *Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission*, Spring 2012, [http://www.aihrc.org.af/media/files/Reports/Research/English/Report%20on%20Afghan%20Local%20Police%20\(Final%20Draft%2C%20English\).pdf](http://www.aihrc.org.af/media/files/Reports/Research/English/Report%20on%20Afghan%20Local%20Police%20(Final%20Draft%2C%20English).pdf)

²⁵ "The Future of the Afghan Local Police" *International Crisis Group*, June 4, 2015, <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/268-the-future-of-the-afghan-local-police.pdf>

weaponry.²⁶ Other reports show over eighty ALP members have joined the Taliban in western Afghanistan.²⁷

Furthermore, the factional nature of ALP represents a significant vulnerability and highlights several challenges for the NATO mission in Afghanistan, which must be managed at both the central and local level. Although US forces remain deeply engaged with ALP units at a greater risk of insider attacks, the engagement has allowed these operators to understand the local culture better. Engaging with the ALP units enables these forces to identify potential threat indicators such as the presence of unauthorized weapons, anti-Western rhetoric or sympathy for the insurgency, and spot those who exhibit unusual behavior or signal malicious intentions.

Although there is no reliable data with which to conclusively determine the precise

motivation of each attack, especially due to the deaths of most of the assailants, the events have served as a propaganda tool for the Taliban. The Taliban have adopted insider attacks as a tactic to exploit a seam between NATO troops and

ANDSF and to undermine their partnership. The Taliban frequently use propaganda tools to inspire more attacks with themes of admiration for assailants and promises of support and sanctuary to them. For example, in one of the Eid messages of Mullah Omar,

"In one of the Eid messages of Mullah Omar, the now-deceased spiritual leader of the Taliban, he praised turncoats in the ANDSF who conducted the attack on Afghan and NATO troops, and urged other ANDSF members to do as 'your brave friends have done.'"

the now-deceased spiritual leader of the Taliban, he praised turncoats in the ANDSF who conducted the attack on Afghan and NATO troops, and urged other ANDSF members to do as "your brave friends have done."²⁸ Mullah Omar called on his followers to "increase your efforts to expand the area of infiltration in the ranks of the enemy and to bring about better order and array in the work."²⁹ To encourage

²⁶ "Dozens of Afghan Police Surrender, Join Taliban in Western Province." *Al Bawaba*, May 10, 2016. <http://www.albawaba.com/news/dozens-afghan-police-surrender-join-taliban-western-province-838758>

²⁷ Salahuddin, Sayed. "Afghan Local Police group deserts to Taliban-led insurgents," *The Washington Post*, July 4, 2012, http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2012-07-04/world/35489043_1_afghan-security-afghan-local-police-taliban-attacks

²⁸ Scarborough, Rowan. "Attacks by Afghan 'insiders' double in past year; NATO recalculation leads to new numbers." *The Washington Times*, March 3, 2013, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2013/mar/3/attacks-by-insiders-double-in-past-year/?page=all>

²⁹ "Message of Felicitation of the Esteemed Amir-ul-Momineen." October 24, 2012, <https://archive.org/details/MessageOfFelicitationOfTheEsteemedAmir-ul-momineen>

disgruntled ANDSF member to defect to the insurgency, Mullah Omar's message noted the Taliban had created the "Call and Guidance, Luring and Integration" department "with branches . . . all over the country."³⁰ Accordingly, the Taliban regularly release videos of defected Afghan soldiers to persuade other ANDSF members to join the insurgent ranks as a matter of religious duty.³¹

The media attention the insider attacks have garnered has been a boon for the Taliban. The group often takes credit for attacks it had no part in and exaggerates casualty figures after an attack. The insider attacks have reinforced negative psychological impacts on NATO troops and have affected international public and political support for the Afghan war. "I'm mad as hell about them, to be honest with you," then commander Gen. John R. Allen said. "We're going to get after this. It reverberates everywhere, across the United States."³² The Taliban have repeatedly claimed that their operations and tactics have forced NATO

commanders to forego their plans, which is "an achievement for the *mujahideen* who have managed to create mistrust among the enemy forces and, God willing, this is the start of their overall defeat in Afghanistan."³³

While NATO personnel have been the primary targets of insider attacks, estimates show an even greater number of Afghan soldiers being killed by such attacks every year. As shown in Table 3, between 2007 and 2016, an estimated 271 green-on-green attacks resulted in the death of at least 557 Afghan soldiers and injured 255 others. From January 2015 to August 2016, there were at least 101 such attacks, killing 257 and wounding 125 Afghan soldiers.³⁴ In one example, a cook working for the Afghan police in Nahr-e Saraj, Helmand province attempted to kill several officers by poisoning their food and then teamed up with another Afghan policeman to shoot and kill two ANDSF members. In another example, a defected ANDSF member drugged Afghan soldiers before shooting them as they

³⁰ Goggio, Bill. "Mullah Omar addresses green-on-blue attacks." *The Long War Journal*, August 16, 2012, http://www.longwarjournal.org/threat-matrix/archives/2012/08/mullah_omar_addresses_green-on.php

³¹ "Observations on Taliban video welcoming rogue ANA soldiers." *The Long War Journal*, August 12, 2012, http://www.longwarjournal.org/threat-matrix/archives/2012/08/observations_of_taliban_video.php

³² Cloud, David. "Change of U.S. command expected in Afghanistan." *Los Angeles Times*, September 28, 2012. articles.latimes.com/2012/sep/28/world/la-fg-general-afghan-20120929

³³ "Taliban claims credit for NATO Afghan pull back." *The Telegraph*, September 19, 2012, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/afghanistan/9552294/Taliban-claims-credit-for-NATO-Afghan-pull-back.html>

³⁴ "Afghan Forces Suffered 15,000 Casualties in First 8 Months of 2016." *The Voice of America*. Accessed February 3, 2017. <http://www.voanews.com/a/afghanistan-us/3571779.html>

slept.³⁵ Additionally, an unknown number of Afghan soldiers are killed each year in crossfire by fellow Afghan soldiers.³⁶ In other cases, when the Taliban infiltrators, aided by one or more

Afghan soldiers, found it hard to reach NATO personnel, they have targeted and killed Afghan troops.

TABLE 2³⁷
Total Green-on-Green Attacks (2007–2016)

Year	Number of Attacks	Dead	Injured
2007	8	7	4
2008	3	9	3
2009	7	11	4
2010	19	15	7
2011	20	37	13
2012	29	38	15
2013	33	71	43
2014	27	43	17
2015	69	175	70
2016	56	151	79
<i>Total</i>	271	557	255

Culture as an Explanatory Variable

Scholars define culture in a myriad of ways, but one of the earliest definitions is most useful in the context of this report. Edward Burnett Taylor, the founder of cultural anthropology, defined culture as “that complex

whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of

³⁵ "Afghan police officers kills 9 comrades as they sleep." *The Washington Post*, March 30, 2013

³⁶ Riechmann, Deb. "Afghan forces also suffer from insider attacks," *The Associated Press*, September 30, 2012, <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/afghan-forces-also-suffer-insider-attacks>

³⁷ The table lists available data on insider attacks targeting Afghan troops and security personnel from 2007 through 2016. The author compiled the data using available open-source material.

society.”³⁸ According to Taylor, culture is anything and everything that humans learn as a result of their environment, including what people typically imagine to be culture, such as the art and music of a society, to more quotidian elements, like styles of dress or language. In Afghanistan, culture is considered an important element of religious, national, ethnic, and regional identity. Religion plays a unifying role in Afghan culture and identity and it is echoed in the structure and functions of the Afghan state. For most Afghans, these connections play a powerful role in their everyday lives. However, they have also become the main influence areas for the Taliban to exploit.

The insider attacks are a product of cultural friction and personal disagreements between Afghan and NATO personnel. Issues such as low morale, combat stress, and provocations over perceived disrespect to local values and norms play an important role in understanding the root cause of the threat. The cultural fissures and their adverse effects are discernible among both Afghan and NATO personnel, from senior tiers of the leadership down to the tactical level. Afghanistan is a

conservative tribal society with a deeply rooted culture and a tendency among people to look inward. The basic aspect of the Afghan culture is based on a hierarchy of respect and care for family, clan, and tribe. Relationships tend to be personal where honor, respect, and trust are overarching values. Religion plays a central role and Islamic teachings are indomitable, especially among rural Afghans with a long-held system of beliefs. These principles are taken seriously by Afghans in their social conduct and they often hold foreigners to the same standard.

NATO leaders recognize that many of the personally motivated insider attacks occur because of Western ignorance of Afghan culture, not Taliban infiltration.³⁹ According to Brig. Gen. Stephen Townsend, former director of the Pakistan-Afghanistan Coordination Cell in the US Joint Chiefs of Staff office, “disputes can arise from cultural, religious and ideological friction or combat stress” and that “cultural training has been vital for U.S. soldiers and now the Afghans are considering doing the same in providing better understanding of Americans.”⁴⁰ Educating Afghan troops through short cultural awareness training programs aimed at encouraging them to

³⁸ Burnett Tylor, Edward. *Primitive Culture: Researches Into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art, and Custom*. (J. Murray, 1871), 1.

³⁹ Nissenbaum, Dion. "Draft Army Handbook Wades Into Divisive Afghan Issue," *The Wall Street Journal*, December 11, 2012, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887324024004578171561230647852.html>

⁴⁰ Levine, Adam. "Rising concern about killing of NATO troops by Afghan military," *CNN.com*, February 26, 2012, <http://security.blogs.cnn.com/2012/02/26/rising-concern-about-killing-of-nato-troops-by-afghan-military/>

overlook certain behaviors—exiting showers nude, swearing, or asking to see pictures of their wives or sisters—that they deem offensive but are normal to their NATO counterparts only scratches the surface of dealing with the cultural divides that separate Afghan culture from that of the West. Educated Afghan soldiers have rarely turned their guns on their NATO partners and most NATO personnel acknowledge that Afghan soldiers who are educated are easier to work with and take well-reasoned approaches to resolving personal disagreements. Considering the role of culture among Afghan troops, most of whom have no formal education, it becomes somewhat easier to understand the motives behind most insider attacks.

The problem, however, is not limited to cultural differences or lack of education. Showering and grooming practices aside, psychosocial factors have not been given serious consideration. The past four decades of conflict and chaos have exacted a heavier toll on the Afghan people. A generation of ordinary Afghans grew up in fear and poverty during the war, which has psychologically scarred them. Before the Soviet occupation in the 1980s, Afghan society was one of moderation and tolerance. However, years of conflict and political disorder have made interactions between Afghans and

people outside their trusted circles tenuous. The shortage of basic resources such as water and farming land has created unhealthy competitions and, at times, rivalries among rural Afghans, including close family relatives.

In addition to social complexities, the proliferation of militant groups has injected radical ideologies into the Afghan population. Rural Afghanistan, where the writ of the central government is either trifling or absent, suffers from a significant social and ideological vacuum that must be considered. The absence of connection to state infrastructure, resources, governance, or even the rule of law leaves local Afghans vulnerable to Taliban intimidation, propaganda, and disinformation campaigns, and thereby prone to radical ideologies. Many Afghan refugees, especially young men, returning from Pakistan and Iran have either espoused strong beliefs or are influenced by different extremist elements operating in those countries. For example, as Gen. John W. Nicholson, commander of US and NATO forces in Afghanistan, has noted, “Of the 98 U.S.-designated terrorist groups globally, 20 operate in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region, along with three violent extremist organizations. . . . This is the highest concentration of terrorist groups anywhere in the world.”⁴¹

⁴¹ Pellerin, Cheryl. “Resolute Support Commander: More Troops Needed to Break Afghan 'Stalemate.'” *U.S. Department of Defense*. February 9, 2017. <https://www.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/1078377/resolute-support-commander-more-troops-needed-to-break-afghan-stalemate>

Perhaps among the most troubling aspects of the introduction of extremist ideologies has been the emergence of suicide bombing in Afghanistan. Many of the heaven-seeking assailants are uneducated, unemployed, impressionable young men. In the known cases of insider attacks, most attackers were between seventeen and twenty-five years old. Most of them come from low-income families and are dragged into the insurgency, mainly in areas with insurgent strongholds, for simple reasons: a sense of purpose and need to belong. Young men are exposed to extremist ideologies in religious *madrassas* in Pakistan, where they are indoctrinated to act against those who have supposedly failed the teachings of Islam, as understood by extremists. Devout Afghans show little tolerance for those—whether a local or a foreigner—who disrespect the tenets of Islam or contravene important religious beliefs. Unfamiliarity with basic tenets of Islam is not an excuse and joking or making disparaging comments about religion is taboo. On several occasions, blasphemous messages, cartoons,

and videos such as the “Innocence of Muslims” ridiculing Prophet Mohammad has sparked public fury and reactions against NATO personnel, events which are exploited by insurgent groups.⁴²

Over the past sixteen years, more than fifty nations have engaged in Afghanistan in various capacities.⁴³ While some efforts have been made by partner countries to understand Afghan society, many countries still grapple with the intricacies of Afghan cultural mores. For example, while rare in the early years of the Afghan war, NATO troops now receive basic pre-deployment cultural and language training.⁴⁴ Although this training has proven beneficial, it places an excessive focus on specific customs and protocols (e.g., not shaking women’s hands) and little on enforcing those principles on the ground. For instance, Afghans value women’s honor and privacy, but NATO troops have at times violated it during unwanted house searches and kinetic military actions.⁴⁵ Afghans are expressive about the disrespect they feel when NATO troops enter mosques with shoes,

⁴² Khan, Abdullah. "Innocence of Muslims Protests: Violent Clashes Over Anti-Islam Film Break Out in 3 Nations." *Huffington Post*, September 17, 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/09/17/innocence-of-muslims-protests_n_1889679.html

⁴³ "International Security Assistance Force: Key Facts and Figures." Troop Numbers and Contributions. *ISAF Headquarter*. June 7, 2013, <http://www.isaf.nato.int/images/stories/File/Placemats/2013-06-01-ISAF-ANA%20Placemat-final.pdf>

⁴⁴ "Afghan Culture and Language Training." Center for Army Lessons Learned, United States Army Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, September 2010, http://usacac.army.mil/cac2/call/docs/10-64/ch_5.asp

⁴⁵ Lemmon, Gayle Tzemach. "Ashley's War. The Untold Story of a Team of Women Soldiers on the Special Ops Battlefield." Harper Collins (April 2015). <http://www.cfr.org/defense-and-security/ashleys-war/p36399>

burn or insult the Quran, detain civilians indefinitely, break into houses, damage property during searches, or accidentally kill civilians. Isolated events such as one where a US sergeant went on a rampage and killed sixteen local villagers as they slept have caused widespread public fury.⁴⁶

Afghans resent the airstrikes and night raids conducted by NATO troops and the casualties they inflict.⁴⁷ Reports show that in less than ten months between 2010 and early 2011, night raids conducted by the US special operations forces caused well over 1,500 Afghan civilian casualties.⁴⁸ According to Jeffrey Bordin, night raids and a lack of respect for women and their privacy are some of the top grievances Afghan soldiers have with their NATO counterparts.⁴⁹ As one Afghan soldier reported, "A U.S. Soldier broke down a door to go into a female's room. I told him he could not do that;

we almost fought but he then relented. This could have turned into a firefight."⁵⁰ This cultural divide between armed Afghan and NATO troops has at times escalated minor disagreements into violence even among the most committed of soldiers.

Bordin's study notes that factors that caused anger among Afghan soldiers toward NATO troops included convoys interfering with traffic, civilian casualties caused by indiscriminate fire, poor intelligence practices, public searches and disarming of Afghan troops when they entered bases, urinating in public, cursing at and insulting Afghan soldiers, and unnecessarily shooting animals.⁵¹ Some Afghan troops also found many NATO troops to be "extremely arrogant, bullying, unwilling to listen to their advice, and . . . lacking concern for civilian and [ANDSF] safety during combat."⁵² Furthermore, Afghans typically prefer to correct

⁴⁶ Johnson, Kirk. "Army Seeking Death Penalty in Massacre of 16 Afghans." *The New York Times*, December 19, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/20/us/robert-bales-faces-death-penalty-in-afghan-massacre.html>

⁴⁷ Gall, Carlotta. "Night Raids Curbing Taliban, but Afghans Cite Civilian Toll." *The New York Times*, July 8, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/09/world/asia/09nightraids.html>

⁴⁸ Porter, Gareth. "ISAF Data: Night Raids Killed Over 1,500 Afghan Civilians," *Inter Press Service News Agency*, November 2, 2011, <http://www.ipsnews.net/2011/11/isaf-data-show-night-raids-killed-over-1500-afghan-civilians/>

⁴⁹ Bordin, Jeffrey. "A Crisis of Trust and Cultural Incompatibility: A Red Team Study of Mutual Perceptions of Afghan National Security Force Personnel and US Soldiers in Understanding and Mitigating the Phenomena of ANSF-Committed Fratricide Murders" *NSA Archives*, May 12, 2011 <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB370/docs/Document%202011.pdf>

⁵⁰ Ibid., Bordin. <http://www.michaelyon-online.com/images/pdf/trust-incompatibility.pdf>

⁵¹ Ibid., Bordin. <http://www.michaelyon-online.com/images/pdf/trust-incompatibility.pdf>

⁵² Ibid., Bordin. <http://www.michaelyon-online.com/images/pdf/trust-incompatibility.pdf>

a mistake in private, but past instances of NATO personnel publicly embarrassing or scolding Afghan troops has led to Afghan soldiers developing personal grievances. For example, at a ceremony at Bagram, a US soldier harshly reprimanded an Afghan commander in public after he inadvertently steered TV crews to a sensitive location to film. The infuriated Afghan commander then told the

“At a ceremony at Bagram, a US soldier harshly reprimanded an Afghan commander in public after he inadvertently steered TV crews to a sensitive location to film. The infuriated Afghan commander then told the US soldier through his translator: ‘If I had a gun, I would empty an entire magazine in your stomach.’”

US soldier through his translator: “If I had a gun, I would empty an entire magazine in your stomach.”⁵³

Afghan troops recognize they have much to learn from their NATO partners to remain operational, but it frustrates Afghan soldiers when they are undervalued by their NATO partners. A significant portion of Afghan soldiers graduating from training programs often cannot read or write; yet they greatly value education. Most Afghan recruits come from families that have spent the bulk of their lives in poverty and dire social conditions. Even though many Afghan soldiers may not understand complex PowerPoint presentations, it does not make

them less efficient on the battlefield or incapable of formulating effective plans and solutions.

Tensions also exist among NATO troops

toward their Afghan partners. The main concerns of NATO personnel, especially US soldiers, about Afghan soldiers cited in the Bordin report included “illicit drug use, massive thievery, personal instability, dishonesty, no integrity, incompetence, unsafe

weapons handling, corrupt officers . . . covert alliances . . . with insurgents, high [desertion] rates, bad morale, laziness, repulsive hygiene and the torture of dogs.”⁵⁴ The main concern of US troops is trust. It is true that insider attacks have played a role in creating a degree of mistrust of Afghan soldiers among some NATO troops, but the lack of trust is also driven by a sense that Afghan soldiers are motivated by money rather than a duty to the country. “They are here to simply collect a paycheck; nothing else,” one US soldier remarked in the report. Additionally, some US soldiers doubt the intentions and commitment of the Afghan soldiers. For example, one US soldier quoted in

⁵³ “What lies behind Afghanistan's insider attacks?” *BBC News*, March 11, 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-19633418>

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, Bordin. p.3. <http://www.michaelyon-online.com/images/pdf/trust-incompatibility.pdf>

Bordin's report remarked, "It's funny how they [Afghan soldiers] tend not to get shot at when we are not with them."⁵⁵ Building trust and forging a relationship are intertwined. One needs trust to build a relationship, and a relationship to build trust. The problem is that while Afghan troops maintain a sustained presence in Afghanistan, NATO troops often rotate. This clearly increases the time needed for rotating NATO units to build a truthful relationship at a time when the Taliban could exploit a decline in the operational tempo.

Another concern among NATO troops is the professional and social conduct of some Afghan soldiers, especially in joint bases. For example, NATO troops have expressed anger over Afghan soldiers' behaviors that ranged from not cleaning after using a shared toilet,⁵⁶ to connecting US-made 110-volt electronics directly into local 220-volt outlets, smoking in smoke-free areas, and staring inappropriately at female foreign troops.⁵⁷ Another common complaint among NATO personnel is the issue of time and punctuality. While NATO personnel

work with an operational urgency based on hours and days, Afghan troops appear to have a different concept of time and tend not to be punctual or concerned with time. No wonder the personally motivated insider attacks does not come as a surprise to some Afghan soldiers. For example, in an interview with *Newsweek*, a major in the Afghan army said, "I understand why our men are shooting U.S. and NATO soldiers. I too have been personally hurt by the way American forces behave towards my soldiers, our villagers, our religion and culture. Too many of them are racist, arrogant, and simply don't respect us."⁵⁸ Undeniably, these and other personal differences, disagreements, and distrust have at times made the partnership between the two sides challenging. It has helped provide a recruitment ground to the Taliban to infiltrate and exploit Afghan forces.

Mitigation Strategies Adopted by Friendly Forces

Afghan authorities and NATO commanders consider the insider killings as a

⁵⁵ Ibid., Bordin. <http://www.michaelyon-online.com/images/pdf/trust-incompatibility.pdf>

⁵⁶ Quiggle Doyle. "Of Alexander, gods and bathrooms: Why the Afghans can't 'get their shit together'." *Foreign Policy*, January 19, 2012, http://ricks.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/01/19/of_alexander_gods_and_bathrooms_why_the_afghans_can_t_get_their_shit_together

⁵⁷ Armstrong, Nicholas. "With an Eye Open and a Round Chambered: Explaining the Afghan Insider Threat and its Implications for Sustained Partnership." *Journal of Intervention and State-building*. Vol. 7, Iss. 3, 2013, www.tandfonline.com/action/showCitFormats?doi=10.1080%2F17502977.2013.783991

⁵⁸ Yousafzai, Sami <http://www.newsweek.com/afghanistan-green-blue-killings-explained-64561>. "Afghanistan: 'Green on Blue' Killings Explained," *Newsweek*, August 27, 2012

product of personal disagreements and culture misunderstanding, exploited by the Taliban. In order to prevent future incidents, Afghan and NATO commanders have adopted several collective methods, in line with the US military's DOTMLPF-P approach, to address the threat.⁵⁹

As an initial response, the NATO coalition revised its training requirements and halted the training of more than 2,000 new ALP recruits.⁶⁰ The Special Operations Joint Task Force–Afghanistan (SOJTF-A) took active measures to revalidate all ALP personnel by engaging respected village leaders in local communities to vouch for each ALP member. Traditional village and customary leadership have existed for centuries in Afghanistan along extended kinship lines. Local leaders such as Maliks, Khans, mullahs, and tribal chiefs are an influential part of the Afghan society and serve as local power-brokers and interlocutors between their respective communities and the government. Most of these leaders are trusted and respected by local villagers. NATO

commanders have engaged these leaders in order to identify and weed out potential infiltrators from the ALP.

New training modifications for ANDSF recruits were established to prevent vulnerability to insider attacks. For example, after a rapid increase in insider attacks in 2011 and 2012, the weapons provided by NATO troops to new ANDSF recruits for training purposes often had their bolts and magazines removed. In some instances, new Afghan police recruits conducted field exercises with wooden rifles to avoid potential risk to the NATO trainers.⁶¹ NATO commanders also embedded “guardian angels”—or spies—in Afghan police and army units, training centers, and joint patrols to watch over and protect NATO troops.⁶² Counterintelligence operations were expanded at the battalion level to weed out Taliban sympathizers, and NATO commanders ordered its troops to carry loaded weapons at all times, even inside bases.⁶³ Furthermore, NATO troops temporarily suspended joint patrols and

⁵⁹ A military approach or process that considers gaps in the context of strategic direction by taking into account: Doctrine, Organization, Training, Material, Leadership and Education, Personnel, and Facilities.

⁶⁰ "U.S. Suspends Afghan Local Police Training for Further Vetting," *American Forces Press Service*, U.S. Department of Defense, September 2, 2012, <http://www.defense.gov/News/NewsArticle.aspx?ID=117728>

⁶¹ Hodge, Nathan. "Ready or Not, Afghans to Take Over Security." *The Wall Street Journal*, July 14, 2013, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887324188604578545420443715216.html>

⁶² "Guardian Angels assigned to watch over U.S. troops in Afghanistan." *The Telegraph*, March 29, 2012, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/afghanistan/9174294/Guardian-angels-assigned-to-watch-over-US-troops-in-Afghanistan.html>

⁶³ "U.S. boosts intelligence after Afghan insider attacks" *Reuters*, August 14, 2012, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2012/08/14/uk-usa-afghanistan-intelligence-idUKBRE87D13020120814>

operations with small ANDSF units below the battalion level.⁶⁴

Additionally, NATO commanders established the Insider Threat Action Group (ITAG), a program to curb the threat posed by insider attacks.⁶⁵ An oversight group, which was represented jointly by the NATO commanders and ANDSF leaders, recruiting commands, and intelligence agencies, was tasked in 2013 to study the incidents and coordinate shared approaches to identify necessary measures to prevent potential threats from developing. The commanders also created a joint oversight commission, called an Insider Threat Mitigation Team, comprising senior Afghan and NATO leaders to study each insider attack and identify lessons and recommend future actions. Steps taken by the oversight group included tightening the ANDSF recruitment process to reduce the risk of Taliban infiltration. Afghan authorities employed a more vigorous, eight-step vetting process for every ANDSF member, which did not exist before. The new vetting process included issuing new identification cards, collecting personal and family background information and

biometrics data, conducting criminal background checks and drug and medical screening, and soliciting references from local leaders to vouch for new recruits.

Since the new vetting process was put in place, Afghan authorities have detained or removed hundreds of suspected soldiers and have registered more than 80 percent of the 350,000-strong Afghan security forces into a biometrics database. ANDSF leaders closely monitor Afghan soldiers for signs of defection or radicalization, especially those returning from leave, including checking their cell phones for Taliban songs and ringtones and encouraging fellow soldiers to pass on warnings on colleagues they consider a potential threat. Nonetheless, Afghan troops, and especially the local police, remains prone to Taliban infiltration through any number of means. Identity cards can be forged, tribal leaders can be intimidated or influenced, and with corruption no secret in Afghanistan, low- and mid-level screeners in Afghan security institutions can be bribed.⁶⁶ Reports indicate that contraband Afghan army and police uniforms, insignia, boots, and other items are

⁶⁴ Martin, David. "U.S. military suspends joint patrols with Afghans," *CBS News*, September 17, 2012, http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-18563_162-57514546/u.s-military-suspends-joint-patrols-with-afghans/

⁶⁵ "Advance Questions for General Lloyd J. Austin, III, U.S. Army Nominee for Commander, U.S. Central Command." *Senate Armed Service Committee*. February 14, 2013, <http://www.armed-services.senate.gov/statemnt/2013/02%20February/Austin%2002-14-13.pdf>

⁶⁶ According to the Transparency International's annual Corruption Perception Index (CPI), Afghanistan is ranked 169 out of 176 most corrupt countries. Afghanistan's Interior Ministry responsible for the national police is repeatedly perceived as the most corrupt institution in the country.

sold openly in local Afghan stores and tailor shops.⁶⁷ How those uniforms got to local stores or why Afghan tailors are allowed to prepare police uniforms for easy purchase by those who will use it for nefarious purposes remains unclear.

Furthermore, NATO commanders developed various training resources to educate NATO personnel about Afghan culture to mitigate the risk of future attacks motivated by cultural differences. The training material included a video prepared by the Center for Army Lessons Learned, the Asymmetric Warfare Group, and the Training and Doctrine Command's culture and intelligence support centers, which attributed personal grievances as the primary causes behind most insider attacks.⁶⁸ NATO commanders also prepared the "Inside the Wire Threats" handbook on insider attacks and a pocket smartcard called "Insider Threats in Partnering Environments, A Guide for Military Leaders," and required all NATO personnel to read it and keep a copy for future reference. More importantly, considering the criticality of cultural awareness for both

deepening ties with Afghan troops and ensuring greater operational safety for NATO troops, the NATO command prepared a culture guidebook for all NATO personnel in Afghanistan. The handbook, which drew upon a 2011 study, "A Crisis of Trust and Cultural Incompatibility,"⁶⁹ was designed to educate NATO personnel on Afghan cultural norms and religious beliefs to allay the threat of triggering an insider attacks.

Additionally, Afghanistan's Ministry of Defense implanted hundreds of intelligence agents into Afghan units, especially the ALP, and recruitment and training centers to monitor suspicious activities and social conduct of Afghan troops. The ministry also released a 28-page training booklet titled "A Brochure for Comprehending the Cultures of the Coalition Forces," geared towards improving cross-cultural understanding in ANDSF to reduce the threat of personally motivated incidents incited by cultural gaffes, disagreements, and perceived insults. The ministry also appended hundreds of religious and cultural affairs officers into Afghan units to advise ANDSF members not to be offended by social gaffes inadvertently made by

⁶⁷ Khamoosh, Kawoon. "Taliban tactics: Stealing the enemy's uniform." *BBC News*. October 6, 2013, www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-23358411

⁶⁸ "Marine Corps Center for Lessons Learned, Mitigating the Afghan National Security Forces Insider Threat." January 2013 Newsletter, Volume 9, Issue 10, p 7

⁶⁹ Bordin, Jeffrey. "A Crisis of Trust and Cultural Incompatibility." *A Red Team Study of Mutual Perceptions of Afghan National Security Force Personnel and U.S. Soldiers in Understanding and Mitigating the Phenomena of ANSF-committed Fratricide-Murders*. May 12, 2011, <http://www.michaelyon-online.com/images/pdf/trust-incompatibility.pdf>

their NATO counterparts that may be considered offensive in Afghan culture. For example, these included entering of NATO troops into mosques with their shoes on, walking in front of an Afghan soldier who is praying, swearing, asking Afghan troops about their wives or female relatives, and talking to or laughing at Afghan women in villages. While it is common among NATO personnel to show photos of their family members and significant others, it is considered unbecoming among Afghans to do so. Even a friendly greeting such as "how is your wife?" or "how is your daughter?" can be construed as insulting and can provoke a hostile reaction.

Conclusion

Insider attacks are a complex phenomenon, but they are not new to modern wars. As NATO commanders attempt to curb the possibility of future incidents, the attacks have created fear among NATO personnel and hostility toward their Afghan partners. The attacks have also undermined trust between the two sides and have important consequences beyond the number of casualties they have caused. They have impacted the United States' relationship with Afghanistan in several ways.

First, the media impact of the attacks has been paramount and has been a boon for the Taliban. The attacks have helped the Taliban to damage public and political support for the Afghan war in Western capitals. For example, in March 2012, the rise in insider attacks prompted concern in the United States, leading to questioning of Gen. John R. Allen, then commander of NATO forces in Afghanistan, in his testimony in front of the Senate Armed Services Committee. Senator Rodger Wicker asked Allen several questions about green-on-blue attacks, including how many US forces had been killed by these attacks and what the US military was doing to correct it.⁷⁰ The steady increase of insider attacks throughout the summer of 2012 saw a corresponding increase in media coverage, culminating in a question to President Barack Obama during a press conference regarding what the United States was doing to reduce them. The president outlined plans for improved vetting processes, better counterintelligence, and the "guardian angel" program, but also stated that "we're going to have to do more".⁷¹ The public attention garnered by these attacks served to only erode confidence in the American war effort and may have contributed to the

⁷⁰ "The Situation in Afghanistan: Hearing Before the Committee on Armed Services of the United States Senate" *US Government Publishing Office*, March 22 2012, <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-112shrg76272/html/CHRG-112shrg76272.htm>

⁷¹ "Remarks by the President to the White House Press Corps." *Whitehouse.gov*, August 20, 2012. <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2012/08/20/remarks-president-white-house-press-corps>

record low support for the Afghan war in mid-2013.⁷²

Second, insider attacks weakened the working relationship between NATO personnel and Afghan troops, which only benefited the Taliban. In an interview with *Newsweek*,⁷³ a senior Taliban commander remarked that “these attacks are the Taliban’s most effective tool to create a golden gap between the Americans and the Afghans. We are aware that the Afghan security forces are getting stronger, so this is best way for us to weaken and divide them from the Americans.” The commander also noted that “the Taliban have a carefully planned strategy to infiltrate the Afghan security forces, not only to stage attacks but also to weaken morale. “We are working like termites, eating into this already rotten wooden structure.” Insider attacks also negatively affect joint operations between NATO and Afghan troops, because more than half of the attacks took place during joint Afghan-NATO patrols and operations. As insider attacks grew, NATO troops saw partnering with Afghan soldiers as risky and scaled back. On many occasions, NATO personnel minimized close contact with Afghan soldiers to avoid the threat

of insider attacks, which damaged the rapport between the two sides. The attacks also hurt the quality of NATO training support provided to Afghan troops, especially at a time when Afghan troops endured an alarming number of casualties and higher attrition and desertion rates.

Third, trust between NATO personnel and Afghan troops became a casualty. After each insider attack, more suspicion and distrust dominated interactions between the two sides. Mutual interpersonal and institutional trust remains a crucial element for a stable and functioning partnership. However, building trust and a stable relationship are intrinsically intertwined. Adm. William McRaven, then commander of US Special Operations Command, rightly stated that “you can't surge trust.”⁷⁴ In the early years of the Afghan campaign, NATO personnel did make a concerted effort to get to know their Afghan partners as they worked to build a nationalized Afghan security force. In most of their interactions, NATO troops came across as open and direct about issues of concern and they quickly earned the confidence and loyalty of Afghan soldiers, especially through

⁷² “Many Americans Say Afghan War Isn’t Worth Fighting.” *Washington Post*. Accessed February 3, 2017. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/many-americans-say-afghan-war-isnt-worth-fighting/2013/07/25/d0447d44-f559-11e2-aa2e-4088616498b4_story.html

⁷³ “Afghanistan: 'Green on Blue' Killings Explained.” *Newsweek*, August 27, 2012.

⁷⁴ Howard Altman, “SOCOM's Goal: Pre-empt Wars,” *The Tampa Tribune*, May 19, 2013, <http://tbo.com/list/macdill-air-force-base-news/socom-goal-pre-empt-wars-b82486657z1>

partnered operations. Joint operations and patrols fostered collaboration between the two sides and identified areas for improvement. NATO personnel also acknowledged that close contact with Afghan troops helped to create better rapport and in-field cooperation between the two sides ensured the safety of NATO troops. However, building that rapport did not start easily. A common complaint among Afghan forces had been that although NATO personnel demonstrated authority through their respective positions and ranks among themselves, they showed little respect for Afghan ranks and positions. Another common criticism of Afghan soldiers was that NATO troops did not create many instructive opportunities for them in the field, especially engaging Afghan troops in more operations. Afghan soldiers also complained that NATO personnel listened to and favored the input of a select few Afghan soldiers and granted them more access over others, which created personal disagreements.⁷⁵

Looking ahead, the possibility of future insider attacks cannot be ruled out, but a tighter recruitment and vetting process for Afghan troops and more cultural education and training for NATO personnel and Afghan soldiers can play a mitigating role. Steps taken in that regard by NATO and Afghan authorities have already reduced the frequency of insider attacks.

However, the insider attacks have underscored the fact that Afghanistan's security institutions remain fragile and vulnerable to external infiltration and influences. Currently, Afghan troops and NATO personnel enjoy a stable partnership despite the mistrust created by insider attacks. Countering the threat of insider attacks requires continued NATO commitment to its train, advise, and assist mission to support Afghan troops. Because of sustained NATO training, equipping, and partnering, Afghan troops fight bravely every day alongside NATO forces and enjoy overwhelming support among Afghan people. To improve in-field cooperation, joint Afghan-NATO operations that strengthen rapport and build trust should be increased. Notwithstanding pressing concerns, NATO commanders should seldom rotate their troops between units or joint bases, in order to allow Afghan and NATO personnel to build closer interpersonal relationships. Shared training exercises before joint operations and in-theatre collaboration such as route clearing, joint ambush response, and convoy movement would help boost the camaraderie among the NATO and Afghan soldiers. Unfortunately, distrust would only widen the gap between the two sides and provide the ground for the Taliban to exploit the opportunity and stage more insider attacks.

⁷⁵ Personal conversation with an Afghan security official, Brussels, March 2013.