



Translational Research

at the USMC Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning

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Introduction: A Strategy for Improving Military Partnerships

Increasingly the Marine battalions deploying to Afghanistan are focusing on their role as mentors and advisors for the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). In the context of the planned decrease in troop levels that politicians say will begin in 2014, ANSF's self-sufficiency is key. Ideally, by then, ANSF will be equipped and ready to take complete control of security throughout the country. But how can this be achieved? The challenges that Afghans and their Marine partners face are manifold, including widespread poverty and illiteracy; language barriers (between Afghans and Marines, and between Pashtu and Dari-speaking Afghans); a lack of resources; a tradition of nepotism; limited recruiting options, especially among Pashtuns; drug use; and poorly trained leadership. These are not simple problems; overcoming them requires a mixture of time, training, and enormous resources.

One battalion saw training as a way to rectify some of the issues that they encountered shortly after joining up with their Afghan National Civil Order Police (ANCOP) partners. Under the leadership of LtCol Brian Christmas, in March 2010, 3rd Battalion, 6th Marines created a two day "reset training," which included a combination of individual drug tests for every person (leaders and subordinates alike) and classes covering topics such as ethics, Marine culture, and even Afghan culture. At the time, this "reset training" was seen as an innovative solution to the problems at hand. Despite progress in partnering efforts, this training is just as necessary today. Any Afghan unit, no matter how well-trained, will arrive in its area of operations in need of additional support in security operations and in areas such as understanding its partner(s), their activities and their operating environment. The "reset training" did just that.

This issue of Dispatches describes the training from two perspectives. LtCol Christmas recounts his initial impressions, the impact of the training, and lessons learned, while one of the instructors, Kristin Post, provides some specifics from her experience teaching one of the classes. While these articles address the Afghan theater, Marines who face challenges in effective partnering in any theater may find it useful in learning how to build and staff a similar training effort.

Reset Training: Bridging a Cultural Gap By LtCol Brian Christmas

Celebrating Partnership: A Farewell to Our ANCOP Partners



Note: Photo courtesy of the author. Individuals gave permission to be photographed at media event.

Saying farewell to leaders and members of the first Afghan National Civil Order Police (ANCOP) unit that joined 3rd Battalion, 6th Marines immediately following our initial clear of Northern Marjeh was a bittersweet moment. Within a few months, my Battalion witnessed the maturing of the ANCOP into viable and valuable partners. We were happy that our plan, developed and understood by all involved, led to success in the mission, but sad because these now invested and better-trained partners were rotating out during a critical time in our operation.

Upon arrival in theater, we were immediately injected into the planning for Operation MUSHTARAK. While we already had Afghan National Army (ANA) units with us, we recognized the need for additional manpower to seize our assigned objectives and conduct the follow-on clearing operations in our designated area of operations (AO). Accessible nearby were ANCOP units. Bringing them in after the initial clear would increase our available manpower so that the ANA and Marines could continue the clear while establishing permanent security posts. Furthermore, the ANCOP would be the first official contact many returning citizens would have with the central government (GIROA), and hopefully would provide a positive example for our future recruiting efforts.

Reset Training... (CONTINUED ON PG 2)

This decision was highly criticized by those outside the military, mainly due to concerns that it was too early to introduce the police because the security situation had not improved enough. While these concerns were legitimate, we felt they had been adequately tempered by the partnering of ANCOP with Marines and ANA platoons and by the ANCOP's paramilitary training.

However, the first and most important lesson I learned regarding all ANSF was management of expectations. Approximately 180 ANCOP were assigned to my AO. We were under the impression that the ANCOP were experienced and had received training, both in the traditional area of law enforcement and in paramilitary activities. "The best and the brightest," we were told. Upon first contact, they appeared motivated, but disorganized. My initial expectations were diminished further when the first negligent discharge occurred during their vehicle debarkation. Marines are known for setting high standards, so "well-trained and capable" and "best and brightest" conjure images of disciplined Marines. Of course, these images, based on Western culture, reflect American military standards. This was my mistake, and I should have managed not only my own expectations, but those of my subordinates.

The second lesson I learned was the value of providing the appropriate training to get the ANCOP closer to that image of professionalism I had created. In our initial meetings together, we identified to the ANCOP leaders the boundaries for the partnered platoons, and I provided my intent and desired end state. Within the first week of operating, it became clear that we had a problem. ANCOP apathy towards the manning of posts and conducting street patrols, especially at night; shake downs of local businessmen; and the use of marijuana challenged our effectiveness. After multiple attempts to rectify these issues through ANCOP leadership, I decided to pull every ANCOP unit on a rotating basis into the Battalion Forward Operating Base for training geared towards resetting the force. This training included classes on US/USMC culture (understanding how we eat, act, use the head, etc.); Marjeh people and culture; drug policy; enemy threat and Taliban intimidation tactics; shooting skills and weapons safety; law enforcement ethics; and Civil Affairs. Time was also allotted for the ANCOP officials to address internal leadership issues. Instructors drawn from the Battalion, the Regiment, and the MEB included a member of our Human Terrain Team, ANCOP leadership, the MEB's Marine liaison officer to the ANCOP, my S-2A, the Civil Affairs Group leader, and my Staff Judge Advocate. We also conducted a drug test, and those who tested positive were immediately removed from the AO to set a strong example. Approximately 25% of the ANCOP was sent directly back to ANCOP Headquarters for processing. While the impact on available manpower was significant, the effect was worth the shortage. The training was carried out without further distraction and resulted in its intended effects.

Reset Training... (CONTINUED ON PG 4)

Teaching COIN to COIN Partners

By Kristin Post

When the battalion asked me to create a class for Afghan security forces about the local Afghan culture and people, I thought this was a brilliant idea, as the cultural differences between the Afghan National Security Force (ANSF) and the local population in Marjeh were impacting the mission at hand. The majority of Afghan National Civil Order Police (ANCOP) and Afghan National Army (ANA) are Dari-speaking ethnicities from the mountainous and more urbanized North. Most had no prior experience, and probably very little awareness, of what life was like in the Helmand River valley, a desert climate populated by Pashtu-speaking farmers and herders living at the subsistence level. The battalion was not only wise enough to recognize this cultural gap, they were also proactive enough to use some of their training time to address it. In addition, I added another component to the class based on my own observationsⁱ. In the weeks prior, when I went out on patrol with the Marines and their ANSF partners, I noticed that the ANCOP were, at a minimum, bored and confused. Marines were frustrated by what appeared to be a lazy security posture. However, I felt this behavior was not entirely due to incompetence, but rather to a gap in understanding of what constitutes a security patrol. The most recent training these men had was on paramilitary tactics, and their concept of a security patrol was narrowly defined by this. I used the class to broaden their understanding of security to include different types of patrols. The intent of the culture class was to level the playing field between what Marines knew and what the ANCOP had yet to learn; this was the who they were securing and how they were doing it.

The class was titled "The People of Marjeh,"ⁱⁱ representing its primary focus on the population (more so than tactics). For about an hour and a half, twice a day, every third day, a terrific Dari-speaking Afghan interpreter and I used a combination of PowerPoint slides (projected on the side of the tent) and experiential learning techniques to describe the population and culture of Marjeh. Each slide contained at least one photograph of the local population or the ANCOP with the local populationⁱⁱⁱ. This technique illustrated that the "population is the center of gravity," which is a central tenet of counterinsurgency^{iv}. By "population," we emphasized that everyone was worthy of protection, not just the wealthy land owners or Dari-speakers. The photos also illustrated how the ANCOP could help the Marines, by pointing out what is important to Afghans and their livelihoods. For instance, one photograph was of a mud-brick building with a blue door, glass windows, and no other adornment. The ANCOP knew it was a mosque. I explained that when Marines see that photograph, they may mistake it for a house. And because mosques are so important to the local religious population, it was important to make sure Marines were able to recognize them as well as other structures like cemeteries, wells and health clinics. I encouraged the ANCOP to stop, and at a minimum, use body language (if not an interpreter), to point out and explain these structures (or features) to the Marines on future patrols.

Culture Class... (CONTINUED ON PG 3)

We then practiced how to communicate through body language. I told them that their way to show prayer (hands cupped behind each ear^v) does not look like the US gesture for prayer. Once the ANCOP knew specifics of what they could look for and what was important, they could then be more effective, especially on the non-kinetic patrols. This was the “who” and the “what” of providing security.

For the “how,” I explained to the ANCOP that the Marines had different names for different kinds of patrols. Most of the ANCOP understood a cordon and search patrol because that is what paramilitaries or police might do. We discussed how patrols may not always need to be aggressive. If the security situation allowed, Marines and ANSF might choose to do a “soft knock” instead of a “hard knock.”^{vi} Patrols with missions like making a payment for battle damage or conducting census operations were a more foreign concept to the ANCOP. The 3/6 Marines were conducting these latter types of patrols far more often than the cordon and search, and thus, the ANCOP needed to better understand how to effect such a patrol. Such non-kinetic patrol types are difficult to grasp for most militaries because they seem so distant from what the military and police are “supposed” to do, which is to “get the bad guy.” It takes mental and physical fortitude to be patient and to remain alert while sitting under a baking sun watching a squad leader drink tea with a poor local farmer and his sons. That strength comes in part from physical training, but it is incomplete without the mental understanding, without knowing the “why.” Stating that there are many types of patrols, each with its own intended outcome, helped the ANCOP learn the various tools available to accomplish their mission and so reinforced that they are providing security, even when they are not hunting down the enemy.

Given that the local population held a general distrust toward the police^{vii}, our class concluded by reinforcing the long-term goals of the ANCOP’s mission. A photograph of a child was accompanied by the message “we want this child to want to be an ANCOP when he is old enough.” Another slide stated that a woman should feel that her family is secure. The final slide emphasized the ANCOP are to be “trusted and respected members of the Marjeh community.” These final slides and messages reinforced the “who”- it is every child, every female, every member of the community. They also reiterated the “how”- the concept of patrol as a flexible tool to accomplish mission – and ANCOP’s goal of becoming a trusted, respected component of local society. These messages are so critical to the counterinsurgency mission; yet rarely are they made explicit. Rather they are more implicit and thus need to be explained to ensure partners share a common understanding of their joint mission, tactics, and operating environment. However, when 3/6 held subsequent trainings for incoming Afghan forces, the “People of Marjeh” class was dropped in favor of the more immediate concerns of weapons training and IED detection. Given the enormous challenges in military partnering, the time constraints and the ever-present security threats, it is never going to be easy to host a culture class for ANSF partners. But there is a need, and this method provides an example upon which we can build.

Notes:

ⁱI worked with 3rd Battalion, 6th Marines as a social scientist with the Human Terrain Team (HTT7). Almost daily, between February-March 2010, I accompanied the combined foot patrols in the northern part of Marjeh and conducted interviews with the local population.

ⁱⁱ“The People of Marjeh” presentation was based, in part, on a training I had previously created and delivered to newly arrived Marine Battalions in Camp Leatherneck. That scenario-based class was initially titled “In the Words of the Marines” and ultimately refined into “AO Orientation and COIN for Helmand.” The “People of Marjeh,” also modified and improved, was used to train newly arrived Afghan ANA batalions in Camp Dwyer. Overall, a total of over 600 US Marines and 400 Afghan forces received a version of this population-centric culture class.

ⁱⁱⁱThese were photographs I took in weeks prior while on patrol. ANCOP who had been on those patrols with me enjoyed seeing photos of themselves and of familiar landmarks. Even those who were not pictured reacted well when they saw their buddies and local terrain. Given the language barriers, these photographs worked to keep their attention, ensure comprehension (even among those who are illiterate) and reinforce the learning objectives.

^{iv}FM 3-24 (MCWP 3-33.5) Counterinsurgency. December 2006. It is worth noting that COIN is about the local people, but is not from them. It remains to be seen whether ANSF will continue this population-centric strategy in the upcoming years.

^vSalaat (Muslim prayer) starts with the gesture of raising both hands with thumbs next to the ears while saying Allahu akbar.

^{vi}It is common for Marines to use terms like this in their patrol brief, but without giving a full description of what they mean. Frequently, ANSF and interpreters will not reveal their lack of familiarity with these terms. In counterinsurgency, there is a wide difference between “hard knock” and “soft knock,” so a proactive explanation of these terms is ideal.

^{vii}In several interviews, Afghans in Marjeh reported their distrust and even strong dislike for the police, of which ANCOP was considered to be a part. Most of these impressions had been formed years ago, due to poor treatment by Afghan police prior to the Taliban takeover in Marjeh. Though the residents understood the units currently with 3/6 were not the same, they remained skeptical.

The reset training provided the ANCOP with a true understanding of the importance of their role. They developed a sense of pride in their unit as well as in being a part of the coalition forces in Northern Marjeh; they began to embrace the traditional values of all militaries and law enforcement (serving the people); and they developed a better understanding of the threat and how they could defeat it. By our standards and expectations, they were not top notch, but they became a force to be reckoned with. As we began to employ the ANCOP farther into the AO, the improvements in their commitment and abilities were readily apparentⁱ. Over time the leadership became actively involved in planning the locations and structure of future police stations; they provided a positive representation of the GIRoA; and they began to gain the trust and confidence of the local citizensⁱⁱ.

Ultimately, the decision to bring in the ANCOP and partner them with Marine and ANA forces after the initial clearing of Northern Marjeh was a good one. It allowed for a more effective use of forces between the “clear” and “hold” stages. However, it would not have happened without resetting the force, aligning our organizational goals, and ensuring we were operating from the same play book. It was risky to remove the forces from the AO for 2 day training cycles and to reduce the ANCOP force by 25%. However, that risk enabled us to maintain the momentum of the operation throughout Northern Marjeh. When we partner, it is critical that we share a common understanding of our missions, our cultures, our methods, and our standards. We achieved this common understanding through our reset training. I highly recommend that commanders, when time and situation allow, incorporate this training upon joining with their ANSF partners, but prior to conducting operations in the AO.

Notes:

ⁱ This was apparent when four civilian delivery trucks were ambushed and set on fire off route 608 heading towards Lashkar Gah. The ANCOP were first on the scene, and with no additional mobile forces available to react at the time, I engaged with my Jump Platoon. With the help of the ANCOP, we attempted to extinguish the truck flames and to conduct searches of the surrounding area. We knew where the ambush had taken place and began pursuit of the enemy. Once the Marines of the Jump began moving towards the enemy, the ANCOP stepped up in magnificent fashion. The instincts of the ANCOP, their willingness to take the lead from the Marines, and their drive to capture or kill the perpetrators while respecting the local citizens, were excellent. I watched with respect as the ANCOP small unit leaders led their teams against the enemy and realized ultimate success.

ⁱⁱ An example of this growth and gaining the trust and confidence of the locals occurred when I was working with one of the mid-level ANCOP leaders on establishing a police station on route 608 between the Five Points and the Kems Bazaar. He developed a plan and walked the ground with me to show me what he wanted to do. When we articulated his plan to the owner of the land we wanted to use, the land owner provided the land free of charge to support the efforts of the ANCOP. If we had approached this land owner prior to the reset training, I am certain that the land owner would not have provided the land or would have required a large payment for its use.

Research Notes

Long Term Approach Group on Resilience

Dr. Kerry Fosher is spearheading a new group charged with examining the longer-term issues associated with building resilience training into the Marine Corps. The group is composed of academic members from Marine Corps University, military members from Training and Education Command's Ground Training Branch, and researchers from the Center for Advanced Operational Culture's Translational Research Group.

29 September 2011

Kristin Post led a discussion at the Small Wars Discussion Group in Quantico, VA, entitled “Women in the Battlespace: From Female Engagement Team (FET) to the Future.” The discussion focused on how the make-up and tasking of FET have changed over time and how an all-female patrol team might be relevant in future peacetime or conflict situations.

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