



Middle East Studies

at the Marine Corps University

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ANA Visitors Suggest Constructive Steps During Meeting with MES

by Amin Tarzi

A high-level delegation from the Afghan National Army's (ANA) 205th Corps participated in a roundtable discussion organized by the Middle East Studies (MES) at Marine Corps University during their recent visit to the Marine Corps Base Quantico. During the productive exchange, the ANA delegation made several suggestions which, if implemented, they argued, would not only improve the morale and quality of the Afghan forces, but also would lead to better communication between the ANA and their U.S. and other international partners and trainers.

ANA VISITORS... (CONTINUED ON PG 2)

MES AfPak Lecture Series Presents a History of Nationalism in Afghanistan

by Adam C Seitz

As part of an ongoing effort to expand the understanding of Pashtun people within the Marine Corps PME community and beyond, the Middle East Studies at Marine Corps University has launched a lecture series entitled "A Multidisciplinary Approach to the AfPak Region and Its People."

The lecture series incorporates the ISAF Commander's Summer 2009 counterinsurgency and stability operations guidance for Afghanistan into the Marine Corps PME to "embrace the people", "partner with the ANSF", "build governance and accountability", and "get better everyday" by giving Marines a better understanding of the Pashtun population.

LECTURE SERIES... (CONTINUED ON PG 3)

MES Notes

MES AfPak Lecture Series

MES at MCU is hosting an AfPak Lecture Series throughout 2010 entitled "A Multidisciplinary Approach to the AfPak Region and Its People." Upcoming lectures include:

25 March

Ambassador Peter Galbraith, "Afghanistan: War of Necessity or Quagmire"

5 April

Professor Shah Mahmoud Hanifi, James Madison University, "Pashtun Counter-Narrative"

All lectures are held at the GRC from 1400-1530. POC for the lecture series is Adam Seitz at seitzac@grc.usmcu.edu.

Emerald Express Strategic Symposium, Afghanistan: The Way Ahead

Agenda and registration for MCUs Emerald Express Strategic Symposium is available at www.regonline.com/ee2010.

MES at MCU Disclaimer

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According to the ANA delegation, one of the principal reasons people join the opposition is the lack of access to viable jobs and education for average Afghans – two interrelated factors, they maintained. They argued for more strategic planning on job creation and emphasis to be placed on developing the indigenous Afghan labor market, integrating them into the countless development projects underway in Afghanistan. This would have the dual benefit of strengthening the bonds between people and their government and preventing them from joining in the destructive work of the insurgents.

To improve the viability of the ANA, the Afghan delegation proposed providing English language training for ANA volunteers. They argued this has both short-term and long-term advantages for the military and for Afghanistan writ large. First, while foreign forces rotate in and out, the ANA remains, providing a stable, consistent force. Investing in English language training would maximize the return on language training investment and facilitate relations between ANA and the U.S. and other international partners.

Furthermore, they added, there are direct economic benefits for both ISAF and Afghanistan's overall economic and security calculations. The ANA representatives pointed out that the imported interpreters from the United States and elsewhere at a great expense had severe inadequacies in the Pashto language and limited understanding of military language and culture and challenge the sensitivities of ANA personnel who, while asked to sacrifice much, cannot even imagine the benefits these individuals - whom they perceive as equals or less qualified - receive. The incentive for individuals' participating in the language training would be the hope of finding a more lucrative job after their military service ends, one of which could be as an ISAF interpreter. These interpreters would be less costly, as they are local, and would bring their military and cultural experiences, eliminating the inadequacies present in the current pool of available interpreters. Moreover, they continued that there could be a positive effect on accessions once the word got out that joining the ANA opens up doors to better opportunities, fixing ANA as a viable organization in the minds of the local population. Finally, they argued that the salaries provided to these interpreters vice their non-local counterparts would be reinvested into the Afghan economy and help in the overall rebuilding of that country and the Afghanization process of that process.

The suggestions by the ANA delegation may not respond to the short-term requirements of the U.S. forces on the ground in Afghanistan; however, they may merit consideration because of their potential long-term benefits.

MES Past Events

22 January 2010

Dr. Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled "Iran's Changing Political Landscape: Challenges and Opportunities? (An Iranian View)" to National Defense University, Washington, DC.

19 February 2010

Dr. Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled "The Historical Relationship between State Formation and Judicial System Reform in Afghanistan," to U.S. Army JAG's Legal Center and School, Charlottesville, VA.

27 February 2010

Dr. Amin Tarzi presented a lecture entitled "Afghanistan and Its Region: An Assessment" to 1st Battalion, 25th Marines, Fort Devens, MA.

To date MES has hosted two lecturers in the series, Dr. James Caron of the University of Pennsylvania and Professor Robert McChesney from New York University. Both lectures deepened the Marine Corps knowledge of the Pashtun people and challenged some perceptions about the history of Afghan governance and the Pashtun tribes.

MES at MCU kicked off its MES AfPak Lecture Series, with a presentation by Dr. Caron entitled "Social and Political Dissent in Pashtu Poetry: The Case of Malang Jan." Dr. Caron provided a different perspective of the Pashtun people and shed new light on the history and role of tribes in the AfPak region. He discussed the history of the Pashtun tribal structure, how Pashtu poetry has been used as a form of political and social dissent, and where this dissent was targeted. Dr. Caron argued that "in the case of Malang Jan, his poetry was often directed at domestic critique of the Afghan power structure, especially tribal hierarchies. Oral poets of eastern Afghanistan, including Malang Jan, tend to emphasize tribal elders, not as natural representative leaders of a collective tribe, but as autocratic rulers who are most interested in personal gain and self preservation." Pashtun poetry was not limited to localized tribalism, but rather it was larger and more nationalistic, reaching out to a greater audience helping to shape public opinion. The nationalist sentiments in Malang Jan's poetry challenge some of current trends of thought which argue that Afghans are tribal and therefore do not have desire to be a part of a greater Afghan national identity.

Dr. Caron's presentation provided insight into Afghanistan's history of nationalism, as revealed through Pashtun poetry. He discussed how this nationalism was spread throughout Pashtun society, even beyond the border of modern-day Afghanistan, and was seen as a real and popular challenge to the tribal system. The argument he presented based on the case of Malang Jan, challenged the idea the tribes are the answer to governance and security in Afghanistan.

In second lecture in the series entitled "Afghans' View of Afghanistan's History", Professor McChesney presented an argument that furthered the notion of a history of an Afghan nation and an Afghan national identity, through an examination of historical texts. Through these texts, Professor McChesney presented an Afghan view of their master narrative. This narrative provides insight into the creation of an Afghan national identity, not an identity based on a tribal norm, but rather on something greater, transcending subnational identities. The narrative shows the formation of a nation state, bringing together myriad tribes, ethnicities, and cultures under a created Afghan national identity and set forth a national chain of command with Kabul taking control of an Afghan nation with sovereignty within established borders, dating at least as far back as late nineteenth century.

Professor McChesney and Dr. Caron brought a fresh look at the history of nationalism, tribal structures and modes of communication as well as governance to the Marine Corps University. Their insight based on their examination and analysis of written and oral word of the Afghan people provided a window into the history and culture of the AfPak region and its people.

The presentations discussed above, as well as more information about the lecture series, are available online at <http://www.mcu.usmc.mil/Pages/Middle%20East%20Studies.aspx>, in both audio and DVD versions. For further information on the series or how to obtain copies of the lectures, please contact MES of MCU at MCU_MES@grc.usmcu.edu.