



# Afghanistan Policy Page

A one-page brief on a major issue concerning U.S. policy and engagement in Afghanistan.

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## State of the Afghan National Army

### Take Aways

- **The Afghan National Army is charged with protecting the security and national self-determination of the Afghan state.**
- **The ANA has steadily improved** under U.S.-led training efforts with increasing independence of planning and operations.
- The ANA is accelerating its growth but some analysts worry that **rushed expansion could weaken the military's overall quality.**
- The ANA strives for ethnic diversity but it is **disproportionately Tajik due to low Pashtun recruitment rates.**

### In Quotes

*"If you don't develop leaders, this military cannot succeed"* **U.S. Lt. Gen. William Caldwell IV**, commander of the NATO Training Mission and Combined Security Transition Command – Afghanistan

### Key Facts

**The ANA strength is currently just over 100,000 soldiers.**

- 117 *Kandaks* (battalions) of 600 men are fielded, and 76 are capable of leading operations.
- For comparison, Pakistan's military has active duty 650,000 soldiers and over 800,000 in paramilitary and reserve forces.

**The United States is the lead nation for coordinating ANA training, and has provided \$17 billion since 2001.**

As the ANA grows to 134,000 soldiers it will cost \$2 billion per year to sustain operations.

- For comparison, Pakistan's annual military expenditures are around \$7.8 billion.

**Women were invited this month to join the Afghan Army for the first time** in military hospitals and combat support service units.

The Afghan army is an **all-volunteer force**, although President Karzai recently said he was considering implementing conscription.

### Key Issues

**Steadily Increasing Capacity** – Nearly two-thirds of the fielded Afghan National Army (ANA) units are rated capable of leading operations independently or with some international coalition support. Between October 2008 and May 2009, the ANA led 54% of operations.

**Training** - The U.S. took responsibility for training the Afghan military at the December 2001 Bonn Conference on the future of Afghanistan. The NATO Training Mission – Afghanistan and Combined Security Transition Command – Afghanistan (CSTC-A) train and mentor the ANA with several coalition countries.

**Diversity and Leadership** – The Minister of Defense Abdul Rahim Wardak and Army Chief of Staff Gen. Bismullah Khan are former anti-Soviet Mujahidin, although many of the generals and colonels in the ANA are veterans of the Soviet-trained military from the 1980s. Tajiks seen as over-represented in the officer and NCO corps, and the ANA has difficulty recruiting ethnic Pashtuns from the south of Afghanistan.

**Equipment** – The ANA is currently converting from Russian to NATO-made small arms, and the conversion intends to be complete by the spring of 2010. 2,000 Up-armed HUMVEES are fielded, with a goal of 4,200 by mid 2010.

**Army expansion** – The ANA currently stands at just over 100,000 men, and it is planned to expand to 134,000 in early 2010, and eventually to 240,000 soldiers. Accelerated growth is planned, which will necessitate using makeshift training facilities, providing older Soviet weapons recently swapped out for NATO-standard weapons, and recruiting more former Afghan Army officers from the Soviet-era.

**Security Coordination** - Operational Coordination Centers (OCCs) have been established to coordinate the activities of an area's security forces (ANA, ANP, and NATO-ISAF) with the National Command Center. OCCs are multi-functional and respond to insurgent activity as well as natural disasters and humanitarian crises, and coordinate with Non-Governmental Organizations and the local population.

### Major Challenges

- **Insurgent infiltration** – Screening for insurgents is difficult as the army expands
- **Equipment accountability** – In February 2009 the GAO found that one third of weapons purchased for the ANA since 2004 are missing.
- **"Ghost Units"** – Corrupt commanders attempt to receive wages for missing or imaginary soldiers.
- **Illiteracy** – Around 80% of recruits are illiterate. [WSJ](#)
- **Drug use** – Around 15% of soldiers are addicted to drugs. [The Telegraph](#)
- **Desertion Rates** – Desertion rates are estimated at between 16% and 25%.

### Possible Questions

- What is being done to improve recruit screening and equipment accountability?
- How is the effectiveness of ANA training being measured and evaluated?
- What is being done to effectively expand ANA training to allow for successful acceleration of Army expansion?
- How does illiteracy affect military effectiveness?

### In the News

**The United States has pledged an additional \$16 billion** to train and equip the Afghan National Army and Air Force. \$17 billion has been spent in training and equipping the Afghan military since 2001. [Reuters](#)

### Further Reading

[Long War Journal](#)  
[NPR](#)

The [Afghanistan Congressional Communications Hub](#) serves Members and staff by providing relevant and accessible information on Afghanistan. It is non-partisan.

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