

Building capacity in Afghanistan

Afghan police are now taking the lead in training their recruits.

Since October 2007, 105 AFP members have deployed to Afghanistan. Initially, just four members worked directly with the Afghan National Police (ANP) and the Counter Narcotics Police of Afghanistan to develop policing capacity and disrupt the illicit drug trade.

As the Australian role changed over time, so too have the numbers. The AFP commitment expanded to 28 in May 2010 when Operations Synergy and Contego combined into Operation Illuminate.

Under Illuminate, a main objective has been to train, develop and mentor the ANP in the southern province of Uruzgan, complementing the efforts of the Coalition throughout the country.

It can be seen as a measure of the mission's success that the AFP role has transitioned from delivering the hands-on training to ANP recruits to one where the ANP now directs its own training and the Australians. More broadly, active policing throughout Afghanistan is increasingly in the hands of the ANP.

AFP Commissioner Tony Negus believes that capacity development initiatives such as this are an encouraging sign that establishing the rule-of-law within Afghanistan is not only possible but a reality.

At a recent farewell for AFP members deploying to Afghanistan Commissioner Negus said the AFP continues to build (with Australian

and international counterparts) a secure nation governed by rule-of-law principles.

"This may seem ambitious, but we are committed to the task and our previous experience tells us it is possible," he says.


"The successes we have had in Timor-Leste and the Solomon Islands show that it is possible to create tangible benefits for the people of countries affected by conflict."

The results are definitely impressive. The AFP has delivered the Uniform Patrolman's course (the basic recruit training) to 2194 ANP recruits at the Multinational Base Tarin Kowt Training Centre in Uruzgan.

Other courses have included non-commissioned officer training, as well as train-the-trainer initiatives, delivered in conjunction with the European Union Police Mission in Afghanistan.

An additional 212 ANP members have been trained on the investigator's course and 65 members trained in surveillance courses conducted at the Afghan Major Crimes Taskforce Centre in Kabul.

The AFP also has assisted training ANP personnel in topics such as exhibits handling, in partnership with the Australian Defence Force's Special Operations



An Afghan National Police recruit marches up to receive his graduation certificate.



A proud Afghan National Police recruit holds aloft his graduation certificate after eight weeks of training.

Taskforce. Despite this effort, there are many challenges ahead. In a country beset by decades of violence and an ongoing insurgency, there is still work to do.

AFP Superintendent Jason Byrnes has recently returned from an 11-month posting to Afghanistan. He says “being a police officer in Afghanistan is literally a life-and-death occupation”.

At a recent graduation ceremony of more than 100 ANP members he felt the most sobering part of the event was his silent reflection that many in the graduating class would most likely be dead or seriously injured in the coming months.

“Attrition rates are high,” Superintendent Byrnes says. “In just the past few years alone, over 3000 ANP officers have been murdered by insurgents, have

died on duty from vehicle crashes, or have been assassinated by insurgents whilst off duty.

“Thousands more have been injured. The insurgents deliberately target police, soldiers and government officials in an attempt to cause panic and concern within the broader community.”

In adopting modern concepts of service provision and accountability, Superintendent Byrnes says the ANP is rapidly implementing what has taken Western nations around 200 years to develop.

He says in many areas of the country the ANP is now assuming responsibility for providing security in their local districts and cities. Training efforts are now focusing on the non-commissioned and senior officer ranks and, through this, the ANP is developing a resilience that is gradually overcoming the myriad of challenges.

AFP and United States military mentors alongside Afghan National Police recruits and instructors at Tarin Kowt.



“In fact, progress has been so solid that in many areas the ANP is starting to stand on its own in relation to the provision of security and policing services. Military forces from NATO are moving very much into the background.

It is expected that the ANP (along with the Afghan National Army) will be firmly in the lead throughout the country by 2014. It’s my hope that most of those who graduated at the event I attended will be part of that historic event.”

National Manager International Deployment Group (NMIDG) Mandy Newton unreservedly shares Superintendent Byrnes’ optimism. Assistant Commissioner Newton took over as NMIDG in April and says she has been impressed by the work and commitment of AFP members deployed at all missions. She says the AFP’s success in transitioning the ANP to deliver its own recruit training in Uruzgan was so complete that “we have made ourselves redundant almost and we are just providing some of the back-of-office guidance and mentoring work”.

“I don’t know if anyone else has been in a position where they can walk out the door and know that it can operate in its own right. And that is where you want to be – developing their ability to run training themselves so that we can move on within the region,” Assistant Commissioner Newton says.

“We hope they will maintain that capability to run their own general training and can be proud of it themselves without feeling as though they have to rely on us as a backstop. The goal is to make sure that they are doing it okay and they have got the confidence to do it.”

Assistant Commissioner Newton says as the military withdraws, delivering effective policing becomes increasingly important in maintaining public order.

“In Afghanistan, it is still a very dangerous occupation for the local ANP to be fulfilling that role. We have to focus very much on how we assist them with reducing the corruption that occurs and that people will continue getting paid.

“We need to focus on making sure the organisation can support itself to deliver. Otherwise you end up exacerbating the issues of corruption if the police don’t have the ability to be paid and have the fundamentals for their needs to live.”



Afghan National Police recruits on parade for the last time at their graduation parade.



Approval has been granted for deployment of 28 AFP members for the next two years.

She says another future challenge is how donor countries coordinate the consistency of different policing capabilities. As Western military forces withdraw as part of transition efforts in the lead-up to 2014, the AFP presence will centralise in Kabul and focus increasingly on developing the ANP at the strategic level.

To that end, Commander Wayne Buchhorn will soon move to a senior police role with the National Police Coordination Board – an international group whose mission is to coordinate the various training and development initiatives between the ANP and other countries.

Meanwhile, funding for 28 AFP officers in Afghanistan will be maintained for at least the next

two years. Assistant Commissioner Newton says a decision will be made in the next 12 months as to whether that level of commitment will continue.

“We only want the right number of people there according to what our outcomes are going to be or where we need to have people. So we will be reassessing that over the next 12 months. As the military withdrawal occurs [we need to determine] what position we want to be, what [positions] are the most effective and what contribution we need to give.”



Inspector Brett Swan, left, speaks with senior defence officers at the Afghan National Police Training Centre in 2010.

Training to succeed

Recruits to the Afghan National Police (ANP) undergo an intensive, eight-week program designed to impart the basic policing, security and survival skills necessary to operate in a community deeply scarred by an ongoing insurgency.

Training includes human rights, basic arrest procedures, combat first aid and defensive skills. Considerable effort is also given to delivering basic literacy skills.

Few if any ANP recruits outside of Kabul have formal schooling and, as a consequence, most are illiterate. The basic recruit program aims to have graduates capable of reading and writing at a third grade (primary school) standard by the end of the course.