# Building an Army

## Program Management in Afghanistan

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Since the fall of the Taliban in December 2001, the U.S. government has been rebuilding Afghanistan's infrastructure, institutions, government, and army. More than just supplying weapons and supplies, the United States and its coalition partners are building a security infrastructure that includes operational forces, sustaining institutions, and the general staff and ministry that direct those forces and institutions. The Combined Security Transition Command – Afghanistan (CSTC-A) (formerly the Office of Security Cooperation - Afghanistan) is currently re-forming and building both the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP). Success in those endeavors is critical to long-term U.S. security; however, the organizations dedicated to the tasks have overlooked and underused a potentially important component of their staffs—trained acquisition program managers.

These staffs are flush with operational expertise, but they are typically short of personnel familiar with designing and developing complex systems. Building complex security forces uses many of the same processes found in complex weapon system development. Security systems are composed of numerous interrelated subsystems (personnel, logistics, medical, communications, etc.) that must be integrated. It is also similar in that certain activities must precede others, and the phasing of developmental activities must be carefully mapped out in order to produce the right effects at the right time. Decision makers need to understand their desired end state and the sequence and integration of events that will get them there within budget and on schedule. This is familiar terrain for program managers, and they should be included as an integral part of the security assistance staff in places like Afghanistan.

### Importance of a Baseline

The accepted standard for managing large acquisition programs includes a documented baseline. The acquisition program baseline (APB) is the contract between the customer and provider regarding cost, schedule, and per-



Group of ANA soldiers on a road march during their basic training at Kabul Military Training Center.
*Photograph by Col. Mike Therrien, USAF.*

formance. Experience at CSTC-A indicates that a documented baseline is not only useful in decision making as excursions are considered, but it is arguably essential for communicating with external and internal audiences.

### Scrutiny- and Oversight-based Requirements

Large-scale security assistance programs are subject to constant and justifiable scrutiny and oversight from DoD

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security assistance program organizations, Services, the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Office of Management and Budget, and interagency stakeholders. Communicating clearly with these external audiences is a constant challenge for organizations like CSTC-A, not only because of the time zone difference, but also because of the operational environment and personnel turnover. The added challenge of changing priorities and adjusting to an ever-evolving security situation further frustrates both oversight and execution officials. A well-documented APB improves communications between these groups by providing a means to depict not only the desired end state, but also the strategy to get there. Once an APB is in place, it also provides internal planners and external audiences with a consistent and agreed-to frame of reference to consider implications of changes to budget or schedule.

In terms of the external audience, Congress is a special case and merits special attention. Along with all federal funding, security assistance funds are appropriated by Congress, so the importance of clearly communicating the funding requirements within the context of the na-



ANA soldier preparing to fire an artillery round during training. Photograph by CSTC-A public affairs staff.

tion-building effort cannot be overstated. The Government Accountability Office provides independent oversight for Congress, as they did in their June 2005 report on Afghanistan to the House Committee on International Relations (*Afghanistan Security: Efforts to Establish Army and Police Have Made Progress, but Future Plans Need to be Better Defined*, GAO-05-575). A key finding and rec-

ommendation of the GAO was to "develop detailed plans for completing and sustaining the Afghan army and police forces, including clearly defined objectives and performance measures; milestones; funding requirements; and a strategy for sustaining the results achieved" Although a baseline did not exist when the GAO performed their audit, one was established that documents the elements cited by the GAO, and it is incorporated into joint planning groups as we explore options to adjust to the changing situation. The baseline is a vital tool to explain, justify, and defend the requirements and rationale for funding requests, and to ensure Congress maintains sufficient insight and oversight.

## Other Uses of a Baseline

An additional use for the well-documented baseline is continuity—a valued commodity where there is high personnel turnover. In a deployed environment where nearly all assignments are four to 12 months, minimizing the time spent learning a new job is vital. The APB provides a roadmap that incumbents at almost any level can use with their successors to say, "You are here, and this is the path to where we are going, and here are the reasons why." A clear, easily understood baseline aids the process significantly.

Finally, a baseline aids decision making by providing a documented, known, and understood starting point and context for analysis. Good decision making in the military is very often a result of using the rigorous and often-employed Military Decision Making Process; such was the case at CSTC-A. The MDMP requires clear facts and assumptions. A baseline provides easy access to facts and assumptions and, more important, provides the context for intelligent evaluation of alternatives during course of action development and selection.

## Tools of the Trade

In addition to the program baseline, acquisition PMs bring a wide array of tools and processes to the security reconstruction environment. The rigor and structure PMs are accustomed to imposing on a project make them especially valuable members of the security assistance team.

## Program Schedules

Among those tools, program schedules are the most basic. When dealing with complex systems with numerous linked and interdependent subsystems, a schedule is a useful and (arguably) critical management device. Security-assistance and nation-building programs are usually organized according to functional specialties. CSTC-A has

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and performance. Security assistance program managers operate in a similar environment. Given a fixed budget, decision makers in regions like Afghanistan have to choose between growing forces as quickly as possible but sacrificing quality, and slowing down the rate of growth to improve training, equipment levels, and sustainment capability.

Security assistance program managers also need to make internal subsystem trades. CSTC-A committed substantial resources to build a robust ANA medical system and train ANA medical personnel (one of only three currently recognized ANA military occupational specialties, the others being "soldier" and "cook"). Investments in the medical sector came at the expense of funds for ANA operations, combat equipment, and soldier training. This investment decision reflected classic trade-study methodology. CSTC-A determined that the marginal utility, in terms of operational capability, derived from the last dollars spent on medical capabilities outweighed the marginal benefits derived from additional funds for equipment, operations, or training in other sectors. PMs are accustomed to addressing these "last dollar spent" questions in order to derive maximum performance and capability from a fixed program budget.

U.S. teams dedicated to developing ANA personnel, intelligence, operations, logistics, acquisition, medical support, communications, education and training, and other functional subsystems that together compose the ANA. Until recently, however, CSTC-A leadership had only limited insight to the details of each and to the linkages and the critical interdependencies among these stovepipe activities.

Program managers introduced scheduling tools (in this case Microsoft® Project) to develop a five-year schedule organized by functional area, explicitly depicting linkages between activities that crossed functional boundaries. The schedule highlighted instances where linked activities fell along the critical path or where margin existed. Senior decision makers were provided a means to make better resource allocation decisions because they not only understood the interdependencies, but they could also see whether they were directing resources towards activities that fell along a critical path.

Many of the functional area specialists and operational personnel on the CSTC-A staff were reluctant to use a Gantt chart approach to security assistance program planning. In contrast, the few PMs on the CSTC-A staff understood the benefits to be realized from taking the time to build a comprehensive, long-term schedule. More important, because the PMs were accustomed to using tools like Microsoft Project on a routine basis in their regular assignments, they were able to work with the functional area specialists to capture their understanding of sequenced activities, duration, and interrelationship to assemble the collection of schedules into a cohesive program baseline.

## Trade Studies
In addition, trade study and cost-benefit methods also translate well to the security assistance arena. Acquisition program managers spend much of their time making decisions regarding trades between system cost, schedule,

## Capability Milestones
The CSTC-A experience highlights another useful tool that PMs bring to bear on security assistance programs—capability milestones and spiral development strategies. A common challenge for PMs is assessing where to direct additional resources or reduce resources if required. In a multifaceted system like the one under consideration, deciding how to pace investment in the subsystems is not trivial. Understanding and linking capabilities with investments provide a means to make resource decisions. We've already discussed how a comprehensive security assistance program schedule can help with identifying critical paths via the subtle and not-so-subtle links between elements. Capability milestones, introduced at CSTC-A in July 2005, aid PMs further by expressing, from a holistic perspective, the incremental improvements in capability that activities and expenditures will provide at specific points in time.

Capability milestones allow the PM to express the overall capability improvement and value-added from each of the individual activities within a system. Capability milestones also enable senior decision makers to quickly gauge whether their overall resource allocation strategies are appropriate and whether subsystems associated with a large-scale security assistance program will be capable

of supporting one another. To draw an analogy to Air Force weapons systems, it makes little sense to invest heavily in precision targeting capabilities without a synchronized delivery system to get the weapon to the desired target. Likewise, it makes little sense for a security assistance program to deliver, say, an advanced communications capability well before the education and training systems are in a position to produce qualified operators. Capability milestones improve alignment between the disparate subsystems that make up a large-scale security assistance program.

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## Not Just Another Acquisition Program

Security assistance programs benefit from the application of acquisition management tools and techniques, but they also differ from traditional, technology-centric acquisition programs in important ways. Seasoned PMs who anticipate an environment and processes similar to those associated with a typical system program office are in for a rude awakening.

### Security Environment

The security environment drives the most important difference between traditional acquisition programs and today's large-scale security assistance programs. In Afghanistan, the United States and its coalition partners needed to develop and deploy an indigenous security system as rapidly as possible to confront existing threats. As a result, less time was available for the extended concept development process that typically takes place in the early phases of an acquisition program. Similarly, there was no time for subsequent design, development, and deployment phases and their associated reviews and milestones. Security assistance in environments like Afghanistan requires that combat capabilities and their sustaining institutions be in place even as their underlying structures, support, and policies evolve. Basic operational, personnel, logistics, intelligence, communications, medical, and other systems are typically fielded in rough form as quickly as possible and then evolve and grow into more mature and capable systems.

Huge complications arise from the parallelism inherent in this approach, but the simultaneous design, development, deployment, and testing of systems is not entirely without precedent in the defense acquisition arena. In many respects, building and fielding a national security apparatus in Afghanistan resembles an Advanced Concept Technology Demonstration program. Like an ACTD, the fundamental design and organization of the Afghan security system is based on a mature technology and a prototype

design—typically an amalgamation of indigenous and U.S. organizational schemes, processes, and systems. Successful implementation of this design requires that decision makers and PMs adopt an unusual design philosophy. Rather than focusing on fielding a complete, coherent design, they need to prioritize their requirements and ensure that operational forces and sustaining institutions—the subsystems of a national security system—develop in phase with one another. In the Afghanistan case, priority was initially given to fielding ANA troops to provide a visible presence and security prior to the presidential election in October 2004 and the parliamentary elections in September 2005. This operational imperative desynchronized the fielded forces with sustaining institutions—logistics, medical, personnel, and training, in particular—needed to maintain readiness. CSTC-A was able to overcome the lag in sustaining institutional capability through a bridging strategy that saw them apply coalition forces, embedded trainers, and contract services to address ANA sustainment shortfalls. Once past the presidential and parliamentary elections, however, CSTC-A instituted a slowdown in ANA combat battalion production to bring the operational and sustaining capabilities back in line, reducing the reliance on U.S. and coalition support and reducing costly bridging capabilities.

### Social and Cultural Considerations

Another factor that distinguishes large security assistance programs from traditional defense acquisition programs is the influence of social and cultural traditions. Most experienced PMs have worked within different acquisition organizations or have moved from a single-Service to a joint environment and have grown accustomed to adapting to different institutional cultures. There are at least two reasons why cultural and social traditions play a much more prominent role in the Afghan security assistance program. First, there are fundamental differences between western and non-western patterns of leadership and behavior. In a society where there is greater defer-

### "Speed it Up" and "Successful Presentations": On the Mark

Thanks to Capt. Mounce for his delightful article "To Speed It Up, Size It Down," in the May-June 2006 edition of *Defense AT&L*. I agree completely. One of my favorite stories is how Charles Lindbergh's plane, the Spirit of St. Louis, was completed in about three months from scratch. Wow! And it was successful. I wonder how "mega-projects" ever have a chance.

I appreciate Mounce's candor in his recommendation to do away with the military acquisition career field. This idea has been mumbled under people's breaths for years, but this is the first time I've seen anyone come out and say it. Since most projects last more than three years (the average assignment for a military officer), it's guaranteed that there will be disruption in leadership and its attendant problems. I am interested to know what will come of his remark.

I also liked the recommendation to "get rid of useless processes and procedures." Under Lean thinking, this is referred to by its Japanese name "muda," and it's a wonderful idea.

### Aristotle's Rules … Rule

In the same issue, I very much enjoyed "Aristostle and the Art of Successful Presentations" by Matthew Tropiano Jr. As a frequent victim of "PowerPoint poisoning," I found his points about Ethos, Pathos, and Logos to be right on the mark. The article should be required reading for briefers, as it would surely save a lot of wasted time at meetings.

A final aside: There's a subtle yet valuable byproduct of reading *Defense AT&L*. Many of the authors reference good books in their articles. I have ordered and read many of these books. Always nice to get recommended reading from others in your business.

Al Kaniss

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ence and respect toward elders, subordinates are reluctant to initiate activities without explicit guidance. Middle Eastern tradition also frowns upon public confrontations where one side may lose face, and so problem resolution is obscured rather than dealt with. Tribal loyalties also create parallel decision-making systems that impede formal staffing processes. Second, and more important, people are the core of an army, resulting in an entirely different experience from designing and developing a weapon system. Social and cultural traditions need to be considered in the design of the national security system in the same way that mechanical, aerodynamic, or electrical properties are considered in the design of a weapon system. Decision makers are often faced with a difficult choice: adapt the system to the ingrained culture, or try to shape and influence attitudes through training and mentoring. PMs rarely confront these considerations in a traditional acquisition environment.

### Benefits of Embedded PMs

Iraq and Afghanistan arguably represent the most ambitious nation-building effort since the end of World War II. Capturing and sharing the lessons and insights from the current nation-building efforts enable leaders to more effectively manage these expensive and difficult tasks. The CSTC-A experience rebuilding Afghanistan and the Afghan National Army highlights the applicability of program management techniques to large-scale security assistance programs. A detailed program baseline enabled CSTC-A to better communicate its vision and plan with external stakeholders, and provided a common roadmap that eased internal staff transitions. Program managers brought tools that allowed CSTC-A to express and evaluate the baseline. The program schedule expressed critical subsystem interdependencies; trade-study methodologies considered the most effective use of the last dollar spent; and capability milestones enabled decision makers to make informed resource decisions and maintain synchronization between related subsystems.

To realize the benefits program management techniques bring to a security assistance organization, trained program management personnel must be fully integrated into the teams responsible for developing subsystems that comprise the national security structure. As part of the teams responsible for developing personnel, logistics, or medical subsystems, PMs serve as force multipliers, helping to capture and express the expertise that operational and technical personnel bring. Including PMs on security assistance teams and ensuring they are properly dispersed throughout the organization will pay dividends in the form of better decisions, improved accountability and communication, and earlier host-nation capability at less cost.

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