



## CAAT Special Report

# PARTNERING: A COUNTERINSURGENCY IMPERATIVE

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## **PARTNERING: A COUNTERINSURGENCY IMPERATIVE**

**Special Report to Commander, International-Joint Command**

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*Arguably the most important military component of the struggle against violent extremists is not the fighting we do ourselves, but how well we prepare our partners to defend and govern themselves.*

– SEC DEF Gates 10 OCT 2007

*Live, eat, train, plan and operate together. Depend on one another. Hold each other accountable at all echelons down to trooper level. Help our ANSF partners achieve excellence. Respect them and listen to them. Be a good role model.*

– COMISAF COIN Guidance, 1 AUG 2010

As statements from the U.S. Secretary of Defense and Commander, International Security Assistance Force (COMISAF) make clear, partnering is an essential skill for Coalition Forces (CF). The ISAF Partnering Directive, dated 29 August 2009, provides clear guidance for the practice:

The Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIRoA) faces two daunting tasks: protecting the Afghan population and defeating the insurgency that challenges its sovereignty. ISAF's mission is to assist GIRoA in accomplishing these tasks. ISAF will use embedded partnering—a trust-based, habitual and enduring relationship with the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) - as the method to assist GIRoA in overcoming these challenges.

However, while this directive defines *what* partnering is—and tells us what we must do—it does not tell us how to accomplish it. And make no mistake: effective partnering is hard, complex work. Units in the field continue to struggle to figure out just how to make partnering work on the ground. Fortunately, many effective practices have emerged from the laboratories of small unit improvisation and innovation. The best of these have been incorporated into the recently COIN Collective Tasks<sup>1</sup> for company and platoon level operations, and are also summarized below. But before delving into the critical “how’s” of partnering, it is useful to consider more fully the factors that combine to make effective partnering such a powerful COIN tool.

## So Why Partner?

An “official” answer to this question might be to simply paraphrase from the Intermediate Joint Command (IJC) Fragmentary Order (FRAGO) 068-2010, which tells us that embedded partnering, mentoring and combined operations are the approach that will be used to achieve the objectives of the IJC campaign plan – specifically to increase ANSF capability and capacity and support GIRoA in their transition to Afghan-led security and stability.

But while necessary, this explanation is not sufficient to explain why CF and ANSF in fact *must* partner if they are to defeat the broad-based insurgency they face together.

Simply put, partnering increases the capabilities of both forces, leveraging their strengths while compensating for their respective weaknesses. The end result is enhanced collective combat effectiveness. Why is this so?

Certainly, CF can provide key enablers such as Civil Affairs, Information Operations, Quick Reaction Force, Joint Fires, Aviation, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance, Medical Evacuation and Logistics for ANSF units, thus magnifying their capabilities. But—the ANSF understands the language, environment, cultures, intentions and motivations of the populace. Learning from them, CF gains better access and information, increases situational awareness, and reduces operational risk along with the likelihood of generating unintended consequences from interactions with the local populace. In short, working together like this, ANSF and CF are able to more effectively and enduringly build trust between GIRoA and the Afghan citizenry.

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<sup>1</sup> COMISAF approved U.S. COIN Qualifications Standards for Afghanistan, dated 27 August 2010.

And, while planning, rehearsing, and operating with Coalition Forces develops Afghan leadership and military capacity as they watch and learn how we operate, the process also allows us to better understand the specific challenges faced by the ANSF in areas like logistics, recruiting, retention, training, and unit administration. As a result, rather than reflexively advancing what may be inappropriate “western” answers, we are able to help craft Afghan-centric solutions to address the issues confronting our ANSF partners.

## **Embedded Partnering is the Key**

Successful partnering is a function of proximity, time, and good communication. These are achieved when Coalition and ANSF embed their personnel with one another to form a single team. This team is co-located, eats, plans, trains, and operates together as equals. In the process, multi-faceted relationships develop and serve as the basis for effective mentoring, a key partnering activity.

The daily intra-unit mentoring between and among the CF and ANSF is optimized when it is supplemented with specialized external expertise. This support may be an individual Coalition expert, an Operational Mentoring/Liaison Team (OMLT), or Evaluation Training Team (ETT) assigned to teach and advise individual ANSF officers or assigned groups of ANSF. In some cases, mentoring may be structured using all approaches, with the OMLT or ETT providing continuous individual or small unit teaching, and an SME or the partner unit cadre providing higher level advisory support in the form of tactical operations planning and execution. In this way, partnered units are aided by a mentoring team that acts as a training and liaison element. The French in Kapisa and the Marines in RC South have adopted this approach to great success.

The key take-away is that “traditional” partnering—characterized by ad hoc task organizations, limited joint mission planning and execution, living separately, working at different HQs, and limited information sharing—is just not good enough to carry out this mission. *Shona ba Shona*<sup>2</sup> requires embedded partnerships and mentoring.

## **What Works. . . and What Does Not**

So how exactly are units to translate the guidance above into effective action on the ground? Here are a number of field-tested practices—and caveats—that the CAAT has observed over the past year, from Task Force down to the Company level.

Collaborate. Establish Joint Tactical Operations Centers (JTOCs). Work together in open spaces that allow ANSF and CF to share a Common Operating Picture and battle track unit movements and information. Make it a functional, but inviting environment with computers, radios, coffee, adequate seating and air conditioning. Leaders should be drawn to the JTOC as the best place to obtain and share current, accurate, detailed information and interact with counterparts. ANSF leaders have a much easier time understanding 3-D terrain models than printed maps, so in addition to our detailed maps and imagery, with villages, roads and subordinate units’ current locations labeled clearly in Dari, build a large terrain model

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<sup>2</sup> “Shoulder to Shoulder.”

on a table in the middle of the room. A Significant Activities (SIGACT) board, written in Dari, rigorously maintained, will also attract Afghan leaders to the room. At one Battalion headquarters, the ANSF leads the morning Commander's Update Briefing – given in Dari and shared via Falcon View and Command Platform of the Future (CPOF). Coalition Forces support the updates with their English translated into Dari for the ANA leaders.

Break down the Barriers. Literally. A unit smashed down the walls that separated his unit and his ANSF partners. He then held a ceremony with the ANSF that highlighted the new, improved connectivity and showcased a new and improved relationship. This is a corollary to the first two imperatives. Here is another: DO NOT allow two-tiered living or working conditions to develop where CF are enjoying “creature comforts” conspicuously denied to their ANSF partners on the same Combat Outpost (COP).

Plan together. ANSF should always be part of the planning process, from conception to After Action Review. Their input must be elicited, respected, and fully considered for each operation conducted. DO NOT plan a mission and then at the last second grab a few ANSF for the execution—actions speak louder than words, and nothing will sour relationships faster than this show of disrespect. In one battalion, to ensure that subordinate units were planning missions with full ANSF participation, an Operations Officer demanded that they submit a Concept of Operations (CONOP) listing by name the ANSF Officer and NCOs that were planning and executing the mission, and specified that ANSF comprised at least 51% of each mission force. As a result, there was a significant change in the way units were planning and conducting missions, as ANSF suggestions and solutions were being integrated into the planning process.

Train together. Whether the task is to conduct a Basic Radio Operator's Course, marksmanship, tactical “hip pocket,” or physical training, design training sessions as partnered activities. Conduct weekly language and cultural training where CF study Dari and the ANSF study English—and share at least one meal per day.

Patrol together. Encourage the ANSF to engage the local populace as they patrol. When a patrol stops to talk to the local populace, the ANSF must join – and hopefully lead - the discussion along with the Coalition members and interpreter. Through these interactions, the ANSF will further refine the skills necessary to operate independently moving forward. As necessary, diplomatically counsel ANSF partners to increase their professionalism. An example may be advising ANSF not to take fruits and vegetables from farmers' fields without compensating the owner. Partnered patrols also save lives. On a patrol in Kapisa, a combined French and ANSF patrol was about to cross a river when they were stopped by a local villager who warned the ANSF soldiers that an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) had been laid just across the river bed in advance of their arrival. As a result, the IED was discovered and neutralized, and the patrol continued on. As the French unit was new to the area, had the patrol not been partnered, it is likely no warning would have been forthcoming.

Exchange information with each other. An embedded partnership resides not only in the physical domain, but also in the information domain. Maximize the sharing of information with each other along a need-to-know, need-to-share, need-to-use methodology. This allows partnered units to obtain and manage a Common

Operating Picture, gather actionable intelligence from the entire Combined Team and efficiently plan operations. Along these same lines, when it is time to rotate out of an area, take the time to actively transition the good will and trust you have built in relationships with your ANSF counterparts to incoming CF during the Pre-Deployment Site Survey (PDSS) and Relief in Place/Transfer of Authority (RIP/TOA).

Hold each other accountable. Ensure that your ANSF partners are trained and ready to do their jobs militarily and ethically. But know that this goes both ways. Get *them* to hold *us* accountable so that we do things that make sense culturally.

Building relationships. CF tend to be impatient. They operate under a culture of “hurry up” and “I want it yesterday.” Recognize that accomplishing the mission requires spending time with your partners, listening to them, and getting to know them. A frustrated Soldier recently told his Battalion Commander that he was rolling out the gate four hours late to conduct a mission because his Afghan partners wanted to spend more time talking about the mission and drinking tea together. The Battalion Commander responded by telling his Soldier that *taking time to talk and drink tea with his Afghan partners was part of his mission*. It is not always about fire and maneuver.

Relax together. Lastly, share a little “down time” with your partners. In units where the CF and the ANSF co-locate, work, eat—and relax—as a team, trust and rapport are built. In one platoon, this level of trust was such that CF leaders encouraged their ANSF partners to determine and control movement formations and patrol structure.

## **It Don't Come Easy**

Even armed with the “best practices” outlined above, partnering is hard. CAAT advisors have recorded numerous challenges when working with the ANSF. None are insurmountable—but neither are they overcome without dedicated work. Here are a few of the most daunting.

Afghan National Army (ANA) rotations. In RC East, some ANA units rotate every 45 days. The short time frame makes it difficult to build mutual knowledge, trust and confidence.<sup>3</sup>

The will of ANSF leaders to partner. Some ANSF are not eager to have you there, and are not eager to be mentored, advised—or watched and reported on. This can be exacerbated if they are not partnered with a CF member of equal rank.

Lack of language capability and pre-deployment partnering training. Most CF do not have the opportunity to train to partner prior to arriving in Afghanistan, and qualified interpreters are always in short supply.<sup>4</sup> Try to have a few Soldiers in your platoons, companies and battalions that can speak basic Dari or Pashtu.

National caveats. Some Coalition members are prevented from embedding and otherwise partnering with the ANSF – or sharing information with them.

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<sup>3</sup> Note: some CF rotate out frequently as well. Some units stay as little as four months; others six.

<sup>4</sup> Note: a lack of language capability may even effect your ANSF partners, as many of them are not local to the area that they operate in; and they make speak Dari (the official language of the ANSF) which may further alienate them from a Pashtu speaking populace.

Inadequate infrastructure. Partnering generates infrastructure requirements for ANSF, to include additional Command and Control (C2) infrastructure, compatible communications systems, force protection, billeting, logistical support and MEDEVAC capacity.

Rules of Engagement and Escalation of Force. Directives that govern CF operations are sometimes difficult to communicate and inculcate into ANSF units.

SIGACTS between ANSF and CF. Expect accidents where CF and ANSF suffer “friendly fire” incidents. Also plan for and expect rogue members of the ANSF conducting attacks against CF. Be prepared and have a battle drill to address the lack of rapport that will likely follow. Maintain momentum and keep the partnering relationship alive.

Risk aversion by CF Leadership. Sometimes, it is the CF that hinders the ability to partner with the ANSF. An example: the ANA lack armored vehicles and use stock Ford Rangers for most mounted movement. There have been instances where CF commanders would not authorize their soldiers to travel in these vehicles, even to areas unreachable by MRAP/MATV vehicles. This restriction can complicate or prevent effective maneuver against insurgent elements—and sends the message that partnering only applies in the COP.

Afghan National Police (ANP)-specific challenges. CF partnered with ANA has certain advantages: they can co-locate, train, plan and fight with their partnered unit. But what does one do when your partner goes home to his house at the end of the day? And mans a checkpoint during the day? And how does a military unit from the Coalition best prepare an element conducting a policing function? There are ways to crack this nut (Law Enforcement Professionals, the ISAF Evidence Collection Guide, etc) but recognize that working with the ANP has its own set of challenges.

Measuring partnering. How does a CF unit know if it partnering adequately? What are the measures of effectiveness? The measures of performance? For starters, use the COMISAF approved U.S. COIN Qualifications Standards for Afghanistan, dated 27 August 2010 as an assessment tool. But think of innovative yet simple ways to gauge your unit’s effectiveness.

Degradation of CF performance during the implementation of partnering. The 800 lb guerrilla in the room – yes, your CF unit may not maneuver as effectively when partnered. But if done right, you will actually increase your CF/ANSF partnered team’s capability and credibility – and most importantly, have the COIN effect that you are striving for – an ANSF that can protect the population and is connected to the people that it serves.

Suitability of CF for partnering. Let’s face it: not every member of the CF is suitable for partnering. The problem: no one else is coming to do it. So CF leaders must go the extra mile to ensure that their personnel are ready to take on the partnering task – by cultural training, advisory training, or just plain military discipline.

Workload. Lastly, there is the sheer workload that CF units carry. In most small units, junior leaders are tasked with providing their own force protection, conducting patrols, working with District leaders, conducting Civil Affairs, manning their combined TOCs, and planning, rehearsing and executing their own orders

process. When partnering with an ANSF platoon is added to this mix—planning, rehearsing, executing missions - it can be daunting. However, as argued above, and as many units have found, if done properly and consistently, embedded partnering with ANSF can increase the capacity, capability and survivability of CF units. And this outcome is worth working for.

## **Conclusion**

It is often said that only the Afghans can win this conflict. This is true, but it is also true that they need our support to be successful. Partnering creates a synergy that amplifies our strengths and reduces our individual weaknesses. However, effective partnering takes active leadership across all echelons. Embedded partnering must be embraced at every level from HQ ISAF to the most junior organization, setting conditions for Afghanistan to grow into a democratic, unified, and independent nation.

As the Commander of IJC said, “partnering allows for the connection between the Coalition and ANSF, the GIRoA, and the people. Over time, you get them to partner and work with themselves.”

The good news is that this is what we do: our militaries are adept at building leaders and building teams. So do it with your Afghan partners, and strive to create an ANSF that is capable, credible, and connected with the citizenry of Afghanistan.

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