

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH BRIGADIER GENERAL GARY PATTON, DEPUTY COMMANDING GENERAL (PROGRAMS), COMBINED SECURITY TRANSITION COMMAND-AFGHANISTAN, VIA TELECONFERENCE FROM AFGHANISTAN  
SUBJECT: OVERSIGHT OF AFGHAN NATIONAL SECURITY FORCE (ANSF) PROGRAMS  
TIME: 10:30 A.M. EST DATE: SATURDAY, MARCH 6, 2010

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LIEUTENANT JENNIFER CRAGG (Office of the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs): We would like to welcome you all to the Department of Defense's Bloggers Roundtable for Saturday, March 6, 2010. My name is Lieutenant Jennifer Cragg with the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs. And I'll be moderating the call today.

A note to the bloggers on the line. Please clearly state your name and organization you're with prior to asking your questions. And if you have to place your phone on hold during the conversation, please hang up and call back in. We might hear your hold music.

And so with that, I'd like to welcome Brigadier General Gary Patton. He's the Deputy Commanding General (Programs), Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan. Without further adieu, I'm going to turn it over to Brigadier General Patton. Sir, if you'd like to start with an opening statement, and then we'll go to questions. The floor is yours, sir.

GEN. PATTON: I'd like to hear who we have on the line, and I'd be glad to take questions from that point. I'm not clear exactly who we got, but welcome all bloggers.

LT. CRAGG: Okay, sir, I will give a quick rundown. We have Richard Lowry; Andrew Lubin, who writes for Leatherneck; Spencer Ackerman, who writes for Washington Independent; Chuck Simmins, North Shore Journal; and then also John Doyle. And I believe Richard -- yes, Richard is on the line.

So with that, Richard called in first, sir. Do you want to just go straight into questions?

GEN. PATTON: I would love to. I've talked to Richard before. So good to talk to you again, Richard. Go ahead.

Q Hello, General. How are you today?

GEN. PATTON: Hey, we're doing great over here in Afghanistan. Last time I talked to you I was in D.C. I like it over here a lot better.

Q Yes, and that was after being in Fallujah. I guess my question is going to be about the difference between what you're doing in Afghanistan and Fallujah. What kind of programs are you setting up to help the Afghan people become self-sufficient?

GEN. PATTON: Yeah, that's a -- let me tackle that in a couple of different ways, Richard. Most of my time in Iraq was in Ramadi in the '04, '05 time frame. I didn't have a lot of police. Didn't have a lot of army as partners, to speak of, so we've gone a long way from there compared to Iraq to Afghanistan.

And my second tour in Iraq, as you know, was in the Tikrit area with the 25th I.D. And at that point in '06, '07, we were starting to see some good decent partnering with both the Iraqi army and police.

So what we're doing here in Afghanistan is, to develop -- I think what your question was -- develop self-sufficiency. And we're doing that militarily and in a couple of other directions. Militarily, we want the Afghans to be self-sufficient in their Army and their police, but they're just not ready for that right now. They accept our partnership.

And what we're doing in the fielded force is a concept called combined action. You see this very apparent, for example, over in Regional Command East. Regional Command East is led by the 82nd Airborne Division, is the division headquarters there for the RC. And they're partnered with the 201st and the 203rd Afghan army corps. And their concept of combined action has the 82nd and their subordinate units literally embedded and intermingled with their Afghan partners at every level, starting at the corps, the brigade, on all the way down to platoons. I mean, living together, fighting together, eating together, planning together. I mean, it's a pretty remarkable form and effective form of partnership.

And so what we're doing, you know -- you get a lot from that. You know, we're creating -- we're generating Afghan army units at a pretty rapid pace. And what you don't get when you generate units at a rapid pace is leader development, because it takes a lot longer to develop a leader than it does a soldier from a recruit.

And so what you get from the partnership of combined action is the role modeling of the U.S. soldiers, the U.S. Marines, and whoever has that combined action lead, you get a lot of role modeling, you get leadership by example. And a big part of leader development of our Afghans is just being connected at the hip with their coalition partner and then developing that way as well.

And that's one of the ways we're able to mitigate some of the shortfalls in leadership development as we're generating these Afghan army units at such a rapid rate. So that's on the military side.

On the civilian side, the job I'm in as DCG of programs, what I'm doing is, generating the new units with equipment, with basing and combine that with the training piece. And what we're trying to do -- because we spend -- we're going to invest about \$1.5 billion in the local economy this year in buying sustainment items for and equipment items for the Afghan army and the Afghan police, things like blankets, poncho liners, boots, socks, t-shirts, wet gear and that sort of thing. And we're buying that on the local economy.

And what that does is create jobs. About three months ago, we found out, started looking at the contracts here. About six or seven boot contracts were imported from other countries. And our import office figured about two or three jobs as opposed to a factory making the same sort of products.

So what we've done is eliminate some of those foreign contracts and import contracts, and now we're focused on building up business capacity, production capacity within the Afghan economy so that the boots for the Afghan army are being produced by Afghan factories and employing Afghans.

And that's so important, because when I was in Ramadi, it was a hard time finding a place to create jobs for the Iraqis. Here, you know, if you build up a boot factory so that they have to generate a couple hundred thousand pairs of boots every year, that is a lot of jobs. And every Afghan that has a job is less likely to be an Afghan out there recruited as an insurgent for the Taliban. So it also builds, you know, an Afghan with a job is more likely to side with the government and reject the insurgency. It's all about winning the confidence of the population.

And creating jobs is a big part of that.

So as a big investor in the nation of Afghanistan with that 1.5 billion (dollars) of local acquisition, we take an Afghan-first approach, you know. Going to the Afghan economy or developing a capability within the Afghan economy so we can generate those things, produce those products, goods and services from the Afghan economy and create jobs at the same time.

Q So that does make them self-sufficient then.

GEN. PATTON: Well, it helps. The goal is self-sufficiency militarily and also, you know, as a nation. But it is quite costly to sustain an army and a police size the size of the force that we're building.

And so in the years -- right now, we have objectives to grow the army and the police to a total of about 305,000 by the end of October 2011. But that force of 305,000 costs about \$6 billion a year to

sustain. And so the Afghans cannot, in their current economy with their current revenues, cannot sustain their own security forces in those out years.

So there will be some international support here for some time. But again, the more that we can do to contribute to creating jobs and so forth, creating production and capacity within the Afghan economy, I mean, the nation ought to be able to sustain its own army in boots and blankets and that sort of thing.

And where we can, we're trying to develop that capacity and then bring some jobs into the mix as well. So self-sufficiency is a goal. Fiscally, self-sufficient is probably not achievable here in the near-foreseeable future. Does that make sense, Richard?

Q Yes, it does. I meant by self-sufficient, the only true professions today are drug lord and warlord in Afghanistan. But if you build boot factories, now you're providing more employment for the Afghan people.

GEN. PATTON: We're about a week or two away from awarding contracts to 20 different businesses here in Kabul and bringing them on, slowly but surely, but bringing them on to produce kind of low-end gear for the army and the police -- blankets, poncho liners, socks and that sort of thing. But you've got to start somewhere.

And importing is not going to get them anywhere. So we're focused entirely now on Afghan first and building up the Afghan economy to sustain its own army.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir.

Thank you, Richard.

I want to make sure I get to the other bloggers on the call.

Andrew, you're next. Please go ahead.

Q General, good afternoon. Andrew Lubin from Leatherneck magazine. Thank you for taking the time today.

GEN. PATTON: Hey, good to talk to you, Andrew. I understand you're from Pennsylvania. I'm from -- I hail from Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania.

Q Oh, just went to the Carlisle War College for fun? Or you're just going to end up in the Army just because you -- (inaudible). That's not a bad area.

GEN. PATTON: I grew up not as an Army brat. The first time I went to Carlisle Barracks was when I was a colonel going to the War College, believe it or not.

Q Pretty area. Hey, sir, I want to follow up on Richard's question. I understand about having to build factories, and even it's nation-building or economic-building by whatever name. But if these factories aren't economically sustainable, when we pull out -- I mean, if you're making boots, for example, that cost 100 bucks a pair that they can buy from China through Pakistan at 50, these factories aren't going to stay in business without being subsidized. How does that help? Or in the end, are they going to be economically viable?

GEN. PATTON: Well, what we're trying to do is, you know, right now, the boots they make, they can't compete with the Chinese and Indonesian products, for a large part, and they don't meet the standards of their own army.

So what we're doing is we're bringing some industrial experts into the mix, and they're going to take a look at what we can do to improve their production. Because we're not going to create a factory that doesn't produce to standard.

And we call it a low rate of initial production. And we want to produce a boot to a standard that we've set that's satisfactory for their army. And then we'll let them produce that and see how we do at a low rate. And then do some quality tests. We're going to let the Afghans and the Afghan sergeant major of the army and some of the other Afghans test these in the field.

And then we'll bring it back. And then as we get confidence in producing products to an acceptable standard, then we're going to go into a higher rate of production.

So a big part of it is just improving the quality so it can compete there and also meet the needs of its army. So I'm starting small here. I mean, I'm on the boots because boots are important to an infantry-centric army, and that's what we're building here, generating a couple of infantry battalions every month. We just built an infantry headquarters last month.

So you know, boots is what an infantry-centric army operates on. So we're starting there. And I'm not claiming we're going to revitalize the entire nation, the national economy or anything like that. But I'm focused on what can have an immediate impact on the army and also on some of the local companies here.

Q But in the end, these factories are economically viable, they will make a profit?

GEN. PATTON: Well, that's the idea. You know, right now, the boots are actually -- they also make mattresses. They also make PVC pipe. They found a local market there. They're selling entirely to Afghans. They also sell to some of the coalition here as we build up bases and that sort of thing. And we see a lot of construction companies coming up. You see they're pretty active in the textile industry, some various service industries.

And so, you know, I'm not an economist, but there is some potential here in this economy. And again, we're focused on one area there that we think can be helpful in providing for its army.

Q Okay, great, thanks. I want to follow up afterwards.

Jenn, next person.

LT. CRAGG: Roger that, thank you.

And I know Steve Schippert has joined us, so he'll be right after John.

Spencer, please go ahead.

Q Thank you. Spencer Ackerman from the Washington Independent. You mentioned the importance of creating confidence among the Afghans and about contracts that are going to be awarded. One contract that's up for being awarded is an Afghan police training contract. And one of the potential recipients is a subsidiary or a renamed Blackwater. Blackwater, of course, is involved not only in the shooting of Afghan civilians but, as a Senate inquiry recently determined, set up a shell company called Paravant which took hundreds of AK-47s and pistols from a weapons depot intended for the Afghan police. Do you think it's appropriate to give this contract to a company to train Afghan police when it stole weaponry from them?

GEN. PATTON: Yes, Spencer, you know, what we do here is develop the requirements. And we've developed a requirement for a contract that places advisers at the Ministry of Interior.

It places trainers in our institutional training base, both in the -- at the national level and also at the regional training centers, training the police. It also puts police trainers at the fielded force, all the way down to what we call the PMTs, the police mentoring team, and then the -- (inaudible) -- which is the NATO version of the PMT.

So we've identified a requirement for trainers and advisers at those three levels. Those are the tasks that we've specified in our requirement. We've passed that requirement to acquisition authority. In this case, the acquisition authority is the Counternarcotic Technology Program Office, CNTPO. It's a DOD agency.

The contract of the -- apparently, the current contract we have is managed by INL. That's an international -- can't think of what INL -- yeah, that belongs to State Department. So it's an INL-managed contract. And that contract was set for expiration on 31 January.

And then before there was a winner announced for that contract award, it came under protest. And that protest was filed back in December on 16 December. And now that's in the Government Accounting Office's hands as to how that protest gets handled. They have until 24 March to decide whether the protests will be on the side of the side with the government or side with the protester which is DynCorp.

Now, the reason I mention all that is because the CNTPO, they're the acquisition authority. So the requirements I mentioned on the front end, we passed those requirements to the acquisition authority, and they do all the source selection, and they run that part of it.

We're the war fighter, and we've identified our requirements. I have no idea who's going to win that contract. It hasn't been announced, and I haven't been told. And that's the way it is.

So everything you said about some company winning the award is unknown to me. I know that we want a company -- we'd like to get through the protest period. We'd like to transition to the next contract, because we've put some features into the new contract that we like. And we want to transition, we want to get through the protests, we want to transition to that next phase, and we want to get into the new contract. Because in the new contract, we want the scope to change a little bit. Right now, the contractors principally train the trainer, train the Afghans who then train the police. We want the new contract to be where we're training Afghans with the police trainers that we bring in under contract.

And we also want more counterinsurgency in the program instruction, more counterinsurgency lessons, operating conditions and the like brought into the program instruction. Right now, that's not a key piece to it. So there's some areas that we want to change the scope of the new contract. We've made that known. It's part of the next contract.

As far as who gets it, you know, our job is to define the requirements, and we're letting the acquisition authority and the laws that apply make the rule, work through those rules and then decide on the best competitor, the best contractor in that process. And that's where we're at with that.

Q If ultimately Blackwater gets the contract, are you worried about the message that will send to the Afghan police and Afghan citizens.

GEN. PATTON: Well, that's a hypothetical. I'm not going to address hypotheticals. Yeah, I'm going to stick to the requirements. I wanted a company that is considered the best competitor and can meet the requirements that we specified for the contract. And I've got faith in the system, and we're going to let the system play out and go from there.

But I think we've been pretty clear on what our training and advisory requirements are on this end.

Q Thank you.

GEN. PATTON: Okay. Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir.

Thank you, Spencer.

Chuck, you were next. Please go ahead.

Q Yes, sir. Chuck Simmins from America's North Shore Journal. Thank you for taking the time. It sounds to me like they've got developing a fairly robust textile industry. I have kind of a two-part question. The first is, are these industrial developments limited to the Kabul area, or are they nationwide?

And you know, people say the army runs on its stomach. Well, it also runs on paper. How are the Afghans doing, you know, with a paper industry? Can they do printing? Can they do publication, that kind of thing? GEN. PATTON: Yeah, Chuck, I don't have expertise across the economical base to be able to comment on the paper industry. That's a really -- that's something that would be interesting to maybe exploit and capitalize on. But that hasn't been my focus. And I can't really give you any expert answer on that piece.

On the other part, though, about, you know, are we just focused on Kabul or are we looking elsewhere, our Afghan-first policy really applies across the country, because, you know, we've got -- I'll just give you a good example -- we've got bases going up everywhere in Afghanistan, both for police and the army. I mean, we're generating three, four, five different units every month. And they've got to go somewhere.

And in most and in most cases, they have to go to a new base. The pace at which we can generate permanent basing, and that's the brick-and-mortar variety, we can't keep up with the pace that we're producing the units.

So a lot of these bases are temporary. And by temporary, they're tents, they're set-up barriers, life support, latrines, dining facility, that sort of thing. And some of them are made out of containers. They call them a containerized base camp, a CBAC.

And so these are the two varieties of temporary bases we're putting up all over the country. And so what we do, if we're building a base in Herat, for example, that's out west, well far away from Kabul, you know, we expanded a base out there recently, and we've built some new bases.

And so what we did was the contractor that delivered the gravel was a local contractor from Herat. The laborers that came out and spread the gravel around were laborers from Herat. The laborers that came out and helped put up the tents, we ended up purchasing the tents, I think, from it might have been a regional contract or it might have come from Kabul. We have them in both different regions. It depends on the region.

So the labor is to put the tents and the containers up. And then, you know, same thing with the service that comes in and services the sanitation and does the wastewater removal and that sort of thing. That's a local company.

And then you've got the potential is that the security might be contracted by a local security firm. The Afghans are -- that's a growing industry.

And then the last piece, you know, in Herat, we found that we could not locally find an electrical engineer to hook up the electrical grid. So we had to actually bring in from Kabul or some other region into the area to do some of the final electrical work. But for the most part, the great majority of the labor and the equipment that was in place at some of these camps out there were all local from the Herat area.

So wherever that's possible, that's what we're doing. And again, that has a big impact on the local economy.

I was just, two days ago, I was down at the national police training center which we are constructing in the Wardak province. That's southwest of Kabul. And they had 800 laborers on site, all of them employed from the local region. They bring them in there. Some of them live on site, some of them commute back and forth.

They're laborers. They're building buildings. They're making cinder blocks. They do all their own cinder block construction on site. They do all their gravel production on site. They do all their stone. They've built a stone quarry within the region there, and they bring all their big stone from the quarry on site to make some of the walls at the compound.

So it's an amazing operation there. And apart from the leadership and the site leadership, which is an Afghan construction engineer, and he's from Kandahar, but apart from him, pretty much all the labor and the materials being used to erect this massive police training center is all local.

So I think those are two examples that I want to give you that kind of highlight our point, that it's a lot more than just Kabul. It's something we're doing across the country, because it has an impact locally, and that helps the area that those projects are being built in, because you've just provided jobs to the mostly men in those areas.

Q Great, thank you very much.

GEN. PATTON: You're welcome. Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, Chuck.

Thank you, sir.

John, you're next. Please go ahead.

Q Hello, General. John Doyle with the 4G War Blog. I wanted to follow up on a couple of points you've already made.

On these factories that are going to be making some things to sustain the military equipment and the Afghan economy, are there a pool of factories now that are up and running or capable of making boots and blankets and poncho liners? Or are you going to have to acquire a pool of entrepreneurs and fund them to start up these factories?

And if I could get in a quick second question, you talked about brining in industrial experts to help develop these factories. Are they contractors, or are they people from the State Department or AID? If you could give a little explanation of who these industrial experts are and how they're going to work.

GEN. PATTON: Yeah. Yeah. For the most part, the production lines are already in place -- not all in place, let me just focus on the boots there. You know, there is a factory. It does make boots. There's one of those in Kabul. Their boots aren't very good, so we've got to improve the quality.

But also, we're looking at some other businesses that have not yet established, who are interested in establishing now that they know this requirement is out there and they happen to produce this capacity.

So we're having it's kind of a stimulus. And at that point, we're going to let the market, you know, stimulate itself and bring some of these other businesses along at their own pace, in their own way.

And the industrial experts I've mentioned are just coming in, focused on the quality and the way in which a boot factory would produce a better quality boot. For example, when I was out there looking at the one boot producer in Kabul, and, you know, some of their stitching -- I'm not a boot expert, I've worn a lot of boots, 30 years of walking in Infantry boots, but I don't know how to make them. But the industrial guys I had with me pointed out that some of the stitching, if they had cut the stitching a little deeper into the cloth on the side of the boot that it would have held better. And that's one of the big complaints with the current boot is that the stitching comes apart.

So that's a quality point that, you know, somebody who knows what they're doing can come in and make that recommendation. Maybe it's just a small adjustment. They basically have in the factory I was in, they basically have all the machinery they need, so now it's just a matter of refining their production methods, in my assessment, that would, you know, bring their quality along.

Some of these other businesses I'm talking about -- the blankets, the poncho liners and so forth -- some of them are existing small businesses. And you know, by getting on contract and having a requirement to produce more products, they may be able to expand their existing business to, you know, both expanded space and capacity there.

So we'll see how that comes along there. I'm just trying to grow an army while we're at war and also, at the same time, do the best we can in bringing along the Afghan economy and creating jobs. And so, you know, I'm starting out small and working our way up.

But we are talking to, for example, a nongovernmental organization, Peace Dividend Trust. We had a meeting with them last week. They're operational here in Kabul. They run called Peace Dividend Trust marketplace, Kabul. And they have information on a lot of these contractors. They know who their -- what their origins are. They know what they can do. And so we're talking to them to see, you know, what are the areas of potential that already exist out there maybe and bring them along to a greater capacity. And they can also serve the army at the same time and the police by producing quality products.

Q Thanks, General. Just quick, industrial experts, are they in house or where are they from?

GEN. PATTON: Oh, yeah. Yeah, right now, we've got a couple of folks come in from Natick.

Q I'm sorry?

GEN. PATTON: And they're not here yet, but they're coming next month. And I think we're tracking that they are some textile manufacturing. You know, they do a lot of that production and testing up at Natick, and they have that expertise. And they signed up to help us out on this particular project. And we worked that through, you know, put a (net ?) call out there in a couple of different Defense organizations to see if anybody had that skill set and could get some folks over there on short notice for a short period of time.

So, yeah, Natick Laboratories are the ones helping us out on that end.

Q Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir.

Thank you, John.

Steve, you're next. Steve, are you still with us?

Q Yes, yes. Thank you for taking the time, General, considering the time it is locally for you. Certainly appreciate the access and exchanging of information. This is Steve Schippert. I'm with ThreatsWatch.org.

I have two questions for you, sir. One concerns the recent change in night ops policy, including Afghans. And the other is regarding NATO forces. You were talking about the difficulty in developing leadership as opposed to turning a recruit into a soldier.

My first question regarding the night ops, the rule change passed down from command is that we need to include Afghans on all night raids in order to quell anger from the Afghan public, which is a very important portion of winning the public and battling the propaganda war, if you will, against the Taliban.

My question regarding that is, we've had issues with trustworthiness and reliability of primarily police, but also within the Afghan army, that I'm aware of, and now we're going to be sending them on night raids with us and putting them to the front, to the head of the tip of the spear, if you will, as often as possible. This means they're going to have to have night vision, as I would understand it operationally.

And my concern is, the security of the gear, are we going to have positive control over this kind of equipment, if it is going to be provided to the Afghan forces?

GEN. PATTON: Yeah, that's a long question, Steve. (Laughs.) Here's a short answer.

In terms of -- you know, I'm probably not the right headquarters to talk about the employment of Afghan units in concert with our coalition units and night ops. I mean, I haven't been on a night raid since I've been over here.

And my focus is on generating the force by matching equipment with the training base, with the shelter and getting those units out of the training base, into the field or force. And that's a little outside my area to comment on their effectiveness.

However, I will take one part of that question, and it has to do with, you know, night vision equipment, night vision capability, that sort of thing. There are some Afghan units that currently possess night vision equipment that we have procured with Afghan security force funds. Those are the funds provided or appropriated to us by U.S. Congress.

And we take very seriously the accountability of that gear. It's a law, NDAA-10, National Defense Authorization Act stipulates that we do what's called enhanced end-use monitoring on night vision equipment. And that means that we've got to go out and do serial number inventories on a regular basis so that by the end of the year, a U.S. soldier has inventoried 100 percent of the night vision equipment that's issued to the Afghan army. And there's not a lot of them out there issued, but there are some in select units.

And those select units are very closely partnered with U.S. forces. And so, one, the partnership is extremely tight on those units conducting night ops with the night vision equipment. And second, we have a very rigorous policy and practice where we go out and inspect those NVEs on a regular basis and achieve a 100 percent inventory at the end of every year.

In fact, I've got a unit right now from my headquarters down in Kandahar doing end-use monitoring inspection on three units in Kandahar on no notice. A police headquarters where they're looking at weapons in that case. They're looking at an Afghan army unit that possess night vision equipment. They'll do a 100 percent inventory there. And then they're going over to another unit to look at weapons security and

accountability and that sort of thing. So we've got a very active program on that end, and that's pretty much the area of expertise. I've got to stay in my lane on that particular question.

Q Right. Well, I apologize here. You're absolutely right about the nature of the question and who I'm asking it to, so I apologize for that. But your answer was actually very informative. I certainly appreciate that.

My next --

GEN. PATTON: Okay. Thanks, Steve.

Q Could I ask one more question, sir?

LT. CRAGG: I'm sorry. Who was this, one more time?

Is this Steve again?

Q Yes, ma'am.

LT. CRAGG: We're going to be wrapping up. I want to make sure I go around to everyone else that was on the call.

Q Okay, that's good.

LT. CRAGG: Is it a quick question, Steve?

Q No, go ahead.

LT. CRAGG: I said, is it a quick question?

Q No, ma'am. Go ahead and go around.

LT. CRAGG: Okay. I want to wrap up pretty quickly. I want to make sure I don't take too much of Brigadier General Patton's time. So Richard, Andrew, Spencer, Chuck or John, any follow-on questions?

Richard go first.

Q Yeah, I do.

LT. CRAGG: Andrew, go ahead.

Q General, Andrew Lubin again. With the jobs program which is obviously needed -- and thank God you're doing it -- we just finished a big operation in Marja. Clear is done; now it's hold and build. What are you putting into Marja to keep them employed and, again, to keep them relatively ISAF-happy?

GEN. PATTON: Yeah, well, that's a question that could best be directed at the RC South, the Marines, the Med down there, and also the Intermediate Joint Command. We don't -- my command, Combined Security Transition Command, and also we double-hat as a NATO Training Mission-

Afghanistan, we don't employ fielded forces. And so, you know, we train them, we send them out to the field force, and then they're employed by those other command.

So, you know, if you're asking me how we're doing, what the next step is there, I know we're in the hold and build. There are, you know, we're seeing an increased partnership and Afghan participation, both on the police and the army side. A lot of the units that we've generated just in the past couple of months are active down there in the fight and partnered with their Marine counterpart units and so forth.

But it would be really a stretch for me to go into any of the other tactical employment here for the next phase. I know part of the build phase is creating an placing and building confidence in the government. And there's been measures taken to, you know, essentially install new reliable figures into the local government down there. That's been done here in the last couple of weeks.

Certainly with all the potential basing and so forth going up there and bringing more troops in there in an area that hasn't been occupied in the past, there are a lot of potential there for the local service industry, the local construction industries and that sort of thing.

And so we'll be looking at opportunities there to create jobs as we expand the infrastructure and that military basing down there in that region as kind of part of that build phase. And that's probably about as far as I can go on that one.

Q Okay, General, thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Quickly, any other follow up before we wrap up today's roundtable?

Q Yeah, Jen.

LT. CRAGG: Okay, go, Chuck.

Q Yeah. General, are you able to speak to local food purchasing and whether the Afghans have the capability to can or freeze quantities of food to preserve it? Are we buying a lot of local food? And what can they do towards a modern food industry?

GEN. PATTON: Yeah, I don't know about the canning and the freezing part there, Chuck. But I do know that the first direction we go in terms of an Afghan base is to go to an Afghan solution. So you've got a new Afghan battalion out there somewhere, you know, the first solution to that is, that unit should be able to provide for itself if they had cooks and staff and so forth in its organization. And if they're a new unit, maybe they don't have all those positions filled. So then the next option is to go to the local food service industry. And that's the case, like, for example, we've got a new training base that we've set up here on the outskirts of Kabul. And that unit, because it's a training unit, does not have cooks and mess staff and equipment in its organization

right now. So they've gone out and have contracted for a local Kabul food caterer, who cooks the food off site, brings it on site and serves it, brings fruits and vegetables and complements the meal with beverages and that sort of thing.

And it does all the clean up and service and all that.

So there is a capable food service industry. Wherever possible, we utilize that in taking care of the Afghan police and the army when they're out there.

For the most part, we haven't brought them on the coalition bases, but we're relying on the local food service industries to take care of its army and police when they have that particular need.

Q Thank you.

GEN. PATTON: You're welcome.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, Chuck.

And thank you, sir.

And at this time, I'd like to turn it back over to Brigadier General Patton. Sir, if you'd like to end with any closing thoughts, we'd wrap up today's roundtable. The floor is yours.

GEN. PATTON: Well, thank you. And I really appreciate everybody being on the net here. And it's good talking to Richard again.

You know, I just want to say, we are making progress over here, you know. And we want the Afghans to run their own army and their own police force. They just can't do it themselves yet, but they want to. And so we're working at generating new units and sustaining the currently fielded units.

And we have growth objectives that we're aiming at. We want to build the army to 134,000 here by the end of October. And we want to build the police force to 109,000 by the end of October 2010.

We're going to take that even further. For October 2011, we want to build the army to 171,000 and the police to 134,000. And currently, the army is sitting at 107,000, and the police are sitting at about 99,000. So we've got a little ways to go.

But we're generating, like I say, infantry units, for the most part, right now, every month. And you know, I just want to comment on quality versus quantity. And quantity has a quality all its own. Because we're creating a large force capable then of establishing a rotation where you've got sufficient boots to put on the ground when you're operational, and then you can rotate those units out so they can refit, they can take some leave, and they can do some training. And right now, the army and the police force aren't big enough to do that.

So we're growing the army so they can, in their increased quantity, it can develop a rotation like that.

And what we've seen in a unit like the commandos, for example, is a specialty unit in the Afghan army, we already have that rotation. And they are at about a 99 percent retention rate. In other words, everybody that's in that unit, stays in that unit. And the attrition rate is extremely low, and it's because they've grown to a certain size. They're able to build a rotation in and get their soldiers leave, training and also rotate into operations.

So that's what we're trying to do in the army and the police corps, grow them big enough so that they can develop that sort of rotation. And if we can put that into effect, we think that's going to have a tremendous impact on attrition, and by reducing attrition, increasing retention and allowing this army to continue to grow and the police to continue to grow.

It's not without challenges. Leader development was one challenge. We have corruption in the ranks; that's a challenge. But we're taking those problems head on. We're dealing with them with the Afghan leadership. And again, we're making progress here. And we're very optimistic, mindful of quality, but growing in quantity. We're optimistic we're going to meet those objectives and create, in the end, a self-sufficient army and police force.

And I'll just end on that. And I want to thank everybody for their time and their very interesting questions today.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you so much, sir.

With that, I just want to remind everybody you can go to [www.dodlive.mil](http://www.dodlive.mil), click on Blogger Roundtables. And when the transcript is done by Fed News, we'll make sure to add it there as well, and all the other documents relating to this roundtable.

You've been listening to Brigadier General Gary Patton. He's a Deputy Commanding General (Programs), Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan.

With that, thank you so much, sir, for taking your time to talk with us today. And this wraps up this -- GEN. PATTON: If I could make one -- (inaudible). While you're talking the different sites, I'd like to just put a plug in for our website as well. We've got a lot of good stories on there to kind of highlight and underscore some of the things that we've been talking about today. And that's [www.ntm-a.com](http://www.ntm-a.com) -- [www.ntm-a.com](http://www.ntm-a.com).

Thank you very much.

LT. CRAGG: Sir, great. I will add that to the blog posting just in case any other listeners in the future would like to log onto that site.

Thank you so much, sir.

And thank you to the bloggers on the call. It ends today's discussion. Thank you, sir.

END.