

# Security Returns

Ex-Militia fighters take up new lives, returning to school and learning trades

About 20 kilometers from the center of Kabul, along the road to Jalalabad and the Pakistan border, 800 newly-trained Afghan National Army (ANA) soldiers raised clouds of dust as they sprinted in unison in their green uniforms.

It was the latest group of graduates from the Kabul Military Training Center, built and maintained by the U.S. military under a \$750 million plan to prepare a national force capable of replacing the militias that ousted the Taliban in 2001, with U.S. and other military support.

"With the help of the coalition we are making national unity and bringing Afghanistan together," said Sgt. Mohammed Yussuf, 26, a soldier for 21 months in the new army.

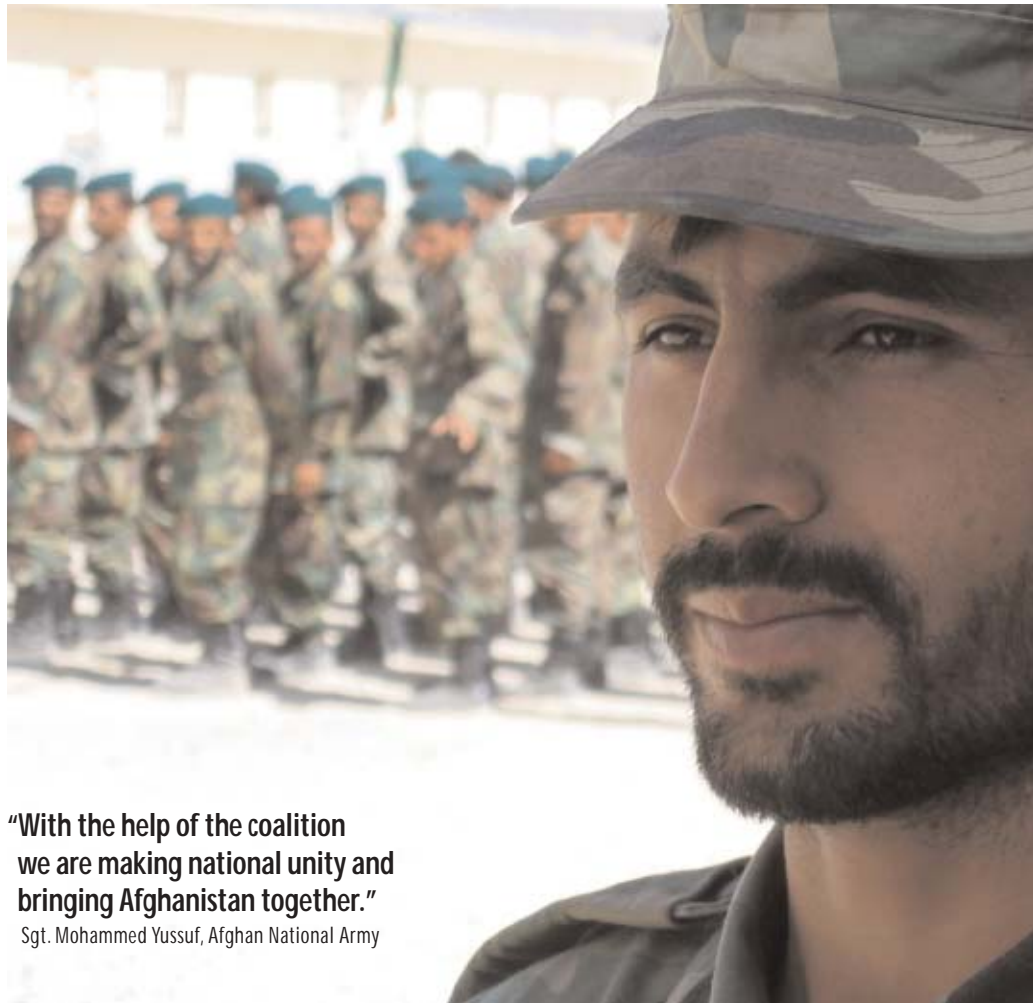
Standing at the edge of the parade ground while the newer recruits marched, sprinted and received awards from U.S. and Afghan generals, Yussuf recalled that "before the ANA there was some ethnic discrimination—you were seen as a Tajik or Uzbek or Hazara or Pashtun.

"Since the establishment of the ANA, we live together as brothers. We think we are one nation and one army. The army is the heart of the nation. I want to serve."

Yussuf, who earns \$145 per month and lives with his wife and two children in Pul-i Charki nearby, has put his finger on the key to Afghanistan's future: creation of a strong national army formed from all major ethnic groups to spread rule of law from Herat to Kandahar to Mazar-i Sharif. Units are 30 percent Pashtun, 30 percent Tajik, and 10 percent Uzbek, Hazara, Turkomen and other minorities.

The ANA will replace the ethnic warlords who fought against the Soviets and then against the Taliban. It should also allow the 18,000 U.S. troops and 8,000 NATO troops in the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to eventually go home, leaving the Afghans in charge of their own security.

Since it was created two years ago, the ANA has trained and deployed 14,000 troops at bases built by the U.S. and other foreign agencies around the country. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is completing barracks, dining halls, and other facilities at a large



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Sgt. Mohammed Yussuf, Afghan National Army

Sgt. Mohammed Yussuf stood on the parade ground

outside Kabul where 800 new Afghan National Army soldiers held a graduation

ceremony after their training course ended.

base in southwestern Kabul on a hill overlooking the shattered palaces, office buildings, and homes left from internecine warfare among regional militias after the Russians pulled out in 1989. The ANA goal is to reach some 70,000 troops in another two years.

In the 1960s, Afghanistan was a poor country, but a foreign visitor could travel its length and breadth, day and night, without fear. After 10 years of war against the Soviet Union and another 10 years of rule by warlords and repressive religious zealots, Afghanistan is returning to the more peaceful days of its past.

Trucks, buses, motorcycles, donkey carts, and people on foot crowd the main roads and the narrow lanes of cities and villages. Shopkeepers lean their melons and other goods against outdoor displays. Moneychangers hold up fistfuls of the new

*Afghani* notes—all without a single rifle to be seen.

According to a poll released July 27, 2004 by the International Republican Institute (IRI), some 77 percent of Afghans believe overall living conditions have improved in the past two years, and 90 percent say conditions are better than five or ten years ago.

Some 64 percent said law and order has improved, but an equal number said security remained their paramount concern, mainly because the remainder of the warlords still cling to power. Ironically, while those powerful ethnic leaders in the outlying provinces sometimes abuse the law and fight among themselves, they also have the power to control the holdouts of Al Qaeda, the Taliban, and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's militia.

Those groups continue to launch attacks

May '04

Afghan electoral law signed

First commercial television channel starts

June '04

US Congress passes \$25 billion emergency request for Afghanistan, Iraq

Electoral workers killed near Jalalabad

USAID program treats 2.3 million livestock



**“I am done with fighting. I personally could not find any benefit from the fighting except looting and destruction. I fought for 12 years. Most of my friends disappeared.”**

Mirwais, who uses only one name, fought for 12 years with an Afghan faction and now is taking literacy and job training after turning in his weapon and resigning from the faction.

### Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration

Establishing peace requires programs to disarm the militias, train them for peacetime employment, and find them jobs.

Mirwais, 30, stepped outside of his literacy class in Mazar-i Sharif run by the U.N.’s International Organization for Migration (IOM), to explain why he is one of nearly 13,000 militia fighters—of an estimated 60,000—who have turned in their weapons.

“I am done with fighting,” said Mirwais, who hopes to learn carpentry. “I personally could not find any benefit from the fighting except looting and destruction. I fought for 12 years. Most of my friends disappeared.”

IOM, using U.S., Japanese, and other donor funding, first shows the militia fighters a video thanking them for serving their country by defending it against communists and then against the Taliban. It says that now that peace has come, they must lay aside their weapons and join the effort to rebuild their country.

After disarming and demobilizing, the ex-combatants need help to reintegrate into a peace-time economy, so IOM has set up training centers, funded by USAID and others, to teach six-month courses in literacy, carpentry, carpet weaving, agriculture, welding, tailoring, auto mechanics, and other trades. Ex-fighters are paid \$30 a month to sustain their families and some receive bicycles to get to the training centers.

### Results

- 12,000 fighters handed in weapons and joined literacy and job training programs.
- Heavy weapons being handed in and stockpiled; warlords and armed factions increasingly accepting political competition.
- 14,000 soldiers in new Afghan National Army have been trained, equipped and deployed to bases around country.
- 25,000 Afghans have been trained, equipped and deployed in the Afghan National Police and units controlling borders and narcotics.
- 64% of country says law and order has improved.
- Despite threats by Taliban holdouts and targeted violence, Afghans have held two Loya Jirgas, adopted a constitution, and created an interim government. By September, 2004, 10 million voters were registered as the October presidential election approached.

And while individuals lay down their automatic rifles—often at the urging of their former commanders—militia leaders have been turning in the heavy weapons. In August, it was announced that all heavy weapons had been removed from the capital, a major step toward complete disarmament.

Meanwhile, about 18,000 U.S. troops patrol the mountains of Asadabad and the deserts of Paktia where militants launch attacks on girls’ schools, voter registration sites, local officials, and other aspects of the new order rapidly taking hold throughout the country.

Some 8,000 troops from Italy, Germany, and 27 other countries in ISAF patrol the Kabul area, with several thousand more troops arriving to help protect the October presidential voting.

In a sign of growing security, more than 10 million people registered to vote despite Taliban and other attacks that killed about 20 people in the past year.

from remote hideouts along the Pakistan border and elsewhere, but appear to have little support among the Afghan people, according to polling data and random interviews.

The IRI survey reported that despite Afghanistan’s ethnic diversity, 96 percent said their identity was “Afghan” rather than a specific ethnic group. The survey interviewed 2,378 voters from across Afghanistan and was funded by USAID.

So far, more than 25,000 Afghan National Police have been trained by U.S., German, British, and other trainers under a \$160 million foreign aid program. One unit was training with U.S. soldiers in the more than 100-degree sweltering heat at a base in Jalalabad this August. In addition, the ANA is growing. Border and anti-drug police units are also being trained.



Road crews uncovered a land mine, one of many left behind by years of war.

July '04

17th PRT set up

Electoral workers killed in Ghazni

Médecins Sans Frontières withdraws from Afghanistan

Kabul industrial park begun

August '04

10 million voters registered