

Winning in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

By Gen. David D. McKiernan
Commander
International Security Assistance Force
North Atlantic Treaty Organization,
Afghanistan

The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) is in Afghanistan to win. Winning means building a better future for Afghanistan, viewed in Afghan capacity—achieving a real sense of security, a viable government with capable and competent institutions, sustained development and improved economic opportunity. Winning matters to our national security and to the security of our international partners who are here fighting with us and the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). This endeavor will take time. It requires our long-term commitment.

Ultimately, as history has proven in counterinsurgencies, the solution will be a political one, not a military one. This is why we are focused on a comprehensive approach along three lines of effort—security, govern-

Soldiers of the 1st Battalion, 6th Field Artillery Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, patrol a village in Nuristan Province, Afghanistan, working to separate insurgents from the local population.



Afghan National Army (ANA) soldiers and paratroopers cross the Gowerdesh Bridge during Operation Mountain Highway II in Nuristan Province, Afghanistan. The ANA, Afghan Border Patrol, U.S. Army and Marine Corps worked together during the operation.

ance, and reconstruction and development. ISAF's main contribution is in security. UN and NATO mandates make us the lead for the international community. With respect to governance and development efforts we support others, namely the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) and the United Nations Assistance Mission Afghanistan (UNAMA). In all these efforts we take an integrated approach, working in close cooperation with UNAMA, other organizations and members of the international community—all in support of the legitimately elected GIROA.

We are fighting a counterinsurgency campaign based on a "shape, clear, hold and build" strategy. We *shape* the conditions of the security environment, *clear* areas of insurgents, *hold* with the enduring presence of ANSF and set the conditions to *build* through enabling the extension of viable governance and promoting development. Our focus must be the Afghan people and what matters for them—security and basic needs and services. Our first priorities, therefore, are helping those populations most threatened and building the essential infrastructure needed to ensure security, provide basic governance and services, and promote development. All of these efforts must be achieved in the cultural, religious and environmental context of Afghanistan.

Are we winning? The short answer is that progress is uneven—"yes" in some areas, "not yet" in others. More importantly, the insurgency is not winning and cannot win. The Afghan people do not want the Taliban back—or any other substitute espousing extremist ideology. The tactics employed by the Taliban, al Qaeda and others in this "nexus of insurgency" are recognized as illegitimate and



counter to Afghan culture. Their propaganda is not believed. The insurgents are overmatched in every fight with the Afghan National Army (ANA) or Coalition forces. That said, the insurgency is not short on manpower. It recruits across the border, it cooperates with criminals and narcotics traffickers, and it can influence or intimidate those



GEN. DAVID D. MCKIERNAN is commander, International Security Assistance Force, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Afghanistan. His previous assignment was commanding general, U.S. Army Europe and Seventh Army/commanding general, U.S. Army, North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Gen. McKiernan has served in Europe, the continental United States, Korea

and Southwest Asia. His assignments have included tours of duty in 1st Infantry Division, 2nd Infantry Division, 1st Armored Division, 3rd Armored Division, 1st Cavalry Division, VII Corps and 3rd U.S. Army. He has commanded 1st Battalion, 35th Armor (Iron Knights), 1st Armored Division; 1st Brigade (Iron Horse) 1st Cavalry Division; and Third U.S. Army/Combined Forces Land Component Command. He has also served as the operations officer at every level of command from battalion to Headquarters, Department of the Army; deputy chief of staff for Operations; senior task force observer/controller at the Combat Maneuver Training Center in Hohenfels, Germany; and as executive officer to the commander of U.S. Army Forces Command. In

the Allied Command Europe Rapid Reaction Corps, he served as the deputy chief of staff G-2/G-3, forward deployed in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and also in Rheindahlen, Germany. He was next assigned to the 1st Infantry Division where he served as the assistant division commander (Maneuver). He served as deputy chief of staff for operations, Headquarters, U.S. Army Europe and Seventh Army during a period of simultaneous operations in Bosnia, Albania and Kosovo. Returning to Fort Hood, Texas, he commanded the 1st Cavalry Division. He was then assigned as G-3, Headquarters, Department of the Army. He assumed command of the Third U.S. Army and U.S. Army Forces Central Command and became the Coalition Forces Land Component commander in preparation for Operation Iraqi Freedom. He commanded all Coalition and U.S. conventional ground forces that attacked into Iraq to remove Saddam Hussein from power. He also served as the deputy commanding general/chief of staff for U.S. Army Forces Command. Gen. McKiernan attended the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College and the U.S. Army War College. He holds a master's of public administration from Shippensburg University and received an honorary doctorate in public service from his alma mater, the College of William and Mary.

Capt. John Williams (left), commander of Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 1st Squadron, 91st Cavalry Regiment (Airborne), observes the hilltop while SSgt. William Randall (center) directs Sgt. Shawn Seymour (right) during an operation in Nuristan Province, Afghanistan.



without practical alternatives, education or income.

The insurgency we are fighting in Afghanistan is a loosely syndicated network of groups with different objectives and diverse motivations. Objectives range from government overthrow to weakening local authority in order to facilitate criminal or power broker aims. Motivations range from extremist ideology, lack of alternative employment, fear and a historical aversion to foreign presence to a culture of violence that stems from decades of warfare. The insurgency is neither unified nor coherent in action but does manage to cooperate at times in certain regions.

Violence has increased this year for several reasons. First, insurgents have deliberately changed to more asymmetric tactics—smaller in scale and shorter in duration, with more vulnerable targets. These tactics require less sophisticated command and control and result in less direct contact (and less attrition). Larger scale attacks continue, but at a lower rate. Second, insurgent freedom of action to recruit, stage, train and sustain across the border has improved due to the lack of an effective counterinsurgency capability and strategy in Pakistan's tribal areas. A porous border exacerbates this situation. Finally, ISAF and ANSF are operating in new areas. Increased Coalition force contributions and an ANSF growing in both capacity and capability mean more operations to disrupt insurgents in

their safe havens or support zones. (Currently just over 50,000 troops are assigned to ISAF—13,000 more than in October 2007. During that time, ANA—including ANA Air Corps—have increased from 40,000 to more than 65,000.)

Despite the freedom of action insurgents enjoy in Pakistan, the insurgency is not spreading inside Afghanistan;



An Afghan National Police (ANP) officer learns to use a rocket-propelled grenade launcher on a range in Nangarhar Province, Afghanistan. The ANP will conduct live-fire training at the range, advised by a U.S. soldier from the 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team.



First Lt. Michael Skuski, executive officer for Headquarters and Headquarters Company, speaks with Afghan children while conducting a foot patrol through Qaleh-yegolay village, outside Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan.

it remains concentrated in Pashtun tribal areas in the south and east. Less than 7 percent of the Afghan people experience insurgent-related violence on a frequent basis in their districts. Insurgent activity has increased in the east with respect to last year, but elsewhere the increase in ANSF and ISAF offensive operations accounts for the rise in contact. The Afghan people, however, do not feel secure from the insurgency, crime or corruption in many areas.

Progress is widespread but uneven. Today a million more children are attending school than two years ago. The majority of Afghans have access to health care. Mortality rates are dropping. More Afghans have access to water and electricity. Hundreds of kilometers of new roads have been built, linking communities and enabling commerce. The gross national product is growing 10 percent annually. But many Afghans do not yet have access to basic services, and great challenges remain—illiteracy, unemployment, drought, the narcotics trade and addiction.

The real question is what will it take to win? First, we must acknowledge that an enduring peace in Afghanistan requires addressing the militant sanctuaries in Pakistan and improving governance at all levels—national, provincial,

district, municipal and village—within Afghanistan. The former is a matter for the governments of the United States and international partners to work on with Pakistan. Regional stability and the success of global counterterrorism are at stake. For ISAF's part, we are aggressively working to improve coordination and effective cooperation between ANSF, ISAF and the Pakistani military. Border coordination consists of monthly bilateral meetings and border security subcommittee meetings at the region command (RC) level, border flag meetings from brigade to platoon level and tripartite meetings between the ISAF commander and Afghan and Pakistani Chiefs of Army Staff. Additionally, the first border coordination center (BCC) was established and jointly manned in July 2008 at Khyber in RC East. Three more BCCs are planned in the next year.

Improving governance is a focus of our integrated approach at all levels to build human capacity and improve services for and accountability to the Afghan people. ISAF is engaged in daily direct dialogue with key Afghan ministries, including staff partnership with the Ministry of Defense to improve effectiveness and connect the government to the Afghan people. Regional and subordinate commanders, together with provincial reconstruction teams, partner with provincial governors, district subgovernors, appointed village representatives and tribal elders, as well as with district development assemblies and community development councils. The two greatest limitations to faster progress in governance are lack of trained human capital and endemic corruption. Widespread illiteracy and an underdeveloped education system will take a generation or more to overcome. This is why a long-term commitment is so important. Corruption is an internal disease that eats away at public support and confidence, and it will require great international pressure and Coalition scrutiny to identify, expose and eliminate it with time and persistence.

Another element necessary for success is increased forces (ANSF and ISAF) and security capability over a sustained period. The Afghan soldier and growth of the ANA tell a definite success story, but the Army must continue to grow and develop. The U.S.-led Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan (CSTC-A) is largely responsible for this success. Since the start of 2008, the first seven *kandaks* (battalions) have been declared capable of independent operations. ANA units now lead the majority of their operations. ANA strength is on a glide path to grow to 80,000 by 2009, and planning is ongoing to increase further to 122,000 by 2012. ANA leadership at all levels is good, and in-place leader development programs will only make it better. Soldier commitment and the warfighting spirit are strong. Soldiers are reliable in combat and formidable foes to their adversaries. They have gained the confidence and support of the Afghan people. The emerging Afghan National Army Air Corps already consists of 17 Mi-17 assault helicopters, four An-24 and two An-26 transport aircraft and executes the majority of air movements required by the ANSF. The ANA executed its first independent air movement operations in July. Another great ANA

capability is the Commando Brigade. The U.S.-led Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-Afghanistan (CJSOTF-A) has skillfully trained commando *kandaks* of elite infantry soldiers for each of the ANA Corps. Commando *kandaks* with CJSOTF-A advisers are the most effective counterinsurgency force in the ANA.

The Afghan National Police (ANP) are progressing at a slower pace, but ISAF and CSTC-A have partnered to set the conditions for steady improvement. Pay reform, grade reform, elimination of private governor militias, police mentor teams and the training of a highly capable Afghan National Civil Order Police (ANCOP) are CSTC-A initiatives that are comprehensively improving ANP competence and capability. The ANCOP battalions are the key enabler of focus district development, a program to reform police and improve rule of law at the grassroots level. District police are temporarily replaced by ANCOP battalions

to maintain our presence. In order to “build” in our COIN strategy, we must be able first to “hold.” A lack of forces—maneuver and enablers—to date has resulted in repeat operations to “clear” areas where we have been before, but could not remain in or “hold” due to other demands. We are confident U.S. and NATO leaders are working to resource our force requirements as other global commitments evolve.

The recent U.S. initiative to establish U.S. Forces-Afghanistan (USFOR-A) is a great step forward in improving unity of effort and effectiveness in Afghanistan. The Department of Defense’s decision streamlines command and control, identifies one U.S. commander for the conventional forces in theater and creates synergy among the two different ISAF and Operation Enduring Freedom mandates.

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Recruits from the ANP’s Jump Start program stand at attention after successfully completing the eight-week course in June. The graduates, including four female officers, will be assigned to the Kabul police district.



while vetting, recruiting and retraining occurs. Districts are selected jointly by ISAF and GIRoA. Construction or improvement of key district infrastructure is synchronized. ANCOP battalions take over policing and then are relieved eight weeks later by the newly trained district ANP. The program has enjoyed great success in improving ANP skills and effectiveness, reducing civilian casualties (as ANP ability to protect and defend improves) and improving public confidence.

Additional forces are required for two reasons—ANSF mentoring and partnership, and counterinsurgency (COIN) operations. An increase in ANA and the need to develop ANP (the face of public security in most villages) require more Coalition forces to train, mentor and partner; to accelerate ANSF force generation; and to conduct COIN operations where we are not present today or cannot sus-

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for presidential and provincial elections in fall 2009. ANSF will assume lead security responsibility for the province of Kabul, and eventually other provinces, as the right conditions are set. The ANA will continue to grow in size and capability. The ANP will make real strides in professionalism and COIN capability. ISAF will grow in capability and, together with ANSF, take the fight relentlessly to the enemies of Afghanistan. UNAMA, ISAF and other members of the international community will improve cooperation and development aid effectiveness in support of the government of Afghanistan. The insurgency will react and external challenges will remain. Our great soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines will not fail us. The rate of progress will depend on factors we only indirectly influence, but our resolve must not falter. The Afghan people and international security depend on us to prevail. ★