



Inception and Early Evolution of a Partnership Doctrine: Building Afghan Army Capacity While Fighting a Counterinsurgency

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*"Now there's much to be done ... Along the border where insurgents often move freely, we must work together with a renewed sense of partnership to share intelligence, and to coordinate our efforts to isolate, target and take out our common enemy."*¹

*"... we're working in a very close partnership ... to share everything ... intelligence, information, tactics, techniques and procedures and expertise."*²

During a 20 June 2007 press conference in Afghanistan, 82d Airborne Division's Colonel Marty Schweitzer described the approach to which he and the Soldiers of his 4th Brigade Combat Team had committed themselves during their rotation in the war-weary nation: "The 4th Brigade of the 82^d is a subordinate formation to Colonel [*sic*] Khaliq and the 203rd Corps ... [Khaliq] developed this plan that we're currently executing."³

Schweitzer added, "We've been fortunate . . . to be partnered with General Khaliq." Incidentally, General Khaliq sits to Colonel Schweitzer's left - in fact leading the press conference.

That press conference was over two years ago, so it was bitter irony to read Joe Giordono's *Stars and Stripes* article in February titled *Afghans Will Help Plan, Execute Joint Missions*.⁴ For fifteen months, from about January 2007 to April 2008, Soldiers of the 82^d Airborne had set aside stereotypes, preconceptions, pride, fear and their more conventional and familiar tactics, techniques, and procedures in order to grow a significant and productive degree of trust between

¹ Scott Wilson, "Obama Stresses Joint Action Against Taliban Push in South Asia," *Washington Post*, May 7, 2009.

² US Department of Defense Transcript, "DoD News Briefing with Maj. Gen. Rodriguez from Afghanistan," DefenseLink, <http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=4188>.

³ US Department of Defense Transcript, "DoD Briefing with Col. Schweitzer and Maj. Gen. Khaliq," DefenseLink, <http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=3995>. MG Khaliq goes on to say, "I just want to tell you in brief about the Operation Maiwand, which is the first operation planned, resourced, and executed by the Afghan Army." In fact, that was the case. Important to note in this briefing is the way that the lead is conceded to 203rd and MG Khaliq. He goes on to inventory the accomplishments of Operation Maiwand over the previous 20 days.

⁴ Joseph Giordono, "Afghans Will Help Plan, Execute Joint Missions," *Stars and Stripes*, February 14, 2009, Mideast edition.

our Soldiers and the troopers in the Afghan National Army. They planned missions together, briefed missions together and executed missions together – that was partnering. The idea Giordono’s article headlines as a novelty or innovation was really old news...

That is, it *should have* been old news. At that point, we should have been well beyond thinking that Afghans *will help our* efforts; at that point, every coalition leader in Afghanistan should have understood that the Afghans must do much more than *help*.

The perspective we must adopt if we are ever to move forward is that *we* are there *to help and support* the Afghans succeed, and partnership is a big part of what will be that success. But we must understand what effective, embedded partnership means, and we must take it to its logical conclusion to achieve the greatest effects.

In the President’s 2006 National Security Strategy, forty-eight examples of *partner* or some variation appear in only fifty-four pages. In the more diminutive twenty-nine page 2008 National Defense Strategy, the word has multiplied like the proverbial rabbits, presented some fifty-three times. The December 2006 Army Field Manual *Counterinsurgency* begins to develop the notion of partnership as it relates to building a security force; however, in the course of fifty-two mentions, the concept of partnership is relegated to only a follow-on measure in the wake of other training options outlined in a single table-graph, littered among methods like formal schools, mobile training teams, advisor teams, and contractors. And even the discussion of partnership training does not seem too convinced of the efficacy of partnership as a genuine effort or of any sort of all-encompassing doctrine in itself: “As training progresses, host-nation squads, platoons, and companies may work with their U.S. partners in security of combat operations.”⁵ The phrase *may work* equates to noncommittal.

Finally, in ninety-two instances of the word *partner* or some variation in the October 2008 FM 3-07 *Stability Operations*, there still is not a precise, committed, doctrinal definition of *partner*, of what the term is to mean or to require, though the manual’s discussion of the military’s role in Security Sector Reform seems to point in that direction.⁶ Unfortunately, FM 3-07’s Security Sector Reform discussion has more to do with the criteria necessary for the military to gradually disengage from the scene rather than a criterion for the military to engage with other elements in productive partnership.

So, the word *partner* – and its various derivatives like *to partner*, *partnering*, *partnership* – has become one of those *en vogue* words that sounds great, has a contemporarily appropriate corporate ring to it, drops well into politico-military scholastic conversations and serves as an attractive filler when one is not willing (because of laziness) or inclined (because of diplomacy) to struggle to define more clearly a particular proposed relationship between or among entities. Sadly, the word begins to suggest ambiguous, undefined relationships free of all the associated,

⁵ FM 3-24 *Counterinsurgency* (Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2006), http://www.army.mil/USAPA/doctrine/Active_FM.html (accessed February 3, 2009). See Table 6-4, page 6-14.

⁶ FM 3-07, *Stability Operations* (Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2008), http://www.army.mil/USAPA/doctrine/Active_FM.html (accessed December 15, 2008). See pages 6-4 – 6-5.

pesky requirements, commitments, responsibilities, expectations and means of accountability necessary for productive *and* reliable relationships.

In spite of the apparently central role the notion implicitly serves in our national security documents, we are at a loss to even begin explaining just what we mean when we speak of partnering, of partners, of partnerships from a security perspective. As a word of caution – if we are not careful the word *partner* will go the unfortunate way of the word *transformation*, which, through its prolific misuse to win quick support for and give apparent depth to shallow and disingenuous programs and initiatives around the beltway, was sadly robbed of its effect and meaning during the early 21st Century.⁷

Partnership – To Begin

Major General Rodriguez’s April 2008 characterization of partnership captures the direction a doctrinal definition needs to go: partnership is about trust; it is about sharing – sharing intelligence; sharing information; sharing tactics, techniques, and sharing procedures; sharing expertise. Partnership – “that’s what’s most important for moving forward,”⁸ he says.

That might sound like a rather elementary proposition, rather simplistic or even oversimplified. But in my estimation, that perspective of partnership is as novel as it is definitive, clear, and precise, and it is more complicated than one might first believe. To get an organization to actually *engage* in that sort of partnership – what we are now beginning to call *embedded partnership* – is very, very hard work.

Doctrinal definitions for terms like *combined*, *joint*, *direct* and *general support*, *attached* and *assigned*, OPCON, OPCOM, and TACON all define relationships that by their very nature require subordination of one element to another, a relinquishment of control to another entity: these terms implicitly require concessions, and we understand the value of these words, if by nothing else, by the emotion our leaders invest in fights over the practical application of the concepts. Most every officer remembers a commander’s rant about higher command’s task organization that, rightly or wrongly, placed one command in a position subordinate to another. These doctrinal terms with which we are all so familiar are powerful, perhaps because they are so final, and because they so clearly define relationships and drive missions.

⁷ The Army originally leveraged the word *Transformation* after the most careful consideration in an effort to capture the massive breadth and depth The Army Vision proposed for change during General Eric K. Shinseki’s tenure as the 34th Chief of Staff and beyond. For example, in the prepared remarks for his retirement ceremony on June 11, 2003, the 34th Chief looks back as well as forward and works to define the concept of transformation as The Army meant it. He explained, “Transformation has never been about just one thing . . . The Army Vision and Transformation are about comprehensive change at the very heart of our institution – of our culture: doctrine, organization, training, leader development, materiel, and Soldiers.” Once The Army unveiled that word as a description of bold, deep, and fairly all-encompassing change, one began hearing it routinely applied to less ambitious efforts, efforts that were not, by that definition, transformation as much as conventional change and evolution, at best. Ultimately, the word as we originally understood it became hollow in meaning and trite in usage.

⁸ Ibid.

Similarly, the word *partner* should clearly explain a relationship if we are to continue using it in any sort of serious way. But *partnership*, for some reason, will not carry what some might interpret as those pejorative connotations of subordination so emotionally charged and so presumably necessary for effective command and control and productive, effective work.

Partnerships, when truly embraced and genuinely respected, are threatening because of the potential exposure they represent, intimidating because of the deep commitment they demand, challenging because of the intellectual and reflexive paradigm shift they require, and uncharacteristically selfless because of where they accept blame and to whom they attributes successes. To acknowledge one a partner of another demands a good deal of trust because of the vivid association and shared interest between the two entities.

Partner is more accurately about an egalitarian sort of relationship: one group has resources to which essentially unconstrained – though managed – access is provided and, at the same time, the other group has resources to which unconstrained access is provided. Recollect Rodriguez’s words: “share everything.” That is everything from hard resources like transportation platforms and weapon systems to soft resources like information and intelligence; tactics, techniques, and procedures; better ways to plan, better ways to execute, better ways to evaluate after actions; better ways to understand a nearly impenetrable culture, to interact without giving unintentional offense, to demonstrate compassion in terms the local people understand and appreciate, and to wield power in a way that advances, rather than undermines, objectives in both the short- and the long-term. Again, *share everything*.

As well and importantly, partnership does not imply any particular flow for those shared products, a flow that terms like *direct support* and *general support* define: the word suggests that each partner has one or more thing the other needs. One partner is, indeed, not privileged over the other. Partnership does not imply a necessarily large degree of autonomy – the two entities engage in a joint venture, striving towards the same goal, sharing resources with one another and shouldering risks together, empowering one another and the conglomerate, each in its own way. Ideally, and tritely, the whole becomes greater than the sum of the individual parts. When considering how to employ an additional 30,000 Soldiers to the fight in Afghanistan, thinking along the lines of genuine partnerships is a good, productive, investment that will compound the reach of that 30,000.

To be sure, for this exercise we have to advance on the assumption that each partner wants to evolve into a more effective entity capable of functioning on its own and more professional and successful in its particular art – in this case, warfare⁹ – and each entity wants the same for the

⁹ To imagine that the Afghan National Army leadership is anything but experts in the art of war – especially in that region – is as shortsighted as it is inaccurate. To fail to learn from their experiences is simply a mistake. My letter to the Editor of the *Army Magazine* tried to get to this point in response to the essay “What Goes On in Theater Stays in Theater?”: I wrote, “Joe Doty’s excellent . . . essay ‘What Goes on in Theater Stays in Theater?’ makes some critical observations, but an early assertion that we must qualify. He writes, ‘There is little argument that our current military force is more experienced, combat hardened, mentally agile, flexible, stronger, and technologically and tactically superior to any potential adversary.’ He goes on to write that ‘our leaders are becoming more confident and agile, but those gains cannot come at the cost of being humble [sic] . . .’ Actually, I’d argue – and hope that there is a great deal of argument – that we’re see some pretty combat hardened and tactically superior soldiers and officers among the ranks of our Afghan partners in Operation Enduring Freedom, at least, and we

other. It is a noble ideal, and perhaps idealistic, that we the United States, as a partner to another, walk away better for having engaged, as well.

In short, the word *partner* carries with it all the best connotations and some risk: it is about acknowledged equals working together to achieve a specific goal. In our case in Afghanistan, that goal is to build the Afghan army's capacity, to build its capability, to build the confidence of the Afghan National Army and the confidence of the Afghan people *in* their army. In our view back then, there was no question – they were our partners.

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Commander's Guidance

- Help give the Afghan people the opportunity to chart a new future
- Operate as trusted partners with the Afghan people and Afghan institutions
- Encourage the Afghan leadership to live up to their own values
- Use our capabilities to help US Government and international actors succeed
- Employ all available assets
- Seize and maintain the initiative; create and take advantage of opportunities
- Build Afghan capability to gain and sustain the momentum



Afghans Charting a New Future Key Leader Engagements Ongoing Construction

Beyond Rhetoric – Operating as Trusted Partners

The second directive of the CJTF82 Commander's Guidance established a clear vision for how his Task Force would go about business with the Afghans: "Operate as trusted partners with the Afghan people and Afghan institutions."¹⁰ This directive was second only to the charge to help "give the Afghan people the opportunity to chart a new future."¹¹

Our role, as stated in the directive, was to serve as partners in that endeavor, in pursuing that objective and providing an opportunity. In some of his last words to the Afghan people with whom we had partnered, Rodriguez reiterated, "In the final analysis, you will win this struggle.

cannot be so short-sighted as to think that our Afghan partners, Taliban, insurgents, and terrorist adversaries are necessarily less mentally agile, flexible, battle hardened or tactically superior in their own environments where it matters -- emphasis on 'their own environments.' Believing that, somehow, we are superior in every way as the observation suggests – that we know more about fighting the hard fight in the enemy's own territory – risks leadership that believes itself invincible, infallible, and characterized by anything but the humility necessary to interact productively and effectively with those who have, in fact, significantly more combat experience than most of us: it has been their life for decades, on their own ground, and they certainly understand the mentality of the enemy better than we do. . . . We can learn a tremendous amount from our perhaps not-so-technologically-advanced counterparts in the Afghan army, and we must really believe that we can learn from them. Patronizing, hollow gestures are quickly transparent and, understandably, insulting and detrimental to any progress we have made building relationships and operating as what we must: trusted partners who can help facilitate an Afghan solution to Afghan problems."

¹⁰ Post-Combined Joint Task Force – 82 rotation After Action Review slide, prepared for Joint Forces Command After Action Review that, finally, never occurred. The slide itself, however, is that CJTF-82 routinely used to describe its vision to visiting dignitaries, among others.

¹¹ Ibid.

You are the core of leadership around which this nation grows.”¹² The commander’s guidance made this notion clear: operate as trusted partners. It isn’t about us; it is about them.

We heard that phrase – trusted partners – again, and again, and again: it became something of a mantra: operate as trusted partners. It was not just a catchy phrase; it is how we were to do business. If we were unsure about a decision, that phrase reminded us of the perspective to adopt - how would you treat a partner – and this aided in developing a very clear idea of what that word *partner* meant. In truth, there was nothing ambiguous about it, and it was by this point, a doctrinal term, for those two operative words – trusted partners – explained to us how we relate to the Afghans, how we were to perceive the Afghans, what we were to expect of them and what we wanted the Afghans to expect from us. And – in effect – this meant that the Task Force subordinated itself to the Afghans - “The 4th Brigade of the 82nd is a subordinate formation to Colonel Khaliq and the 203rd Corps.”

Partnership, in this instance, means:

- Plan together.
- Seek the advice of partners throughout the planning process.
- Brief plans together, in both languages, privilege the Dari and Pashtu and then English.
- It is *their plan*.

The Task Force partnered at the battalion level, brigade level, and division-level; the CJ2 and his staff partnered with their G2 and his staff; our military police leadership and staff partnered with their Afghan National Police leadership and staff, from the division level down to the battalion and company level. Our division chaplain engaged their Army chaplain; our Command Sergeant Major their Sergeant Major of the Afghan Army. And so on. Our commanders briefed their organizational charts as depictions of their partnership with their counterparts, ensuring each element up and down the chain was partnered with the other. We welcomed liaison officers from the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police into our headquarters, gave them an appropriate office and means of communication and without compromising security protocol expected them to participate in our meetings and briefings. Without exaggeration and when practical, our partnered soldiers and officers lived together, fought together, and too often bled together. We helped look after their welfare because, in our view, we were one in the same: partners. It built trust.

“ . . . until we prove capable, with the help of our allies and Afghan partners, of safeguarding the population, we will never know a peaceful, prosperous Afghanistan.”
13

Given the opportunity, one might reinterpret Admiral Mullen’s important observation from 15 February 2009, at least for the sake of argument: “Until our Afghan partners prove capable, with the help of our allies and us, of safeguarding the population, we will never know a peaceful, prosperous Afghanistan.”

¹² Major General David M. Rodriguez, Prepared Remarks at the Regional Command – East & CJTF-82 Transfer of Authority, as prepared, April 10, 2008.

¹³ Admiral Mike Mullen, “Building Our Best Weapon,” Washington Post, February 15, 2009, B7.

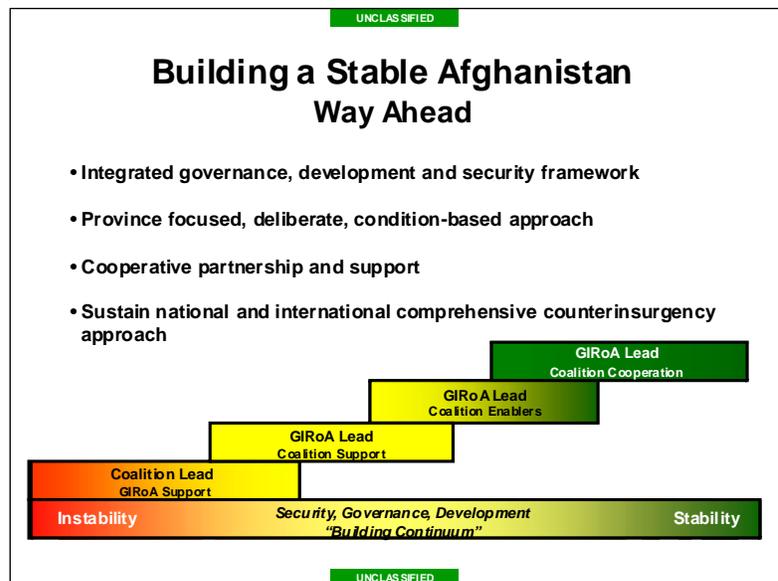
We know now that we cannot do it alone. And we are beginning to see that, in fact, *we* cannot do it at all – only an Afghan-heavy partnership that succeeds. Only the Afghans will win this contest.

Partnership – a proposed definition

A formally established, recognized, and sanctioned command and control relationship between or among elements at any echelon that combines and shares resources – material and intellectual – without constraint and that shares equal responsibility for devising plans, executing missions, and achieving objectives; eat, sleep, train, plan, brief, rehears, fight, and recover – together.

Building a Stable Afghanistan

After partnership, then what? The concept of partnership to which CJTF82 subscribed lent itself to an almost ready-made evolutionary framework. The objective of partnership from a security perspective is to build the capacity of the other partnered nation. Then, as our partner’s capacity grows, we progressively step back, leaving behind the enablers needed to continue to support the partner’s requirements and operations. As the environment evolves from unstable to more stable, and as the capacity of the partner country to secure itself and preserve that stability becomes more reliable and durable, the partner moves towards autonomy, though the partnership never completely evaporates.



A Few Final Words

Admiral Mullen describes in his February 13, 2009, *Washington Post* commentary “Building Our Best Weapon,” what he has witnessed in regards to the effects of partnership: “They are building schools, roads, wells, hospitals and power stations. They work every day to build the sort of infrastructure that enables local governments to stand on their own. But mostly, even when they are going after the enemy, they are building friendships. They are building trust.”¹⁴

A point for a latter discussion presents itself in those words: while partnership between our militaries – a very well-defined sort of partnership – must work its way into our doctrine and

¹⁴Mullen, Ibid.

consciousness, Admiral Mullen betrays a different shortfall in resources. His words remind that after Vietnam and the end of the Cold War we may have cut too deeply the ranks of civil servants in organization like the United States Agency for International Development professionals and the Department of State with the expectation that Soldiers can do it. And *they can. They have. But they shouldn't* – and this must be addressed – sooner than later.

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The views presented in this article are his own and do not represent the views of the U.S. Government or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

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