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Afghan military increases presence in southwest Afghanistan



A formation of nearly 500 Afghan National Army soldiers with 2nd Kandak, 1st Brigade, 207th Corps, listens to Brig. Gen. Abdul Wasea speak, June 16, 2012. Second Kandak, from Herat province, is replacing another unit as Marines and coalition partners shift to an advising role and Afghan forces take on more security responsibilities. STAFF SGT. BRIAN BUCKWALTER/DVIDS

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DELARAM, Afghanistan – Afghan military leaders are sending more of their soldiers to southwest Afghanistan to bolster their presence in a region known as a hotbed for insurgent activity.

Afghan National Army Brig. Gen. Abdul Wasea, commanding general, 2nd Brigade, 215th Corps, welcomed nearly 500 soldiers from 2nd Kandak, 1st Brigade, 207th Corps, to his area of operations, June 16. The soldiers recently traveled 200 miles from Herat to Delaram to train before heading to Washir district, 30 miles to the east of Delaram.

"I appreciate your service, and I welcome your arrival," Gen. Wasea, said to the formation in Pashto. He praised the unit for being professional and well-trained. The unit will be relieving another kandak already in the area.

"The (training) that our soldiers have, they are ready to fight against the enemy and serve and defend their country and bring peace and stability for this country," said Lt. Col. Mohammed Anwar, commander of the incoming kandak. "We want to fight against those enemies of peace that the people don't like."

During his speech, Gen. Wasea asked the soldiers to be mindful of how they treat civilians, saying that the previous ANA unit in Washir had a good relationship with the locals.

"Don't ruin the progress and achievements made by the soldiers that went before you," he said. "If we do, it will ruin the reputation of our unit, brigade and up to the corps."

In a counter-insurgency, Gen. Wasea said the ANA can lean upon the cooperation of civilians to point out buried improvised explosive devices and where the enemy is hiding.

He added that the cooperation of Afghan police forces is also critical. Although their training may differ, he said, their efforts have had positive effects in the region.

"They are fighting in the same trench as us," Gen. Wasea said. "Teach them and train them."

These words come as coalition forces – the ANA's teachers and trainers – shift their focus.

For several years, the Marine Corps has fought alongside their Afghan counterparts while training them to take control of the security situation. Marines and other coalition forces are now stepping back into an advising role. General Wasea said over the past three months, 70 percent of all the ANA's operations in the region were conducted independently from coalition forces.

Marine General John R. Allen, commander, International Security Assistance Force, recently visited the Marines and ANA at Forward Operating Base Delaram II to see this transition in action.

"Here is where it is working well, and I wanted to come and see it," he said during his June 14 visit. Even with the transition he promised that coalition forces "will be with you for a long time."

General Wasea noted the commitment of the Marines and coalition forces.

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"We inherited (this country) from our ancestors and we will return it to our children. This is our responsibility."

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