

May 19, 2008

Freedom Watch

AFGHANISTAN

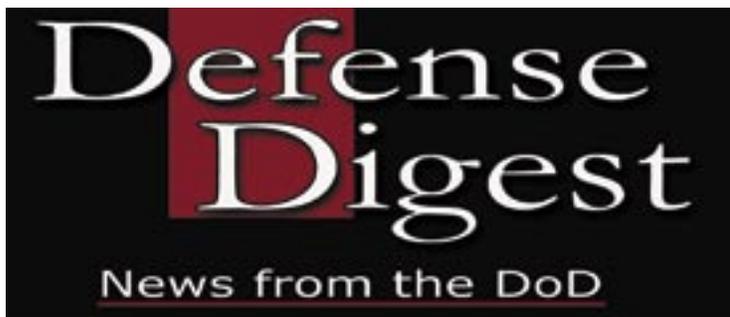
Operation Mountain

Highway II

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Afghanistan mission requires more NATO, international support, general says

By **Gerry J. Gilmore**

American Forces Press Service

U.S., NATO and Afghan forces' efforts are preventing Taliban insurgents and transnational terrorists from regaining a foothold in Afghanistan, but more support is required from NATO and the international community, a senior U.S. military officer told members of a local think tank in Washington, May 8.

"NATO has not failed, and I assure you that we are succeeding and we will continue to succeed" in Afghanistan, Army Gen. Bantz J. Craddock remarked during his speech at the Heritage Foundation.

However, NATO and the international community "can and must do more" to support the mission in Afghanistan, said Craddock.

NATO "has not yet completely filled" its agreed-to commitment of troops and capabilities to Afghanistan, Craddock said, noting there's still a shortage of key military functions and skills such as intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, communications and air support.

"Each nation has its own internal issues that it must address, but a completely resourced force sends a clear message to our adversary and to the Afghan people," Craddock explained. "And, the message is: NATO is committed to achieving success."

In addition, the more than 80 conditions of deployment, known as caveats, among NATO-member troops in Afghanistan reduce force flexibility and increases risk, Craddock noted.

Establishing peace and stability throughout Afghanistan is of paramount importance to U.S. and European security interests, Craddock said, noting the pace of globalization is causing many nations' economic and security needs to intersect.

"Just as economies are increasingly interdependent in our globalized world, our external and internal security is equally interwoven," Craddock explained.

"Afghanistan is a mission of necessity, rather than of choice," the four-star general emphasized.

Less than a decade ago, al-Qaida terrorists used Afghanistan as a training ground, Craddock recalled. Today, it's crucial "to ensure that the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan is

never again a place that transnational terrorists call home," Craddock said.

What occurs in Afghanistan also affects the Middle East and Asia, the general observed.

"One only need look at the borders of Afghanistan to recognize the complexity of the geopolitical situation," Craddock said. "Pakistan, Iran, China and the Muslim republics of the former Soviet Union are all affected by the situation in Afghanistan."

Therefore, "extremism and terrorism must not continue to threaten stability in the region or even beyond," Craddock said. NATO support in Afghanistan remains essential, he emphasized.

About 47,000 NATO International Security Assistance Force and U.S. troops are in Afghanistan, Craddock said. At last month's NATO summit in Bucharest, Romania, alliance members reaffirmed their long-term commitment to Afghanistan, he said. France announced it would send a battalion of troops to eastern Afghanistan, with additional contributions pledged by Poland and the Czech Republic.

Meanwhile, successful military operations conducted by Afghan army and NATO forces have compelled Taliban and al-Qaida terrorists to adopt hit-and-run tactics, Craddock observed.

So far in 2008, about 91 percent of insurgent activity has occurred within just 8 percent of Afghanistan's 396 districts, Craddock said.

The Afghan National Army continues to grow in numbers and capability, and increasingly is taking the lead in battles against terrorists, Craddock reported. Meanwhile, he added, efforts are continuing to improve the performance of Afghanistan's national police, which still lags behind the Afghan army.

"Police performance must be urgently enhanced," Craddock said. "Recent pay and structural reforms will help, but corruption, criminality and a lack of qualified leadership remain pressing issues."

The application of military or constabulary authority all by themselves cannot address all of Afghanistan's needs, Craddock said.

"Certainly, a military solution alone will not secure and stabilize the country of Afghanistan," Craddock said.

To date, more than 7,500 civil-military reconstruction projects have been launched across Afghanistan. "We're finally starting to see progress in the area of reconstruction and development," Craddock said.

Children's education programs are moving forward, he added, noting there are now more than 6 million students, 41 percent of them girls, who were not permitted to attend school under Taliban rule.

Afghanistan's child-mortality rate has been reduced by 25 percent since 2001, Craddock reported, noting that more than 16 million vaccinations have been administered to Afghan children over the last five years.

"So, NATO is making a difference in Afghanistan, but as I said, we can and must do more," Craddock said.

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COVER: Afghan National Army Sol-
diers and Paratroopers from Head-
quarters and Headquarters Troop, 1st
Squadron, 91st Cavalry Regiment (Air-
borne), walk across the Gowerdesh
Bridge during Operation Mountain
Highway II in Nuristan province, Af-
ghanistan, April 27. (U.S. Army photo by
Staff Sgt. Brandon Aird) See related story
on page 8.

BACK COVER: A Romanian soldier
is silhouetted by the early morning sun
as he preps for the day's patrol on top
of an armored personnel carrier at FOB
Masoud in Qalat, Zabul. (Photo by Roma-
nian photographer Florin Ghioca)

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Several insurgents killed in Helmand province

Story and photos courtesy Combined Joint Task Force-101

Several insurgents were killed May 8 during a Coalition forces operation to disrupt Taliban support operations in Helmand province.

Coalition forces searched compounds in Garmsir District, targeting a Taliban insurgent associated with weapons facilitation operations, including the procurement and smuggling of various types of small-arms, munitions, fuses and explosives.

During their search, Coalition forces were fired upon by an unknown number of insurgents from the compounds. Coalition forces responded with small arms and airstrikes, killing several of their attackers.

Numerous PK machine-guns, AK-47s, RPGs, mortar rounds, fuses, small-arms ammunition and ammunition vests were discovered on the compound. Coalition forces destroyed these items in place to prevent future use.



Dozens of 60mm mortar rounds were discovered in a Taliban insurgent's compound in Helmand province, May 8. Coalition Forces destroyed the ammunition to prevent its future use.

Afghanistan's only female governor meets with Coalition forces

By Army Pfc. Mary L. Gonzalez
CJTF-101 Public Affairs

Afghanistan's only female governor met with a top U.S. national security advisor at the governor's palace in Bamyan province, Afghanistan, May 9.

Gov. Habiba Sorabi, Bamyan province, met with Army Lt. Gen. Douglas Lute, assistant to President George W. Bush and Deputy National Security Advisor for Iraq and Afghanistan, and

Army Brig. Gen. James McConville, Combined Joint Task Force-101 Regional Command-East deputy commanding general for support.

The governor and generals discussed ongoing needs for the province and the progress they have made with the help of the New Zealand Provincial Reconstruction Team, TG CRIB 12, at Forward Operating Base Bamyan.

"In many provinces, there are problems between provincial council and lo-

cal government, but here, there is not," Sorabi said. "With the old system, the system of kings, they believed the people were slaves to them. With the new system, the democracy system, we believe we are the servants to the people."

According to Sorabi, the province's number one need is paved roads. Additionally, the province needs more electricity.

Still, the province is very politically stable, Sorabi commented.



Lt. Gen. Douglas Lute meets with Bamyan province Governor Habiba Sorabi, May 9

Coalition forces provide medical care in Nangarhar

By Army Sgt. Jessica R. Dahlberg
382nd Public Affairs

A Coalition medical team conducted medical screenings and provided routine treatment to 65 Afghan citizens, including 25 children, in Kama District, Nangarhar province, April 27.

Working with local leaders, the team set up a temporary treatment facility at a school in Mer Zert Kheyl village, while Afghan National Police and Coalition forces provided security. The team treated citizens suffering from various health conditions ranging from digestive disorders and eye problems to joint pain. In addition to medical treatment, the Coalition forces also provided free flour, rice and milk to the citizens.

“I found helping the Afghan people to be a rewarding experience,” said one service member who participated in the medical treatment operation. “Throughout almost 30 years of war and strife, the Afghans have remained proud and strong. It was a privilege to help them stay strong and healthy.”



A Coalition Doctor examines a young local boy's injured foot April 27

The Afghan Commando School

Story courtesy French Coalition forces

In November 2006 in Riga, France announced its contribution to the Afghan Special Forces training. The Afghan Commando School aims to train six kandaks (Afghan battalions) of 700 Special Forces soldiers each.

The ASF training course lasts 12 weeks and closely mirrors the U.S. Army Ranger training course. The program consists of infantry techniques and commando know-how, reconnaissance, attacks, ambushes and demolition of enemy travel routes.

Afghan instructors trained in Jordan in 2006, with U.S. and French forces leading the courses. A 20-French-soldier detachment ensured the mentoring of school instructors beside the U.S. forces.

French instructors monitor on several topics: close quarter battle, mortar firing, medical, signals, and explosives.

The current trainee battalion is

the 207th Corps of the Afghan National Army, located in Herat.

This training course will allow the ANA commandos to lead operations in their area of responsibility alone or under the command of the Afghan Ministry of Defence, and also in cooperation with Coalition forces.



photo by Jean-Yves Desbourdes

International seminar enhances Afghan, Coalition medics

By Army Sgt. Jessica R. Dahlberg
382nd Public Affairs

Medical leaders from Coalition forces and international medical organizations gathered at the Jirga Center, May 5, for an all-day seminar to discuss infectious diseases, which plague the Afghan population.

The speakers at the seminar were Afghanistan medical experts from the Ministry of Public Health in Kabul and the World Health Organization.

“The purpose of this seminar is to train U.S. and Coalition doctors to treat Afghans the Afghan way,” said Army Lt. Col. Mendalose Harris, CJTF-101 Public Health nurse.

The first speaker was Dr. Ahmad Jan Naeem, Director of Policy and Planning at the Ministry of Public Health.

“Infectious disease control is very important because most of the mortalities in Afghanistan are a result of infectious diseases,” said Naeem.

Dr. Sha Muhamad Rahim, a staff officer at the Ministry of Public Health, spoke of five strategies being developed to combat infectious disease.

“The Ministry of Public Health is going to strengthen their resources so they are better prepared for an epidemic and can respond more quickly,” he said. “The ministry wants to develop the infrastructure of Afghanistan to extend to more rural areas of Afghanistan and develop a risk communication plan.”

“There are challenges when trying to accomplish these strategies,” said Rahim. “Some areas are deemed unsafe for medical personnel and the difficult terrain of Afghanistan makes rural areas hard to access. Also, the lack of females on the medical staff makes it hard to treat the female population.”

The system currently being used is the Disease Early Warning System and it services all provinces. The DEWS system is used to collect information about certain diseases and provide aid.

“Last year, DEWS detected 165 outbreaks,” said Dr. Nanjibullah Assadi, Ministry of Public Health DEWS Internal Coordinator.

Tuberculosis, malaria and leishmaniasis were the three main diseases discussed at the seminar. All three can be detected by DEWS.

“The Ministry of Public Health would like to reduce the global burden of tuberculosis by 2015,” said Dr. Hamid Hassan Momand, the National TB/HIV Collaboration Officer. “The Ministry



U.S. Army photo by Pvt. Tamara Gabbard

of Public Health considers tuberculosis a priority and the organization plans to ensure access for diagnosis and treatment for each patient, while reducing deaths and the disease.”

“Malaria is another high-priority infectious disease,” said Dr. Najibullah Safi, the Ministry of Public Health Leishmaniasis and Malaria Program chief. “The population’s of Afghanistan most at risk for malaria is the percentage of the population living at 2000 meters below sea level and the population that cultivates rice. Also, leishmaniasis cases have risen in the last 10-15 years because of political instability, sporadic diagnosis and treatment of cases and the absence of vector controlled activities,” said Safi.

These three infectious diseases, along with others, are taking their toll on the Afghan population. The infectious disease seminar gave the Afghanistan Ministry of Public Health an opportunity to explain to the Coalition forces and international medical organizations, how they operate and plan to expand in the future. This information encourages teamwork among medical personnel, resulting in better health care for the Afghanistan population.



U.S. Army photo by Pvt. Tamara Gabbard

Reapers combined in Afghanistan

By Tech. Sgt. James Law
455th AEW Public Affairs

One year after its first training mission at Creech Air Force Base, Nev., the MQ-9 Reaper is well engrained in combat operations. Since taking flight for the first time here in October 2007, Reapers have flown more than 320 missions and 2,400 combat hours throughout Afghanistan, providing close-air-support and precision engagement.

The unit contributing to this effort is the 42nd Expeditionary Attack Squadron, a combined unit with Reapers from the U.S. Air Force and the United Kingdom's Royal Air Force.

"It's awesome working with the Brits," said Maj. John Myers, 42nd EATKS commander. "We work well together."

"We have split crews. We have a British pilot and an American sensor operator and another crew is an American pilot and a British sensor operator," said Myers. "We are truly integrated, even down to the crew level."

Myers explained the



combined unit pilots the unmanned aircraft during launch and landing on a flightline in Afghanistan and turns control of the Reaper over to personnel at Creech AFB after it has reached altitude.

"Our main mission is to launch and recover airplanes that are flown primarily from the states from the MCE, or mission control element," said Myers. "The units we support at Creech are the 42nd Attack Squadron and the 39th Squadron, which is a RAF squadron."

Although the unit's inventory consists of aircraft from both countries,



Photos by Air Force Master Sgt. Demetius Lester



there is no distinction between which Reapers the pilots fly.

"From here I fly both the American airplanes and the British ones," said Flight Lieutenant Swainston, a RAF MQ-9 pilot. "I enjoy it."

Swainston said the relationship between the two air forces was symbiotic.

"It's great working alongside another nation; we get to see how two different doctrines approach the same airframe," said Swainston. "The Brits get to see how the Americans operate and the Americans get to see how the Brits operate."

In addition to piloting the aircraft during take off and landing, the 42nd EATKS also provides air-base defense and close air support for units in the vicinity.

Larger and more powerful than the MQ-1 Predator, the Reaper is designed to provide the very essence of modern-day persistent Air Power: that 'unblinking eye' which provides actionable intelligence for our decision-makers, as well as proportionate and precise firepower in defense of Afghan and Coalition forces.

"I can tell you it's not unmanned; it's a lot of work," said Myers. "But the reward is great. Other than being in the cockpit and being out over the battlefield, this is the next best thing... being here."

Operation Mountain Highway II de

By Army Staff Sgt. Brandon Aird
173rd ABCT Public Affairs

Soldiers from 1st Squadron, 91st Cavalry Regiment (Airborne) and Legion Company, 1st Battalion, 503rd Infantry Regiment (Airborne), teamed with the Afghan National Army and the Afghan Border Police to conduct Operation Mountain Highway II, in eastern Nuristan province, Afghanistan, recently.

Operation Mountain Highway II started April 22 when Soldiers from International Security Assistance Force and the ANA simultaneously air-assaulted at night onto three mountains above Gowerdesh Bridge.

Afghan and U.S. Soldiers created observation posts Mace, Hatchet and Brick, which enabled the ABP and ANA to drive up from the south and seize the Gowerdesh Bridge April 26.

“It was very in-depth, synchronized, air-assault to get everybody in,” said Army Capt. John Williams, commander of Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 1st Squadron, 91st Cavalry Regiment (Airborne). “Over four months of planning were put into this operation.”

During the four-month planning phase, ABP were retrained on weapons, vehicle searches, first aid and reacting to contact, said Army Capt. Kafi Gwira, an ABP embedded tactical trainer from Chicago. The ABP were also issued new uniforms, weapons, ammunition and equipment for the operation.

“We got them ready to seize the bridge for good this time,” said Gwira. “The ABP will now maintain a presence at the bridge at all times.”

The ANA built three local observation posts near the bridge during the first few days of the operation, which were handed over to the ABP a few days later.

“The reason why this bridge is so critical is that its one of the last ones left for insurgents to use,” said Williams. “If they can’t use the Gowerdesh Bridge, this severely limits their capabilities in this area.”

According to Williams the bridge is part of a route used by insurgents to travel from Pakistan into the interior of Afghanistan.

Last summer, insurgents drove off the ABP and destroyed their security check point. The Gowerdesh Bridge has been a key altercation point between insurgents and Afghan forces over the last year. Numerous fire-fights between ISAF and insurgents have occurred near the bridge.

“They need strong positions, which is why we provided the engineers to build the bunker positions at the bridge,” said Williams. “They also needed local OP’s, which we’re building near the bridge. So now, we can see all the area around us. The enemy can’t come here unimpeded like they have been.”

ISAF will continue to operate two of three larger observation posts to support the ABP, but once the bunkers and fighting positions are built the ABP will take over operations at Gowedesh Bridge.

According to Williams, Operation Mountain Highway II is an ongoing operation, but it’s already considered a great success.

“Since we have secured this bridge, we can now bring development to this region,” said Williams. “We can fix the road and bring economic and government development here. The insurgents have lost the upper hand in this area.”



als blow to insurgents



U.S. Army photos by Army Staff Sgt. Brandon Aird

COMBAT OUTPOST CONSTRUCTION CONTRIBUTES TO COUNTER-INSURGENCY FIGHT

By Army Capt. Ashley Dellavalle
Task Force Rugged Public Affairs

Army Engineers completed the construction of a combat outpost on the Afghan-Pakistan border to reduce insurgent attacks there.

For Task Force Pacemaker Soldiers, the process started by coordinating with the Afghans to secure where the new COP would be built. The Margah Village of Eastern Paktika province was the unanimous choice.

The construction facilitates a key tenant of the counter-insurgency fight by allowing ground forces to interact with the local people, as well as separate the enemy in historical border-infiltration areas.

Bravo Company, 864th Engineer Battalion, also known as the Bulldogs of TF Pacemaker, spent their first days of construction pounding pickets into the rocky mountainside less than a few kilometers from the Pakistan border.

This task challenged the Soldiers endurance, resilience and determination with altitude, steep terrain and rock rigidity.

Next, the Soldiers blasted the mountain with more than 300 pounds of explosives to carve the mountain-top into suitable grounds for a base.

Understanding that the enemy was watching and an attack could commence at any moment, the engineers assembled the base walls out of hesco bastions, wire baskets filled

with dirt, and then began construction on the guard towers. While some worked on the towers, others built fortified living and working areas.

“Incredible...really impressive,” said Col. Marty Schweitzer, the Task Force Fury commander in charge of ground forces in the area.

Elders of a neighboring village were thankful the COP was moved away from their district center.

“It is a very good thing that you are moving the COP up onto the top of the hill,” said one village elder. “When the bad guys attack the COP now, we aren’t stuck in the middle. Thank you for doing this very good thing.”

U.S. Army courtesy photos



24th Marine Expeditionary Unit goes outside the wire

(Marine Convoy cont. from last issue)
By Marine Cpl. Randall A. Clinton
24th MEU Public Affairs

Making it real

While officially named mission 001 and 002, the Marines of Battalion Landing Team 1/6 hesitate to use a word that conjures memories of their firefights inside of Iraq's worst neighborhoods. So the name might be a misnomer, but delve deeper into the psyche of these men and you find that putting boot to ground, or in this case powder-thin dust, is an important threshold to cross.

Week after week, more Marines arrive at the base. More Marines wait for the call from their commander, or-

dering the start of operations. When the time came for the first contingent of Marines to break from the weapons maintenance, acclimation hikes and rules of engagement classes, the question of if they wanted to go never came up – this is what Marines do. They were going.

"Today was just a test fire of 204's and 50 cal (machine guns)," said 1st Lt. Micah Steinfeld, executive officer, Alpha Co., BLT 1/6, 24th



MEU, ISAF.

Steinfeld is cautious about calling this a mission, comparing this to the hornet's nest these Marines walked into during their last deployment to Iraq would be unthinkable, but this was the first chance for his Marines to get outside the camp.

"The more you can push Marines out, get them talking to the local people, the more they start to comprehend what is actually going on out here. The closer they get to the enemy and civilian populations, two very different things, I think the more real this becomes... the more real their sacrifice becomes," he explained.

Next week's issue **Butterflies and Bullets**

THE BARISTA BLEND

MONDAY NIGHTS



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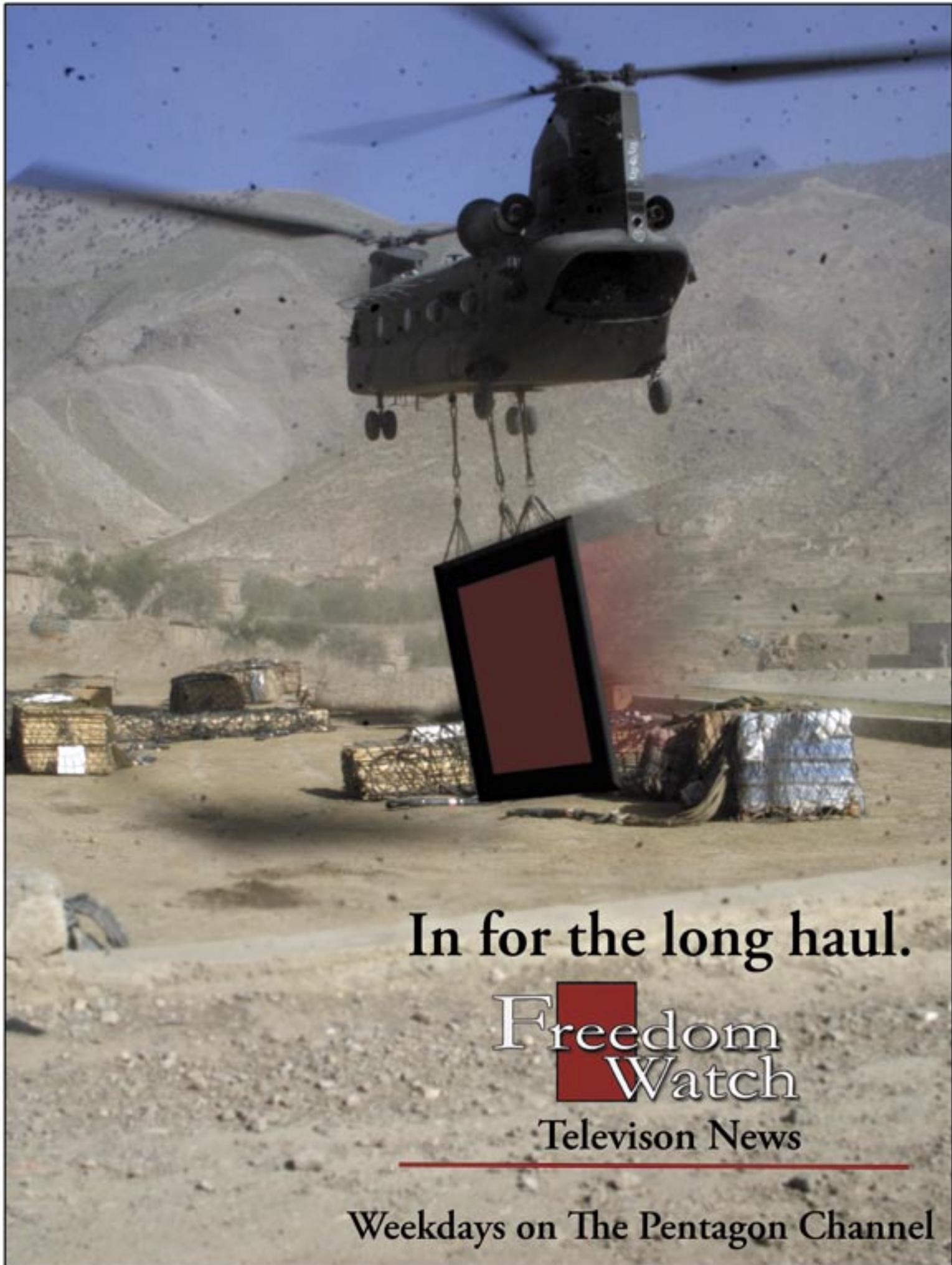
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hits you've never heard of...

and some you know by heart



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Soldiers, Airmen lend helping hand, hone Afghan National Police skills

By Army Sgt. Jessica R. Dahlberg
382 Public Affairs Detachment

The sound of idling humvees resonated in the air as the Parwan Police Mentoring Team commander briefed his team on mission-related convoy operations. Once orders were received and the brief concluded, the team mounted up and prepared to roll; their mission destination – Dandar, a small village in the Parwan province of Afghanistan.

Army Capt. Mark Moeckli and his team rolled out of Bagram Air Field and embarked on a scenic and treacherous journey over winding mountain roads. Their task was to train Afghanistan National Police in Dandar, a small village in Parwan province on hand-to-hand combat, community policing, coordination-cell training and criminal investigation.

Moeckli's team brings an array of military occupational specialties. "With their expertise combined, they made a highly-skilled and effective team – ready to tackle the task of teaching the ANP the necessary skills to remain effective," said Moeckli who added, "some of the Afghan people do bad things, but most of the Afghan people want to see the Taliban gone and their country safe – just like we do."

"We took it upon ourselves to give these training classes," said Army Capt. Donald Young, Idaho National Guard and PMT leader. "The PMT is a highly efficient team of Soldiers and Airmen who teach a variety of classes based upon the needs of the police in each district." The team is charged with training ANP in two provinces and 17 districts.

"The training is very good for us," said Dawa Jan, ANP officer. "Our main goal is security and the classes the Americans give us help prepare us for that Goal."

During the hands-on portion of the class, Tech. Sgt.



Army Sgt. Justin Koers shows an Afghan National Police officer how to correctly execute a physical-apprehension-restraint technique at Dandar village in the Parwan province, Afghanistan, May 8.



U.S. Army photos by Army Sgt. Jessica R. Dahlberg

Tech. Sgt. Chris Padron demonstrates a physical-apprehension-restraint technique for the Afghanistan National Police as part of a hands-on-training class held at Dandar village, in the Parwan province, Afghanistan, May 8. Padron also taught ANP officers how to control access to resources.

Chris Padron, deployed from Cannon Air Force Base, N.M., coached ANP officers and gave them useful tips to help master the techniques. "I love doing what I do," said Padron. "Teaching the Afghanistan National Police has been a great experience."

Becoming an ANP officer is not an easy task, explained one officer. At minimum, applicants must have a high school education, go through testing and then attend a six-week course at one of the country's four academies.

Their training is augmented by U.S. forces, which help the ANP retain the training they received at the academy. "It is good for my policemen to learn from the Americans," said Farazie. "They have improved greatly since the Americans have come to teach them."

The PMT travels all over Parwan province and coaches ANP officers in an effort to meet the goal of enabling the ANP to function effectively, without the assistance of Coalition forces. "We want to make the Afghanistan National Police sufficient because in the end, it's not about us, it's all about them," said Young.

Photos From the Field

By Romanian photographer Florin Ghioca



A Romanian soldier plays with a puppy before heading out on the day's mission from FOB Masoud. The dog is also named Masoud and was adopted by the Romanians.



Have a photo you'd like to see in
Freedom Watch Afghanistan?

freedomwatch@swa.army.mil

Troops of Regional Command Capital conduct more than \$2 million worth of reconstruction projects in Kabul, concentrated in remote areas of the Afghan capital.



Courtesy Photo

Photo by WO1 Charles Brown



Spc. Royal, B Co 96th, Attack Systems Repair Platoon conducts routine maintenance on an AH-64D Longbow Helicopter at Bagram Air Field in mid April.

Soldiers from the 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team train Afghan National Army Soldiers how to medevac casualties April 28.



U.S. Army Photo



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