

Phantom Forces II

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On Tuesday, Senate Armed Services Chairman Carl Levin (D-Mich.) [told reporters](#) ^[3] he endorses a proposal to expand the Afghan National Police (ANP) and the Afghan National Army (ANA) beyond their standing targets, 134,000 officers and 171,000 soldiers respectively. But apparently someone forgot that with increased end-strength comes the need to build more countrywide logistical infrastructure.

The NATO-led training mission (NTM-A/CSTC-A)* will devote \$11.4 billion through FY 2012 for the construction of nearly 900 Afghan National Security Force (ANSF) facilities, including training centers, air corps installations, supply depots, et cetera. Presumably, to ensure the most efficient use of funding, CSTC-A would want to formulate a plan detailing what facilities are needed, how resources are prioritized, and where potential waste can be minimized. But, lo and behold, no such plan exists.

A [recent audit](#) ^[4] by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) found that without a construction and maintenance plan, CSTC-A risks building ANSF facilities that are “inadequate or do not meet ANSF strategic and operational needs.” Of course, “inadequate” and “do not meet...needs” are euphemisms for the fraud and waste endemic to foreign-led stabilization and reconstruction. But none of this is new. In fact, [previous audits](#) ^[4] of construction contracting have shown that “CSTC-A was not able to document the U.S. plans and *justification* for the number and types of ANA facilities, including documents delineating the size, location, or use of the garrisons.” [Emphasis added.]

Several problems are worth mentioning.

The first is that much of the conflict is in reaction to the very Afghan government that the United States seeks to expand. For example, in Helmand province, President Hamid [Karzai has rewarded](#) ^[5] sub-tribes within his dominant Durrani

Pashtun confederation (including Alokozai, Popalzai, and Barakzai) with district governor positions, police chief posts, appointments in the intelligence service, and other critical government departments. Meanwhile, in neighboring Kandahar, many fighters also come from communities and tribes systematically excluded from the Karzai-appointed local government. In this respect, increasing Afghan recruitment numbers will do nothing to address the problem of group disempowerment—much less tackle the complex blend of other intangible motives that spur many people to fight.

A second and closely related problem is that too few Afghans trust law enforcement, especially in rural subsistence areas. When Afghans want to resolve an inter-communal dispute, many of them turn not to corrupt government courts, which demand exorbitant bribes, but instead they go to a local mullah, who may or may not moonlight for the Taliban, but who nevertheless delivers swift justice. Despite what U.S. officials would have us believe, Afghan security forces will be useless without effective rule of law, and any strategy that ignores this is doomed to fail.

The third and perhaps most critical problem for which troop training fails to account is that the Government of Afghanistan lacks the financial capacity to pay for the massive security apparatus the coalition is foisting upon it. On average, police officers and soldiers now make \$165 a month; forces serving in more dangerous areas get an additional \$75. [6] Even a low-end cost projection would bring security funding to \$39.6 billion, and that's just to pay for salaries. Keep in mind that Afghanistan's GDP is roughly \$14 billion. The Afghan government already spends almost half of its yearly \$1 billion revenue on security; thus, it is conceivable that the United States will be forced to pay the lion's share of a financial burden that may continue through 2025 [4].

In Washington, war proponents insist that the international community can and should train Afghans to protect their own country, but rarely do these proponents recognize the role of prolonged foreign patronage in undermining that outcome.

* NTM-A/CSTC-A = NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan/Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan