

The Unnoticed Surge in Afghan Security

THE FOLLOWING OP-ED, WRITTEN BY GEN. WILLIAM B. CALDWELL IV RECENTLY APPEARED IN THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE.

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A little known but potentially decisive story developing in Afghanistan is the "surge of Afghans," that is, how Afghan men and women have swelled the ranks of the Afghan National Security Forces to levels more than double the U.S. surge.

Since Dec. 1, 2009, when President Barack Obama announced the surge of 30,000 U.S. troops, more than 79,000 Afghans have committed to serve their country. Over the past year, these young Afghans have put their lives at risk volunteering to serve their country. In a little over a year, the Afghan National Security Forces has grown to more than 270,000 from 191,000, a 42 percent expansion. The Afghan National Army increased by 57 percent to more than 152,000 from 97,000.

This story comes at a decisive point in the decade-long struggle to secure Afghanistan against the existence of transnational terrorists. While the international community has expended tremendous blood and treasure for this just cause, the remarkable story of the surge of Afghans, of a people committing themselves to defend their country, is a reason to hope for a successful long-term outcome.

Plagued by the lack of international funding and focus since the Taliban's fall, Afghanistan's security situation began spiraling downward in 2005. Meanwhile, the Afghan National Security Force's numbers were insufficient to secure the population against anti-government forces and transnational terrorists; consequently, the Afghan army and police force levels actually declined in the months preceding the renewed U.S. commitment. When

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Obama fully committed to the war with additional troops and increased funding, the foundations were laid for growth in the Afghan National Security Force. In the time that it took U.S. forces to reach the committed 30,000 in Afghanistan, the ranks of the Afghan army and police swelled by more than 79,000 men and women.

A key facilitator of growth and quality has been the NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan. Activated by NATO in November 2009, NTM-A was built upon the existing framework of the U.S. Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan. The U.S. transition command was responsible for training and building the Afghan National Security Forces. However, the transition command in Afghanistan was undermanned and under-resourced. NTM-A brought with it the necessary inputs: sufficient resources (\$1 billion per month in funding); the right people (an infusion of more experienced personnel in greater numbers including the upgrade of the commander to a three-star general experienced in training armies); and an effective training strategy. NTM-A was able to build the foundation of a professional security force, to include the necessary facilities, increased trainers, proper pay scales, and systems and processes for the Afghans to grow their security forces. However, there can be no progress toward growing and building Afghan security forces without the Afghan people themselves.