

Behind the Afghan National Police Force

'It's up to the Afghans to take control of their future...'

May 13, 2011

COLONEL WILLIAM V. WENGER currently serves as Senior Advisor, Afghanistan Uniform Police, Ass't CG - Police Development and began his long and distinguished military career in 1969 when he was commissioned through ROTC at the University of California at Santa Barbara. In October 2000, Col. Wenger retired ... for a short while anyway (he returned to service on four separate occasions).

Unfortunately, (and I hope Col. Wenger will forgive me), space doesn't allow me to list all of the billets and commands Colonel Wenger has held, nor does it allow me to list all of the awards and accomplishments he has earned over his forty-plus years of dedicated and exceptional service to our nation. There are many.

You should know, however, that he has served with Airborne, Ranger, Special Forces, Infantry, Armor and Intelligence, and seven joint service assignments. Col. Wenger, a real estate executive in civilian life, has commanded at every level of the Army—from platoon to Joint Brigade equivalent as well as the California Army National Guard. He's served during operations DESERT SHIELD/STORM, multiple tours in OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM and Afghanistan during OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM. From July 2008 to Oct. 2009, he volunteered to serve again in OIF as Chief of Staff, Directorate of Interior Affairs, Ministry of Interior Transition Team, and then served as Director of Iraq Transition and Advisory Team – Ministry of Interior, a Brigadier General assignment. In 2010, Col. Wenger volunteered again to serve in Afghanistan.

I wanted to share this with you because the difficult job of helping to fulfill the goal of establishing and transitioning to a well-trained and professionally led Afghan National Police force (ANP) requires someone who is up to the challenging task of turning around an infamously corrupt and inept organization formally bereft of competent leadership and loaded with systematic problems, from the top-down.

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Structurally, one of the biggest problems facing the ANP is that the majority of all Afghan police were recruited and assigned to duty without any formal training. In essence, because of the sense of need, it ended up being about numbers, resulting in a force rife with unsavory types who oftentimes preyed upon or abused the Afghan citizenry and were not paid a living wage, resulting in an extremely high attrition rate.

NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan (NTM-A) implemented a new model, which now provides workable wages, makes training mandatory for all police recruits and puts a premium on literacy as "the basis for professional law enforcement personnel." Not only that, NTM-A worked with Afghans to establish leadership training courses and introduce innovative classes on domestic violence, sexual abuse prevention and women integration.

The new model produced results and recruiting numbers appear to be ahead of projections for all types of ANP, currently standing at about 125,000 with an expected cap of more than 150,000 by fall of 2012.

It's up to the Afghans to take control of their future. We can't do it for them. It's up to them to ultimately carry the weight for ensuring a stabilized and secure Afghanistan. A professional police force is key to accomplishing that. Of course, many challenges remain before a totally professional, enduring and self-sustaining police force can be fully in place. As I said earlier, it requires someone who is up to the task to make it happen. I'd say selecting Col. Wenger for the job put the right man, in the right place, at the right time.

—Jerry Newberry