

Afghan Local Police – Lessons In Drawing Down a Security Force Assistance Mission¹
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Executive Summary

Coalition and U.S. forces in Afghanistan are actively consolidating gains and moving to a more centralized operational footprint. As the Coalition shrinks in size, the optimization of Train Advise and Assist (TAA) efforts demands an accounting of Security Force Assistance (SFA) programs like the Afghan Local Police (ALP). The ALP story is analogous of the upcoming reductions in Coalition forces; despite years of collaborative work and engagement, gaps remain in the Afghan Government's ability to secure their country and the Coalition's capacity to understand and assist in filling those gaps continues to wane. As the Coalition looks to the future, the inception, growth, and ultimate dissolution of the ALP program is instructive. As we examine the ALP, two lessons are clear: that SFA programs' tactical successes must be tied to strategic goals and that senior leaders responsible for oversight must ensure there is sustained control of these programs until their culmination or transition to the host nation.

ALP flourished under the focus and attention of senior Coalition and Afghan leadership for several years. In 2014 the ALP transitioned to Afghan control as the Coalition looked for options to reduce the military presence in Afghanistan. The Afghan Ministry of Interior (MoI) took responsibility of the ALP program despite having neither the internal nor external mechanisms to manage the program. In 2020 the ALP program funding culminated along with the advisory structures that started to shrink in advance of the U.S. and Taliban agreement. Meanwhile, the Government of Afghanistan, who were primarily focused on the COVID outbreak and the Taliban, put only a cursory planning effort into closing down the program.

Conducting a thorough analysis of the ALP is challenging because there are few consistent metrics on impacts to the security environment and the general reputation of the ANDSF. Therefore, much of the qualitative data on the ALP is partial or from first-hand accounts. In this paper, we address three clear contributing factors that led to the ALP program's inauspicious end: poorly applied parameters for success and scaling of the program, a reliance on individual continuity rather than a strategy for long-term implementation, and inconsistent senior leader engagement that led to the eventual dissolution of the ALP.

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Introduction

In 2010, United States Special Operations Forces, in support of the International Security Assistance Force, formed the ALP to create and maintain security at the local level. Similar efforts were tried before, in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere, but as experienced by the Soviet Union in the 1970s, and the British in the 1800s, Afghanistan has a unique set of political, religious, and social circumstances. Afghans adhere to a tribal construct that prioritizes local leaders and customs over any national government and is highly distrusting of any outside influence, meaning that local solutions are favored because it is sourced from and resembled a construct that was intrinsic to the culture. ALP was one of a series of locally established security programs intended to harness the strengths of these cultural differences.

The idea for ALP stemmed from classic counter-insurgency doctrine where, foundationally, security must begin at a local level for governance to exist and flourish.² The origin of the ALP program was a “bottom up” approach to security, based on Village Stability Operations (VSO) executed by Special Operations Forces (SOF). VSO married Coalition local security goals with tribal ideology and tactical methodology that the Afghan people used to defend their homeland for hundreds of years from foreign incursion.³ Similar attempts at local security that preceded the ALP program attempted to harness Afghan adherence to village and local customs, but typically lost favor or momentum when expanded beyond the village or district level.⁴ Indeed, even the commander of U.S. Special Operations in Afghanistan was forced to admit that previous SFA efforts often failed because they were not reflective of Afghan tribal culture, unsynchronized, or too focused on offensive operations rather than the defense.⁵

Good tactics don’t make up for strategic shortcomings. Though there were some successes as a local security force, when the ALP program expanded throughout the country, problems became evident. Some of these problems were a result of incongruities between traditional Afghan culture and society and the westernized governance model the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) was attempting to follow. In some cases, ALP colluded with local warlords to use their newfound empowerment from the government to conduct illegal activity. Linda Robinson notes that areas where ALP “...supported each other...were well led, and where provincial police chiefs ensured the flow of logistical support...” the program saw success.⁶ Instead, the pace of production was arbitrarily increased and problems quickly arose; namely in the recruiting from tribes or villages outside of where ALP guardians⁷ operated; a violation of one of the central precepts of locally-grown security programs. This method of recruiting and employment reflected the extent to which eligible populations and the area’s most

² Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 3-24: Counterinsurgency, Washington, D.C.: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2013.

³ Interview with BG (ret) Don Bolduc on 4 April 2020.

⁴ Kristoffer T. Mills. (13 December 2013). *Village Stability Operations in Afghanistan: Comparing Past Counterinsurgencies for Future Operations*. Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College.

⁵ Robinson, Linda. 2013. *One Hundred Victories: Special Ops and the Future of American Warfare*. <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10767374> (13).

⁶ Robinson, Linda. 2013. *One Hundred Victories: Special Ops and the Future of American Warfare*. <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10767374> (254).

⁷ The term for an entry level member for the ALP was “Guardian” similar to “Soldier” for the Army.

in need diverged, especially in the later years. Issues continued, including violations of Robinson's three focus areas, and the program slowly fell out of favor.

As the Resolute Support mission begins to optimize following the March 2020 agreement between the United States and the Taliban and funding for Afghan National Defense Forces (ANDSF) wanes, the lessons learned from the dissolution effort serve as a guide for how to divest or reduce Coalition forces from blanket sustainment of Afghan security forces. This paper examines the history of ALP and its Security Force Assistance (SFA) predecessors that led to the formation of the ALP. As the Coalition optimizes, examining the ALP successes and failures gives insight to how the program earned a mixed reputation and how to avoid missteps in the challenges to come. This paper examines the decision to defund the ALP and the subsequent dissolution planning effort that followed. In the final sections, we review some of the reactions to the dissolution order from the Coalition and the Afghans, and explore what the lifecycle of the ALP program portends for other SFA programs moving forward.

Local Security Efforts Prior to the ALP

Local security efforts prior to the 2010 creation of the ALP focused on locally recruited and trained programs. The Coalition, responsible for enforcing the peace and fostering the nascent security and governance capabilities, would often create zones of security from the local populace to ensure local allegiance and generate a sense of ownership. In many cases, mission creep and reprioritization of resources would cause those security efforts to fail.

There are two key issues that the United States faced in Afghanistan, both affecting the ALP. First, nothing in Afghanistan works in a vacuum, which is a result of 40 years of ongoing conflict and the almost continuous impacts brought about by foreign actors. Second, Afghanistan does not scale through traditional methods; that which works in one area cannot be expanded to work in another due to cultural, familial, or geographical limitations. Tens of millions of dollars in development programs contributed very little to the overall security of Afghanistan. Local security and development projects still enjoyed some success, but very rarely were scaled up with lasting results.

The Afghanistan National Auxiliary Police's (ANAP) creation in 2006 was a reactionary effort by the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to stem the growing influence of the Taliban-led insurgency at the local level. ANAP was focused on recruiting in and around the 124 high-risk districts, mainly in the south and some in the southeast. The training and organization proved to be inadequate, providing only ten days of training and yearly contracts. The ANAP was the first coordinated effort by the Coalition and GIRoA to address the deteriorating security situation at the local level.⁸

⁸Mathieu Lefèvre, "Local Defence in Afghanistan: A Review of Government-Backed Initiatives" (Kabul: Afghanistan Analysts Network, 2010), p 2. Andrew Wilder, "Cops or Robbers? The Struggle to Reform the Afghan National Police" (Kabul, Afghanistan: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2007), p 13-14.

ANAP grew faster than existing supervision or control measures could manage, encouraging fraud and abuse; namely ghost soldiers⁹ and payroll graft. There were reports from Coalition forces that the ANAP was used as militia for various regional and local powerbrokers, thereby undercutting the security for the local population for the interests of the powerbrokers. The Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan (LOTFA),¹⁰ an International Community funded trust, would not assist with funding because of the varied training standards for the ANAP. Ultimately, the program had minimal support and limited legitimacy among donor nations and, eventually, ANAP shut down in 2008. Unfortunately, little documentation of the mistakes and challenges of the program exists.¹¹ In the case of the ANAP, unclear operational goals and training standards, as well as the failure to build the institutional capacity for sustainment, plagued the program until its dissolution.

On the heels of the ANAP shutdown, a new program emerged called the Afghan Public Protection Program or AP3.¹² Like the other programs examined in this paper, AP3 was a locally recruited and developed security force that began in eastern Afghanistan. AP3 fell victim to the sponsorship of specific personalities and made compromises to create “success” and expand the program past its original intent. These compromises included adjusting or ignoring recruiting standards and relying on locally established training methods to ensure continuity. AP3 began in 2009 as a local security project of General David McKeirnan, the ISAF Commander, but lost its sponsor when GEN McKeirnan was replaced by Secretary of Defense Robert Gates later that year with General Stanley McChrystal.¹³

In 2010, the AP3 program oversight began to wane. Recruits from differing regions across Afghanistan joined local police units, diluting the localized interest of the individual security forces. With less oversight, some local leaders took advantage of the lack of oversight with business practices that eroded the trust of local Afghans and the Coalition. In one area, a former Taliban commander rose to become a recognized leader; delegitimizing the program in the eyes of the local population along with some in the international community. Around this time, ISAF started to transition the Afghan National Army (ANA) to a national security force with a nation-

⁹ The term “ghost soldier” describes a soldier that is on the unit rolls but never shows. In many cases a leader within the ghost soldier’s chain of command will take the payroll funds. In some cases a soldier will get the money without having performed any work, but with a portion withheld by leaders.

¹⁰ LOTFA offered an opportunity for non-NATO states to contribute as LOTFA was funded through the United Nations Development Program. This allowed nations such as Japan, Finland, Switzerland, the Republic of Korea, and others.

¹¹ Lefèvre, “Local Defence in Afghanistan,” p 2. Wilder, “Cops or Robbers?” p 13-14.

¹² AP3 is often confused with the Afghan Public Protection Force (APPF) due to both programs being created during roughly the same time period. While each program had some similar goals the methodology behind each program was dramatically different. The APPF was formed out of an effort by Afghan President Hamid Karzai to create a centralized authority over private security contractors, who were largely composed of powerbroker’s security guards. AP3, however, was a program focused on the development of security at the local level, primarily in Wardak and Logar provinces. Moshe Schwartz, “The Department of Defense’s Use of Private Security Contractors in Afghanistan and Iraq: Background, Analysis, and Options for Congress,” Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 13 May 2011).

¹³ Lisa Saum-Manning, “VSO/ALP: Comparing Past and Current Challenges to Afghan Local Defense” (RAND National Defense Research Institute, December 2012), p 4-6.

wide and regional mission focus,¹⁴ and away from localized security. AP3 ended similarly to ANAP, without an analysis of the missteps and challenges to the program that contributed to the need for its eventual dissolution before the initiation of the next locally grown security program.¹⁵ This transition reflected the reliance on the experience of members of the Coalition with multiple rotations through Afghanistan, which created inconsistent direction and supervision to each subsequent program. This methodology caused vacillations in measures of performance and strategy exacerbated by a constant rotation of personnel. Often, institutional memory and experience gave way to the focus of the new commander or new unit.

In addition to ANAP and AP3, there were multiple smaller initiatives surrounding security at the local or community level¹⁶. These programs never grew larger having similar command and control issues from which the other programs suffered. Thematically and consistently, leaders developing what would become the ALP understood that a common shortcoming of these local security programs was a lack of an underlying and interconnected tactical and operational framework. To counteract this problem, planners designed a successor to these programs: VSO which was a locally-focused, security operational framework. This framework would help alleviate previous issues in continuity of training and recruitment, while still empowering security efforts at the district level.

Military programs were not the only ones competing for the same resources and leader attention. While ANAP and AP3 were in development, the 3D (Defense, Development, and Diplomacy) national strategic concept was popular within national security circles.¹⁷ In Afghanistan, this manifested through a multitude of development programs funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). These programs ranged from schooling and governance to infrastructure development. While the DOD and USAID ends were similar in nature, the ways and means were not always complementary. For instance, defining the security impacts of USAID programs of the time is complicated because USAID's focus was "concentrated" on eight sectors,¹⁸ none of which were local security. The underlying assumption was that through development, stabilization of the eight sectors would result in local security.

¹⁴NATO Begins Handover of Security In Helmand To Afghan Forces. (2011, July 20). Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Retrieved from https://www.rferl.org/a/nato_to_hand_over_security_in_helmand_to_afghan_forces/24271042.html

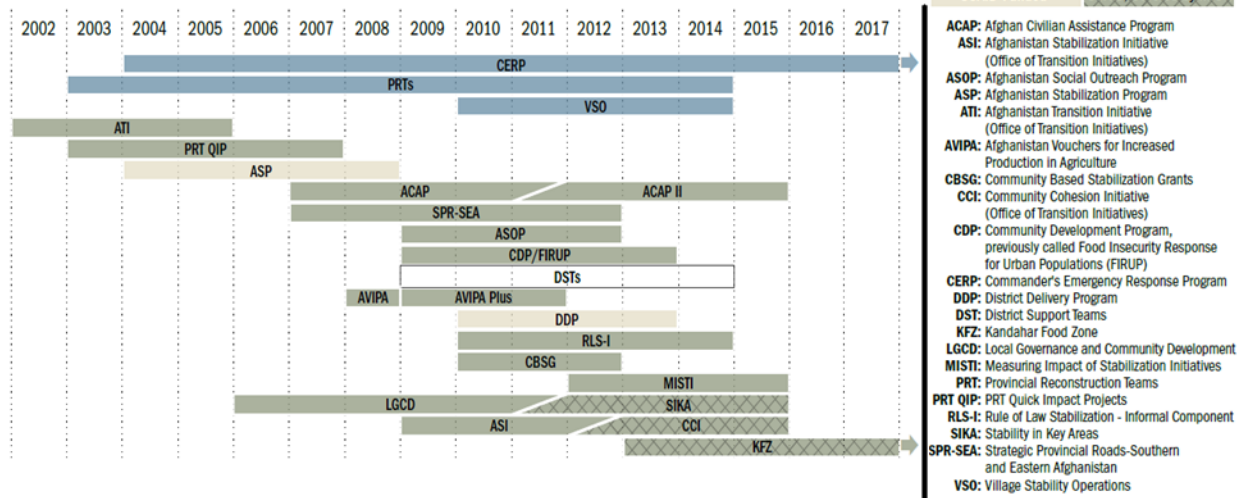
¹⁵ Linda Robinson, *One Hundred Victories: Special Ops and the Future of American Warfare*, (New York: PublicAffairs, 2013), p 209.

¹⁶ Kelly, Terrence, Nora Bensahel, and Olga Oliker, *Security Force Assistance in Afghanistan: Identifying Lessons for Future Efforts*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2011.

¹⁷ The National Security Strategy of the United States of America, March 2006 (Washington, D.C.: The White House) accessed April 28, 2020, <https://www.comw.org/qdr/fulltext/nss2006.pdf>.

¹⁸ The eight sectors of development focus were agriculture, economic growth, education, governance, healthcare, infrastructure, media, and women's issues.

AFGHANISTAN STABILIZATION PROGRAMMING FROM 2002-2017



Note: Date ranges are approximate.

Source: USAID, response to SIGAR data call, June 22, 2017, and January 17, 2018; DOD, response to SIGAR data call, January 17, 2018; USAID, *Timeline of USAID-U.S. Military Cooperation in Afghanistan (2002-2013)*, March 3, 2015; Kenneth Katzman, *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy*, Congressional Research Service, October 9, 2014, p. 35; DOD, NSOCC-A Response to SIGAR, April 7, 2014; Donald Bolduc, "The Future of Afghanistan," *Special Warfare*, vol. 24, no. 4 (2011), p. 24.

Inconsistent continuity of effort and unclear benchmarks for success and sustainment were root problems that drove numerous programs to failure. The diagram above lists the major United States Government programs in Afghanistan funded over 15 years. These programs appear to start and end in a completely desynchronized manner. For example, to effect an on the ground effort, USAID contributed personnel to the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) that were a combination of military and civilian personnel. A challenge that the PRTs experienced was the disconnection between the development programs and the underlying local security shortfalls that those programs tried to influence. These shortfalls led many military leaders to understand that current local security programs and USAID development programs weren't synchronized at best, or weren't complementary at worst.¹⁹ The end result was that Development and Defense were operating in ways that weren't always coordinated and with differing definitions of success.

Successes and Failures of the ALP: Real and Anecdotal

Afghan Local Police enjoyed success early on. Some success derived from the perception of senior Afghan and Coalition leaders that the program had a positive impact. However, there were real security gains in key areas of Afghanistan early in the program, particularly in the East and South where incursions from threat groups conducting illicit activity or working to destabilize Kabul and the surrounding provinces were most prevalent. Key to early success was the direct supervision of Coalition forces, the focus on a local program that had regional alignment, and improved unity of effort. Senior level engagement and resourcing ensured that supporting staffs and commands clearly understood and incorporated ALP guardians as part of ongoing security efforts. GIROA established training standards for the ALP, rather than relying on individual

¹⁹ Robert M. Perito, "Special Report: The US Experience with Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan: Lessons Identified," (United States Institute of Peace, Washington DC: October 2005), accessed April 28, 2020, <http://www.usip.org/pubs/specialreports/sr152.pdf>.

Coalition units to establish their own. These elements of continuity of advising and supervision, unity of effort, leader engagement, and standardization were the foundations of the ALP program's early success. When those elements waned or were removed altogether, the program encountered the same challenges as its predecessors.

Over the course of multiple interviews of U.S. and Coalition officers who served with the ALP and those that served in the ALP Special Operations Advisory Cell (SOAC), a few consistent themes emerged. The first is that no consistent metrics exist to assess the ALP as a functioning organization, either as individual units at the local level, by district, by province, or nationally. Effectiveness, or the lack thereof, could not be quantifiably measured, especially after the bulk of Coalition forces left with the drawdown in 2014.²⁰ Robinson lays out how the ALP program grew to the point where senior leaders forced the circumventing of established SOPs and practices.²¹ In truth, the ANP and ANA suffer the same challenge in that there is no singular standard for training or mission readiness. The difference being that ANA and ANP are nationally managed programs with local oversight, but the ALP often lacked consistent oversight at the local and national levels, especially in later phases. As a means of bridging the gap in local supervision, one officer remembered calling numerous ALP units in the field to confirm the receipt of needed and promised supplies. He felt this was the ALP SOAC's best method for checking on their Afghan partners.²² Given that the ALP would eventually grow to cover 200 districts, maintaining close oversight of the program became impossible for the ALP SOAC.

From the perspective of the advisor, clear and well-defined parameters for expansion, or reduction, of the program need to be clear. The ALP, like its predecessors had clear definitions for success at the local level but, at an operational and national level, these standards were rarely consistent and even more rarely enforced as time went on. Accurate measures of performance and effectiveness were often absent, which begs the question: against what standard would the Coalition assess ALP units? The concept of basic military skills and an associated list of grading standards to be considered qualified exists in nearly every modern military. Through the accomplishment of individual and unit-level training on each of these basic skills, a military unit is considered trained. Assessing the ALP is challenging for most train, advise, and assist (TAA) activities: developing a quantitative measurement for qualitative observations. While there have been numerous efforts,²³ there are no widely accepted models that have shown how documented, quantified, tactical TAA success leads to achievement at the operational level, creating strategic level gains. In the end, there is minimal quantifiable data that the ALP succeeded or failed in developing effective local security.

²⁰ In September 2012, in the midst of the ALP beginning to grow, President Obama announced there would be a significant "time-based" withdrawal of forces from Afghanistan by the end of 2014. The switch in strategy from a conditions-based withdrawal to a time-based withdrawal was due to the belief within the Obama Administration that conditions would never be met.

²¹ Robinson, Linda. 2013. *One Hundred Victories: Special Ops and the Future of American Warfare*. <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10767374> (252-253).

²² Interview with COL (ret) John Stahl on 31 March 2020.

²³ Jan Osburg et al, "Assessing Locally Focused Stability Operations," (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2014), p 8 -12.

Adding to the complexity of the issue, regular rotations of advisors meant that standards were often filtered through the tactical leader's perception of standards and eventual employment. Taking into account the ongoing rotations of personnel, the few ALP assessments that are quantifiable are suspect because of inconsistent interpretations and units of measure. As part of the dissolution plan from 2019-2020, the ALP SOAC developed an evaluation for the Train, Advise, and Assist Commands (TAACs)²⁴ to provide to the Provincial Chiefs of Police (PCoPs). The evaluation requested an assessment from each PCoP of the security and stability being provided by the ALP in a specific district and an assessment of the PCoPs continued ability to support the ALP. However, these assessments varied in terms of metrics²⁵ and was entirely up to the PCoPs, and then the TAACs, to interpret. Assessments varied from one region to the next and prevented a standardized, nationwide assessment. Even with inconsistent data, patterns of stability emerged within individual TAACs that helped inform an optimal method of dissolution that focused on effectiveness of the ALP and the resultant security risks in a given area when the ALP were dissolved. A dissolution plan emerged that focused on effectiveness and associated risks that ensured responsible dissolution with a minimal impact to the security environment.

An author once wrote that history doesn't repeat itself, but it does rhyme.²⁶ Security force assistance programs in Afghanistan follow this pattern, although no comprehensive assessment exists to prove or disprove this. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the truly effective ALP units were those that worked directly alongside U.S. Special Operations Forces. These ODAs focused on VSO, the tactical program designed to develop security at the lowest local level in Afghanistan, the villages. When looking for a responsible unit to assume the TAA responsibility, Afghan National Army Special Operations Command (ANASOC) SFODAs were viewed as a potential replacement force for the U.S. Special Forces teams, but this concept never materialized. The 2014 drawdown saw the end of dedicated partnering with the ALP, conventional and SOF, adding to the complexity of an uncertain future for ALP. Following the pattern of programs that preceded it, a combination of waning coalition oversight and interest and no viable Afghan unit able to assume control caused the ALP program to lose additional focus and efficacy.

ALP differed from its predecessors because the VSO framework did two things that prior initiatives didn't: 1. It fully embraced the idea of "bottom up" security and 2. It was designed on the historical Afghan methods of local security. Trusted tribal leaders were empowered to nominate personnel to participate in security efforts and, in return, those personnel would receive the backing and recognition of the government along with consistent training and oversight necessary to ensure success. Even though ALP built on previous failed attempts, it still suffered the same fundamental challenge experienced throughout the War on Terror: success at the tactical level was not clearly linked or nested with strategic objectives. Once the program expanded beyond the oversight capacity, this schism between tactical and strategic goals led to a similar slow dissipation of successes, replaced by corruption and inconsistent performance in

²⁴ The TAACs replaced the Regional Commands in 2014 as Operation Enduring Freedom evolved into a train, advise, and assist mission of Operation Resolute Support.

²⁵ Based on the Author's personal observations from 2019-2020.

²⁶ Garson O'Toole, "History Does Not Repeat Itself, But It Rhymes," *Quote Investigator* (blog), accessed 6 April 2020, <https://quoteinvestigator.com/2014/01/12/history-rhymes/>.

some districts. Without senior-level engagement, tactical efforts and broader strategic goals weren't aligned, and resources were soon diverted away from the ALP to other higher priorities.

Dynamics of ALP Funding and the Decision to Cancel the ALP Program

The decision to dissolve the ALP program was not a singular one. Closing down the program appears to be the culmination of several decisions over a three or four-year period. There is little to verify or validate the process or conditions under which the Coalition decided to defund the ALP, which effectively ended the program. For example, a previous member²⁷ of the ALP SOAC described a scene in 2017, during a Council of Colonels meeting; the Council sought his concurrence on defunding the program, but the decision to defund was essentially a fait accompli. The ALP SOAC member protested and told the council that if they decided to cut the ALP funding, they were essentially closing the program without considering potential security risks of dissolving the program. This assertion ultimately proved true. Throughout our research, we found a series of seemingly small decisions made at various staff levels and commands which would ultimately lead to funding and advising modifications; the accumulation of which would become contributing factors to the program's dissolution.

The budgeting process for the ALP was the combined responsibility of CSTC-A, NSOCC-A, and the Afghan Ministry of the Interior. Under normal circumstances, requirements were jointly agreed to by the ALP Staff Directorate and the ALP SOAC, the budget was then reviewed by Resolute Support and CSTC-A Headquarters, and packaged with the rest of the Afghan Security Forces Fund (ASFF), the main funding mechanism for Afghan Security Forces. The ASFF request, called the Justification Book or the J-Book, was then transmitted to the Office of the Secretary of Defense – Comptroller (OSD-C). OSD-C shepherded the requirement request through other offices in OSD, the Department of State, and then was included in the President's larger budget before being sent to Congress for program authorization and appropriation of funds.²⁸

While the program was able to escape an immediate shutdown in 2017, it simultaneously benefitted and was a victim of limited of senior leader attention or interest in 2018. Although the program limped along for another year, few effective program reforms were put in place. In 2019, the overall emphasis on reducing forces throughout Afghanistan reinitiated ALP funding debates. Afghan National Defense Security Forces (ANDSF) had to move to a more sustainable funding model. The presentation of defunding plans to senior Coalition and Afghan leaders marked the beginning of the end of the program.

The funding process was adjudicated differently for F.Y. 2020 in that ALP received a line item authorization in the J-Book, but no funding was appropriated. The J-Book approval was the first definitive decision on dissolution, but follows a series of staff-level actions that left few other viable options available. Recognizing the Afghan Government did not have sufficient funds to sustain the program, multiple commands and advisors took the pragmatic approach that defunding ALP constituted the program's dissolution. By recommending funding shift to other programs, staffs were effectively working to end the ALP. In some cases, incorrect assumptions

²⁷ Interview with COL Kurt Sisk, ALP Director 2017-2018

²⁸ Interview with COL Brian Smith, CSTC-A Comptroller, on 8 April 2020.

shaped decisions. For instance, a rumor surfaced that the U.S. Congress cancelled the ALP program, despite there being no evidence to substantiate this claim. Numerous individuals clarified in interviews that no such decision by Congress was ever made formally, but informally there was an emphasis to improve fiscal management and accountability, which included the ALP.²⁹ Although it is impossible to draw a direct correlation, this may be a secondary effect of the 2017 NDAA which placed additional restrictions on how worldwide SFA programs were managed and funded.³⁰

Another possible reason for the financial misunderstanding was that since there was no designated funding for F.Y. 2020 (which would have been submitted in calendar year 2019) for the ALP, the assumption was that Congress canceled the program. This was not the case, and there was never an effort made to formally cancel the program authorization for the ALP. A request went forward and was approved to designate funds for ALP in F.Y. 2021, reflecting the CSTC-A staff's desire to provide maximum funding flexibility to senior leaders.³¹ However, the Coalition leadership clearly understood that the intention to defund the program would lead to the program's culmination³².

In May 2020, accounting for funds expended remains a challenge. CSTC-A Ministry Advisory Group – Interior (MAG-I) Resource Management put in place an adjusted disbursement plan for ALP salaries. This plan followed the normal funding reimbursement cycle with the intention of depleting the ALP account completely. The amended disbursement goal was to rectify accounting issues within MOI resource management by resetting the account to zero.³³ Even with these corrective measures in place, it is unlikely a full accounting of expenditures will ever exist.

Planning Efforts by ALP SOAC for Successful Dissolution of the ALP

From 2014 to 2020, leaders across the Coalition and GIROA struggled to balance competing security priorities while reducing in manpower. During this time, the ALP program languished and staff sections were faced with balancing diminishing resources, training, and funding. These actions, combined with the shifting focus of Coalition senior leaders, meant that key resources and oversight of ALP was diverted or removed altogether. The confluence of oversight restrictions, funding, and shifting priorities necessitated a decision on the future of the program. After years of reprioritization, the ALP degraded to the point where the program was not salvageable and few options other than dissolution existed. Around the summer of 2017, LTC Sisk, the ALP SOAC Director from June 2017 to July 2018, understood the decision to dissolve the ALP occurred between ALP SOAC directors.³⁴ This apparent decision to dissolve by proxy is indicative of the extent to which the ALP program was surpassed by other programs and priorities.

²⁹ Interview with LTG James Rainey, CSTC-A Commanding General, on 27 April 2020.

³⁰ Dalton, Melissa G., Hijab Shah, Tommy Ross, and Asya Akca. *Shifting the burden responsibly: oversight and accountability in U.S. security sector assistance*. 2019. https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/190424_Dalton%20et%20al_ShiftingBurdenResponsibly_WEB_v2_0.pdf.

³¹ Interview with COL Brian Smith, CSTC-A Comptroller, on 8 April 2020.

³² Based on the authors' direct interactions with senior RS, CSTC-A, and NSOCC-A leadership.

³³ Interview with COL Brian Smith, CSTC-A Comptroller, on 8 April 2020

³⁴ Interview with COL Kurt Sisk, ALP Director 2017-2018.

This led to Lt Col Dwight Pertuit, the ALP SOAC Director from July 2018-January 2019, to be given clear direction from Maj Gen Buck Elton, the NSOCC-A Commander, that his mission was to posture the ALP for dissolution. CSTC-A declined to designate funding in the J-Book for Congress to fund the ALP in F.Y. 2020. Lt Col Pertuit directed the ALP SOAC to assess how best to dissolve the ALP. Due to the relationship with the ALP Staff Directorate, he was able to introduce the idea of dissolving the ALP, but unable to do more than preparatory work internal to the Coalition. Lt Col Lotarski took over the team in January 2019 and was also told by Maj Gen Elton that his primary mission was to dissolve the ALP. LTC Wilcox took over the SOAC in June of 2019.

LTC Wilcox's initial assessment of the effort to dissolve the ALP was that the ALP SOAC needed a clear, actionable plan that could fully dissolve the ALP through a top-down/bottom-up approach, engaging simultaneously with MoI leadership, the ALP Staff Directorate, and provincial leadership to develop the relationships necessary to set conditions for dissolution. The ALP SOAC worked through and with the TAACs and the Provincial Chiefs of Police (PCoPs), who had nominal command and control of the ALP. The ALP SOAC retrieved reports from the TAACs that showed a different situation than the one anticipated; the ALP were still considered effective in a number of districts. This feedback caused the ALP SOAC to reconsider its planning for dissolution and amended plans being shared with the ALP Staff Directorate.

The ALP SOAC engaged with senior leaders from the ALP Staff Directorate and MoI to develop a phased dissolution, incorporating the data from the TAACs. The plan called for the most effective ALP units to dissolve first and prioritized the guardians in those districts for post-dissolution employment in the ANDSF. The goal of the plan was that the most effective ALP units would become part of either the Afghan National Police, the Afghan National Army, or an emerging locally recruited security force, the Afghan National Army Territorial Force. This sequencing would preserve security gains while enabling a more deliberate transition timeline for the latter districts, providing guardians additional time to weigh their options.

Afghan partners involved in the ALP and the dissolution process acknowledged the need to dissolve the ALP program in a responsible, predictive manner. The ALP SOAC advanced a plan that was adopted by the MOI, enabled by effective relationships developed with senior Afghan leaders. In addition, to help spur the Afghan leadership into a formal decision, the ALP SOAC advised and assisted the MoI in drafting a decree for the President of Afghanistan to sign authorizing the dissolution of the ALP. The decree went through formal staffing from April to May 2020 and was forwarded to the Afghan Office of the National Security Advisor (ONSC). President Ghani signed the ALP presidential decree for the dissolution of the program in July of 2020, but the COVID pandemic that had brought much of the globe to a sudden halt was still forcing isolation and shuttering of much of the Afghan government, thereby adding additional friction to an already slow moving process.

Reactions to Dissolution from GIRoA and Resolute Support

A senior Special Forces officer once commented that his experience over 8 combat tours in Afghanistan showed him that when the Afghans did not want to do something that Coalition

Forces were advising or urging was necessary, they would find every reason to avoid doing so. At the same time, when there was something that seemed almost impossible for the Afghans to do, they would be well on their way to accomplishing that task before the Coalition advisors understood what was going on.³⁵ This perceived dichotomy stems from deeply rooted Afghan cultural beliefs and norms. The Coalition's challenge in understanding what, from a western view, appears to be cultural dissonance or incongruent characteristics of Afghan culture, captures the experience of the ALP SOAC and their efforts to dissolve the ALP.

While efforts to dissolve the ALP likely began as early as 2017, before LTC Sisk had the defunding meeting with the Council of Colonels, it was not until 2018 with Lt Col Pertuit that the idea of defunding and dissolving the ALP was brought to the ALP Staff Directorate leadership. Despite warnings from Coalition members that funding was about to stop, Afghans resisted taking decisive steps toward ALP dissolution. The matter was brought up in engagements between two CSTC-A Commanders, LTG James Rainey and LTG John Deedrick and Minister of the Interior Anderabi. Minister Anderabi continuously discussed his desire to evolve the Afghan National Police (ANP) into a more professionalized security force, believing that the ALP, no matter how effective, did not fit into the model that the Minister envisioned.³⁶

The ALP Staff Directorate and MoI responded to the talk of dissolution with resistance and general disbelief. Rumors about the ALP's impending dissolution persisted over many years prior to 2019, reinforcing the Afghan belief that ALP dissolution was merely talk. As other Coalition officers commented,³⁷ this attitude of the Afghans was not surprising because the Coalition had taken a limited interest in the program for several years. In these officers' opinion, many advisors and leaders throughout the Coalition had a pattern of taking hard stances on funding and resourcing issues, but eventually retreated from that stance or found another source of funding. The result was little or no net loss to GIRoA and its officials and reinforced the belief that if the Afghans waited long enough, the Coalition would find a money source.

Once LTC Wilcox took over the ALP SOAC in July 2019, he began developing courses of action for dissolution while at the same time asking the ALP Staff Directorate for a plan. The Afghans began to create more sophisticated methods to deflect decisions. Tactics by the ALP partners included avoiding decision making of any form for a dissolution plan, avoiding meetings with the ALP SOAC, and deferring decisions up the chain of responsibility. Whether by design or on purpose, ALP partners were giving clear signals that they did not believe ALP dissolution would happen nor did they want to be concretely involved in such a decision.

In May 2020, recent engagements with some senior GIRoA leaders were supportive of plans developed by MoI planners dissolving the ALP, albeit begrudgingly. In this case, concurrence was generated through pragmatism and a hardline stance from the Coalition that funding would not continue past September 2020. Those same GIRoA leaders resisted executing dissolution on the grounds that they did not have the authority to act. Engagements with GIRoA officials on

³⁵ Conversations with COL Darin Blatt in April 2019.

³⁶ Interview LTG James Rainey on 27 April 2020.

³⁷ Interviews with Lt Col Dwight Pertuit on 25 March 2020, Maj Austin Emery on 16 March, COL Kurt Sisk on 3 March 2020, LTC John VanHook on 12 March 2020, and LTC Wilcox's conversations with Minister Anderabi in 2019.

ALP occurred because of strong working relationships and the unwavering support of the current CSTC-A Commanding General LTG John Deedrick and the DCG for Force Generation, BG Nick Janjgava from the Georgian Defense Forces. LTG Deedrick clearly stated to both the Coalition and GIRoA that ALP would no longer receive funding after September 2020.

As of January 2021, the program is on glide path for dissolution. As anticipated, much of the resistance to dissolution continued throughout the remainder of 2020, ultimately requiring the Minister of Defense's direct intervention. The Minister agreed to absorb a little less than half of the guardians into the ANATF. In turn, this decision prompted the MoI to agree to retrain about the same number for police work. Although the actual number of guardians never fully materialized, of the known 18,000 guardians, approximately 7,800 were identified for retraining as police, with an additional 7,500 to serve in the ANATF. The remainder of the guardians would receive severance and termination of service.³⁸

Conclusion: What ALP Means to SFA Moving Forward

As we laid out in this paper, the ALP program was one in a series of SFA programs that followed a similar pattern of initial successes followed by a succession of decisions that caused the program to fail. In the case of the ALP, poorly understood and applied parameters for success and scaling of the program, a reliance on individual continuity rather than a strategy for implementation, and inconsistent senior leader engagement all led to the dissolution of the ALP.

As with ANATF, AP3, and ALP, locally developed security programs are frequently built on cultural understanding and local buy-in. In all three cases, it was the failure to understand that tactical leaders' alliances and agreements don't always scale up easily that caused failures at a national level. When a program is identified for potential growth, clear benchmarks must be set early and adhered to throughout the growth process. When conditions aren't met to expand, the program should cease expansion until pre-established criteria are met. Using the same criteria, should the program need to shrink or be abandoned altogether. These guideposts determine effectiveness and set definitive indicators that a program is ready to grow, maintain, or dissolve.

When it comes to lessons learned from local security initiatives, an important and relevant point is that the U.S. Army readiness and deployment cycles tend to work in opposition to the development of institutional knowledge. The global force management process, career progression, and an inability to develop clear methodologies across multiple deployments and commands, directly led to the loss of critical information or understanding between deploying units and leaders. Early on, ALP benefited from ODA team members returning as part of the same organization or as staff officers who helped foster the ALP, initially generating limited program management continuity. Some who returned to Afghanistan as SOF unit commanders such as BG Don Bolduc and LTG Mark Schwartz also ensured some continuity of direction. Once the reduction of forces occurred in 2014, those leaders who had experience with the ALP did not return to Afghanistan with the same frequency and some ODAs that partnered with the ALP redeployed or moved elsewhere without a replacement. The ALP was caught in a confluence of competing efforts followed closely by a loss of prioritization and resources. After perceptions took hold that the program was unsuccessful, efforts began to shut down or sunset

³⁸ Interview with LTG John Deedrick on 19 November, 2020/

the program. Like its predecessors ANAP and AP3, the program's remnants must transition into other ANDSF or provide the core group for the next program. The difference for the ALP is the program managed to last longer and took longer to shut down, yet the result was the same as its predecessors.

The combination of shifting leader focus and undefined measures of effectiveness and suitability meant the ALP quickly lost viability in some areas. In lieu of leadership engagement, staff officers developed their own assessment processes and methodology, which were not always synchronized, and interpreted Coalition priorities vis a vis the ALP. This kind of staff oversight influenced decisions on funding that eventually made the continuation of the program impractical. Instead of deciding to stop the ALP program at a specified time, the program limped along while earning a reputation for poor performance in the field. It is important to note that engagement is different from guidance. Many Coalition and senior Afghan leaders provided guidance, but leaders set priorities for their organization; in the program's later years the ALP did not receive the same focus as other efforts. Staff focus on the ALP shifted elsewhere in response and resources soon followed. Although the sequence is unclear, senior leader interest in the program appeared to wane about the same time the program expanded past the Coalition's ability to train and advise.

The Coalition will further consolidate its operational footprint by May 2021, per the agreement with the Taliban, and more and more programs will be considered for dissolution or optimization. The withdrawal of forces from Afghanistan will be one of the most challenging and complex in history, but understanding that how we leave is more important than how we began is key. The United States military and intelligence services had definitive lessons garnered from the post-war handling of the support given to the mujahedeen against the Soviet Union; not the least of which was that poorly planned withdrawals can have lasting consequences.

ALP will not be the last program to dissolve or optimize as the Coalition's future becomes clear. While continuity is likely no longer a possibility, maintaining clear established parameters for success along with dedicated senior level guidance and support may prevent security lapses and program failures. Moving forward, the Coalition has an opportunity, through sustained engagement and prioritization, to reform its legacy in the region as the ALP dissolves. Like its predecessors, ALP dissolution will provide guidelines for the Coalition on how transition and dissolution of Afghan security forces might proceed, while preventing lasting damage to hard-fought security gains. It is time to put those lessons learned into action.