

Minister Atmar
February 25, 2009

He began by thanking and paying respects to American men and women in uniform serving in Afghanistan. Then, he identified the three major challenges his ministry faces:

- 1) Terrorism – growing number of incidents, police and law enforcement must effectively engage with counterinsurgents and protect communities;
- 2) Organized crime – kidnapping, killing of innocents, abuse – all patterns of violence that are on the rise;
- 3) Narcotics – despite reduction in '08, still a major threat to security, good governance, and law and order.

The police, he argued, are not yet up to the job in addressing any of these challenges. He then went on to cite ten main factors or reasons why the police force is falling behind:

1. *Limited operational capability* – no unit is at the CM1 level – this situation is very different than Afghan army.
2. *Size* – there was a ceiling imposed by the international community that was arbitrary and not informed by the realities on the ground. The result has been a target size for the force that is far too low, especially if they are to play a role in counterinsurgency.
3. *“Ghost police”* – reoccurring problem of police who are being paid but never show up.
4. *Slow pace of training and reform* – at the current pace it will take 5-10 years to achieve set goals for the police force; this is unacceptable to Afghan people and international taxpayers.
5. *Police weapons and equipment* – police currently do not have sufficient supplies – again, especially if expected to engage in counterinsurgency
6. *Unsustainable and intolerable level of fatalities* – each day, 4-6 police officers are killed; this is at least 4-6xs more than the army or other security forces.
7. *Corruption* – at all levels.
8. *Low salaries and remuneration* – he also mentioned limited health care benefits.
9. *Weak judicial system*
10. *Lack of burden sharing and coordination amongst international community and donors.*

Next, he cited the seven programs or reforms they are undertaking to meet these challenges:

1. **Acceleration of police training and mentoring process.** He cited three police training programs the US is leading: border police development program, civil police development program, focused district development program. These three have already produced results but they are too small. The key constraint is the lack of police mentoring teams. He said they must increase this number to scale up the efforts underway in all three programs.
2. **System-wide anti-corruption program.** He said his staff is focusing on administrative accountability, for example improving and eliminating corruption related to electronic transfer systems. In the next few months, they will also be introducing police IDs, biometrics, and drug tests for all police units, hoping to end the problem of ghost police and salary corruption as soon as possible.
3. **Accountability for weapons and equipment.** They are assigning one Inspector General (IG) to each province and if there is a problem, the IG will be the one held responsible. He has also said he has asked the international community for 34 IGs so

that at least one can go to each province and work with the Afghan inspectors. He said the international community is seriously considering the proposal.

4. **Leadership reform.** The Minister said they must set a high standard for leadership and those in leadership positions will be held accountable and chronic impunity will be removed. Specific initiatives in this area include:
 - a) mandatory disclosure of assets for all police leaders – they must disclose their assets and explain how they attained them. So far, 10 top senior officers have been removed and 5 have been prosecuted.
 - b) establishment of an IG department with a major crime investigation taskforce – he has asked the international community for help by supplying investigators
 - c) new merit-based appointment system
5. **Intelligence-led policing.** The police face a number of enemies; they must deal with IEDs, terrorist, drug lords, corrupt officials, organized crime, enemy infiltration and so forth. However, according to the Minister, in order to effectively counter these threats, the police force requires intelligence capabilities and he likened this to the “brain” of ANP. He said he is working closely with the FBI and CIA.
6. **Increase size of police and capability in terms of weapons and equipment.** The international community wanted the MoI to clean up the police then consider expanding the force. The Minister, however, proposed a compromise – that they do both together and as one unit is cleaned up, it can also be expanded. Part of this expansion involves the Afghan Public Protection Force whose job will specifically be to provide provisional security so the police can focus on law enforcement. [This was discussed more extensively in Q&A]
7. **Improving police effectiveness with counter-narcotics.** This year already, 660 criminals linked to drugs have been arrested, including seven major “king pins.” The overall result of counter-narcotic efforts is still not at the level expected by the international community, but he said it is producing results and moving in the right direction.

It was not one of his seven programs, but he also discussed police readiness for the upcoming elections. He said the police will be helping with voter registration and ensuring safe elections without interfering in the elections themselves.

Q&A

There was a question about recruitment and the difficulties in increasing their numbers. The Minister said that his main priorities are integrity and honesty. Education and competency are second. One cannot expect to have a trained police force overnight, and it is essential, he argued, that they must look for people who meet the first criteria. He also believes that the new system of appointment (merit-based appointment) will help in this area as well.

In response to a question about Obama’s strategic review of the war in Afghanistan, he said that that was the reason why he came to DC and his very grateful that the administration requested the involvement of senior Afghan officials. He also said he is grateful for the U.S.’s continued support and financial assistance. He said the new strategy’s success will depend on whether or not it is based on the realities on the ground and a better understanding of the problems his country and the international community have faced over

the last seven years. He also said an adequate solution necessitates a regional approach or regional strategy. The international community must focus on building Afghan institutions and ensuring security on the ground but it must consider the external dimension as well.

Next, there were a number of questions about the Afghan Public Protection Force (APPF). The Minister said many times that APPF is not a militia force; it is a formal security force that will be trained and accountable to the Mol. For the officers involved, it will be full-time and they will be in uniform. The key difference is the local community will have a chance to nominate candidate and the government will also vet nominees. There is currently a pilot in Wardak province with the help of U.S. forces. He mentioned the auxiliary force and conceded that the implementation of that was flawed. Unlike the auxiliary forces, he said, there is no local strongman with APPF, and they have built an inter-agency committee for oversight (including UNAMA, U.S. forces, Mol, etc.) and they will also establish a joint Afghan-international inspection team. He acknowledges that a great deal of skepticism still remains regarding APPF but reminded the audience that the National Solidarity Program faced similar criticism at first but is now the “darling” of the international community.

Someone asked him what his Ministry gets from the many Americans that work there and if he thought the Europeans were better suited to help with the Ministry of Interior since no equivalent exists in the U.S. system. He responded that they receive a great deal from the Americans: police training, a committed partnership, institutional reform of systems, and of course \$1.2B of the \$1.5B the Ministry receives each year. With regards to Europe, he said they have not gotten sufficient numbers of trainers and mentors from EUPOL. They have asked their European partners to focus on an anti-crime force and anti-corruption strategy as well to provide investigators.

Finally, there was a question about the police role in counterinsurgency and whether the Minister believed the police should be engaged in counterinsurgency. His answer was that this debate cannot be solved – whether we like it or not, police are the first line of defense when insurgents infiltrate a village or community. It is simply a matter of necessity. That is why they want APPF to focus solely on security while others can take on law enforcement and community policing.