

The Collapse of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces: Implications for U.S. Security Assistance and Cooperation

August 23, 2021

The swift collapse of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF), which had received tens of billions of dollars in U.S. training and equipment over two decades, has prompted questions about U.S. security assistance in Afghanistan and beyond.

Background on U.S. Support to the ANDSF

From FY2002 through June 20, 2021, the United States appropriated or otherwise made available approximately \$144.98 billion toward the reconstruction of Afghanistan. From that total, **\$88.61 billion** was for security-specific activities, primarily through the Afghanistan Security Forces Fund (ASFF), which received **\$82.90 billion** of the security funding. Another **\$5.71 billion** was appropriated through other sources, including Foreign Military Financing, International Military Education and Training, Peacekeeping Operations, the Afghanistan Freedom Support Act, and Drug Interdiction and Counter-Drug Activities.

In 2005, Congress established the ASFF (P.L. 108-375, §1202) to build, train, equip, and sustain the ANDSF, which consisted of the Afghan National Army (ANA), the Afghan National Police (ANP), the Afghan Air Force (AAF), and the Afghan Special Security Forces (ASSF). The ASFF also funded ANDSF salaries, fuel, facility and infrastructure repair, renovation, and construction.

Within the Defense Department (DOD), the Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan (CSTC-A) was tasked with managing the ASFF and **acquiring equipment** for the ANDSF. Some of the **U.S.-provided equipment to the ANDSF between FY2003-2016** included approximately

- 600,000 weapons, such as rifles;
- 163,000 tactical and non-tactical radios;
- 76,000 vehicles, such as Humvees;
- 30,000 items of equipment for detecting and disposing of explosives;
- 16,000 items of equipment for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; and

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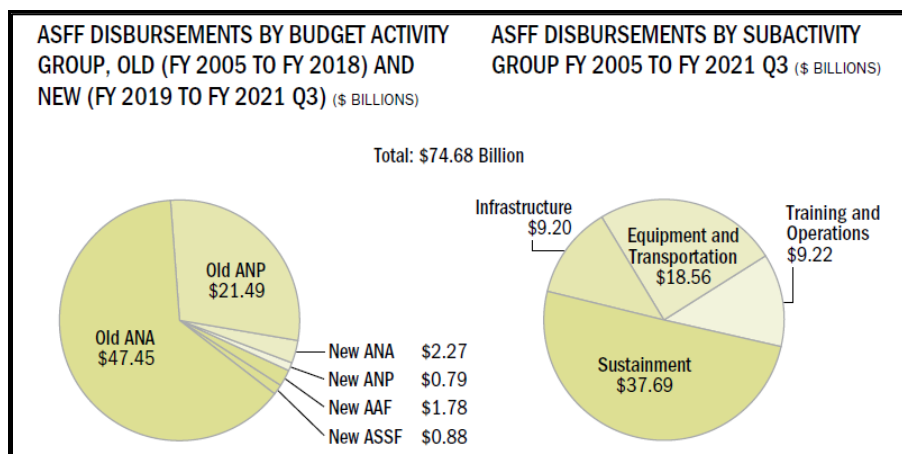
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- 208 aircraft, such as helicopters.

In 2021, DOD began transitioning the CSTC-A's counterterrorism, security assistance, and end-use monitoring mission to an “[over-the-horizon](#)” model through the newly created Defense Security Cooperation Management Office-Afghanistan (DSCMO-A) based in Qatar.

Figure 1. Afghan Security Forces Fund (ASFF) Disbursements, FY2005-FY2021, Quarter 3



Source: Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) [Quarterly Report](#) to the United States Congress, July 30, 2021.

Notes: ANA = Afghan National Army; ANP = Afghan National Police; AAF = Afghan Air Force; and ASSF = Afghan Special Security Forces.

What Led to the Swift Collapse of the ANDSF?

The Biden Administration has attributed the collapse to the ANDSF's [refusal to fight](#) and a lack of “[will and leadership](#).” U.S. government oversight reporting in 2020 and 2021 highlighted the increasing pressure on the ANDSF from Taliban attacks, declining ANDSF readiness and performance, and warnings about the potential failure of the force following the withdrawal of U.S. forces and enablers. Other observers have pointed to more deeply rooted missteps and strategic misassumptions over two decades.

Some observers point to systemic issues within the ANDSF, such as a [corrupt chain of command](#), significant rates of desertion and attrition, a lack of leadership, and widespread illiteracy. The corrosive effect of persistent [human rights abuses and failures to protect civilians](#) by the United States, U.S. allies, and the Afghan government have also been attributed to undermining U.S. efforts to build the ANDSF. Other observers contend that U.S. programs exacerbated these issues by using DOD's [centralized command structures and complex bureaucracy](#). According to the U.S. Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), poor U.S. understanding of social, cultural, and political contexts in Afghanistan contributed to [major failures at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels](#).

Other observers have found that the U.S. train and equip mission [overemphasized tactical skills](#) and neglected higher-level expertise, forced the ANDSF to be [heavily reliant on airpower and technology](#) that Afghans could not maintain independently, and excluded [Afghan involvement or input](#) in equipping decisions.

The withdrawal of U.S.-funded contractors in 2021 left [aircraft overtaxed and the AAF overtasked](#). Taliban operations isolated ANDSF units, and chronic Afghan government failures to provide food or logistical, hardware, and manpower support to many units meant that Afghan soldiers quickly became unable [to fight](#). At the same time, the ANDSF was suffering an [accumulation of losses to the Taliban](#),

including from insider attacks. Some reports found that many ANDSF soldiers negotiated surrenders with the Taliban or simply kept their weapons and joined them.

What Is the Current Situation?

The U.S. military has been conducting airstrikes in attempt to destroy some U.S.-provided equipment from being stolen by the Taliban; however, the Administration has acknowledged that a fair amount of U.S. weaponry has fallen into Taliban hands. Reports and photos continue to emerge of Taliban touting U.S. weapons and driving police vehicles and Humvees that have been confiscated from the ANDSF. To avoid Taliban capture, members of the ANDSF have reportedly flown U.S.-provided military aircraft and driven armored vehicles and pickup trucks into neighboring countries. Other reports suggest that many of the ASSF commandos who refused to surrender to the Taliban are now being targeted and some have joined a nascent resistance.

Questions and Considerations

U.S. Weapons and Equipment. Does the United States have a record of weapons and other materiel that have been destroyed by intentional U.S. airstrikes? What U.S.-provided weapons pose the most risk if confiscated by the Taliban? What is the estimated timeframe for the Taliban to potentially lose the ability to sustain any captured U.S. equipment? What risks do captured U.S. weapons pose to neighboring countries and the larger region?

FY2022 ASFF Budget. In the days leading up to the fall of the ANDSF, President Biden committed to continued U.S. support to the ANDSF. Now that the ANDSF has dissolved, how, if at all, will the FY2022 \$3.3 billion request be reprogrammed or realigned to a new mission?

U.S. Security Cooperation Enterprise. How will the ANDSF collapse change the way the United States trains foreign militaries? What oversight requirements might ensure Congress is better informed of the capabilities and weaknesses of other major U.S. security assistance recipients? To what extent are other U.S. partners as reliant as the ANDSF on U.S. intelligence, air power, and contracted logistics support? How can future monitoring and evaluation efforts mitigate the shortfalls identified in U.S. efforts to build a sustainable ANDSF?

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