# Know Yourself:

# Intelligence Assessments of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the intelligence assessments of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) from 2010 to 2020 to understand why the United States was surprised by their rapid collapse in 2021. It analyzes Department of Defense (DOD) reports to Congress, Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) reports, and external testimonies to identify intelligence gaps and failures. The research reveals that the U.S. primarily assessed the ANDSF based on flawed quantitative data, often presenting an overly optimistic view despite negative trends in troop numbers, attrition, and other key indicators. Cultural factors and morale, critical for assessing military capability, were largely ignored. The study concludes that a lack of understanding of the ANDSF, stemming from both data errors and cultural ignorance, contributed to the surprise collapse. Recommendations include focusing on data quality over quantity, incorporating morale assessments, and providing clearer caveats in reports to policymakers.

Keywords: Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF), United States Intelligence, Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Freedom's Sentinel, strategy

# INTRODUCTION

> If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle (Tzu & Giles, 1994, p. 32)

Sun Tzu proclaimed this wisdom more than two thousand years ago. Yet within the realm of intelligence it seems that the United States focuses most of its attention onto the adversary and understands very little about ourselves or our allies. Throughout the military operations in Afghanistan, the United States and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) declared a "War on Terror," but also aimed to "develop new Afghan security forces to ensure Afghanistan would never again become a safe haven for terrorists" (NATO, 2021, p. 1). In order to accomplish this, the United States and NATO were establishing the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF)[1] in the early 2000s and by 2015 would hand over primary responsibility of all security within Afghanistan to this novel national defense organization.

The transient nature of the ANDSF is something many analysts foreshadowed, which became a definitive and harsh reality in 2021. However, even the more pessimistic intelligence estimates were surprised at the swiftness of the collapse of the ANDSF, which is perhaps summed up best by President Biden himself, "this did unfold more quickly than we had anticipated" (Liptak, Zeleny, Collins, Hansler, & Vazquez, 2021, para. 3). It

[1] Sometimes referred to as Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF).

indicates perhaps the United States & NATO falsely assumed to have a solid understanding of the ANDSF, which then resulted in a rude awakening. This begs the following questions: how did the United States assess the capability of the ANDSF to provide security for Afghanistan? What were the intelligence gaps or intelligence failures, if any? Why is it that U.S. policymakers, the customers of this intelligence, were so blindsided by the inability of the ANDSF to defend against their adversaries? This study aims to closely examine the available unclassified reports regarding the capabilities of the ANDSF, particularly the readiness and sustainability of its troops, from the perspective of intelligence (Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2013). The intelligence that was collected, how "capability" was assessed, and what could have been done better will all be explored within this research.

This paper first examines a portion of the multitude of reports attempting to assess and measure the capabilities of the ANDSF from 2010 to 2020. Through these reports, the major underlying intelligence gaps and failures can be identified that prevented the United States and NATO from understanding the ANDSF capabilities. The information is then compared to external critique and analyzed, to reveal any additional shortcomings within these intelligence assessments. Thereafter, the findings are discussed to reveal deeper underlying issues. Additionally, recommendations are made on how to mitigate repeating the same mistakes again and to ensure that decision-makers receive better intelligence to make more sound policy decisions. Lastly, what this study seeks to ultimately demonstrate, is that while there was a plethora of intelligence assessments to analyze the Afghan military and police forces, the United States and NATO did not understand the

ANDSF capabilities from 2010 to 2020 because of the differences between Western and Afghani culture and the overreliance on erroneous or ambiguous data. Alternatively, in the more profound words of Sun Tzu, we did "not know ourselves which led to the coalition's defeat (Tzu & Giles, 1994, p. 32).

## BACKGROUND

To properly address this topic, it also requires a clear definition of the ANDSF, a brief history, and an explanation of the function it was supposed to serve. The initial idea for a large centralized security force came from Afghan military leader Mohammad Fahim in a 2002 meeting with former Secretary of State Colin Powell (Powell, 2002). In late 2004, the US Congress authorized the Afghanistan Security Forces Fund (ASFF) with the purpose to "build, train, equip, and sustain the Afghan National Defense and Security Force (ANDSF)" (108th Congress, 2004, p. 268). The ANDSF was divided into the Ministry of Defense (MOD) and the Ministry of Interior (MOI), which included the Afghan National Army (ANA), the Afghan Air Force (AAF), the Afghan Special Security Forces (ASSF), and the Afghan National Police (ANP).

In November 2010, at the Lisbon Summit, it was decided that control of Afghanistan was to be handed back to the Afghan people, along with the primary duty of security for the nation (Reynolds, 2010). The goal was to have full security responsibility transitioned to the Afghan forces by the end of 2014 (NATO, 2010). For this reason, the scope of this study ranges from 2010 to 2020, since the focus changed from a primarily international effort to combat terrorism directly, to an "advisory effort" starting January 2015 (DOD, 2010-20).

Following the Lisbon Summit, a White House announcement in July 2011 declared the drawdown of United States troops in Afghanistan by 10,000 before year's end and by another 33,000 by the following summer (Sabochik, 2011). This means that the success of the mission in Afghanistan was primarily going to depend on the viability of the ANDSF. However, the collapse of the Afghan security structure in 2021 manifests that this endeavor was bound to be fruitless (Thomas, 2021).

## METHODOLOGY

In order to understand the underlying issues and get an in-depth appreciation of the complex aspects of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces, a case study is most appropriate. This study will take a mixed method approach to the numerous available sources from 2010 to 2020. This is ideal to evaluate both quantitative and qualitative elements in order to better understand the shortcomings of the assessments made regarding ANDSF capabilities. Unfortunately, there are also some stark limitations with this research. Firstly, due to the nature of the topic and the relatively recent relevance, most classified data and reports are still classified, and will likely remain so for the next 10 to 25 years, based on standard classification and declassification regulations (Executive Order 13526, 2009). Therefore, this study relies entirely on existing data available within the public realm, concerning the ANDSF assessments made.

While this is an issue of access, there is fortunately an overwhelming amount of information on the ANDSF from government and private organizations alike. However, this also puts in question the reliability of certain pieces of information, due to bias or other

predispositions. The majority of selected data for this research comes from government reports, which are an excellent primary source of information that is relatively unbiased[22]. This information reviewed includes data from, but is not limited to, reports by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Department of Defense (DOD), Government Accountability Office (GAO), Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), and official memos and/or interviews from the Afghanistan papers. Some of these reports were part of a periodical requirement to inform Congress on the progress of achieving U.S. objectives in Afghanistan, others are part of "Lessons Learned" initiatives, such as CSIS, GAO, and SIGAR (SIGAR, 2018). These sources were chosen, primarily because of their direct access to original data and testimonies of those that worked with the ANDSF.

Due to the large volume of content available, the primary documents reviewed are selected from three sources. The first set of sources are the 21 biannual DOD reports from November 2010 to December 2020, primarily intended to inform the customer, in this case the US Congress, on matters "relating to building the capacity of the ANSF" per the 2008 National Defense Authorization Act (110th Congress, 2008, p. 386, para. 2B). The second set of sources come from 40 quarterly SIGAR reports that provide an additional perspective on the capabilities of the ANDSF, while critically evaluating the DOD reports (SIGAR, 2021). The third set of sources will come from external testimonies and analysis. This may include think tank reports, scholarly articles, and testimonies from officials that

[2] Still acknowledging that bias will vary from analyst to analyst and that fundamental psychological bias, such as "Implicit bias" exists (Ruhl, 2020).

worked directly in key coalition positions from 2010 to 2020 (Whitlock, Shapiro, & Emamdjomeh, 2019). These first two sets of sources contain quantitative and qualitative elements to inform the customer, i.e. U.S. policymakers, of the current status of the ANDSF and whether their capabilities accomplish the desired end goal of establishing a sustainable security framework in the regions of Afghanistan.

In order to better answer the research questions, a few key areas need to be defined: military capability, intelligence gaps or failures, and policymakers getting blindsided (as it relates to intelligence). The first research question asks how the United States assessed the capabilities of the ANDSF. Military capability is defined by the DOD as the sum of four pillars— "readiness, sustainability, force structure, and modernization".[3] For the purpose of this research, the focus is on readiness and sustainability, since they are more measurable and available within the reviewed reports via troop-related data. The second research question asks if there were any intelligence gaps or failures. Intelligence gaps are defined as "unanswered questions," which means that they are acknowledgements of uncertainties (Carter, 2009, p. 153). Intelligence failures are more complicated, but for the purpose of examining these assessments are defined as not adequately "issuing warnings"[4], or in other words a failure to warn of important events (Copeland, 2010). This relates directly to the third research question: whether policymakers were "blindsided" as a result of not receiving adequate warning or due by the

[3] "Military capability is defined by DOD as consisting of four components readiness, sustainability, force structure, and modernization" (Conahan 1986, p.1, para. 3).
[4] To be effective, messages must present clear, accurate, and persuasive warnings, even if consumers do not want to receive or act upon them" (Gentry, 2008, p. 252, para. 4).

intelligence community, provided the opportunity to do so existed (Gentry, 2008).

The quantitative and qualitative elements within these reports that offer warnings of the eventual inability of the ANDSF to provide security need to be identified. A primary focus for this will be the readiness and sustainability of the troops themselves. This will include anything that may indicate a decline in the readiness or a threat to the sustainability of the ANDSF as it relates to the personnel responsible for security. While other elements, such as politics, economics, logistics and equipment play a significant role in the ability of a military force to perform (Zaidi, 2006), the focus for this study will remain on the troops themselves, since they are the most vital aspect. As General George S. Patton once said: "wars are won by men."[5] Part of this will be content analysis to examine whether the assessments adequately captured the human dimension of ANDSF capabilities, such as morale, and cultural considerations. Morale can be measured in a variety of different ways (Nur, Harrison, Deb, & Strawderman, 2021), but this research will more so focus on how it was assessed, whether morale was thought to be high or low, and if it was evaluated as a factor to the sustainability and readiness of the ANDSF. Other parts will cover more quantitative human elements, such as troop numbers and attrition rates. The reviewed reports are analyzed to reveal how unclassified intelligence reporting enhanced or diminished the ability to understand these capabilities from 2010-2020. These findings can then be compared to assessments outside the official reports to identify any significant flaws in the way these intelligence reports presented their

[5] Wars may be fought with weapons, but they are won by men. It is the spirit of men who follow and of the man who leads that gains the victory." – George S. Patton (Patton & Ratcliffe, 2016, p. 474).

information. The external assessments may include peer-reviewed studies, investigations, or even testimonies from officials that directly worked with the ANDSF. These findings can then be further discussed to determine whether intelligence failures contributed to the apparent surprise by policymakers on the demise of Afghanistan's security framework. This approach is unfortunately inhibited by subjective interpretation of the information (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009) found within these reports, but gives a high degree of flexibility on amalgamating the various different quantitative and qualitative elements across the available sources (White & Marsh, 2006).

It may be worthwhile to reiterate, that while the subject of the study is the capability of the ANDSF to provide security, the true focus is on the available reports addressing the understanding of said capabilities. The intent is ultimately to determine, from an intelligence perspective, what NATO and the United States understood about the primary effort they were supporting. The significance of this research is amelioration—to identify if any mistakes were made in the intelligence assessment process and how to eliminate or mitigate them. Identifying the elements of information that were used to present the degree of readiness that the Afghan forces had, the intelligence gaps that existed, as well as potential intelligence failures will hopefully further the understanding of the underlying issues with intelligence reporting as it relates to the failure of the ANDSF to be able to "secure Afghanistan from internal and external threats and prevent the re-establishment of terrorist safe havens" (SIGAR, 2017, p. 61)—the security policy goal of NATO and the United States (NATO, 2021).

# FINDINGS

*DOD Reports to Congress – Capability Assessments*

This subsection addresses the research question of how the United States Department of Defense (DOD) assessed the capabilities of the ANDSF from 2010 to 2020. These reports assessed the capabilities of the ANDSF through both quantitative and qualitative elements, though relying very heavily on the former. The most frequent metrics reported included total force numbers, attrition rates, logistics capabilities, operational capability, equipment, and literacy. Moreover, the data is accompanied by descriptions and statements to explain the information presented. Within these documents, the troop numbers and attrition reported indicated a continuous degradation of the total ANDSF troops available to authorized strength ratio. As can be seen in Figure 1, the ANDSF went from a 107% of total authorized force strength in late 2010 down to 97% in early 2014, 90% by the second half of 2015, and 84% by early 2020. Though it is worthwhile to note that from 2010 to 2012 the ANDSF surged from an authorized troop strength of 243,000 to 352,000 (DOD, 2011). Troop data between 2017 and 2018 became unavailable due to classification by the Afghan government, which also inhibited SIGAR's ability to assess the capabilities of the ANDSF during the same period.[6] Nonetheless, the periodic reports show a clear decline in ANDSF total force strength on its own, as well as relative to total authorized strength.

[6] U.S. Forces-Afghanistan (USFOR-A) classified or otherwise restricted information SIGAR has until now publicly reported. These include important measures of ANDSF performance such as casualties, personnel strength, attrition, capability assessments, and operational readiness of equipment" (SIGAR, 2017).

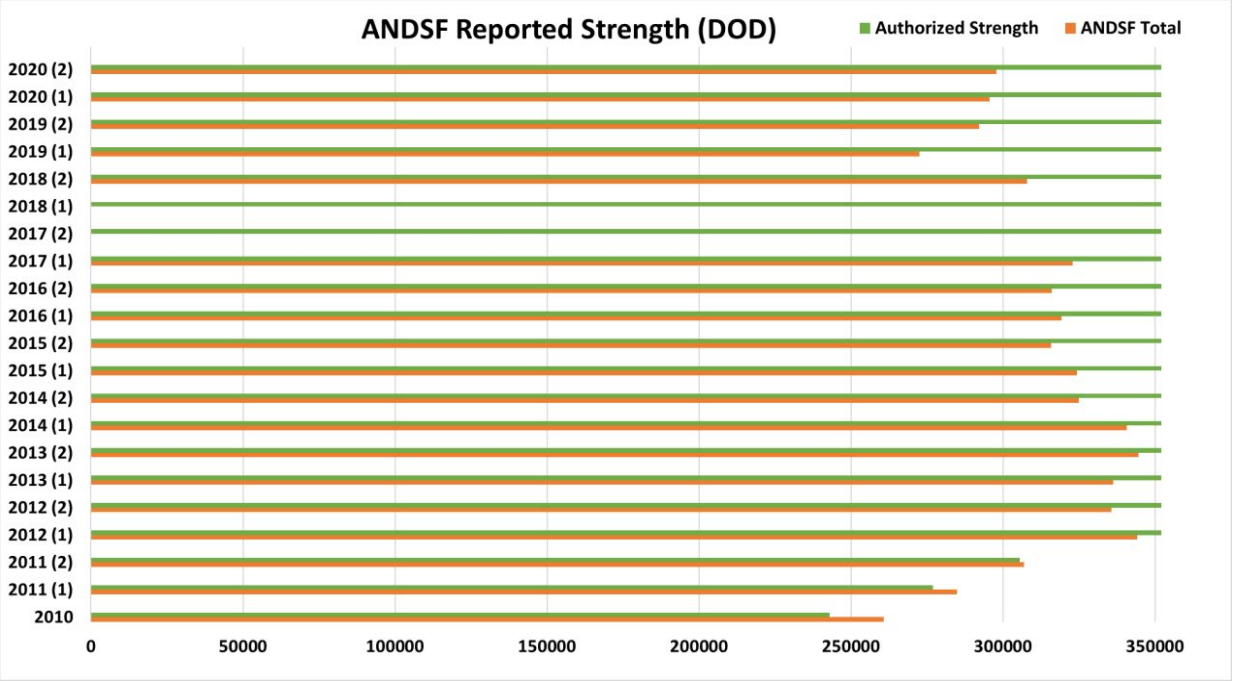


*Figure 1. Total ANDSF troops reported relative to authorized maximum from 2010 – 2020 [Note: 2017 & 2018 data are not available due to classification] (Graph by Christian Ferguson). Derived from Department of Defense. 2010-2020. Report on Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan. Report to Congress, Washington D.C.: Department of Defense.*

Even though the quantitative measures indicate a clear decline in overall ANDSF capability, the DOD assessments' narrative is unaptly more positive, which may be attributed to some inherent cognitive bias (Lovallo & Kahneman, 2003), but is nonetheless poor analysis and reporting when utilizing a mixed-method approach. The July 2015 DOD report to Congress emphasized that ANDSF had "a distinct advantage over the insurgency" (DOD, 2015). Even though the report highlighted multiple shortcomings, such as attrition, intelligence, and poor leadership, they were the same shortcomings from previous reports[7]. This optimistic narrative continues with statements like "ANDSF began growing its

[7] "The ANDSF will, however, require more coalition assistance to close key capability gaps in aviation,

offensive capabilities" (p. 35, para. 1). In December 2017 and reiterates in December 2019 that the situation is "tactically unchanged" (p. 27, para. 1).[8] In 2018, despite an observable downtrend of ANDSF troop levels, the DOD reports called it "the third year of a sustainable security strategy" (DOD, 2018, p. 46, para. 1). According to the July 2020 report, the ANDSF had still "provided sufficient security" (DOD, 2020, p. 29, para. 1) across Afghanistan to prevent the Taliban from advancing. Although the DOD points out in its December 2020 report that the ANDSF was "challenged" by the increased frequency of Taliban attacks (p. 18, para. 1), it asserts that the ANDSF continued to provide security in population centers. By this time the troop strength versus the authorized number of troops had already dropped by more than 30% compared to 10 years prior. Nonetheless, all reports repeatedly point out shortcomings in the areas of leadership, level of attrition, intelligence, equipment accountability, and logistics. Despite that, the narrative across DOD reports rarely matches the undeniable quantitative decline in ANDSF personnel (Sopko, 2016).

The unclassified intelligence assessments regarding operational capability of the ANDSF were particularly difficult to observe, since the systems of measurement kept changing. From 2009 to 2020, the framework to measure operational capability was changed 4 times and the criteria within changed from April 2010 to August 2011 alone five times (SIGAR, 2017). Each framework rated Afghan military and police units on a varying spectrum of readiness to independently execute operations. However, many units were

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intelligence, special operations, and the Afghan security ministries' ability to conduct tasks such as planning, programming, budgeting, and human resource management" (DOD, 2015, pg. 33, para. 2).

[8] Department of Defense. 2010-20. Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan. Report to Congress, Washington D.C.: Department of Defense.

not assessed due to unreliable reporting, no training in utilizing assessment metrics, and lack of literacy (SIGAR, 2014). Additionally, these measurements relied almost entirely on Afghan officials to report accurate data (DOD, 2018). Based on these inconsistent sources, capability frameworks, and lack of continuity, it seems the DOD reports were providing metrics on ANDSF capabilities despite huge intelligence gaps and questionable collection of data (Johnson Jr., 2012). SIGAR emphasized this notion later by stating "any evaluation is capturing only superficial and potentially misleading details of current readiness" (SIGAR, 2017, p. 54, para. 5). However, it is noteworthy that this is not acknowledged by the DOD reports themselves, which instead reported in 2017 the "operational trend continues to be positive, but challenges remain" (DOD, 2017).

While the DOD assessment tools are each short-lived, it is still worthwhile to see how the ANDSF capabilities were assessed. The assessment frameworks that were used from 2010 to 2020 consisted of the Commander Unit Assessment Tool (CUAT) from 2010 to 2013, the Regional Command Assessment Report (RASR) from 2014 to 2015, the Monthly ANDSF Assessment Report (MAAR) from 2015 to 2017, and the Security Tracker for the Afghanistan Compact from 2017 – 2020. Each rating system had a different label for the top rating categories, such as independent (CUAT), capable (RASR), and sustainable (MAAR). According to CUAT, the percentage of units within the top two rating categories rose from 22% in 2010 to 51% in 2013, indicating an increase in the ANDSF's capability to independently conduct operations, which is underscored by the narrative that operational effectiveness "continues to improve slowly" (DOD, 2011, p. 83, para. 6.1). Though the CUAT was to provide an overall rating on operational effectiveness (DOD, 2011), the DOD

reversed this narrative in a later report by stating it "should not be used as a measure of ANSF capability on its own" (DOD, 2013, p. 105, para. 1). The RASR similarly shows a steady increase in operational capability for the ANDSF from 68% in the top two categories in 2013 to 76% in 2014. Unfortunately, the MAAR and the Afghanistan Compact were kept at the classified level, therefore inaccessible to this study. Nonetheless, the CUAT and MAAR assessment frameworks provided insight into the positive operational trend the DOD assessed from 2010 to 2014 (DOD, 2014). Another aspect of the enduring ANDSF capabilities that is particularly well covered in these DOD reports to Congress is the concern over attrition and recruiting. Every single DOD report from 2010 to 2020 highlights attrition as a major concern to sustained institutional viability, especially for the Afghan National Army, but also for the Afghan National Police. This is backed up by very thorough quantitative data, which shows monthly attrition seems to average about 2.0% until 2014 (see Figure 2), after which the data becomes no longer available. Figure 2 also shows the average attrition rate was increasing from an average of about 1.8% per month in late 2009 to about 2.1% per month in 2013. Though the 2017 DOD report to Congress does not present the data, it mentions the 3-year average from 2014 to 2017 was estimated to be 2.2%. To put this in perspective, that is a 22% increase of annual attrition from 21.6% in 2010 to 26.4% in 2017. This means attrition from 2010 onwards was steadily increasing, a trend that was not articulated within the DOD reports. The main reason for attrition in the ANDSF was stated to be "poor Afghan leadership and the failure of consistently granting leave to lower enlisted personnel,"[9] however none of the reports support these

[9] The 2011 DOD report indicated a more complete list of reasons, which included "Poor leadership and

suggestions with any evidence or data (DOD, 2010-20). Moreover, while the assessments stated attrition as "problematic," the authors did not emphasize the steadily increasing attrition rate (Ateş, 2018). Only in December 2019 did the assessments for the first time rephrase attrition as a "threat" (DOD, 2019) to sustainability of the ANDSF and in June 2020 as the "most significant issue affecting ANA and ANP efforts to reach full strength" (DOD, 2020, p. 018, para. 7).

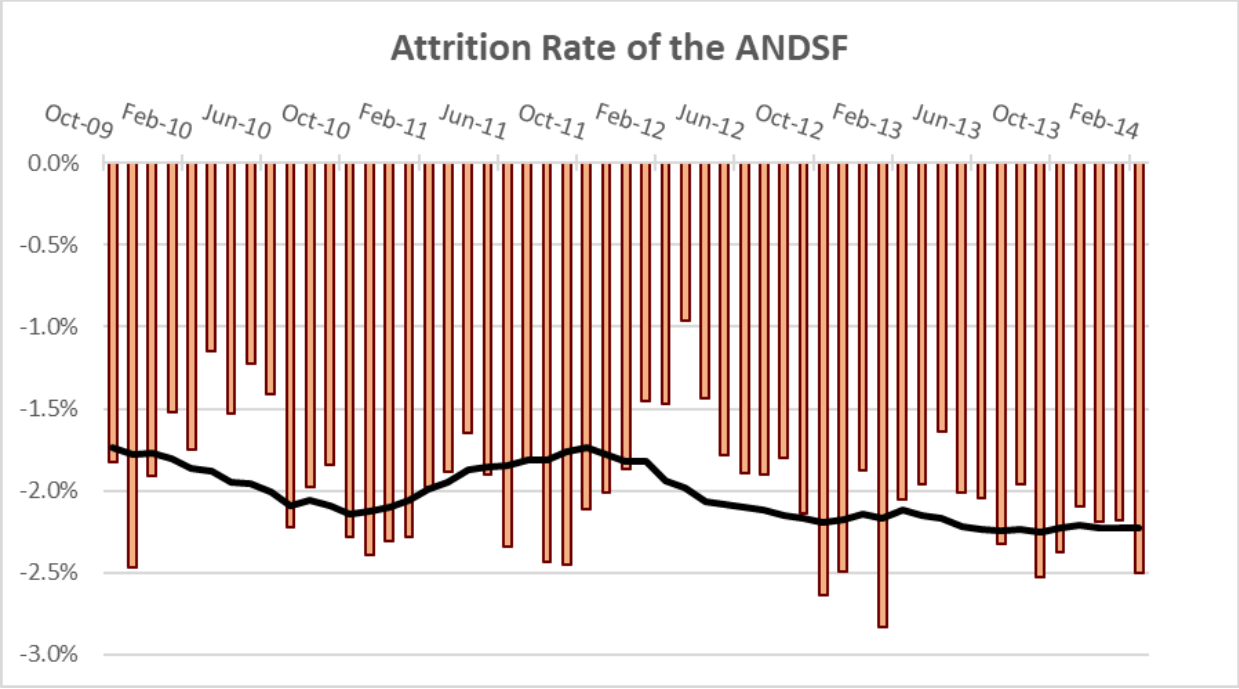


*Figure 2. Monthly ANDSF attrition from 2010 – 2014 [Note: Data was not reported after 2014; an average of 2.2% continued per the June 2017 DOD report] (Graph by Christian Ferguson). Derived from Department of Defense. 2010-2020. Report on Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan. Report to Congress, Washington D.C.: Department of Defense.*

### *SIGAR Reports to Congress – A second look at ANDSF capabilities*

SIGAR's quarterly reports provide a second look and additional assessment to the readiness and sustainability of the ANDSF. They were particularly useful in answering the

accountability, separation from family, denial of leave or poor leave management, high operational tempo, and ineffective deterrence against AWOL" (DOD, 2011, p. 22 para. 3).

second research question by identifying potential intelligence gaps and failures. In addition to the quarterly reports, SIGAR also compiled Lessons Learned reports that occasionally present information pertinent to the capability assessments of the ANDSF, though mostly cover other budgetary matters. Nonetheless, the information that SIGAR contributed raised concerns and doubt over some of the assessments made by the DOD.

SIGAR took a much more in-depth look at ANDSF troop numbers and presented within each report a comprehensive list of concerns regarding the accuracy of these numbers. From October 2010 to July 2012, each quarterly report highlighted in detail the actual number of ANA troops within the DOD reports needed to be split into those present for duty, and those not present. Those not present for duty were split into two subcategories of absent without leave or "AWOL" and other (which included authorized reasons, such as medical, training, approved leave, etc.). The percentage of those not present for duty within the ANA from 2010 to 2013 ranged from 18.3% to 30.8%, while the number of AWOL troops ranged from 5.4% to 16.7% within the same date range (SIGAR, 2010-2014). This presents the assessed end strength of the ANDSF as reported by the DOD in a new light, as can be seen in Figure 3 with the AWOL and present for duty numbers in comparison. It is also worthwhile to note this does not include ANP AWOL numbers, which are entirely unavailable due to lack of reporting.[10] Unfortunately, this ANA data becomes unavailable after 2013 and 2014, due to classification restrictions by the DOD in 2014 and

[10] "Because ANP officers can leave at any time due to their civilian status, unlike their counterparts in the ANA, there are no official numbers for absentee or AWOL rates for the ANP – September 2008 Report on Progress toward Security and Stability" (DOD, 2008).

onward.[11] While this makes it impossible to determine the actual troop strength with personnel that were AWOL included from 2014 onward from these unclassified DOD reports, it is likely that the actual number of troops present for duty was lower than what was officially reported. Even though the DOD reports acknowledged AWOL as a contributing factor to high attrition levels within the ANA, the quantitative information did not subtract those absent from the total force count. This demonstrates a significant flaw in adequately presenting the troop numbers of the ANDSF by the DOD in its reports to Congress.

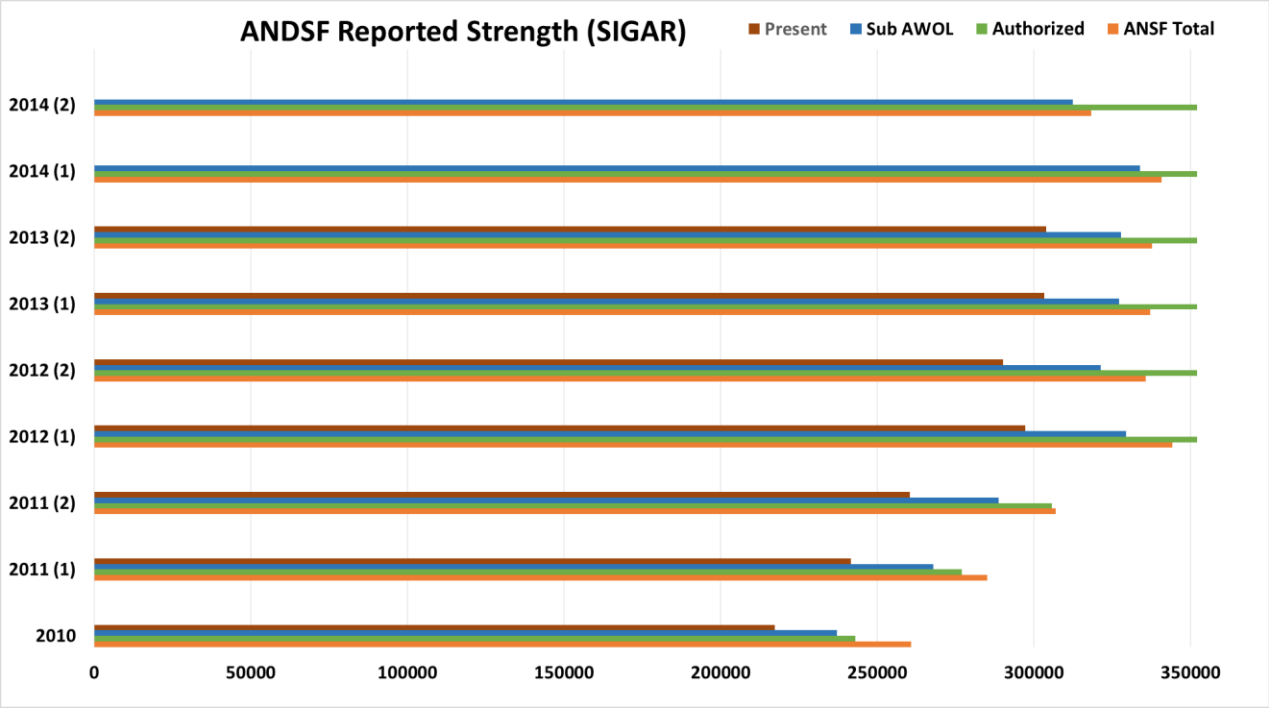


*Figure 3. Comparison of ANSF Total troops reported vs those troops present for duty and with AWOL troops subtracted (Graph by Christian Ferguson). SIGAR. 2010-2014. SIGAR Quarterly Report. Report to United States Congress, Arlington: SIGAR. https://www.sigar.mil/quarterlyreports/index.aspx?SSR=6.*

Another concern regarding the accuracy of reported troop strength is the issue of

[11] "...the new RSM went further, classifying information that SIGAR, until now, has used to publicly report on such matters as ANSF strength..." (SIGAR, 2015).

"ghost soldiers," empty security positions that get counted as being filled by personnel, which was also repeatedly highlighted by SIGAR throughout these reports. The concept of ghost soldiers poses of course a significant issue to the certainty of reported ANDSF personnel, since it undermines its validity (Sopko, 2016). More specifically, it threatens the content validity,[12] since the assessments seek to give an accurate representation of total troop numbers of Afghani security personnel. This means that instead of knowing the actual strength of the ANDSF, which is essential in assessing capabilities, there is a significant intelligence gap, which was not reported within the DOD reports. Some anecdotal evidence indicates that ghost soldiers made up about 40% in the Helmand Province (O'Donnell & Khan, 2016). Other sources, such as Afghanistan's Finance Minister, even suggest that the numbers were as high as 80% (Payenda, 2021). However, SIGAR pointed out a more definitive estimation, based on the, then new, Afghan Personnel and Pay System (APPS), which was implemented in 2019 in response to existing concerns regarding accountability. This revealed there was a difference of 10% to 20% between the numbers the year prior to APPS implementation, which resulted in 58,478 personnel removed from payrolls (SIGAR, 2020). This difference is also visible in the DOD reported numbers from 2018 to 2019 due to the removal of these ghost accounts (See Figure 1). While it is difficult, perhaps even impossible, to capture the exact extent of ghost soldiers, it is a known element of uncertainty that surrounds the actual troop strength of the ANDSF.

*Testimonies of concern – outside impressions of the ANDSF capabilities & assessments*

[12] "Content validity refers to the extent to which the items on a test are fairly representative of the entire domain the test seeks to measure" (Salkind, 2010).

The previous subsections provided an impression of how official reports assessed the ANDSF's military capabilities and what some of the key intelligence gaps were. However, to identify potential intelligence failures within these reports, a comparison must be made to outside assessments of the same subject. This subsection will contrast the reported understanding of the ANDSF (troop numbers, attrition, AWOL rate, ghost soldiers), as well as the method of assessment to external sources to identify flaws therein. The assessments and metrics utilized by the United States to assess the capabilities of the ANDSF were questioned by multiple subject-matter experts. Dr. Downes-Martin from the Naval War College identified in 2011 six flaws in the Afghanistan assessments that were practiced at the time: "Overoptimism, Metrics Collection, Junk Arithmetic, Simplistic Color Coding, Logic Failures, and No Compelling Combination of Assessments" (Downes-Martin, 2011). Similar observations were made by other scholars, regarding logic failures, flaws in metrics calculations (Roginski, Upshur, & Kilcullen, 2012), and simplistic color coding (Katz, 2013). Three of these assessment flaws (Overoptimism, Metrics Collection, and Junk Arithmetic) were observed throughout the review of DOD reports.

Dr. Martin described "Overoptimism" as a "glass half-full" mentality that distorts the ability of assessments to adequately reflect what the analysis has found. This was certainly evident in DOD reports from 2015-2019 that presented a positive outlook, despite an approximately 10% decrease in total ANDSF force strength and rising attrition. Similarly, the RAND Corporation found in a 2012 report on assessment and metric in counterinsurgency, that the DOD assessment reports contained a certain degree of

overoptimism.[13] Dr. Anthony Cordesman echoed this sentiment in a statement to Congress in 2012, calling it "pervasive positive bias" (Cordesman, 2012). A senior International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) adviser, Colonel Bob Cowley, presented a similar observation by exclaiming that "every data point was altered to present the best picture possible" (Crowley, 2016). Furthermore, a 2014 report by CAN, a nonprofit research and analysis organization, also pointed out unsubstantiated optimism in operational assessments in Iraq and Afghanistan (Mushen & Schroeden, 2014, p. 45). While unable to verify the extent of this optimism bias, it has been apparent within the reviewed DOD reports that it is a persistent cultural issue within the assessments that were made. SIGAR described it as a tendency to be "overoptimistic—that is, to favor good news over data suggesting a lack of progress" (SIGAR, 2021) in a quarterly report, as well as a lessons learned report.[14] General Michael Flynn, the former Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, even claimed this to be an endemic issue, where intelligence reporting becomes more biased the higher it moves up the echelons of US agencies (Flynn, 2015). The aforementioned flaw of "Metric Collection" reflects the issue of continuously changing the way operational assessments were conducted, as became apparent from the CUAT framework in 2010 to the Afghanistan Compact in 2020. The problem with this is

[13] "As with Vietnam-era assessment reports, overoptimism in Iraq and Afghanistan assessment reporting is most apparent in the emphasis that is sometimes placed on positive information rather than in an imbalance in the published reports. In other words, reports from both eras often show positive and negative information, but the ways in which the reports are presented may emphasize an optimistic outlook that the report does not necessarily warrant" (Connable, 2012, p. 225).

[14] "To reduce the prevalence of overoptimism in determining progress towards objectives, the Secretary of Defense should ensure that campaign-level operation assessments follow existing doctrine and incorporate "red teams" that challenge organizational biases, provide opposing points of view, and constructively critique proposed plans for accomplishing the mission" (SIGAR 21-41-LL, 2021).

two-fold, according to Dr. Downes-Martin: collecting as many metrics as possible, only to find them irrelevant to the assessment, and then trying to fix the problem by focusing on too few metrics and ignoring essential elements (Downes-Martin, 2011). In the earlier years of CUAT, as many as 422 units were reviewed, including 157 ANA battalions/"kandaks"[15] and 152 Afghan Uniformed Police units (DOD, 2011). The CUAT was then deemed to be "inconsistent and not useful to leadership" (SIGAR, 2014). When the CUAT changed to the RASR in June 2014, only 85 key units were evaluated and decreased to as few as 43 in October 2014, only assessing the ANA corps level and select ANP units (DOD, 2014). This almost identical to what Dr. Downes-Martin had already warned about in 2011 (Downes-Martin, 2011). The main issue is the omitted metrics from the excluded units in 2014 are not analyzed at all. This means the RASR, by reducing the assessed units by almost 90 percent, didn't improve ANDSF assessments, but instead created massive intelligence gaps. While the assessment data of the succeeding framework, the MAAR, is not available, the US Forces Afghanistan (USFOR-A) stated the MAAR was only assessing the ANA and the ANP at the headquarters level (SIGAR, 2017).

The third flaw that became apparent in these intelligence assessments is "Junk Arithmetic".[16] Continuing with the previous example of CUAT, there was a perceived increase in operational performance from 2010 with 22% in the top two categories to 51% in 2013 (DOD, 2013). However, this metric becomes largely irrelevant when considering

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[15] "A unit in the Afghan army that works in cooperation with American forces" (WordSense, 2022).

[16] "The rules of arithmetic—including the fact that adding or averaging rank orders is nonsense—were established
over two millenniums ago by, among others, Pythagoras and are taught in every elementary school worldwide."
(Downes-Martin, 2011).

the rating criteria changed every 6 months within that time period.[17] Additionally, the number of units reviewed increased from 422 in 2011 to 830 in 2013 (DOD, 2013). This means any assessed increase in operational capability calculated via this framework is meaningless, since the sample size has changed dramatically and the criteria for capability is inconsistent. RASR committed to the same junk arithmetic, by exclaiming 83 percent of units "are rated as capable or fully capable" while omitting the number of units that were not included within the assessment (DOD, 2014, p. 60, para. 2.10). That year, only 43 key units were reviewed, due to lack of advisor team shortages, of which 33 (83 percent) received desirable ratings. However, relative to the standard 85 key units that were normally assessed under RASR this means the number of units with desirable rating is only 39% and the number of "unknown" key units is 49%. Furthermore, this approach introduces a stark degree of sampling bias,[18] since the selection of these "key units" is unlikely to be representative of the overall ANDSF capabilities, especially since it excludes brigade level assessments. This "junk arithmetic" that Dr. Downes-Martin observed prior to 2011, clearly continued in DOD assessments in the years thereafter.

An element that was remarkably missing from the official DOD reports to Congress was the cultural aspect of the people that made up the ANDSF. While these reports have displayed quantitative elements and operational assessment metrics (as these findings have covered extensively) there is nothing on the worldview of the people that the entire

[17] See Appendix A.
[18] "This is called admission bias. Bias exists because the population studied does not reflect the general population."
(Šimundić, 2013).

endeavor relies upon—the troops themselves. In 2012, Dr. Cordesman states, "Measuring the ANSF's ability to fight is not nearly as important as measuring its will to fight – and its will to fight for the central government and not some powerbroker or warlord" (Cordesman, 2012, p. 2, para. 3). It is well established that morale and esprit de corps within a unit or army is directly correlated to their effectiveness (Motowildo & C., 1978) and is paramount for an institution in the business of war (Pope, 1941). Even the US Army reiterated this notion in its publications.[19] The 2022 conflict between Russia and Ukraine also demonstrates how morale can matter more than military might (Davis Jr., 2022). In spite of that, neither the DOD nor SIGAR addressed this vital human element, a few glimpses into the morale of the ANDSF can be extrapolated from a number of sources. For example, a 2011 study revealed the murder rate of Coalition Forces in Afghanistan's regions of Nangarhar, Nuristan, Kunar, and Laghman was 154 times greater than that of police officers within the United States—not from enemy attacks, but from their own ranks within the ANDSF (Bordin, 2011). Moreover, the study determined these "Green-on-Blue" fratricides were not just isolated cases, but an indicator of a deep cultural problem between the coalition forces and the Afghanis they were supporting. This means morale is not only low, but there is a strong degree of animosity towards the United States and other western partners (Bordin, 2011). This is a cultural aspect, which was not only disregarded, but even actively suppressed,[20] that would have been useful in assessing the capabilities

[19] "War is a lethal clash of wills and an inherently human endeavor that requires perseverance, sacrifice, and tenacity" (Army Headquarters, 2019).

[20] "When first published it was designated as 'unclassified'… the report was subsequently 'retrospectively classified' by the US military" (Dyvik, 2017).

of the ANDSF (Mausner, 2010).

## DISCUSSION

This study set out to answer three questions related to the capability assessments of the ANDSF: how were they conducted, what were the intelligence gaps and failures therein, and why were policymakers caught by surprise? To find answers, three sets of sources, within the timeframe of 2010 to 2020, were reviewed: bi-annual DOD reports to Congress, SIGAR quarterly reports, and external testimonies on the assessment process. The results found the United States was primarily assessing the ANDSF on the basis of quantitative multitude of caveats, such as ghost soldiers, AWOL, and overall troops present for duty. Additionally, flaws like "Junk Arithmetic" and poor metrics collection created a distorted image of the operational capabilities of the Afghan troops (Downes-Martin, 2011). This study found that the qualitative elements and narrative to describe the ANDSF was more often than not unsuitably optimistic, putting a "hopeful positive spin" on negative trends (SIGAR, 2021). Moreover, vital aspects of unit effectiveness, such as morale (Pope, 1941), were not assessed and negative cultural issues were neglected (Bordin, 2011). Consistent with (Downes-Martin, 2011), there was an overreliance on erroneous data, due to (either deliberate or accidental) misinterpretation, inconsistent collection, and inadequate metrics. Unfortunately, neither DOD reports nor SIGAR addressed cultural aspects extensively, but some of the trends found indicate a serious rift between coalition approach and Afghani culture. However, a few findings, such as the degree of optimism bias within the reporting, were unexpected.

The quantitative elements within the capability assessments used to measure the ANDSF had serious flaws in collection, analysis, and reporting. The significance of this finding is that the numbers presented within the reports to Congress not only have large intelligence gaps (SIGAR, 2021), but, more often than not, fail to caveat these uncertainties and limitations. This is clearly an intelligence failure on the part of the DOD, since it provides inadequate and even misleading information regarding ANDSF capabilities,[21] the primary effort of the entire Resolute Support mission.[22] Furthermore, the purpose of the reviewed reports was to inform Congress on the activities related to the "capabilities, and effectiveness" of the ANDSF (110th Congress, 2008). However, in order to measure whether the ANDSF is adequate to fulfill this purpose, requires a notion of what was needed to accomplish the desired effect. Otherwise, the reports simply capture tactical information that do not answer the strategic questions asked (Cordesman, 2016, p. 5).

The reports present how many troops are on the books relative to the authorized troop strength, but what makes the authorized troop strength of 352,000 for the ANDSF an appropriate number? Some suggest the more appropriate number is 500,000 soldiers and policemen (Jalali, 2016). The most thorough estimated number came from multiple sources (NATO, US, Afghan Ministry of Defense), which indicated in 2009 the end-strength of the ANA, which was capped at 195,000 from 2012 onward, needed to be at least 240,000 troops (GAO, 2011). This would put the needed ANDSF end-strength at

[21] "We have failed because we have not explained ourselves adequately and comprehensibly to the public -- describing our role, the limits within which we work and our view of what can be reasonably expected from us" (Lowenthal, 2008).

[22] "Its purpose was to help the Afghan security forces and institutions develop the capacity to defend Afghanistan and protect its citizens in the long term" (NATO, 2021).

approximately 400,000, assuming no increase was needed amongst the ANP. These examples are not meant to argue for a particular size of the ANDSF, but to emphasize numeric values utilized in capability assessments require meaning and caveats. Intelligence operates in a realm full of uncertainties i.e. intelligence gaps (Friedman & Zeckhauser, 2012), so it is essential to emphasize the degree of analytic confidence that comes with an assessment, as is standard in the intelligence community (ODNI, 2015). The troop numbers presented within the DOD reports lack this emphasis of uncertainty and would look very different if included (see Appendix B). However, most of the intelligence gaps and uncertainties that existed with the quantitative information were pointed out by SIGAR's quarterly reports (SIGAR, 2021), thus one could argue the DOD and SIGAR reports complement each other. Notwithstanding, the findings demonstrated that quantitative elements were insufficiently presented and could lead to overoptimistic conclusions. Therefore, the understanding of the ANDSF, at least to some degree, was likely hampered by the intelligence provided, which falls in line with this study's thesis statement.

As mentioned before, an unexpected finding on the qualitative side of the DOD reports is the degree of optimism within their narrative (DOD, 2010-20). Despite negative trending data, and even acknowledging concerns over attrition and recruitment levels to sustain the ANDSF, the overall narrative seemed to amplify a "can do" attitude.[23] While optimism bias is a natural human tendency (Sharot, 2011), the intelligence assessments

[23] "Confident in your ability to deal with problems and achieve success" (Combley, 2011).

must be as honest and realistic as it can be based on the available information.[24] While this may sound like a reasonable and simple ask, it is much more complex than it initially seems. Consider the analyst, who receives large amounts of data, likely packed with ambiguity, tasked to shape it into laconic statements that not only capture the current state of affairs, but also estimate future outcomes—all of this with haste and accuracy. Not only are there stressors and inherent psychological limitations to exercising sound judgement within the analysis process, but the environment may actually encourage a bias towards positivity and overconfidence (Heuer Jr., 1999). For example, one would think that an analyst who receives a lot of data would be able to correspondingly increase the accuracy of his assessments, but multiple studies have shown that this is not the case.[25] One such study demonstrated that as available information increases for the people making a future prediction, so does their confidence, but not their accuracy, as can be seen in Appendix C (Slovic, 1973). This means that external feedback to mitigate this bias would be required before it festers into a cognitive pattern to the more seasoned analysts (Heuer Jr., 1999). This is a constant variable at the analysts' level that needs to be accounted for and addressed to limit the degree of optimism bias within assessments, just like those made on the ANDSF.

Another unintended effect of the ill-suited optimism within intelligence assessments is that it "snowballs" as reports gets distributed. It is well established that

[24] "Moral courage is required to remain intellectually honest and to resist the pressure to reach intelligence conclusions that are not supported by facts" (Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2013).
[25] "As they received more information, their confidence soared. Furthermore, their certainty about their own decisions became entirely out of proportion to the actual correctness of those decisions" (Oskamp, 1965).

people update their beliefs more likely and more frequently when confronted with good news, while sticking to a prior held optimistic outlook when confronted with bad news.[26] This also holds true in the realm of higher-level decision-makers, particularly policy-makers.[27] This means that even if the intelligence presented were accurate, but negative or against a dearly held policy, it may fall on deaf ears, become concealed or even get altered. In addition, a problem might be recognized, but lacks the impact for a policymaker to deem it an issue worth fixing (Kingdon, 2003, p. 94). This is meant to show that while there are shortcomings on the side of intelligence analysts presenting the information, there are also shortcomings on the side of the decision-maker not necessarily listening—nor is it meant to absolve the intelligence community from a shared responsibility. The identification of vulnerabilities and their amelioration go hand in hand (Gentry, 2008). It is equally a failure when intelligence does not honestly identify negative elements of information revealed through available collection, as it is a failure for decision-making customers to listen and act upon it.

The findings also showed DOD reports presented four operational assessments, which were largely incapable of properly assessing the ANDSF. The first two frameworks, the CUAT & RASR, are the only tool that actually had advisors assessing the brigades/*kandaks* directly. However, a huge flaw of the CUAT is that it mixed measures of performance (MOPs) and measures of effectiveness (MOEs) to make one operational

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[26] See page 12 of "Optimistic update bias holds firm: Three tests of robustness following Shah et al." for a list of relevant studies (Gartret & Sharot, 2017).

[27] "Confronted by differing analyses, a leader mortgaged to a policy tends to resent or dismiss those that are critical, even when they represent the majority view of the intelligence community, and to cling to the data that support continued commitment" (Betts, 2007).

evaluation (DOD, 2011)—something the commander's handbook on assessments calls "a waste of time".[28] Additionally, the data used to measure ANDSF capabilities seems to be centered more along what is measurable, but not necessarily what is needed in order to adequately assess the force. In fact, excessive collection is something that should be discouraged.[29] Uncertainty is a given on any battlefield, and removing the "fog of war" is something that requires tremendous effort (Clausewitz, 1976). Therefore, rather than collecting a variety of metrics for analysis, like the CUAT, that then gets labeled as not being sufficient for a capability assessment a few years later (DOD, 2013), it would be better to collect just the most essential pieces of information. This could save a lot of effort, which can then be used to ensure the accuracy and frequency of the collected information. Besides, more data does not necessarily mean better accuracy, as was already established (Slovic, 1973). Additionally, the decision to only assess the ANDSF at the headquarters level is akin to assessing the average American by only looking at their Congressman. The Army's Field Manual 5-0 even states specifically "the echelon at which a specific operation, task, or action is conducted should be the echelon at which it is assessed" (US Army, 2010). Overall, this is in line with the notion that a severe lack of understanding of ANDSF existed. The assessment frameworks the DOD utilized were ineffective in providing a clear picture, and may even have led to erroneous impressions.

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[28] "MOEs and their supporting indicators measure the operational environment without regard for the MOPs and tasks… Lessons learned indicate that trying to build a linkage between MOP and MOE is a proven waste of time for staffs" (Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2011).

[29] "Commanders reject the tendency to measure something just because itis measurable. Effective commanders avoid burdening subordinates and staffs with overly detailed assessment and collection tasks" (US Army, 2010).

The final aspect worth discussing is that of culture, not just that of the Afghanis, but also of the West. The reviewed reports barely paid any attention to cultural aspects in evaluating the readiness and sustainability of the ANDSF. The will to fight, i.e., morale, is probably the most essential element in evaluating a military's capability.[30] So why was this critical element not included in the assessment process? Part of the reason is likely that morale is not a quantifiable metric, which military staffs prefer to present material with substance and certainty (Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2011). But a deeper underlying reason is there is a problem with American culture—more specifically hubris.[31] Even the counterinsurgency field manual warns of a so called "The American way is best" bias (Army, 2006, p. 232, para. 8-13). What the United States assumed about Afghanis is best captured in the words of the Pentagon Press Secretary in July 2021: "They know how to defend their country and they know the advantages that they have" (Kirby, 2021, p. 12). However, this is a flawed assumption—The Afghan people do not define themselves by the idea of a nation as it is customary in the West, but along a much more complex mix of ethnic, tribal, and religious identities (Ehsan, 2017). There is a tendency for infighting to gain advantage over cultural adversaries (SIGAR, 2018) and a high degree of skepticism of foreign influences, due to their long history of imperial "visitors". This puts the United States in a difficult position to assess soldiers who at times do not understand why Afghan security should be in their interest[32] and at other times may hold a great degree of

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[30] "War is a trial of moral and physical forces by means of the latter. . . In the last analysis it is at moral, not physical strength that all military action is directed … Moral factors, then, are the ultimate determinants in war" (Clausewitz, 1976).

[31] The book "Imperial Hubris", written by a former CIA intelligence officer, makes a case for this as it relates to the war on terror (Scheuer, 2004).

[32] "In Afghanistan, the problem we had training the ANA was that they only really gave a shit about

animosity towards those within the coalition (Bordin, 2011). Furthermore, the high AWOL rate and phenomenon of ghost soldiers were known, but the underlying reasons not explored. Thus, the *esprit de corps* of the and the overall understanding of the Pashtun culture remained an intelligence gap that could have been more thoroughly addressed.

Even though this study suffers from some severe limitations of access to valuable information that still remains at the classified level for the foreseeable future, these findings and their implications already demonstrate a concerning approach to how the ANDSF was assessed. While some have warned about the assessment shortcomings that this study addressed for years, such as SIGAR and Dr. Anthony Cordesman,[33] this study further underscores how little the United States understood about the security structure it was trying to build. While some factors are nearly impossible to mitigate, such as inherent cognitive limitations (Heuer Jr., 1999) and the persistent "fog of war" that one only ever gets a small glimpse through (Clausewitz, 1976), there are certainly efforts that could have made a difference in the assessment process. The next section will explore how some of these failures, intelligence or otherwise, could theoretically be mitigated.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The first exhortation is to focus on quality rather than quantity of data, with a focus on the whole operational environment including an understanding of host nation security

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themselves and their tribal group. Northern Pashtuns were especially bad with this. I caught a group of them smoking hash when they were supposed to be patrolling and their commander gave them a tongue lashing, but they really didn't understand why they should be interested in Afghan security as a whole versus just their own village/family/friends" (Mason, 2015).

[33] Arleigh A. Burke Chair in Strategy at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).

forces, like the ANDSF.[34] This has to start with the requests for information needing to be funneled more to not overwhelm collection capabilities, something that has been warned about in the past.[35] Too much demand stretches intelligence too thin, which leads to corners being cut during collection (Downes-Martin, 2011) and a lack of vetting sources.[36] Better prioritization of what information is most essential is needed (Katz, 2013). In an effort to build the capability of the ANDSF, this should include what the DOD has rightfully monitored in its reports, such as: troop numbers, training, literacy, logistics, operational viability, etc. (DOD, 2010-20), but percentages of courses completed or counting how many attacks were repelled do not necessarily capture what is vital to the readiness and sustainability of the ANDSF. Nor is it beneficial to overly rely on these quantitative factors alone to assess the capabilities of a host nation security force (Cordesman, Afghan National Security Forces and Security Lead Transition: The Assessment Process, Metrics, and Efforts to Build Capacity, 2012). Moreover, the amount of effort that went into collecting metrics for these reports could have been allocated elsewhere. Unfortunately, a more comprehensive description of how intelligence collection can be streamlined would require access to the full collection tasking. Even so, the lack of quality found within a lot of the assessment metrics in the DOD reports and the abundance of arbitrary measurements (CUAT, RASR etc.) show a quantity over quality approach that should change.

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[34] Referring to other host nation security forces that highly depend on the United States.
[35] "The US intelligence community is currently inundated with information. This poses a serious challenge to effective intelligence work" (Young, 2013); "Not just the [CIA], but the Pentagon, the NSA, a whole series of organizations that collect a lot of stuff. And the more stuff you have the harder it is to sift through" –Jack Rice (Maher, 2010); "In my opinion, the number of metrics demanded overwhelms the collection capacity of regional commands' partner civilian organizations and major supporting commands" (Downes-Martin, 2011).
[36] ANDSF personnel strength, recruiting, retention, and attrition information is derived from Afghan reporting" (DOD, 2008).

The second recommendation is that the abstract dimension, which should definitely be included in future assessments, is unit morale. It is an aspect that was missing almost entirely, aside for the occasional mentions related to corruption, yet essential.[37] This should be conducted in two ways: by implementing a self-reporting mechanism in the form of a routine survey and an assessment of a U.S. advisor located at the echelon where the morale is measured. Collecting this information directly at the brigade level by a U.S. national ensures a higher degree of reliability, particularly internal consistency, and impartiality to local politics. Additionally, collecting information only at the Corp or Division would not capture the average soldier patrolling the streets (so to speak). The survey should include six dimensions to measure morale: "Goal/Mission, Group and Cohesion, Mental State/Quality, Selflessness, Feeling/Interest, Spiritual State" (Osman, et al., 2018). These six factors were determined by a recent study to be very reliable indicators to measure motivation in the Malaysian Army, and is supported by a multitude of additional research (See Appendix D.). In fact, this method is so reliable that it managed to attain a Cronbach's Alpha values range from 0.80 to 0.98 in measuring the six constructs of morale.[38] Due to low Afghan literacy rate (SIGAR, 2021), the questionnaire would likely need to be available in written as well as auditory form, but in turn provides a relatively reliable and quantifiable metric to capture self-reported morale, satisfaction, and will to fight. The assigned U.S. official could then process the collected information

[37] (Clausewitz, 1976); (Pope, 1941); (Motowildo & C., 1978); (Cordesman, Afghan National Security Forces and Security Lead Transition: The Assessment Process, Metrics, and Efforts to Build Capacity, 2012).
[38] "One method of assessing the internal consistency of an instrument is by using Cronbach's coefficient alpha. It is represented by a value between 0 and 1, with 1 representing the maximum estimate of reliability" (Osman, et al.) 2018).

along with his findings into a report to be sent to the division or corps level for further consolidation.

The third recommendation is that the ANDSF manning numbers reviewed within the DOD report should have had several caveats and clarifications. Troop numbers were always measured relative to the authorized end-strength, but no feedback was provided if the end- strength of 352,000 was just as applicable in 2013 as it was in 2020 (DOD, 2010-20). The reports should have included an assessment, based on operational conditions and other justifications, of whether the end-strength of the ANDSF needs to be increased or decreased. This could then be followed by an estimate of what analysts assess the ANDSF actual troop strength to be, either as a range or with a margin of error. This allows for troop numbers to still be reported with relative simplicity, while acknowledging the uncertainty associated with reporting. Furthermore, based on the reported attrition and recruitment levels an estimate can be made on future end-strength. Overall, these caveats would provide more valuable information than a simple percentage of authorized troops met.

## CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore why the United States was caught by surprise when the ANDSF collapsed in 2021 and identify whether flaws in the assessment process had given an inadequate impression of the state the security forces were in, the ten years prior. This study conjected the United States lacked a fundamental understanding of the ANDSF, due to quantitative errors and cultural ignorance in judgements, which may have led to the

astonishment of their decision-makers. The research has shown that DOD reports to Congress contained many quantitative elements that were significantly flawed, either in their evaluation, presentation, or interpretation; despite warnings from organizations such as SIGAR & CSIS, in addition to other subject-matter experts. Issues with inconsistent assessment metrics and erroneous data presentation resulted in favorable deceptions of the ANDSF's status. Cultural elements were barely covered within the reviewed reports, but external assessments, such as Dr. Bordin's and Dr. Cordesman's, displayed concern for this gap in intelligence to not be addressed. Unexpectedly, the study found an ill-fitting positive narrative for the slow devolution of the ANDSF from 2012 onward, despite the accompaniment of declining troop numbers, increasing attrition rates, and prevalent "ghost soldiers". This positivity bias is likely an inseparable part of the human cognitive limitations, as multiple psychological studies have shown (Sharot, 2011). However, an excessive quantity of elements of information, may have increased this confidence (Slovic, 1973). Further research is certainly needed, once classified information becomes available, to reevaluate the findings of this study with the newly accessible information. Additionally, exploring cultural aspects of the Afghanis' motivation to fight, their priorities, and impressions of the United States is recommended. The points within this study have underscored the assessment process requires revision to ameliorate the understanding of soldiery readiness, sustainability, and esprit de corp. It also highlights some of the shortcomings within intelligence processes, particularly when it comes to assessing coalition capabilities. Understanding "yourself" is just as important as understanding the adversary in order to succeed.

Appendix A. CUAT framework changes

**History of ANSF Assessment Rating Definition Levels, 2010 to Present**

| CUAT | | | | | RASR |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **April 2010** | **July 2010** | **September 2010** | **October 2010** | **August 2011** | **July 2013** |
| Effective with Advisors | Independent | Independent | Independent | Independent with Advisors | Fully Capable |
| Effective with Assistance | Effective with Advisors | Effective with Advisors | Effective with Advisors | Effective with Advisors | Capable |
| Dependent on Coalition Forces for Success | Effective with Assistance | Effective with Assistance | Effective with Assistance | Effective with Partners | Partially Capable |
| Barely Effective | Dependent on Coalition Forces for Success | Dependent on Coalition Forces for Success | Developing | Developing with Partners | Developing |
| Ineffective | Ineffective | Ineffective | Established | Established | Established |
| Not Assessed | Not Assessed | Not Assessed | Not Assessed | Not Assessed | Not Assessed |

Note: IJC color coded the CUAT and RASR rating definition levels titles. This table reflects the command's color scheme.

Source: IJC response to SIGAR data call, 12/20/2012; IJC meeting with SIGAR, 4/12/13.

*Table 1. SIGAR, Afghan National Security Forces: Actions Needed to Improve Plans for Sustaining Capability Assessment Efforts, February 2014, 14-33 Audit Report, SIGAR, https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/audits/sigar_14-33-ar.pdf*

Appendix B. ANDSF Troop numbers with caveats

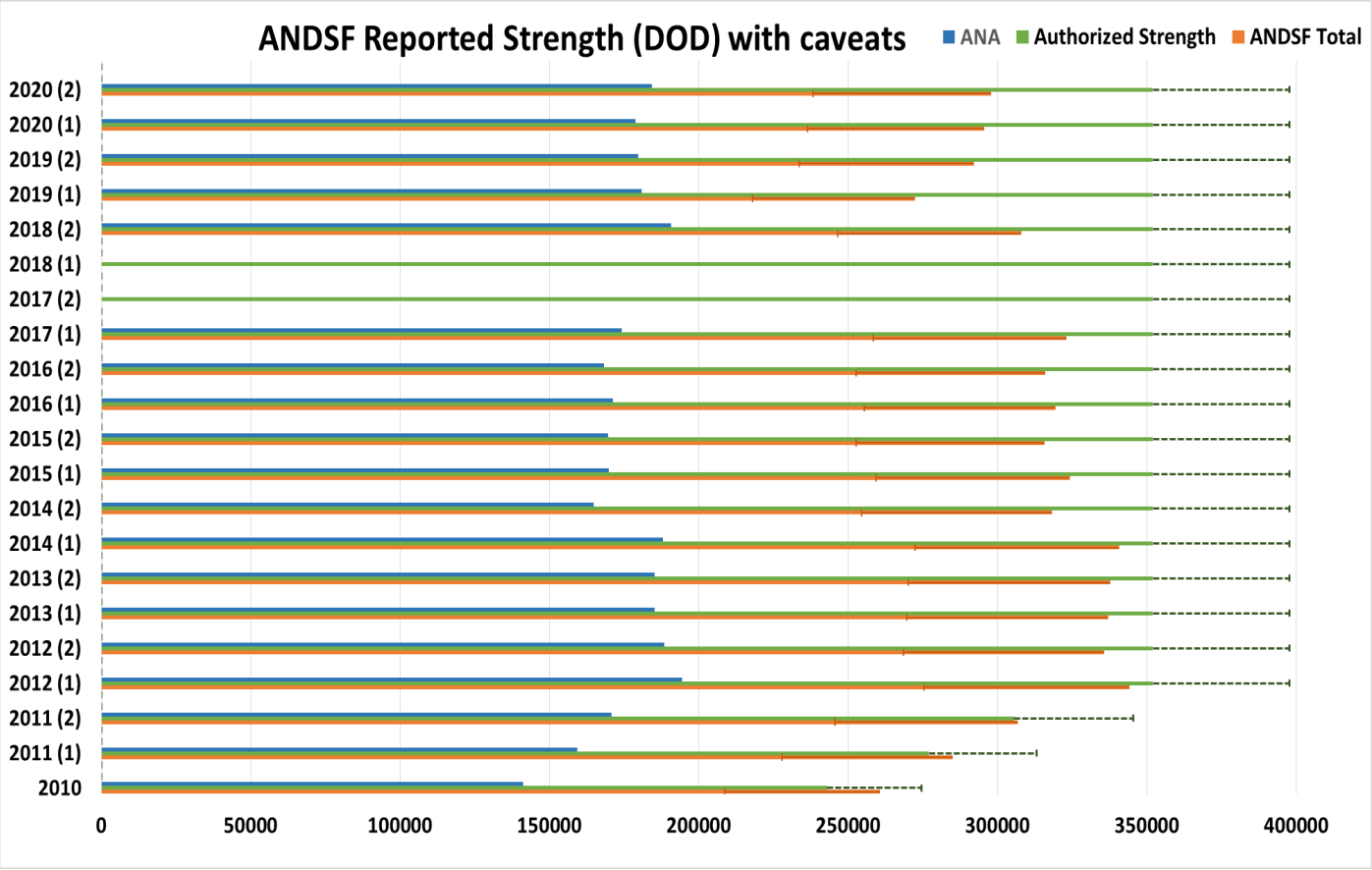


*Figure 4. Example of total ANDSF troops relative to authorized maximum from 2010 to 2020—with the caveats of needed troops being potentially higher (~400,000), reported troops being potentially lower (20% margin of error) and number of actual Afghani military troops (ANA) displayed. [Note: 2017 & 2018 data are not available due to classification] (Graph by Christian Ferguson). Derived from Department of Defense. 2010- 2020. Report on Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan. Report to Congress, Washington D.C.: Department of Defense.*

# Appendix C. Confidence vs Accuracy with increased information

Table 1

Test-Retest Consistency at Low (5 Predictors) and High (40 Predictors) Levels of Information for 8 Subjects (Horse Racing Study)

| Index of Reliability | 5 Predictors | 40 Predictors |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Changes in first-place selections | 9/40<br>22% | 14/40<br>39% |
| 2. Changes in any of five ranks | 91/200<br>45.5% | 121/200<br>60.5% |
| 3. Differences in ranks* | 153 | 220 |

* Sum of differences is less for 5 than for 40 predictors in 30/37 races (3 ties)

Conclusion: Expert handicappers are much less consistent with 40 predictor items than with 5 predictor items.

Example: Race N: 5 predictors

| | Horse numbers | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| First ranking of Race N: | 8 | 3 | 7 | 2 | 4 |
| Second ranking of Race N: | 7 | 3 | 4 | 8 | 2 |

The first-place horse changed; the horses changed at four out of five ranks; sum of differences = 3+0+2+1+2=8.

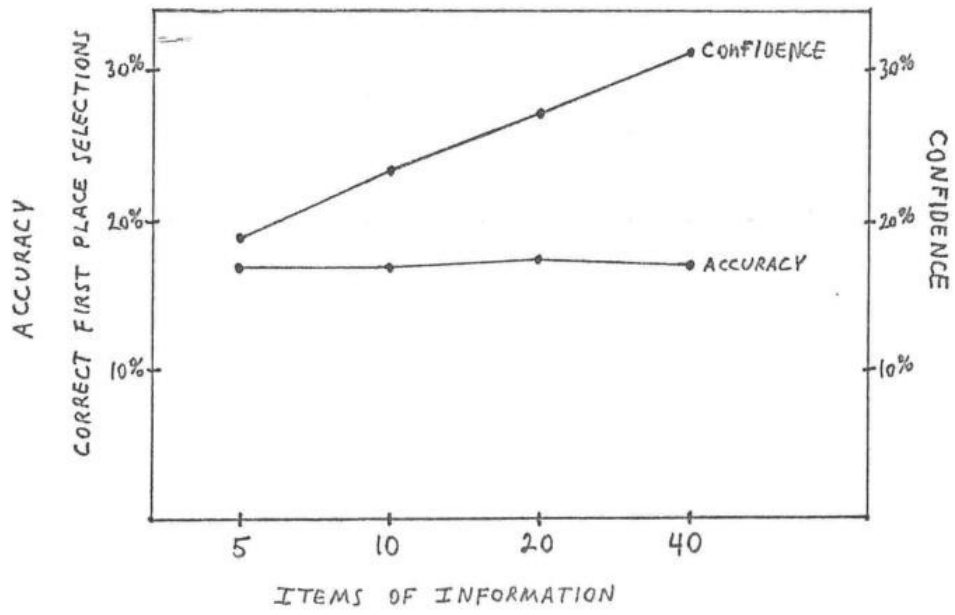


*Figure 5. Experiment on horse-race predictions showing confidence versus accuracy as items of information increased. Slovic, Paul. 1973. Behavioral Problems of Adhering to a Decision Policy. Paper presented at the Institute for Quantitative Research in Finance, Eugene: Oregon Research Institute. https://scholarsbank.uoregon.edu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1794/23607/928.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y*

# Appendix D. The Dimension of Morale and References Cited

| No | Dimension of Morale | References for Dimension |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Goal/Mission/Task Accomplishment | Baynes (1967); Morgenthau (1978); Chandar (1979); Buzan (1983); Gal (1986); Gal & Manning (1987); Jomini (1996); Siebold (1999); Schumm & Bell (2000); Shamir et al. (2000); Riley (2002); Murphy & Farley (2002); Louis (2005); Goyne (2004); Catignani (2004); Britt, Dickinson, Moore, Castro & Adler (2007; Gelooven (2007); Bester & Stanz (2007). |
| 2 | Group and Cohesion | Ulio (1941); Baynes (1967); Knorr (1970); Morgenthau (1978); Buzan (1983); Gal & Manning (1987); Manning (1991); Siebold (1999); Shamir et al. (2000); Schumm & Bell (2000); Riley (2002); Murphy & Farley (2002); Goyne (2004); Cartignani (2004); Britt & Dickson (2006); Bester & Stanz (2007). |
| 3 | Mental State (Mental Quality) | Viteles (1953); Guba (1958); Motowildo & Borman (1977, 1978); Hashim (1999); Evans (1998, 2001); Britt, Dickinson, Moore, Castro & Adler (2007); Gelooven (2007). |
| 4 | Selflessness | Creel (1941); Eric (1986); Goyne (2004); Mohd Kenali (2007); Britt, Dickinson, Moore, Castro & Adler (2007); Peterson, Park & Sweeney (2008). |
| 5 | Affective State (Emotion: Feeling and Interest) | Abd Aziz (2000); Johnsrud & Rosser, (2000, 2002); Jaafar (2003); Fadzilah Kamsah & Ahmad Naim (2008). |
| 6 | Spiritual State | Hocking (1941); Eric (1986); Musa Da' (1987); Manning (1991); Hashim (1999); Ary Ginarja (2003); Goyne (2004); Ismail Lufti (2004); Britt & Dickson (2006); Nurudin (2006); Mohd Kenali (2007) Gelooven (2007). |

*Table 2. A proposal by the Centre for Research and Innovation Management, University Pertahan Nasional, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on the six dimensions that should be included in assessing morale within a military unit. Please click the following to see the sources used in the table above: Osman Zolkifli, Jegak Uli, Mohammad Daud Johari, Ahmad Zaidi, Kwong Fook Wen, and Inderjit Singh Tara. 2018. "An Instrument for Measuring Morale of Military Personnel in the Malaysian Army."* International Journal of Academic Research in Business & Social Sciences *1170-1187. https://hrmars.com/papers_submitted/4311/An_Instrument_for_Measuring_Morale_of_Military_Personnel_in_the_Malaysian_Army.pdf*

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