Garrison and Facilities Management Advising and Mentoring

A logistics officer offers a survival guide for helping the Afghan National Army improve its garrison organizations and assume the management of its facilities.

By Captain Brian R. Knutson

Why is there no water pressure in the barracks? Why are the floor drains in the dining facility blocked? What is the status of the security upgrades to the entry control points? Why can't we change the contract for the electrical conduit in the barracks?

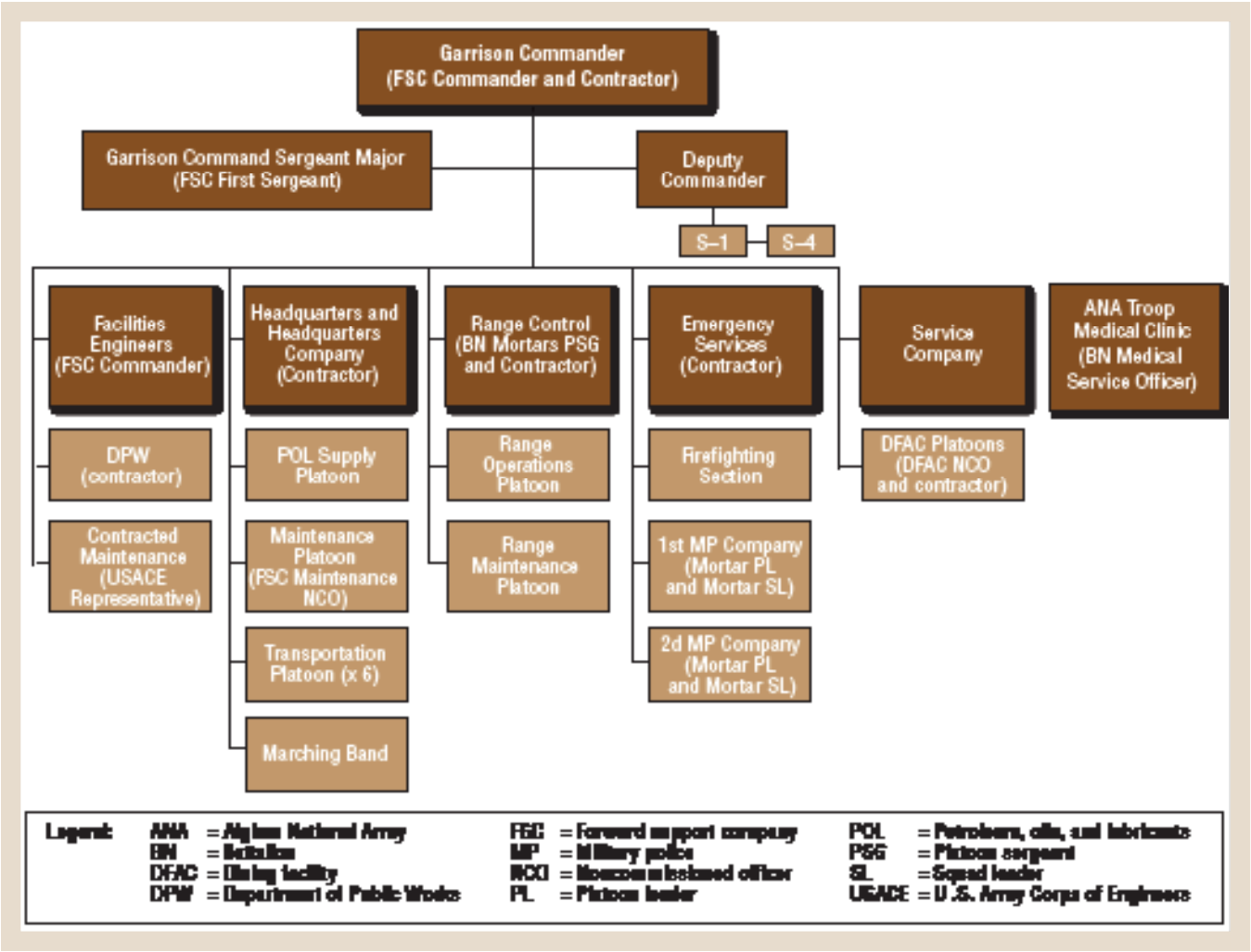
I commonly received these and many other questions during my first few weeks as the adviser to the Kabul Military Training Center (KMTC) garrison commander in Afghanistan. I am a logistics officer by trade, so my experience and skills in engineering and facilities management were a bit lacking.

What follows is a summary of my observations, experiences, and recommendations that others can use if they find themselves in a similar role in a deployed environment. I do not intend to discuss the differences between the U.S. Army and the Afghan National Army (ANA) or which operates better. As coalition leaders, we do not always agree with our coalition counterparts on how to accomplish a mission, but we must work together to find common ground and improve conditions for our allies. My goal is to inform potential advisers about the tactics and techniques we used and make several recommendations for how we can assist our Afghan counterparts in assuming the lead role in garrison and facilities management.

The KMTC Garrison Staff

My unit, the 2d Battalion, 22d Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division (Light Infantry), was assigned as advisers to the ANA's primary initial-entry-training facility in Kabul (equivalent to our Fort Benning, Georgia). The KMTC installation hosted more than 10,000

Soldiers and their ANA counterparts work together at the Kabul Military Training Center to construct tents to be used for literacy training.



This chart depicts the chain of command of the Kabul Military Training Center garrison. U.S. advisers are shown in parentheses.

ANA soldiers daily and trained personnel at all levels from initial-entry training to branch-specific schools (such as food service personnel and mechanics).

We advised and mentored Afghan Army leaders, from the KMTC installation commander to initial-entry training instructors. Included in this group were garrison leaders, facilities engineers, maintenance personnel, and military police.

The KMTC garrison staff structure was minimal. However, a good support network was in place to support the installation. In a fashion similar to our Army, the ANA's personnel strength is drawn from a modified table of organization and equipment document called the tashkil. The tashkil lists the rank and number of civilian and military personnel authorized by location.

KMTC was authorized more garrison personnel than a smaller training center or operating base, such as in Khowst, because of its vast training responsibilities. Without discussing specific ranks and number of personnel authorized, the chart above illustrates the garrison command structure according to the tashkil and where our unit was able to supply advisers and mentors to ANA personnel. It shows where the garrison command needs a significant improvement: the garrison staff.

The ANA garrison staff consisted of two lieutenants, an S–1 and an S–4. This was hardly adequate to support a facility that can train more than 10,000 ANA soldiers at a time. A garrison staff was responsible for all permanent party and trainees on KMTC, so a robust staff (to include an S–2, an S–6, and others) was not required in the garrison headquarters. However, a more robust garrison staff could prioritize garrison responsibilities and projects and support permanent party personnel, who often are the lowest priority for competing resources.

Security and the Military Police

Before making recommendations for changes to the garrison staff and personnel, I should note where the ANA and the current garrison and facilities structure are working well. The KMTC garrison placed significant emphasis and energy on its military police units and security. The entire chain of command understood the importance of security in allowing the ANA and its coalition partners to continue training recruits.

Our unit further emphasized the role of the military police by appointing several officers and NCOs to advise and mentor military police leaders. With advisers working with the military police, the garrison command team, and installation S–2 shops, we were able to demonstrate to the ANA the value of communication and teamwork in accomplishing a mission.

One significant challenge in working with the Afghan military police was giving contracted access to the installation. The military police were very wary about allowing contracted personnel onto the installation. Obviously, this apprehension stemmed from wanting to keep the ANA soldiers at KMTC safe from the enemy.

However, a problem arose because KMTC contractors were hired by a contracting office located on a different coalition installation. When laborers and supervisors showed up at the gates of KMTC, the military police did not always allow them access.

The most efficient way to fix this problem was to have the supervisors from the local company (who usually spoke English) and their U.S. supervisor (if they had one) meet the ANA garrison commander. This allowed the garrison commander to meet the contractor leaders and discuss their work in further detail. This was much easier than using my interpreter to describe the work to be done, and it avoided the problem of trying to provide access for personnel whom the garrison commander did not know.

Contractors and U.S. supervisors who meet with their ANA counterparts often can accomplish much more. This practice also recognizes the importance of personal relationships when dealing with coalition partners. Keep in mind that conversation in a social setting is very important in a culture such as Afghanistan, and much more will be accomplished if this is conducted up front before any work begins. If you have participated in any type of key leader engagement training, you understand the type of relationship and trust that must be built with your ANA counterpart.

Training Afghan Civilian Employees

With more than 10,000 personnel and more than 60 buildings, KMTC has a significant system of facilities that must be managed and maintained in order to continue training new ANA recruits. To accomplish this, an Army Corps of Engineers civilian played a critical role as the operation and maintenance (O&M) supervisor. One of his key tasks involved supervising the contracted company that performed O&M on the installation.

As you can see from the tashkil, KMTC had an authorized civilian Department of Public Works (DPW) workforce. However, at that time, the civilian workforce did not possess the technical skills and training required to operate an installation of this size. More specifically, KMTC had a power plant, wastewater treatment facility, and water-storage facility that required technical expertise to maintain and operate. Managing all of these facilities and the constant work order requests was too much for an unskilled labor force to handle.

Many Afghan civilian employees shadowed the contracted workers and learned some of their skills. An adviser-mentor or contracting officer's representative must be careful not to ask a contractor to do anything outside the scope of his contract. If shadowing was not specifically stated in the contract, the contractor could forbid the Afghan civilian employees from shadowing his workers.

Our higher headquarters, the Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan (CSTC–A), and the Army Corps of Engineers recognized the limited timeline we had to establish and train a DPW civilian workforce. Several programs were established to remedy this problem. CSTC–A created the Installation Transition Advisory Group (ITAG) to train the garrison and facilities management teams for the ANA.

B-huts under construction at Kabul Military Training Center.

ITAG focused primarily on some of the smaller ANA installations that did not have robust or adequate garrison facilities management teams in place. This team made vast contributions toward the eventual handover of garrison command and facilities management responsibilities. The Army Corps of Engineers also addressed this problem by establishing a skilled labor training program for Afghan civilians. This program taught everything from concrete and masonry work to electrical wiring and plumbing. These programs allowed us to begin to hand over the maintenance and construction responsibilities of ANA installations to our Afghan partners.

Changing the Garrison Organization

Updating or changing the tashkil was not an easy task, and many changes are still required to have a successful and effective garrison command. A review board was conducted twice a year, and recommendations were not always accepted. The tashkil review and approval process was several pay grades above my own, and it was most likely regulated and somewhat influenced by politics. Nevertheless, I believe that a garrison command structure for an ANA installation of this size requires authorized personnel similar to what the chart below shows. I believe this would be a much healthier staff with three additional areas of responsibility: S–3 (future operations), housing (current operations), and safety.

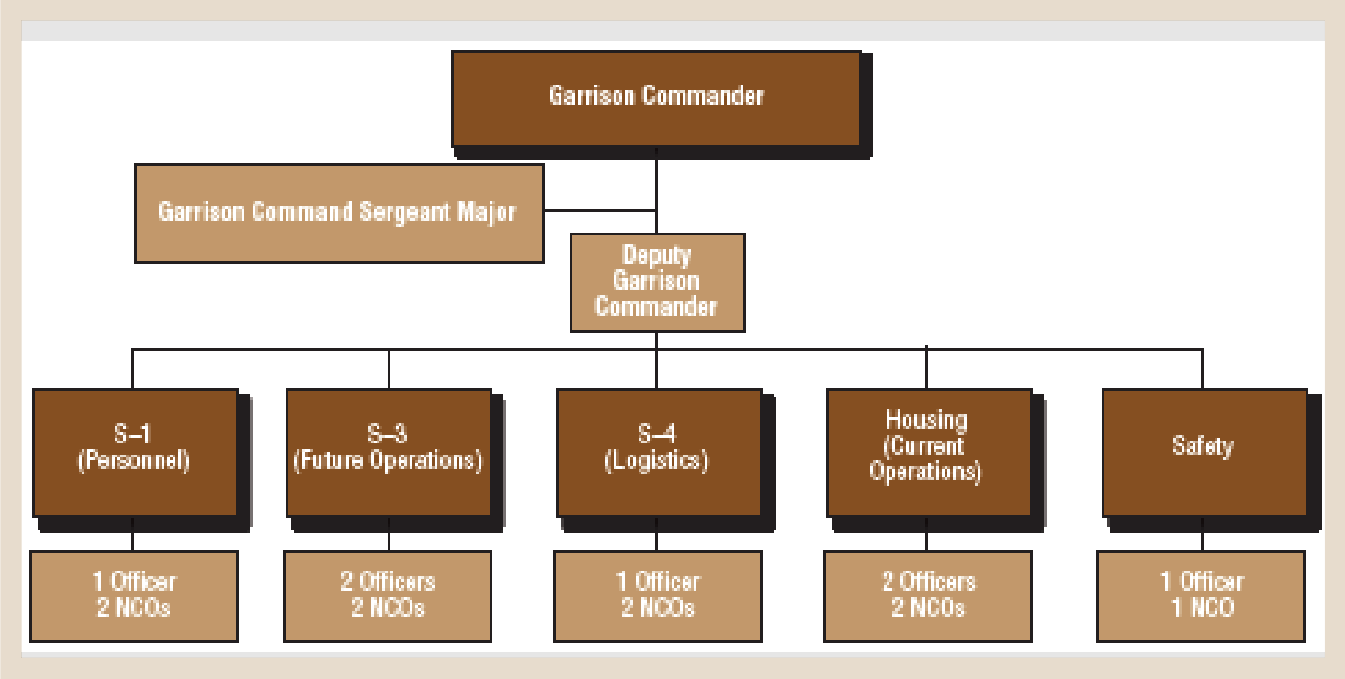
The S–3 section would plan for upcoming construction projects, school moves, and facility responsibilities. During my time as an adviser, the growth in quantity and quality of the ANA was a top priority for our higher headquarters. Since KMTC was such a large installation and capable of training thousands of ANA soldiers, significant emphasis was placed on increasing the number of training courses on the installation. This often became a source of great frustration since only a finite number of facilities were available to support the ever-increasing number of trainees.

New facilities also take a long time to build and require a significant amount of time and money to complete. A garrison S–3 shop could work with the installation S–3 to plan for upcoming changes to courses, personnel numbers, and facility allocations. At the time, no future planning was conducted, and the garrison commander was left to figure out and fulfill these needs, usually with little notice before a new training course started and living space was needed. A staff section that receives guidance from the garrison commander could accomplish the task much better.

Adding a staff section to concentrate on current housing needs (such as current building allocation, offices, and maintenance problems) would greatly benefit the ANA garrison staff. Work orders generated by the ANA training staff (such as initial-entry training NCOs and officers) were given directly to DPW with no oversight or guidance from the garrison commander. This was not a problem when dealing with simple leaky faucets, but many outlandish requests detracted from DPW's ability to organize and prioritize its work. If work orders go through a garrison staff member with oversight exercised by the garrison commander or deputy commander, the leaders could provide guidance, set priorities, and act as a filter for unwarranted or unneeded requests.

The final staff section I recommend is an ANA garrison safety officer and NCO. In the U.S. Army, safety teams are assigned to each installation to ensure that safety is incorporated into all levels of training and operations. If we can convince our coalition partners that they need to devote the same level of attention to safety, we would create an additional way for the

This chart describes the author's proposed garrison staff for the Kabul Military Training Center.



The foundation for a b-hut under construction at Kabul Military Training Center.

ANA to take charge of its roles and responsibilities while looking out for the welfare of its soldiers.

Using U.S. Army Expertise

Another way that U.S. forces can more easily transfer garrison responsibilities to our Afghan partners is to use our Army's garrison experts from the Installation Management Command (IMCOM). If IMCOM could assemble several teams to act as advisers to the Afghan garrison leaders, we would emphasize garrison management as an important aspect of the transition of responsibilities. Each team would require several key personnel to effectively advise or mentor the Afghan leaders, including the garrison commander and sergeant major, military police, DPW, construction engineer, and food service advisers.

However, IMCOM could not assemble a team for each ANA installation. Some Afghan bases are just too small for an IMCOM advisory team to be necessary. In these cases, it makes more sense to work with a larger Afghan garrison team to conduct a garrison or facilities management conference. Smaller Afghan garrison teams then could visit a larger installation, learn different techniques, and compare strategies as transition occurs.

As we transition Afghanistan security from coalition to ANA responsibility and control, many areas require the U.S. Army's attention, effort, planning, and resources. Many of us understand that in order to effectively meet the commander's intent, the organization must devote significant manning and resources toward that goal.

Garrison and facilities management may not seem like an area that the U.S. Army should be concerned about during this transition period. However, imagine if funding were removed from Fort Benning or Fort Jackson, South Carolina. That would have a significant effect on our ability to sustain our Army with new recruits and train other Army units to prepare to execute combat operations.

The same holds true for the ANA as it grows and trains its fighting force. The U.S. Army can continue to use the same garrison strategies and principles that it has employed in Iraq and Afghanistan during future operations or while working to assist other allies. Garrison and facilities management is a vital area we must continue to emphasize to ensure a smooth transition of responsibilities and foster success and mission accomplishment for our allies.

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