

Cooperation between Indian Armed Forces and Afghan Armed Forces

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The Khaama Press News Agency, 2015

The Indian Military Academy (IMA), the largest military academy in India took its first batch of 50 Afghan cadets in the year 2011. This year, the IMA trained a total of 160 Afghan cadets making them the highest foreign cadet contingent. The cadets spend 18 months at IMA training with their Indian counterparts in Dehradun, India.

The Indian army's other military academy, Officer's Training Academy (OTA) at Chennai, trains officers for short service commission. Typically officers serve here for 10 years. The training imparted on them lasts eleven months. The OTA takes in 40 international cadets with the biggest contingent being from Afghanistan with the number being around 15 cadets.

At both the academies, cadets are tested in their physical and mental abilities to sharpen their leadership abilities. Some of the basic training that the cadets go through is physical training, weapons training, military leadership, war strategies, foreign language and computer skills. Along with these, Afghan cadets join the Academy's sporting team with football and shooting being the most popular sports. Afghan cadets also perform tremendously well in cross-country races that are held quarterly in both the

academies. At the academy the Afghan and Indian cadets live together which creates a window for learning about each other's cultures. Afghan cadets are fond of Indian food, especially 'Lassi' (sweet buttermilk) and also enjoy watching Bollywood Movies. The cadets once trained become officers in the Afghan National Army (ANA) and serve their nation with the ideals taught to them at the IMA. With the Afghan contingent being one of the largest as there are around 160 Afghan cadets, 10 in each of the 16 battalions that are present at IMA, they have a lot of influence on the other cadets at the academy and on the officers that train them.

In 2017, the Indian army took up the task to inculcate a program to train Afghan women. The initial agreement was to train 20 women, but has now been made to a 100 women who will be trained at OTA, Chennai from August 2019.

The importance of Afghan cadets being trained in India is beyond just friendly ties. Afghanistan has seen that India has been involved in counter-insurgency operations in Jammu and Kashmir and North East India for decades with the army coming out victorious in most instances. Afghanistan too has been battling terrorism for decades, ever since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1978. The ANA wants its officers, men and women both, to have the same ideals, work ethic and mixture of courage and discipline that the Indian army training institutes inculcates among ranks of its men and women.



Indian Army Instructors teaching Women Afghan cadets weapon training. Source- Mid Day News, 2017.

Apart from the training of Afghan cadets, India has actively been trying to help Afghanistan build its Air force. Last year India had promised Afghanistan 4 MI-35 attack helicopters along with 3 Cheetah light utility helicopters. Afghanistan has been reliant on Western nations for air firepower and air support, but western nations have slowly started to withdraw from Afghanistan. Because of this the

Afghanistan Air force (AAF) has decided to revamp its air power, while they had a lot of blockades from the American forces about creating an AAF. The Americans did this as they wanted to continue using Pakistan as a reliable base for military hardware and mission launches just so they could use Pakistani influence in negotiating with Taliban. Still, India decided to help the Afghan government and decided to pitch in in the creation of the AAF. The recent helicopters gifted to them by India have helped them in carrying out evacuation and rescue missions as well as counter strikes against terrorists. In April of 2018, India promised Afghanistan 4 more Mi-35 attack helicopters, which India will buy from Belarus, and gift it to Afghanistan as a goodwill gesture. India has owned the Mi-35 attack helicopter for almost two decades now and has mastered the art of servicing and producing spare parts. This will help Afghanistan a lot as they don't have to rely on Russia or other Western nations to get them the spare parts and servicing tools for their attack helicopters, while the numbers aren't enough considering the vast area that needs air support in anti-terrorist missions and rescue missions, they are still a start in the right direction towards building a strong helicopter reliant AAF.



Afghan Mi-35 in action. Source: Khaama Press News Agency, 2016.

India has actively given around US \$3 billion dollars in aid to Afghanistan and has also helped build projects such as dams, roads, hospitals and a parliament. The current Indian government has promised to spend invest in 116 new “High Impact” projects that will be carried out across 31 provinces of Afghanistan. India’s efforts to engage in developing Afghanistan have been very well received by the US. While India doesn’t have any active troops on ground in Afghanistan and neither is there a plan to have boots on ground, India has still provided a guiding hand to the Afghanistan armed forces.

India’s assistance still needs to improve as there is still a lot to be done in Afghanistan. India should look into providing weaponry and vehicles to Afghanistan armed forces. Indian vehicle makers like Tata, Ashok Leyland and Mahindra should invest in Afghan armed forces by providing them with combat and non-combat vehicles. There can be an increase in intelligence gathering and intelligence sharing as India has a successful Space program, which can be used to help Afghanistan as well. India

has promised to train more Afghan nationals in its military academies and has promised to help more in the maintenance of Afghan Army and Air force equipment. On the humanitarian side, India will also train Afghan forces in casualty evacuation and casualty treatment.



Afghan Crew inspecting their Mi-35 helicopter. Source: Stars and Stripes, 2016

Afghanistan and India signed their first MOU for military cooperation and training in 2011 which is part of the Indo-Afghan Strategic Partnership and since then the two countries have taken big strides in the cooperation and inter-linking of the two armed forces. According to Afghan News agency, the Pajhwok, in 7 years of involvement, Afghanistan has gained around 3000 trained officers from India, which is the largest amount of Afghans trained in any foreign country. Both the countries have established a relationship based on trust; understanding and friendship, which will continue as the years go by. Indian and Afghan armed forces are aimed towards creating secure spaces through mutual cooperation.

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