

Combined Action in the Khost-Gardez Pass

Written by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Stephen J. Otero
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KHOST PROVINCE, Afghanistan – U.S. Soldiers and Afghan National Security Forces are working together to increase security and governance along the Khost-Gardez pass at a new Combined Tactical Operations Center at Forward Operating Base Wilderness and Combat Outpost Deysie.

The Khost-Gardez pass, a doorway through the southern Hindu Kush mountains, connects downtown Khost to Gardez City and is a critical route for Afghanistan.

“The (Khost-Gardez) road is the primary route between Khost province, Gardez in Paktya, and in turn, to the rest of Afghanistan,” said U.S. Army Capt. Neal R. Erickson, 1-40 Cav., FOB Wilderness. “It is a major supply route and due to the heavy traffic, it provides an opportunity for the local population to improve their economic standing.”

Insurgents want control of the road as well, so U.S. and Afghan National Army soldiers are partnering together with combined action. Combined action takes place at all levels of leadership, from the commanders to the non-commissioned officers.

“As a team leader in an infantry platoon, I train and work with both U.S. and Afghan National Army soldiers,” said U.S. Army Sgt. Kaylon Ross, infantry team leader, 1-40 Cav., FOB Wilderness. “The improvement of the ANA has been drastic in the last four months because of combined action operations. The ANA now know the steps they need to take to get men, weapons, (ammunition), accountability, and other supplies from their leadership and not ours.”

The partnership with the ANSF and Coalition forces in the CTOC are improving day by day, preparing the ANSF for when Coalition forces will hand over full responsibilities.

“Our main task is to mentor the local ANA in order to eventually hand over the region entirely to the Afghan Government,” said 1st Lt. Sam N. Larsh, COP Deysie, 1-40 Cav., 4-25 ID, Ft. Richardson, Alaska.

“Since we started combined action operations, the ANA now have a TOC for a place to plan missions,” said Ross. “They always have men on their radios monitoring traffic, they track their soldiers when they go on leave, they plan missions, and they are proactive; this was all non-existent prior to our combined action efforts.”

Combining efforts has lead to increased security, and with the help of the CTOC, local and national government can prove to the local people they can complete the mission.

“We are just one piece of the puzzle and improving our area of operations has a positive effect on both Paktya and Khost provinces and in turn will continue to build the infrastructure of Afghanistan,” said Erickson.

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