



**Glevum Associates** would like to bring to your attention Jim Michaels' article from today's *USA Today* that quotes Colonel Jeff Haynes (ret), Glevum's Vice President of Operations, on his views regarding leadership in the Afghan National Army.

[http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/afghanistan/2010-03-31-Afghan-army\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/afghanistan/2010-03-31-Afghan-army_N.htm)

## **U.S. looking for leaders in Afghan army**

**By Jim Michaels, USA TODAY**

PUL-E-CHARKI, Afghanistan — Zakirullah Omid was a natural choice for a suicide bomber. The 15-year-old boy was young and an enthusiastic believer in the [Taliban](#), having already committed brazen attacks against NATO and Afghan soldiers.

The Taliban visited his family one day and gave Omid a final assignment: blow himself up at an outpost commanded by Brig. Gen. Zemarai. The charismatic Afghan commander had been frustrating Taliban efforts in the rugged Tagab Valley, east of [Kabul](#), and the insurgents wanted him dead.

On the day Omid was sent to fulfill his suicide mission, he instead turned himself in at the post.

When Zemarai, who like many Afghans uses one name, was told he had his troops bring the teenager to him. If Omid expected punishment he was in for a surprise.

"You did the right thing," Zemarai told Omid about his decision to turn himself in.

The general helped to enroll him in a school in Kabul and turn his life around. More than two years later, Omid, 18, is a soldier under Zemarai's command.

After eight years and billions of dollars spent on building Afghanistan's military, coalition officials have concluded a lack of quality leaders is now the biggest obstacle to creating a fighting force capable of standing on its own.

Zemarai is an example of what they are looking for — tough, effective and aware that forming alliances with people rather than killing them is how to defeat an insurgency like the Taliban.

The commander in charge of training the Afghan army into a force capable of taking over for coalition troops, Lt. Gen. William Caldwell, has ordered that development of leadership skills be a top priority.

"It's more important than equipment," Gen. Stanley McChrystal, the top allied commander here, said in an interview. "It's more important than doctrine. It's more important even than ideology."

And it may be the single most important factor that decides whether the Taliban is defeated and the U.S. military can go home, experts say.

President Obama has said U.S. forces will begin withdrawing from Afghanistan in July 2011, but that the pace of that withdrawal will depend on conditions. In other words, for the U.S. military to stand down, the Afghan military must stand up.

Mark Moyar, a Harvard-educated professor at [Marine Corps](#) University and author of a book on counterinsurgency leadership, says it takes about 10 years to develop effective battalion commanders or district police chiefs. The Afghan army is about six years into the process, Moyar says.

"We still have a long way to go because we didn't focus on leadership development in years past, especially with the police," Moyar says. "Had we focused earlier, we'd now be plucking more fruit from the tree."

### **Corruption and cronyism**

One of the biggest problems with creating leaders in the Afghan military is corruption and cronyism.

Some top commanders lobby for cushy jobs and do little to further the war effort. Top commands are often viewed as sinecures from which to dole out jobs and contracts.

"You've had the good ol' boys network," says Marine Col. Gregory Breazile, an aide to Caldwell. "We're in a culture of who you know, who your family is."

Col. Janbaz Junbish, who has been in the Afghan army 31 years and was trained by the Soviets, complains he has been stuck at a desolate outpost in southern Afghanistan for four years because he doesn't know the right people.

Under the U.S. military's promotion system, officers compete for the top positions to ensure that only the best get commands.

U.S. Maj. Gen. David Hogg, the American deputy commander of the NATO training mission here, acknowledges that some leadership positions that should go for merit are going for money.

Creating junior leaders, such as sergeants and lieutenants, is generally faster than fixing the problem at more senior leaders, such as lieutenant colonels and above, where some officers owe their positions to nepotism, says James Dubik, a retired three-star general who was responsible for training Iraqi security forces.

Fixing the problem at the senior level means moving toward a system that weeds out ineffective leaders and promotes proficient ones, Dubik says. "That takes a long time," he says.

### **Coalition expanding academy**

Young officers graduating from the National Military Academy Afghanistan in Kabul now receive their orders to their first assignments based on a lottery system. In the past, friends and family would sometimes pull strings to get them comfortable jobs away from the fighting.

"We want them to go into the field," Breazile says.

In the past "we focused on just putting out numbers," he says. "We didn't focus on the quality of what we're putting out there."

The coalition is expanding the academy, which was launched about five years ago using as a model the U.S. service academies.

Cadets get a broad education that reinforces values considered critical to leaders, such as the importance of leading by example, honesty and taking good care of the troops in their charge.

These are new concepts to Afghan soldiers, says Col. Hamdullah Yosofzai, the dean at the military academy. He says the Afghanistan military has had no tradition of formal leadership training.

"It wasn't taken seriously in the past," Yosofzai says.

On a nearby parade deck, hundreds of cadets marched smartly in formation, training for an upcoming graduation ceremony. The class of 2014 will graduate 600 cadets, up from 120 in 2009, the first class.

"This generation of cadets will have a different style of leadership," says Mohammed Yusef, a 20-year-old freshman at the academy.

### **Two types of new leaders**

One question is how well these new leaders will do with the old who they will meet when they graduate from the academy.

There are two types: the former guerrilla fighters, known as the mujahedin, who [battled the Soviets](#) in the 1980s from the mountain hide-outs, and the Afghans who were sent after their brethren as soldiers in the old Soviet-backed Afghanistan army.

**The former mujahedin tend to be more innovative in the field and have a better grasp of insurgent tactics, says Jeff Haynes, a retired Marine colonel who had formerly served as Zemarai's adviser. The Soviet-trained officers are not as creative but have the advantage of understanding how to work in a large organization, he says.**

**"We are professional," says Junbish, who served in the Soviet-backed army. The former mujahedin "only have infantry training," he says.**

**The mujahedin, however, often had to live by their wits and earn the trust of the locals, valuable skills in the war they are facing now, Haynes says.**

Zemarai says his experience with the mujahedin taught him that "government can't solve all our problems."

A barrel-chested man with a beard flecked with gray, Zemarai, 45, commands the 3rd Brigade, 201st Corps, which is responsible for a rugged stretch of country east of Kabul.

**Most American officers wouldn't recognize Zemarai's leadership style, says Haynes, who now works for Glevum Associates, a firm that researches the Afghan population and Afghan security forces. Zemarai delegates little to his staff and holds most decisions for himself, in keeping with his background as a young guerrilla commander who fought the Soviets.**

Zemarai starts his morning early. By lunchtime on a recent day, he had met with more than 30 people and had made a dizzying array of decisions, from approving a purchase of new carpets and religious books for the brigade's mosque to telling a logistics officer to switch from oranges to bananas for the fruit that soldiers get at each meal.

He argued with a villager about a water project, saying building a water tank first would be more useful than laying pipes for the project. Children could use the tank as a swimming pool in the hot weather. The same villager gossiped with the general about local Taliban leaders.

A computer sat closed and unused on an end table. No secretary screened visitors, and a steady stream of people came through the door.

"If we have a problem we can go directly to him," says Sayeed Mohammed, a 20-year-old soldier in the brigade.

Coalition officers are pushing officers toward more modern management techniques, such as relying on staff to work through issues and delegating authority.

**Zemarai's approach may be unorthodox, but it is the type of initiative that is needed, coalition officers say. "He's a leader," Haynes says. "It's that simple."**

**Haynes says the war against the Taliban requires commanders who won't sit around and complain but who will figure out a way around the problem. It's something that can be taught to some NATO forces, Zemarai says.**

Recently partnered with French troops, Zemarai says he is frustrated with a lack of aggressiveness on their part. "They need a lot of time to make plans," he says. Zemarai did not need a lot of time to know what to do with Omid, the almost suicide bomber, who appeared relaxed in Zemarai's office wearing a spotless camouflage uniform.

"We can make an example to the people that the government of Afghanistan can bring anyone in as long as they repent," he says.