

Summary of Afghan National Army (ANA)

According to the new *Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, the role of the U.S. military is to assist the host nation. Specifically, it states:

“The long-term goal is to leave a government able to stand by itself. In the end, the host nation has to win on its own. Achieving this requires development of viable local leaders and institutions...While it may be easier for U.S. military units to conduct operations themselves, it is better to work to strengthen local forces and institutions and then assist them. [Host nation] governments have the final responsibility to solve their own problems. Eventually all foreign armies are seen as interlopers or occupiers; the sooner the main effort can transition to [host nation] institutions, without unacceptable degradation, the better.”¹

Since 2001 efforts have been underway to put Afghanistan back on its feet by legitimizing the government. The resurgence of the Taliban has wrecked the development and rehabilitation of the country by making the effort too costly due to immense security risks. As a result, the development of effective security institutions available to the Afghan government is more important than ever. The Afghan National Army (ANA) is at the center of this effort, and despite great progress, significant challenges remain.

Beginnings

Creation of a new Afghan National Army was conceptualized at an international conference in Germany in December 2002. At the conference, sometimes referred to as Bonn II, the new interim government of Afghanistan and participating donor nations “agreed that the new Afghan army should be ethnically balanced, voluntary, and consist of no more than 70,000 individuals.”² The United States agreed to assume lead nation status in the effort to reconstitute the ANA. Under the auspices of the Office of Military Cooperation—Afghanistan (OMC-A), the U.S. Department of Defense has responsibility to manage the planning and implementation process with assistance from the Department of State. Several other donor nations assumed responsibility for specific efforts and parts of the process.³

At Bonn II the participants agreed upon an initial force structure and primary roles for the ANA. Table 1 indicates the planned structure of the army based on the original number of 70,000. The overarching mission of the ANA is to:

- Provide security for the central government and protect the political process as defined by the Constitution;
- Replace every other militia and organized military force in the country;

¹ *The U.S. Army-Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007): 47.

² United States Government Accountability Office, Report to the Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives, *Afghanistan Security: Efforts to Establish Army and Police Have Made Progress, but Future Plans Need to Be Better Defined*, (June 2005): 6.

³ *Ibid.*, 6.

- Fight insurgents and terrorists; and
- Work closely with coalition and other international forces.⁴

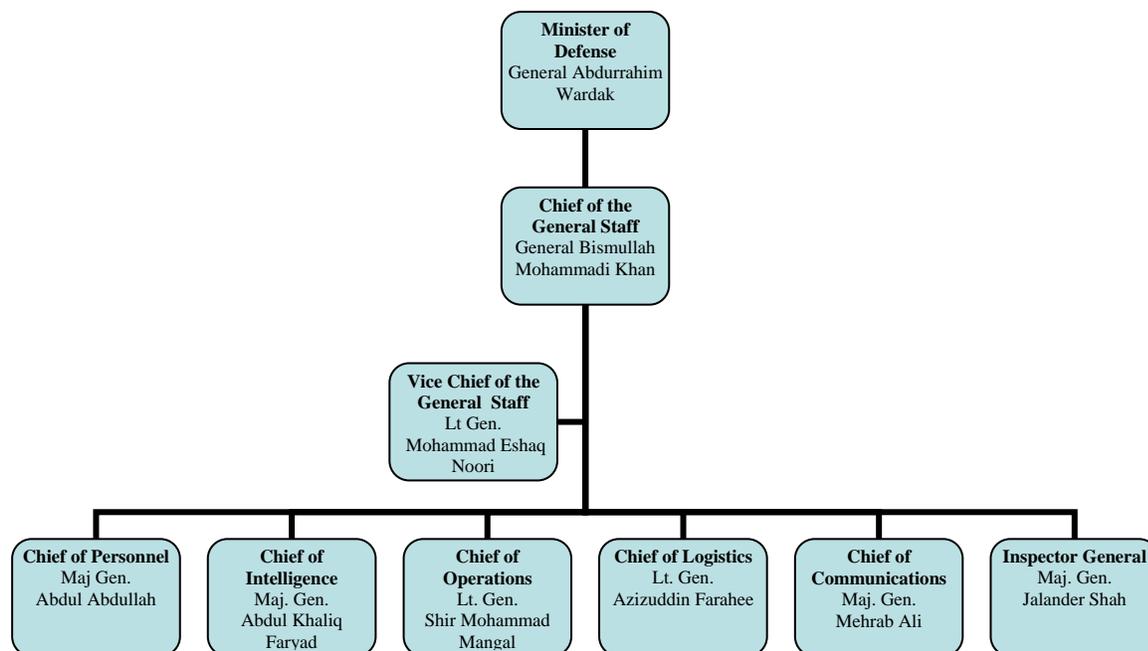
Table 1 Planned ANA Force Structure⁵

Ground combat troops: Kabul and Major Cities	43,000
Support Staff: Recruiting, Education and Training, Acquisition and Logistics, and Communications and Intelligence	12,000
Ministry of Defense and General Staff Personnel	3,000
Air Staff for Secure Transport of President of Afghanistan	3,000

Organization, Leadership and Training

Afghanistan’s Army is divided into five Regional Commands (Corps) and is overseen by the Ministry of Defense and General Staff which are located in Kabul. Appointed by President Hamid Karzai, General Abdurrahim Wardak is the current Defense Minister. The Regional Commands are located in Kabul (201st Corps), Gardez (203rd Corps), Kandahar (205th Corps), Heart (207th Corps), and Mazar-e Sharif (209th Corps). The senior leadership of the ANA is detailed in Charts 1 and 2.

Chart 1 Defense Minister and General Staff⁶



As an “infantry-centric force”, each ANA corps is supposed to have three brigades which in turn are to consist of three light infantry *kandaks* (Dari for ‘battalions’), one combat support (CS) *kandak* and

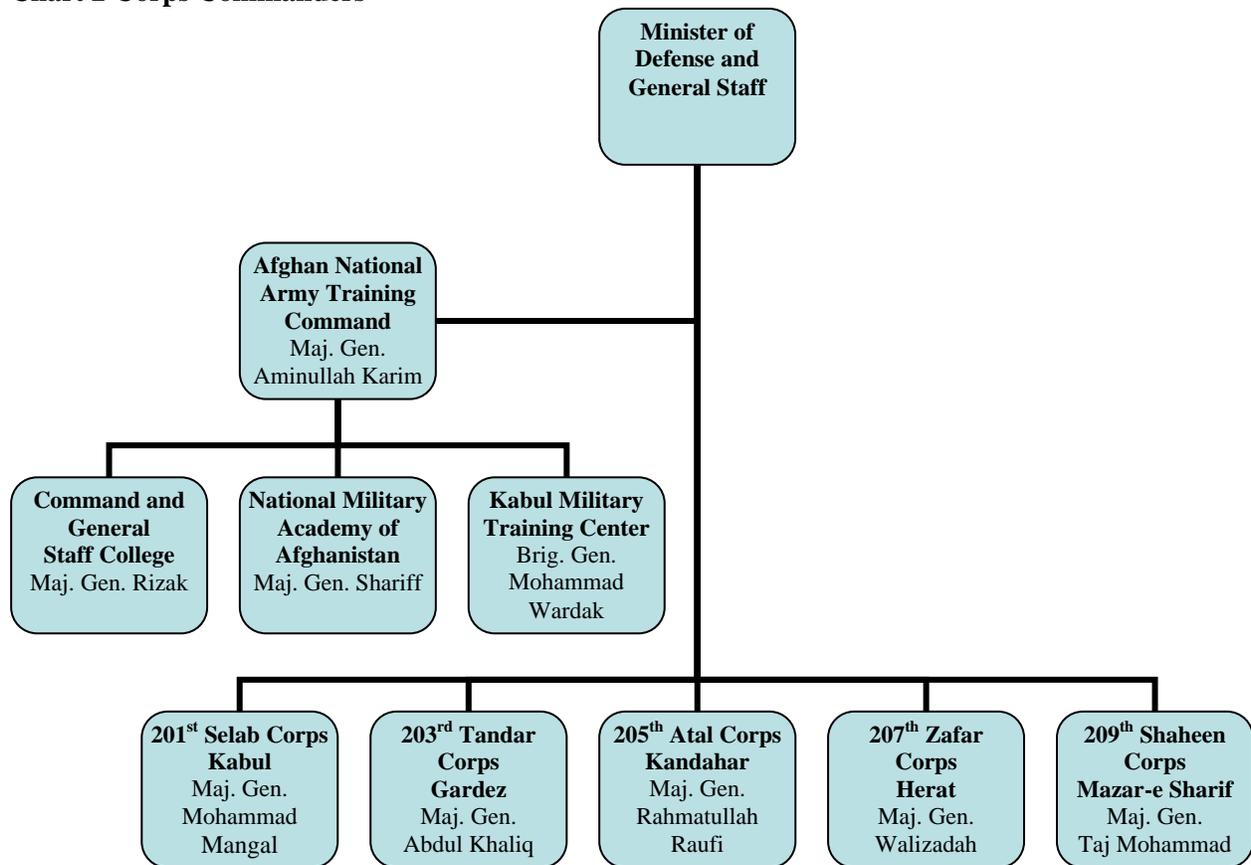
⁴ Ibid., 6.

⁵ Ibid., 6. According to Professor Ali Jalali, “The strength of the [Afghan] military in the 1960s reached 98,000 with 90,000 in the army and 8,000 in the air force.” See Ali a. Jalali, “Rebuilding Afghanistan’s National Army,” *Parameters*, (Autumn 2002): 72-86.

⁶ The Official Website of the Afghan National Army.

one combat service support (CSS) *kandak*.”⁷ Shortcomings in manpower and resources, however, have limited the actual combat power of the five army corps thus far. As of June 2007, only the 201st and 205th corps were fully staffed. The 203rd is assigned two brigades and the other two only have one brigade each. The manning levels of the various corps are indicative of security risk in each region.⁸ In terms of actual manpower, a fully manned *kandak* contains 600 troops, meaning that a fully manned corps should have approximately 5,400 combat troops and 3,600 combat support and combat service troops.⁹

Chart 2 Corps Commanders¹⁰



As recruitment for the ANA began in 2002, the various coalition partners and donor nations assumed specific training responsibilities. Enlisted training, basic and advanced, is overseen primarily by the United States (which also runs the Drill Instructor School). In conjunction with normal basic training, the United Kingdom administers initial and advance training for the ANA’s non-commissioned officers

⁷ Samuel Chan, “Sentinels of Afghan Democracy: The Afghan National Army,” *Working Paper Series* No. 128 (Singapore, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, 1 June 2007): 3-4, <http://www.ntu.edu.sg/rsis/publications/WorkingPapers/WP128.pdf>, accessed on 24 October 2007.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

⁹ The Official Website of the Afghan National Army at <http://www.mod.gov.af/>, accessed on 25 October 2007.

¹⁰ The Official Website of the Afghan National Army.

(NCOs).¹¹ Within the ANA, all military training and education falls under the Afghan National Training Command (ANATC HQ). The bulk of enlisted training takes place at the Kabul Military Training Center (KMTC). Basic training for all new recruits begins with a standard seven week course after which those with potential for leadership are culled from the training *kandak* and sent to the NCO course. The next six week phase of basic training is conducted separately after which the new soldiers are reunited with the fresh NCOs. The Canadians conduct a validation process of the newly trained forces under the auspices of their Afghan National Training Center Detachment. Known as Collective Lanes (CTX), the two-week program subjects and evaluates ANA units on how they handle a number of likely tactical situations they may face in the field.¹²

Initial officer training is conducted through two programs. The National Military Academy of Afghanistan (NMAA) is a four year university-type course modeled on the program at the United States Military Academy in West Point, New York. Due to the rapid growth projections for ANA, the NMAA alone is unable to produce a sufficient number of new officers to lead the troops. As a result a twenty-three week Officer Candidate School (OCS) is run by the British military. The OCS program trains new university graduates to become officers at a much quicker pace than the NMAA. The program curriculum is based on that of the British Military Academy at Sandhurst.¹³ France provides continuing education and training for officers at various levels of command.¹⁴ Additionally, ANA cadets and officers receive training from and in other countries. For example, some Afghan aviators are trained on Mi-17 helicopters in Texas and a number of cadets are attending military academies in the United States. The Indian military also had plans to send a training team into Afghanistan to conduct training on a wide range of topics.¹⁵

Continual training and mentoring of the ANA is carried out by U.S. and ISAF troops primarily through the Operational Mentor and Liaison Team (OMLT) Program. Each OMLT is assigned 12-19 personnel with various areas of specialization and are deployed for at least six months. They are assigned at the *kandak*, brigade, garrison and Corps HQ levels. According to NATO the principal roles of the OMLTs are to “provide training and mentoring to support ANA units’ operational deployments” and to “provide a liaison capability between ANA and ISAF forces.”¹⁶ Several ISAF nations either field their own OMLTs or provide manning for multi-national OMLTs. Currently there are 26 OMLTs assigned to

¹¹ The Official Website of the Afghan National Army.

¹² Chan, 8 and The Official Website of the Afghan National Army.

¹³ Chan, 8-9.

¹⁴ The Official Website of the Afghan National Army.

¹⁵ Chan, 9-10 and Interviews with the Office of International Program, United States Air Force Academy.

¹⁶ NATO in Afghanistan, *Operational Mentor and Liaison Team (OMLT) Programme*, (September 2007), at <http://www.nato.int/issues/afghanistan/factsheets/omlt.html>, accessed on 25 October 2007.

just over 40,000 troops. Some estimates suggest that at least 100 OMLTs will be needed to meet the needs of the ANA once it reaches the end strength of 70,000.¹⁷

Problems and Challenges

Despite enormous strides in just five years, the ANA faces a number of serious problems and challenges which must be addressed in order to insure it becomes a sustainable and efficient institution. A resurgent Taliban only compounds these problems. In May 2006, retired General Barry R. McCaffrey spent time looking at the security situation in Afghanistan and submitted a report to the faculty at the United States Military Academy. In his report he wrote the following:

“The Afghan Army is miserably under-resourced. This is now a major morale factor for their soldiers...Afghan field commanders told me that they try to seize weapons from the Taliban who they believe are much better armed...These ANA units do not have mortars, few machine guns, no MK19 grenade machine guns, and no artillery. They have almost no helicopter or fixed wing transport or attack aviation now or planned. They have no armor or blast glasses. They have no Kevlar helmets...This situation cries out for remedy. A well equipped, disciplined, multi-ethnic, literate, and trained Afghan National Army is our ticket to be fully out of the country in the year 2020.”¹⁸

The current status and the future of the ANA are impacted by the previous three decades of war and anarchy. The destruction of the previous national army during the Soviet invasion left an institutional vacuum that was filled by competing warlords and militias and created a number of significant challenges to the recreation of a new national army essentially from scratch.

In the face of open conflict with foreign forces and amongst the Afghan people, the population divided into groups based on locality, ethnicity, religion and politics. Militias, under the leadership of local warlords, were often the only source of security and order. Throughout the anti-Soviet jihad and the rise and fall of the Taliban, the various militias displayed a willingness to work together only temporarily, often splitting apart and fighting one another once their common goal has been attained. Despite defeating the Taliban in 2001 and the creation of a new state and new constitution, former warlords continue to vie for loyalty and power, often operating in contradiction to the wishes of the central government. At the same time, competing loyalties between local militias and the national army necessarily call into question the quality and trustworthiness of troops with previous militia affiliations. Additionally, there is the possibility that local militias are recruiting the most qualified recruits by offering them greater benefits and the ability to operate closer to home.

¹⁷ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, “Afghanistan: National Army Short of Everything But Spirit,” (21 September 2007), at www.rferl.org, accessed on 24 October 2007.

¹⁸ Barry R. McCaffrey, “Academic Report—Trip to Afghanistan and Pakistan (19-26 May) in *Memorandum for: Colonel Mike Meese and Colonel Cindy Jebb*, (3 June 2006), at http://www.washingtonspeakers.com/prod_images/pdfs/McCaffreyBarry.VisitToAfghanistan.05.06.pdf, accessed on 24 October 2007.

Militias and warlords are a security threat which often demands the attention and resources of the fledgling ANA. Instead of being able to focus its energy on openly anti-government insurgent groups such as the Taliban, Hezb-e Islami, and others, they are forced to deal with the actions of warlords and militias in various geographic locations. The resurgence of the Taliban has prompted former militia leaders to begin illegally hoarding weapons in anticipation of state failure.¹⁹

The new Afghan National Army, devoid of an existing institutional history, is dependant upon donor nations to provide adequate funding and manpower. These donor nations are not providing the ANA with what it needs; as General McCaffrey pointed out, this has resulted in a military without the necessary equipment to perform their mission. It remains to be seen whether the commitment and contributions of the donors will be sufficient or long enough in duration to have a lasting effect. Additionally, the growth rate of the ANA has been slower than planned, thereby reducing its readiness to assume a greater role in providing security for Afghanistan.²⁰

The ANA also faces challenges in terms of human resources, training, discipline and professional relations, which are compounded by the absence of any meaningful institutional history. Recruitment of well qualified volunteers has proven difficult “as the ANA mainly attract[s] volunteers from the lowest strata of society.”²¹ This has caused problems in terms of education and literacy and even physical fitness. Illiteracy among the ANA rose from 60 percent in the 2002 to around 80 percent by December 2005. It is estimated that as of February 2006 approximately “50 percent of the officers of the Army Corps Kandahar” were illiterate.²² This has an obvious negative impact on the ability of the ANA to operate jointly with US and ISAF forces and at the same time hinders the training process. Physical fitness is also a serious problem “with substantial numbers of recruits failing to pass the medical test and others dropping out of the training course because it proved physically too hard for them.”²³

Training new recruits, NCOs and officers has proven challenging. The donor nations have worked to build a cadre of Afghan soldiers capable of conducting and overseeing the training process. Starting the process from the ground up, however, is requiring a significant lead time. Illiteracy and language barriers further complicate the training process. Communication problems exist not only between foreign trainers and Afghans, but also between the Afghans themselves, many of whom speak Dari or Pashto but not always both. Additionally, teaching NCOs and officers to work together

¹⁹ Kirk Semple, “Afghan Militia Leaders Illegally Hoarding Arms,” *International Herald Tribune*, 28 October 2007, at <http://www.ihf.com/articles/2007/10/28/asia/weapons.php>, accessed on 29 October 2007.

²⁰ For example, the original target of 12,000 trained troops by April 2003 had to be revised downward to 9,000 (Antonio Giustozzi, “Auxiliary Force or National Army? Afghanistan’s ‘ANA’ and the Counter-Insurgency Effort, 2002-2006,” *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (March 2007): 48-49).

²¹ *Ibid.*, 58.

²² *Ibid.*, 58.

²³ *Ibid.*, 57.

effectively is difficult. Army leadership at the junior and mid-levels often is unwilling to hand responsibility over to the NCOs.²⁴ Training periods have been shortened periodically in an attempt to increase the number of deployable troops as manpower targets proved unrealistic.²⁵ The result, however, may only prove to be a greater number of untrained and ineffective troops. The need for improved training, and perhaps longer training, are manifested in a lack of discipline which contributes to a number of other issues facing the ANA—desertions, absences without leave, and corruption.

Desertions in the first two years of the ANA were around 20 to 22 percent and have since dropped, yet remain a persistent drain on force strength. For example, in 2005 around 300 men simply walked away from the 205th Corps in Kandahar, or one-twelfth of the entire force. This is extremely troubling considering that Kandahar is a hot bed of insurgent (Taliban) activity.²⁶ The frequency of unexcused absences (AWOL), where the soldiers eventually return, perhaps have an even greater negative impact on force strength. Some estimates suggest that “at any given time, between a quarter and a third of the strength of the average battalion would be AWOL and sometimes even more.”²⁷ A recent Congressional Research Service Report suggests that ANA units may only be 50 percent manned at any given time.²⁸ The AWOL rate multiplies during Ramadan and winter, as troops prefer to be home.²⁹ It is also common for ANA soldiers to be AWOL for extended periods of time as they return home to remit funds to family, as the necessary financial institutions do not yet exist in Afghanistan.³⁰

Evidence and statements by ANA soldiers suggest that the primary reasons behind desertions and AWOL include low pay, lack of equipment, low morale, an unwillingness to serve far from home, and refusal to fight alongside foreigners against fellow Afghans.³¹ The monthly salary of trained recruits, until recently, has been \$70 which pales in light of offers of triple that by the Taliban for switching sides.³² As force strength is reduced due to desertions and AWOL troops, it is compounded further by low retention rates as enlistments are expiring. Just over 35 percent of Afghanistan’s trained troops are electing to reenlist, well below the ANA’s goal of 50 percent retention.³³ Corruption, rampant throughout the entire ANA rank structure, also diminishes the effectiveness of the army. Officer commissions are

²⁴ Chan, 10.

²⁵ Giustozzi, 48.

²⁶ Roland Buerk, “Desertions Blow Hits Afghan Army,” *BBC News*, 9 June 2005, at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/4078118.stm, accessed on 29 October 2007.

²⁷ Giustozzi, 53.

²⁸ Kenneth Katzman, “Afghanistan: Post-War Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy,” *CRS Report for Congress*, (September 10, 2007): 31.

²⁹ Chan, 14.

³⁰ Katzman, 31.

³¹ Chan, 14 and Giustozzi, 52.

³² Giustozzi suggests that the Taliban offered “ANA soldiers three times their pay to switch sides.” See Giustozzi, 52.

³³ Chan, 6.

often for sale and equipment is sold regularly to local militias and insurgents. There is also evidence that some ANA units are involved directly in the narcotics trade.³⁴

Recent Efforts at Reform

As security remains elusive across much of Afghanistan's South and East, efforts are under way to improve the ability of the ANA to do its part. According to the official website of the Afghan National Army there are currently 46,000 personnel in the army with 3,000 new recruits entering each month.³⁵ The push to achieve the end strength of 70,000 by 2009 continues. Recently Afghanistan's Defense Minister, General Abdurrahim Wardak, has suggested that a force of 70,000 may not be sufficient to provide security and indicated that the number may need to be revised upward to 150,000. Such a scenario, however, seems unlikely due to the inability of the Afghan government to meet the sustainment costs of a projected force of 70,000. There are now some suggestions to lower the ANA's end strength to 50,000.³⁶

Attempts to increase the combat effectiveness and morale of the ANA are underway despite the current challenges. In February 2007 the United States committed to assist the "ANA add a commando battalion and combat support units."³⁷ Additionally, the U.S. began transferring over 800 armored vehicles early in 2007 with more equipment promised. Air assets, especially helicopters, are in very short supply for both the ANA and the NATO/ISAF forces.³⁸ In terms of pay, the Afghan Defense Ministry announced that "the government had enhanced the salaries of ANA soldiers from 80 to 100 dollars per month [and] soldiers who wanted to renew their contract would get another raise of US\$35 in their monthly salaries."³⁹ The United States has increased funding for the ANA from \$1.9 billion in 2007 to \$2.7 billion in 2008.⁴⁰ Training of the ANA remains a priority as OMLTs from NATO and ISAF militaries continue to provide assistance and mentoring. As the ANA expands, however, there will need to be a significant increase in the number of OMLTs deployed to Afghanistan.⁴¹ As recently as October 2007 the French and German governments agreed to send more training teams to work with the ANA.

³⁴ Giustozzi, 54-55.

³⁵ The Official Website of the Afghan National Army.

³⁶ Katzman, 30.

³⁷ Ibid., 30.

³⁸ Trevor Royle, Diplomatic Editor, "Afghanistan Needs More of Everything," *Sunday Herald*, at Afghanistan News Center <http://www.afghanistannewscenter.com/news/2007/october/oct282007.html#11>, accessed on 30 October 2007.

³⁹ Chan, 14-15.

⁴⁰ Katzman, 53-54.

⁴¹ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.

Future

The future of the ANA remains uncertain. No one is under the illusion that the ANA is ready to provide security for the whole of Afghanistan. The major players, however, do recognize the challenges they face in recreating a national army. Efforts, while perhaps insufficient presently, are underway to address the problems. Today the ANA has some presence in most of Afghanistan's 34 provinces.⁴² The key to the ANA's future is time; time to train, equip and gain expertise. Without the help of ISAF and NATO the ANA will not have sufficient time to build the institutional strength needed to stand on its own. The donor nations must continue to provide the necessary forces to provide security in the interim along with the funding and expertise to create an ANA that is more than an auxiliary force to NATO and ISAF.⁴³

⁴² Katzman, 30.

⁴³ Giustozzi, 61-63.