ASYMMETRIC ADVANTAGE:

AIR ADVISING IN A TIME OF STRATEGIC COMPETITION

BY

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The undersigned certify that this thesis meets master's-level standards of research, argumentation, and expression.

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ABSTRACT

The U.S. Air Force does not adequately organize, train, and equip for building partnerships with foreign militaries, despite this activity's stated importance in national strategy, joint doctrine, and official USAF guidance. The Air Force does boast an array of air advisor units—some permanent, and some ad hoc. The different units are stove-piped within different major commands, each with different priorities, resources, and authorities. In short, USAF air advising is an active but disjointed enterprise. This project aims to determine *how the U.S. Air Force should organize and present forces for air advising*. The project uses a comparative case study approach, analyzing the 6th Special Operations Squadron in the Philippines, expeditionary air advisors in Iraq, and the 81st Fighter Squadron (i.e., Afghan A-29 training). The author finds that more *cohesive* and *sustainable* air advisor organizations achieve better operational results, and therefore constitute the best cornerstones for a more unified, effective air advising enterprise going forward. On the other hand, ad hoc methods of selecting, training, and deploying air advisors have yielded few operational gains. The author offers several recommendations intended to help the Air Force organize and employ air advisors in a more cohesive and sustainable manner.

Contents

Chapter 1

Introduction

Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis observes that "nations with allies thrive, and those without allies decline," and that militarily, nations with allies defeat those without.[1] The United States enjoys the benefits of a large, well-resourced military, a host of traditional allies, and myriad opportunities for cooperation with emerging partners. In theory, security cooperation provides a rich medium through which to sustain these intersecting comparative advantages—a way to pursue U.S. national interests and military objectives by supporting, enhancing, and leveraging a distributed network of allies' and partners' military forces. The 2018 *National Defense Strategy* (NDS) names *strengthening alliances and attracting new partners* as one of the DoD's three major lines of effort.[2] The logic underpinning this line of effort is straightforward: "The willingness of rivals to abandon aggression will depend on their perception of U.S. strength and the vitality of our alliances and partnerships."[3]

An array of organizations, authorities, and activities contribute to the Air Force's piece of the U.S. security cooperation portfolio—from the combatant commands and the State Department, to the International Affairs division of USAF Headquarters (SAF/IA), to units within Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC), Air Education and Training Command (AETC), and Air Mobility Command (AMC), among others. USAF security cooperation activities range from Air Command and Staff College personnel exchanges to air commandos accompanying partner forces on combat missions. When planned, executed, and sustained prudently, security cooperation advances U.S. strategic objectives, hones U.S. military prowess, and bolsters the U.S. industrial base, while enhancing our partners' capacity to defend themselves and to operate in U.S.-led coalitions—an alluring array of benefits, to be sure. Examples include the work of

[1] Jim Mattis, Secretary of Defense (address, Air Force Association Air, Space, and Cyber Conference, National Harbor, MD, 20 September 2017); and, Jim Mattis, "A New American Grand Strategy," *Defining Ideas*, 26 February 2015. http://www.hoover.org/research/new-american-grand-strategy
[2] Department of Defense (DoD), *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge*, January 2018, 5.
[3] DoD, *2018 National Defense Strategy*, 5.

AFSOC combat air advisors in Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines, and Air Education and Training Command's A-29 attack aircraft instructor pilots and advisors. On the other hand, when organized in an ad hoc manner, security cooperation can squander American military lethality while doing little to advance U.S. or allied goals. Examples of this sort of scenario include the expeditionary air advisor construct used throughout Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom.

A significant body of evidence suggests that some USAF security cooperation efforts to date have been imprudent. Despite improvement initiatives at the service level, a critical need remains for greater strategic planning and sustainable capability in USAF security cooperation. This holds particularly true with regard to the forward elements of the enterprise—air advisors and aviation foreign internal defense (AvFID) specialists.

This paper will introduce the subject by examining relevant academic theory, as well as U.S. and USAF strategy, doctrine, and operational guidance (Introduction and Chapter 2). A broad overview of USAF security cooperation follows (Chapter 3). The paper will then introduce a standardized framework (Chapter 4) to examine current USAF units performing the most forward, expeditionary subsets of USAF security cooperation—air advisor operations and aviation foreign internal defense (Chapters 5-7). Each case will examine the organization, manning, and practices of the participating USAF unit(s), and the results of each effort in furthering U.S. interests. The studies will also consider contextual factors of each case, such as the partner government's legitimacy and its military's absorptive capacity for military aviation training and capabilities. Chapter 8 will provide recommendations, implications, and avenues for further research. The goal of this analysis is to determine *how the U.S. Air Force should organize and present forces for air advising and aviation foreign internal defense*.

Theory and Literature Review

It is important to note at this point that "military assistance," "security cooperation," "advisory missions," and other umbrella terms refer to an array of military-to-military interactions, from initial senior leader engagements with new partner nations, to foreign military sales, to large-scale training exercises and combat air advisor operations with allies. More clarity on definitions and doctrines will be provided in the

next chapter. For the sake of consistency, this academic literature review will use the broad term "security cooperation" for the overall enterprise and the more specific "advisory missions" for personnel going forward to work with partner air forces.

Critiques of Security Cooperation

The literature on U.S. security cooperation has been characterized by other authors as follows: various groups with different motivations, publishing in different sources, using different levels of analysis, and generally talking past one another.[4] Authors and professors of various ideological stripes have argued against U.S. security cooperation as a worthwhile pursuit, for a variety of reasons. Political realists have long contended that security cooperation offers poor return on investment in terms of national interests. Thucydides' Nicias warned his fellow Athenians in 415 B.C. against entering into military partnerships "with people whom we must help in their need, and who can never help us in ours."[5] Contemporary realists carry on this tradition. John Mearsheimer points out that alliances require resources, maintenance, and patience, and that they always involve discord.[6] He argues that it is better for a nation to simply be strong and secure *itself*, rather than to invest in the nebulous strength of alliances or coalitions; a significant portion of the American public today seems to agree.[7] Contemporary realist perspectives also point out that security cooperation and particularly advisory missions are usually geared toward countering regional threats and non-state violent extremist organizations (VEOs), and that such threats are not *existential* threats to the United States. Therefore, they maintain, security cooperation and advisory missions have a low ceiling in terms of potential return on investment.

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[4] William H. Mott IV, *Military Assistance: An Operational Perspective* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 8; and, Maj Nick Dipoma, USAF, "Right-sizing Intervention: The Philippines, El Salvador, and the Future of American Foreign Internal Defense" (master's thesis, School of Advanced Air and Space Studies, 2013), 17-25.

[5] Robert B. Strassler, ed., *The Landmark Thucydides: A Comprehensive Guide to the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Richard Crawley (New York: Free Press, 1996), 369.

[6] John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2014), 156-157.

[7] Mearsheimer, *Tragedy*, 156-157. For a deep explanation of the domestically-focused, anti-globalist Jacksonian tradition making a resurgence in American society, see Walter Russel Mead, "The Jacksonian Revolt," *Foreign Affairs*, 20 January 2017. https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2017-01-20/jacksonian-revolt

Authors elsewhere on the ideological spectrum also argue against Western military interventions and security force assistance, on humanitarian grounds. This liberal-humanitarian school points out that interventions by Western powers in regional or intrastate clashes often escalate conflicts, kill civilians, create deviant war economies, and generally do more harm than good.[8] Like the realists, liberals have leveled these critiques at a wide variety of security cooperation efforts, agnostic of the efforts' strategic objectives.

To its critics, security cooperation is equally misguided whether intended to contain Communism or fight violent Islamists. There is an element of truth in the critiques. No one familiar with the subject would argue that security cooperation or advisory missions are simple, nor that successful ones are scientific and easily reproduceable. Realist, humanitarian, and other critiques of military assistance and U.S. armed interventions will be duly considered in the course of this project.

Strategy: Economy of Force and Continuing Advantage

While there is much skepticism regarding security cooperation in various corners of international relations literature, in strategy and policy circles, literature abounds *advocating* small-scale military interventions and recommending best practices.[9] Typified by a slew of RAND studies and military journal articles, these sources highlight the advantages of security cooperation in terms of **economy of force** and creating conditions of **continuing advantage** for the United States and its allies.

The *National Defense Strategy* declares that the United States intends to "expand the competitive space" in which it can directly challenge or at least increase costs for China and Russia, while keeping pressure on regional actors and violent extremist

[8] Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era*, 3rd ed (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), 117; and, John Norris, "American Assistance is Spread too Widely," *New York Times*, 8 April 2013. http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2013/04/07/a-lesson-in-futilty-for-the-pentagon/american-military-assistance-is-too-widespread

[9] For two representatives of the policy and advocacy literature, see Alan J. Vick et al., *Air Power in the New Counterinsurgency Era: The Strategic Importance of USAF Advisory and Assistance Missions* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2006). https://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG509.html; and, Mort Rolleston, Lt Col Ric Trimillos, and Tom Gill, "Aviation Security Cooperation: Advancing Global Vigilance, Global Reach, and Global Power in a Dynamic World," *Air and Space Power Journal* 28, no. 5 (September-October 2014): 92-117.

organizations as well.[10] The DoD recognizes that one area in which the United States already maintains a great comparative advantage is that of our "strong alliances and partnerships."[11] In light of these ideas, the USAF air advising enterprise offers two significant benefits to today's joint force. *Air advising makes good on the Defense Department's intent to leverage every possible advantage against strategic competitors, while providing an economical way for the United States to fight regional spoilers and violent extremists around the world.*

Twentieth-century British military theorist J.F.C Fuller determines *economy of force* to be *the* governing law of war. Fuller argues that economy of force is a singular continuity in the logic of biology, physics, philosophy, economics, single combat, and warfare.[12] Because war is essentially the competitive expenditure of various types of force (mental, moral, physical), he explains, the side which most economically expends the forces at its disposal will win.[13] A more American, more *economical* expression of the same idea comes from RAND strategist Bernard Brodie: "Strategy wears a dollar sign."[14] The distilled theoretical principle endures: the economically-efficient application of the state's finite resources is at the heart of strategy. To their advocates, advisory missions represent minor investments with the potential for outsized payoffs—small teams helping partner militaries better perform tactical and operational actions, with strategic impacts that favor U.S. interests. *Advisory missions and armed interventions leveraging local forces exemplify economy of force, because they provide a low-cost means by which to counter a regional threat or complicate a major adversary's decision calculus.*

The economy-of-force argument becomes even more central to advisory missions and the broader security cooperation enterprise in an era when the majority of DoD effort and resources are to be devoted to strategic competition and preparing for major combat operations.[15] As the Department of Defense pursues high-dollar, high-end focused, third-

[10] DoD, *2018 National Defense Strategy*, 4.
[11] DoD, *2018 National Defense Strategy*, 4.
[12] Col J.F.C. Fuller, *The Foundations of the Science of War,* (1926; repr., Fort Leavenworth, KS: US Army Command and General Staff College Press, 1993), 194-202.
[13] Fuller, *Foundations of the Science of War,* 201-202.
[14] Bernard Brodie, *Strategy in the Missile Age*, new RAND ed. (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2007), 358.
[15] DoD, *2018 National Defense Strategy*, 1.

offset answers to strategic competitors' challenges—the most *lethal* threats—the Department will also have to find ways of economically countering more *likely* or frequent threats, such as weak-but-destabilizing regional actors and VEOs. If properly organized and executed, security cooperation and advisory missions offer a potential way to leverage the current U.S. strength in international partnerships against these threats, at relatively low cost in dollars and manpower. In theory, J.F.C. Fuller would approve.

In addition, Professor Everett Dolman's definition of strategy, "a plan for continuing advantage," seems inherent to the logic of security cooperation.[16] Security cooperation can occur continuously throughout the various phases of conflict. Because advisory missions have potential utility during strategic competition, shaping and deterrence, major combat operations, and post-conflict stabilization, the security cooperation enterprise seems congruent with Dolman's description of good strategy. Good strategy does not seek a final victory, he says, because victory is never final. Rather, good strategy seeks "a *continuation* of favorable circumstances, that is, a dynamic condition as opposed to some finite end or end-state."[17] True to this idea, security cooperation is an inherently long-term pursuit. It is based on trust built up over time. Long-term state-level commitments are built upon enduring security concerns and military-to-military relationships (from leadership down to the unit level).[18] Security cooperation abjures the short, tactical-victory-based time horizons prevalent in many military endeavors. Security cooperation seeks to create conditions of continuing advantage.

In addition to its longer time horizon, security cooperation seeks multiplication of the state's power through prudent investment and distribution (versus the realist inclination to hoard power and strengthen one's own reserves). Security cooperation is about building a resilient network, rather than an impenetrable fortress. As such, security cooperation, though an old practice, is a strategy well suited to the Information Age.

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[16] Everett Carl Dolman, *Pure Strategy: Power and Principle in the Space and Information Age*, 2nd ed. (London, UK: Routledge, 2011), 18.

[17] Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 3-20, Security Cooperation, 23 May 2017, xi: "While SC activities are conducted primarily for routine shaping as part of the theater campaign plan, SC can be conducted in all phases of an operation and across the range of military operations." And, Dolman, *Pure Strategy*, 21.

[18] Derrick V. Frazier and J. Wesley Hutto, "The socialization of military power: security cooperation and doctrine development through multinational military exercises," *Defence Studies* 17, no. 4 (2017): 392-393.

Security cooperation belongs in Dolman's concept of strategy, wherein rules and boundaries are manipulated, options multiplied, and complex adaptive systems built—in this case, systems of capable, like-minded allies.[19] The idea of security cooperation as a method of pursuing continuing advantage dovetails nicely with the Defense Department's stated intent to expand the space in which potential U.S. adversaries must compete.

The *National Defense Strategy* states, "Long-term strategic competitions with China and Russia are the principal priorities for the Department."[20] A *prima facie* implication of this frank statement might be that air advising and AvFID, typically discussed in a context of small and irregular wars, hold little utility for the DoD going forward. Yet based on the small footprint employed in most air advisor operations, combined with their potential for outsized impacts, these operations require continued attention and improvement in an era of great power competition. The argument for continued investment in air advising rests on two now-familiar ideas: the need to maintain and leverage every possible advantage against strategic competitors, and the need for greater economy of force as the United States continues to combat regional spoilers and violent extremists around the world.

Advocacy from Academics, Think Tanks, and the Military

In addition to being a focal point of the *National Defense Strategy*, the maintenance and leveraging of strong alliances is strongly supported by some academics as well. A 2014 *Foreign Affairs* article by international relations scholar G. John Ikenberry explored this comparative advantage in great detail.

Ikenberry reported active US military partnerships with 60 nations—a very low estimate, by the way—compared to Russia's eight and China's one.[21] Ikenberry elegantly summarized the benefits in a passage that would fit perfectly into today's *National Security Strategy* or *National Defense Strategy*: "Not only do alliances provide a global platform for the projection of U.S. power, but they also distribute the burden of providing security. The military capabilities aggregated in this U.S.-led alliance system outweigh

[19] Dolman, *Pure Strategy*, 5, 7, 9, 179-180.
[20] DoD, *National Defense Strategy*, 4.
[21] G. John Ikenberry, "The Illusion of Geopolitics," *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 3 (May/June 2014): 82.

anything China or Russia might generate for decades to come."[22] Furthermore, as a complement to power projection and burden sharing, Ikenberry maintained that the *shared democratic values* upheld by most of our alliances provide an enduring bulwark against spoilers and revisionists.[23] Ikenberry's fusion of expedience- and values-based arguments supporting security cooperation indicates the broad, enduring appeal of the enterprise to many Western strategists.

Various think tanks have also invoked security cooperation and military partnerships as a way to counter strategic threats. A 2016 RAND study on countering the Chinese anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) strategy recommends that the U.S. government improve partners' own defensive capabilities and their interoperability with U.S. forces, through arms transfers and iterative multinational training.[24] Dean Cheng of the Heritage Foundation agrees: "Just as China is pursuing a broader, more holistic anti-access strategy, the U.S. response should also encompass a broader set of elements…At the strategic level, an essential move for countering Chinese strategic A2/AD measures is to strengthen American relationships with key regional players."[25] Cheng points out that the United States already holds a decided advantage in this competitive space: "Nearly all countries on China's littoral are U.S. friends and allies. Leveraging these relationships, and in the process underscoring American credibility and commitment, is key."[26] Finally, a Brookings Institution author argues for increased U.S. assistance to strengthen the *offensive* capabilities of allies and partners. He explains, "The United States should bolster the ability of its allies and partners to penetrate or 'burst' enemy A2/AD bubbles through the supply and development of stand-off weaponry, 'blinding' capabilities in the form of electronic and cyber warfare, and more 'access-insensitive' platforms such as

[22] Ikenberry, "Illusion of Geopolitics," 82.
[23] Ikenberry, "Illusion of Geopolitics," 81-87.
[24] Terrence K. Kelly, David C. Gompert, and Duncan Long, *Smarter Power, Stronger Partners, Volume I: Exploiting U.S. Advantages to Prevent Aggression* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2016), 151. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1359.html
[25] Dean Cheng, "The U.S. Needs an Integrated Approach to Counter China's Anti-Access/Area Denial Strategy, Heritage Foundation," Backgrounder Report 2927 (Washington, D.C.: Heritage Foundation, 9 July 2014). https://www.heritage.org/defense/report/the-us-needs-integrated-approach-counter-chinas-anti-accessarea-denial-strategy
[26] Cheng, "U.S. Needs Integrated Approach."

submarines."[27] Another "access-insensitive" capability that would fit this list is covert aerial infiltration and exfiltration—a longstanding skill set within the USAF special operations community. AFSOC already boasts a cadre of trained combat air advisors prepared to build this capability in partner air forces.[28]

In another USAF-specific example, an *Air and Space Power Journal* article from 2014 invokes both the main advocacy arguments I have identified. To the authors, Air Force security cooperation is an economical pursuit that can provide enduring advantages:

> It is in the Air Force's interests to organize, train, and equip an effective standing operational security cooperation capability in the general purpose force. Doing so would help the service realize its vision of global vigilance, global reach, and global power; help deal with the challenges of highly contested environments; and provide a low-cost way to support US strategic interests and the nation's emphasis on shaping the strategic environment to prevent or deter conflict.[29]

Current practitioners emphasize the same array of benefits, echoing the claim that *these benefits transcend the counterinsurgency (COIN) and counter-terror doctrinal frameworks in which military professionals usually discuss air advising and AvFID*.[30] It seems that while some academics recommend against such missions, many others in academic, policy, and military circles believe such missions are inevitable, even desirable, and therefore seek to improve their future prospects and impacts.

Two more examples from the advocacy literature, a 2006 RAND study and an *Air and Space Power Journal* article from 2012, describe security cooperation and air advisors in the context of counterinsurgency-era U.S. grand strategy. Security cooperation in general cultivates partner militaries' tactical and operational competence as well as their professionalism.[31] Air advising in particular helps a partner more rapidly

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[27] Iskander Rehman, "Great Power Rivalry: Anti-Access and the Threat to the Liberal Order," *War on the Rocks*, 13 October 2015. https://warontherocks.com/2015/10/great-power-rivalry-anti-access-and-the-threat-to-the-liberal-order/

[28] 6th Special Operations Squadron, "The Most Committed Wins: Combat Aviation Advisors" (pamphlet/factsheet), 19 June 2017. http://www.afsoc.af.mil/Portals/86/Users/135/15/1415/CAALeaflet.pdf?ver=2017-06-19-133423-923

[29] Rolleston, Trimillos, and Gill, "Aviation Security Cooperation," 93.

[30] Interviews with combat aviation advisors from Air Force Special Operations Command, Duke Field and Hurlburt Field, FL, 31 January 2018.

[31] Vick et al., *Air Power in the New Counterinsurgency Era*, 94.

and effectively use force against internal threats. Improved air power also helps a state "inform, support, and secure its population," enabling better day-to-day governance and increasing the partner government's legitimacy.[32] Enhanced air power also proves vital to upholding a state's legitimacy during humanitarian crises and natural disasters.[33] Finally, RAND argued that air advising builds the partner's military capabilities, as well as interoperability with U.S. and U.S.-aligned military forces, increasing aggregate capability to respond to internal *and* external military threats.[34] In a counterinsurgency paradigm, all of these benefits increase the legitimacy of the sovereign partner government, which in turn prevents or retards the growth of insurgent and trans-national threats within the partner's borders. Of course, while much of the theory described remains valid, the United States is trying once again to get out of the COIN business. Fortunately for the advocates, air advisors are not just for COIN anymore.

A Knowledge Gap

Security cooperation and military advisory missions will maintain an enduring role in what one might call the post-post-9/11 military era, because of the potential benefits offered in terms of economy of force and continuing advantage. However, that enduring role has not been rigorously examined in academic circles, nor has it been adequately programmed and resourced by the U.S. Air Force. Other U.S. military services, current military advisors, and many defense policy makers believe advisory missions are becoming *more* important, despite the rhetorical turn in American policy toward "America First," and the concurrent turn in defense strategy toward readiness and modernization for major combat operations. Given the tensions among these concepts, all of which have been expressed by current U.S. leaders and strategists, a need exists for

[32] Vick et al., *Air Power in the New Counterinsurgency Era*, 94-95; and, Maj Chris Wachter, USAF, "Air-Mindedness: The Core of Successful Air Enterprise Development," *Air and Space Power Journal* 26, no. 1 (January-February 2012): 55.

[33] In the United States, for instance, air power has recently played a very visible role performing rescue and recovery efforts after major storms. Such efforts not only provide immediate aid, but their visibility in the disaster area and in public media underwrites a narrative that the government is in control, and is maintaining or attempting to restore order. Such a narrative becomes even more important in countries where control and legitimacy are in contention. For more on the theory of competitive control, see David Kilcullen, *Out of the Mountains: The Coming Age of the Urban Guerilla* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), 114, 116-168.

[34] Vick et al., *Air Power in the New Counterinsurgency Era*, 94-95, 98.

updated theoretical discussions and more contemporary, relevant policy recommendations vis-à-vis military advisory missions.

It is possible that the advocates are correct to say the Air Force should build greater security cooperation capability within its special operations or even its general purpose force. It is also possible that those advocates are correct, but the Air Force is *already* adequately organized for security cooperation, to the degree that financial realities and the Air Force's many responsibilities allow. Finally, it is possible that the many critiques of security cooperation are *validated* by recent historical cases, and therefore the Department of Defense or the Air Force need to seriously revise their strategy, doctrine, and most importantly, their expectations—exercising far greater restraint and devoting less effort to working by, with, and through partner forces. Tensions abound among these different schools of thought. There may be elements of truth in each, but this thesis evaluates which is most accurate and most useful as a guide for Air Force strategy and policy. First, however, a discussion of definitions and doctrine establishes a baseline understanding of USAF security cooperation and advisory missions.

Chapter 2

Definitions, Doctrine, and Relevance

> *Mutually beneficial alliances and partnerships are crucial to our strategy, providing a durable, asymmetric strategic advantage that no competitor or rival can match.*
>
> —U.S. Department of Defense
> *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy*

An effective analysis of US Air Force security cooperation and its place in US strategy requires a brief review of definitions, strategy, and doctrine. The goal here is not to trace the entire logic of security cooperation and its air advising subset through every relevant government, DoD, and USAF document. Rather, the goal is to establish a baseline understanding of the concepts analyzed herein, and the enduring role of Air Force security cooperation—particularly air advising—in U.S. national defense. *This chapter shows that the Air Force conceives of air advising and foreign internal defense as proven, low-cost, small-footprint foreign policy tools which, despite their inherent difficulty, offer force-multiplying potential to combatant commanders.*

The DoD defines **security cooperation** (SC) as follows:

> All DoD interactions with foreign security establishments to build security relationships that promote specific United States security interests, develop allied and partner nation military and security capabilities for self-defense and multinational operations, and provide United States forces with peacetime and contingency access to allied and partner nations.[1]

This definition is sufficiently broad to describe and even justify almost any DoD interaction with allies or partners. At the same time, the definition does specify *three aims of security cooperation—interests, partners, access*—any or all of which may be served by a particular SC activity. These aims are summarized here for ease of reference:

1. Directly promote *U.S. security interests*
2. Build *partner nations' military capacity*

[1] *DoD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, August 2017, 206. http://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/dictionary.pdf

3. Provide U.S. forces with *access*[2]

Note that the DoD definition *assumes* that security cooperation effectively serves these ends. Later chapters examine the validity of that assumption in order to refine current and future security cooperation plans.[3]

With the three specific aims, the definition offers a simple rubric for evaluating specific security cooperation missions or future proposals—does the activity advance U.S. interests, partners' capabilities, and/or U.S. access? Logically, a given security cooperation activity should serve at least two, and ideally all three of these objectives. Of course, the definition exhibits a subtle hierarchy, and perhaps even a circular logic. U.S. elected officials, military leaders, and taxpayers should indeed *assume* that every DoD activity and every dollar in the defense budget promotes specific United States security interests. Therefore, the first objective in the security cooperation definition—directly promoting U.S. interests—is really a super-objective: an objective in and of itself, and simultaneously the overall objective of the whole enterprise, which the other two objectives (partners' capabilities and U.S. geographic access) should serve.

To dissect the potential problem a bit more, note that *access* is a strategic imperative for U.S. forces, whether planning for major war or sustaining a current COIN campaign. Witness the long-running, anxious American discussion regarding China's anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) system of island bases, air defenses, and long-range missiles; or the great amount of resources and political leeway the United States has given to dubious "partner" nations, merely because a U.S. operation depends on a certain international port or airway.[4] Access represents a natural intersection of U.S. interests and partners' capacity to collaborate. Therefore, *the tension at the core of many security*

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[2] It seems *geographic* access is implied, but the definition does not specify. Other connotations include access to intelligence, technology, or resources.

[3] Joint Publication (JP) 5-0, *Joint Planning*, 16 June 2017, xxix, IV-15 (on the need to assess and validate planning assumptions).

[4] For a few samples, see Department of Defense, *AirSea Battle: Service Collaboration to Address Anti-Access and Area Denial Challenges* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Defense, May 2013). https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/ASB-ConceptImplementation-Summary-May-2013.pdf; Ben Wermeling, "Defeating Anti-Access/Area Denial in the West Pacific," *The Strategy Bridge*, 25 August 2016. https://thestrategybridge.org/the-bridge/2016/8/25/defeating-anti-access-area-denial; and, Mujib Mashal and Salman Masood, "Cutting Off Pakistan, U.S. Takes Gamble in Complex Afghan War," *New York Times*, 5 January 2018. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/05/world/asia/pakistan-aid-afghan-war.html

cooperation activities is the relationship between objective 1, the super-objective of promoting specific U.S. security interests, and objective 2, developing allies' and partners' own military capabilities.

If there is any limit to U.S. military and financial resources—if strategy truly does "wear a dollar sign" as Bernard Brodie suggested—then activities meant to directly build *partners'* military capabilities should have to demonstrate or at least make a credible argument for their indirect contribution to *U.S.* interests.[5] Some of the case studies suggest that this positive relationship is often assumed, and too rarely questioned or refined, in U.S. and USAF strategy.

Security Cooperation in U.S. Grand Strategy

The concept of security cooperation has maintained a remarkably stable role in post-Cold War U.S. grand strategy, despite dramatic swings in American politics during the period. Security cooperation's durability is evident in the emphasis it received in the two most recent National Security Strategies (2015 and 2017), which originated from starkly different presidential administrations.

President Obama's 2015 *National Security Strategy* professed a heavy reliance upon security cooperation in the pursuit of national defense goals. The strategy required "a global security posture in which our unique capabilities are employed within diverse international coalitions and in support of local partners."[6] This posture reflected the Obama administration's desire to reduce U.S. military commitments abroad, particularly in the Middle East, and distance itself from the perceived unilateralism of the Bush administration, *while continuing* to advance U.S. security interests through military means.

All presidential administrations face a central dilemma of advancing the nation's global interests while minimizing expenditure of U.S. blood and treasure. To that end, the 2015 *NSS* "redoubled our commitment to allies and partners" in its first paragraph.[7] On the whole, the 35-page document's 110 references to "allies," "partners," and "collective

[5] Bernard Brodie, *Strategy in the Missile Age*, new RAND ed. (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2007), 358.
[6] President of the United States, *National Security Strategy*, February 2015, 9.
[7] *National Security Strategy* (2015), 1.

action" animate the strategic thrust of nearly every line of operation and effort—from geopolitics to counterterrorism, from the Arctic to the Horn of Africa. It seems that at some point, *security cooperation became a central pillar of U.S. grand strategy*.

While some might have expected a major overhaul of the *NSS* in 2017, reflecting the ideological differences between the Trump administration and its predecessor, central figures in American foreign policy at the time did *not* foretell a radical departure from the 2015 document's emphasis on security cooperation. A May 2017 *Wall Street Journal* op-ed by National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster and Gary Cohn, Director of the National Economic Council, previewed ideas that would be fundamental to the Trump administration's *National Security Strategy*. The op-ed confirmed that security cooperation would remain a mainstay of U.S. military operations. Titled "America First Doesn't Mean America Alone," the piece affirmed America's commitment to its allies, and eschewed unilateralism.[8] The authors' main points and language affirmed that *even in a so-called "America First" foreign policy, security cooperation with allies and partners will remain a fundamental element.*

This continuity should come as no surprise. Historically, governmental organizations and processes exhibit a notorious resistance to change.[9] Even following a sea change in governing ideologies, the behavior of established, constitutional governments often differs marginally at most.[10] So *unsurprisingly*, while U.S. troop levels rose incrementally in Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan during 2017, strategies in both theaters continued to rely upon U.S. support to indigenous forces. Such continuity of security cooperation efforts supports the notion that current U.S. grand strategy, at least with regard to irregular warfare, will change incrementally if at all in the near term. Security cooperation and advisory missions are not going away.

The old *NSS* referred to security cooperation 110 times. The 2017 *National Security Strategy* goes even further, using the words "partner" or "partnerships" nearly 150 times, along with 75 references to "allies."[11] While declaring an ideology of

[8] H.R. McMaster and Gary D. Cohn, "America First Doesn't Mean America Alone," *Wall Street Journal*, 30 May 2017.
[9] Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Addison Wesley Longman, Inc., 1999), 180.
[10] Allison and Zelikow, *Essence of Decision*, 180.
[11] President of the United States: *National Security Strategy*, December 2017.

principled realism, the 2017 *NSS* contains references to allies and partners in nearly every line of effort. The document most clearly invokes security cooperation as a strategic tool for fighting violent extremist organizations and denying them safe havens.[12]

> The campaigns against ISIS and al-Qa'ida and their affiliates demonstrate that the United States will enable partners and sustain direct action campaigns to destroy terrorists and their sources of support, making it harder for them to plot against us…We will help our partners develop and responsibly employ the capacity to degrade and maintain persistent pressure against terrorists and will encourage partners to work independently of U.S. assistance.[13]

To summarize: though the 2017 *National Security Strategy* relies on a very different political ideology and uses very different rhetoric than the Obama-era document, security cooperation remains a cornerstone of U.S. national security policy. In the near term, policy makers and servicemembers should expect most campaigns, and especially irregular warfare and counterterrorism efforts, to involve working by, with, and through allies and partners as a primary line of effort.

The emphasis on advisory and assistance missions for irregular warfare in the *NSS* indicates a desire among national and military leaders to fight small wars at low cost to U.S. resources, by enabling local actors and proxy forces. Consistent with the realist ideology espoused by the *NSS* and the "selective engagement" strategy it seems to favor, this hedging approach to small wars has influenced U.S. national security since at least Nixon's "Vietnamization" program beginning in 1969.[14] Some would date the method to Kennedy's small wars emphasis and the creation of the Army's Green Berets.[15] In theory, small-scale advisory and assistance missions provide a way to effectively fight or at least contain a fringe insurgency or other non-existential threat with a small resource commitment, while avoiding the potential pitfalls of large-scale U.S. involvement. Of course, a campaign based on this theory would require that the United States remain

[12] *National Security Strategy* (2017), 11, 33, 39.
[13] *National Security Strategy* (2017), 11.
[14] *National Security Strategy* (2017), 1, 55; and, Robert J. Art, "Geopolitics Updated: The Strategy of Selective Engagement," *International Security* 23, no. 3 (Winter 1998-1999): 106: "Selective engagement is a hedging strategy…To hedge is to make counterbalancing investments in order to avoid or lessen loss. Selective engagement makes hedging bets (primarily through alliances and overseas basing), because it does not believe that the international environment, absent America's precommitted stance and forward presence, will remain benign to America's interests, as apparently does isolationism."
[15] B.H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, 2nd revised ed. (New York: Meridian, 1991), 364.

committed to the strategy, avoiding escalation and large-scale commitments unless vital national interests are threatened.

A RAND study titled *Air Power in the New Counterinsurgency Era* avers that U.S. interventions in civil or irregular conflicts often "carry the seeds of their own defeat," as U.S. presence and kinetic operations "may stir opposition, be perceived as part of a broader design to support U.S. hegemony, or be viewed as supporting an illegitimate local government."[16] The new *NSS* seems to agree with the RAND report's emphasis on "the role of the U.S. military, and USAF in particular, in training, advising, and equipping partner nations so that they can successfully deal with insurgencies."[17] The 2006 report advocates a precautionary strategy of using advisory and assistance missions early and often, which RAND believed at the time to be "consistent with recent DoD moves to take an indirect approach to battling insurgents and terrorists, emphasizing building partner capabilities rather than direct combat operations by U.S. forces."[18] The success of the 2016-2017 campaign against ISIS (relying upon indigenous ground forces, supported by U.S. special operations forces and air power), and the language of the new *NSS*, both indicate that the now-decade-old trends toward an indirect approach in irregular warfare will continue in U.S. strategy for the foreseeable future.

In addition to its benefits in irregular warfare and counterinsurgency, the relatively light footprint of forces conducting train-advise-assist-accompany missions, as opposed to large-scale combat operations, benefits U.S. grand strategy as a whole. The use of small, highly-trained units to advance shared interests by, with, and through partner forces should, in theory, free up the *majority* of U.S. military forces to organize, train, and equip for a major war, or fight one if necessary. In this sense, security cooperation and advisory missions constitute a strategic hedge, but a vital one. President Trump's *NSS* seems to reflect commonality with the Obama administration's efforts to reduce U.S. military commitments abroad, particularly in the Middle East, while continuing to use the military to advance U.S. security interests and influence in ways other than large-scale conflict. Where the Obama administration sought a dramatic course

[16] Vick et al., *Air Power in the New Counterinsurgency Era*, 4.
[17] Vick et al., *Air Power in the New Counterinsurgency Era*, 5.
[18] Vick et al., *Air Power in the New Counterinsurgency Era*, 5.

change away from large-scale military commitments and toward liberal institutionalism, the Trump administration articulates a realist impulse to prepare most of America's military forces for potential war with a peer state. Yet in the wide gulf that separates the two worldviews, the security cooperation enterprise maintains a constant allure.

The unclassified summary of the 2018 *National Defense Strategy* declares that the United States intends to press every advantage against strategic competitors such as Russia and China, as well as regional threats such as North Korea and Iran. It explains,

> More than any other nation, America can expand the competitive space, seizing the initiative to challenge our competitors where we possess advantages and they lack strength. A more lethal force, *strong alliances and partnerships*, American technological innovation, and a culture of performance will generate decisive and sustained U.S. military advantages (emphasis added).[19]

As highlighted in the previous chapter, Ikenberry has explained the U.S. alliance advantage. He writes, "Washington enjoys a unique ability to win friends and influence states," and that this ability is a security-multiplier: it increases U.S. power while distributing its burdens, strengthens like-minded liberal governments, and extends U.S. reach.[20] This argument is remarkably consistent with the DoD rubric, mentioned previously, of advancing *U.S. interests*, bolstering *partners' capabilities*, and expanding *American access* and influence. It is exactly this sort of reasoning, based on aggregate power *and* shared values and norms, upon which the *NDS* bases its unequivocal statement that "our network of alliances and partnerships remain the backbone of global security."[21]

Another explanatory passage in the *NDS* clearly reflects the defining, stable objectives of U.S. security cooperation—advancing U.S. interests, bolstering partners' capabilities, and enabling U.S. access.

> By working together with allies and partners we amass the greatest possible strength for the long-term advancement of our *interests*, maintaining favorable balances of power that deter aggression and support the stability that generates economic growth. When we pool resources and share responsibility for our common defense, our security burden becomes lighter. Our *allies and partners provide*

[19] Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge*, January 2018, 4. https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf
[20] Ikenberry, "Illusion of Geopolitics," 82.
[21] DoD, *2018 National Defense Strategy*, 2.

> *complementary capabilities* and forces along with unique perspectives, regional relationships, and information that improve our understanding of the environment and expand our options. Allies and partners also provide *access* to critical regions, supporting a widespread basing and logistics system that underpins the Department's global reach (emphasis added).[22]

Again, the logic and objectives of security cooperation are consistent at multiple levels of U.S. government and military strategy. This logic also transcends many years of U.S. strategic thought and applies to a surprising variety of strategic threats.

Note that the portion of the *NDS* above places value on a favorable balance of power—traditionally associated with great power politics. The *NDS* on the whole declares a shift in focus toward strategic competitors—a framework in which the role of security cooperation is based on the logic of economy of force. At the same time, the DoD remains unequivocally committed to thwarting non-state actors' efforts against U.S. citizens, interests, and allies—an objective in which air advisors have played a significant, stable role for decades. The present administration, like many before it, is committed to security cooperation as a relatively low-cost means to advance U.S. interests and amplify U.S. power without large-scale commitments of general purpose forces. From a strategic and doctrinal standpoint, security cooperation is fully institutionalized as a way to expand the competitive space against strategic competitors, while economically combating regional and transnational threats.

The Operational Role of USAF Security Cooperation

Joint Publication 3-20, *Security Cooperation,* provides an expanded definition of security cooperation, emphasizing the enterprise's utility in now-familiar terms:

> Security cooperation (SC) encompasses all Department of Defense (DOD) interactions, programs, and activities with foreign security forces (FSF) and their institutions to build relationships that help promote *U.S. interests*; enable partner nations (PNs) to provide the U.S. *access* to territory, infrastructure, information, and resources; and/or to build and apply *their capacity and capabilities* consistent with US defense objectives. (emphasis added)[23]

[22] DoD, *2018 National Defense Strategy*, 8.
[23] Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 3-20, *Security Cooperation*, 23 May 2017, v.

The document, published in May 2017 by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, also makes it clear that each military service *will* organize, train, and equip forces for the purposes of security cooperation:

> Military departments and Services support combatant commander (CCDR) campaign plans and simultaneously pursue Service-specific SC objectives consistent with national and theater strategic objectives.[24]

> Services have Title 10, United States Code (USC), responsibilities to organize, train, and equip US forces to maintain readiness and support GCC theater objectives, which include funds for SC activities by the Services. Service components posture forces to conduct SC activities and to execute theater campaigns and operations, as directed. […] Conducting sustained SC activities in an AOR typically requires a combination of assigned and attached forces, composed of conventional forces (CF) and SOF.[25]

These passages from JP 3-20 re-emphasize DoD policy, unchanged since 2010, in Department of Defense (DOD) Instruction 5000.68, "Security Force Assistance" (SFA). The military services will:

- Support DoD efforts to organize, train, equip, and advise foreign military forces
- Provide scalable capabilities to meet the requirements of SFA activities
- Develop military department service-specific strategy for SFA capabilities[26]

JP 3-20, DoDI 5000.68, and the aforementioned strategy documents establish that security cooperation maintains an enduring role in U.S. grand strategy and military operations. The more operational, forward aspects of security cooperation such as foreign internal defense and air advising, are often characterized in U.S. strategy as an efficient, low-cost way to defeat terrorist movements and deny VEOs the safe havens they need to mature into international threats. But as the introduction noted, these forces and activities

[24] JP 3-20, x.
[25] JP 3-20, II-1.
[26] Summarized in Nicole S. Finch and Peter A. Garretson, "Air Advising: A Critical Component of Joint Engagement," *Joint Forces Quarterly* no. 70 (2013): 35. Original source: Department of Defense Instruction (DoDI) 5000.68, *Security Force Assistance*, 27 October 2010, 2, 11. http://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/DD/issuances/dodi/500068p.pdf

also hold promise for complicating strategic competitors' decision calculus—and ideally, dis-incentivizing and deterring aggression. As we begin to evaluate advisory missions' contribution to counter-VEO operations and their potential for strategic competition, two definitions are already overdue at this point, for air advising and aviation foreign internal defense (AvFID).

> The U.S. Air Force defines **air advising** as follows:
>
> > A category of related activities that provides the basic operational methods used by USAF personnel to work with partner nations to develop, sustain, and employ their aviation enterprise to meet their national security needs, in support of US interests. In essence, it is the act of communicating professional knowledge and skills to partner nation personnel. Air advising occurs within the following five core tasks: assessing, training, advising, assisting, and equipping.[27]

This air advising definition requires only that a partner's "national security needs" be complementary to U.S. interests. Though many of the activities within this field are commonly associated with counterinsurgency or counterterror—internal threats—the United States can and often does use air advising to bolster an ally's national defense and expeditionary capabilities. However, also note that the definition seems to eschew the possibility of air advisors *accompanying* partner nations in combat. While the reader can generally assume that deployed U.S. forces are authorized to defend themselves, air advisors are usually complementary to the combatant commander's strategy, but separate from U.S. or coalition forces prosecuting combat operations.

Whereas the "air advising" definition above provides a broad, categorical or conceptual description, sounding rather like a scientific field of study, the U.S. Air Force also provides a definition of **air advising activities** that better captures the *operational* role of air advising as a subset of security cooperation. Air advising activities are:

> > Security cooperation efforts conducted in support of combatant commander and/or COMAFFOR/TSOC objectives across the range of military operations.[28]

While more specific in its description of the utility of air advising activities—actions that support warfighting commanders' current operations—the phrase "across the range of

[27] Air Force Instruction (AFI) 10-4201 Vol 3, *Air Advising Operations*, 43.
[28] Air Force Instruction (AFI) 10-4201 Vol 3, *Air Advising Operations*, 43.

military operations" seems to leave some leeway for advisors to accompany partner forces in combat if the commander deems it necessary.[29]

> Finally, the DoD defines **foreign internal defense (FID)** as follows:
>
> Participation by civilian and military agencies of a government in any of the action programs taken by another government or other designated organization to free and protect its society from subversion, lawlessness, insurgency, terrorism, and other threats to its security.[30]

AvFID is simply a subset of FID conducted by airmen to bolster partner nations' airpower employment, sustainment, and integration.[31] FID expressly *includes* combat operations. The inclusion of a proactive combat role distinguishes AvFID units—usually SOF—from other, general purpose force air advisory units.[32] While FID is typically directed at a partner nation's internal threats, today most "internal" threats meriting a military response are at least externally connected, if not externally supplied or directed.[33] It is possible a new term is needed to describe U.S. support of a sovereign government against a transnational threat, but for the time being, FID is the term of record.

FID became a common U.S. military activity in the latter half of the twentieth century as part of the overarching U.S. effort to contain the spread of Communism. Internal revolutions and insurgencies from Southeast Asia, to Africa, to Latin America often adopted socialist or explicitly Communist ideologies. The United States regularly deployed small teams of advisors and FID specialists with the goals of aiding US-friendly sovereign governments against such uprisings, while conserving its main force in Europe and the United States for a potential large-scale conflict against the Soviet Union. As the United States government and military seek to move beyond the COIN-dominated campaigns of Iraq and Afghanistan, the role for air advising and FID that emerges in the new *NSS* and subordinate documents actually seems quite familiar. By working by, with, and through allies

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[29] Such considerations will usually be clarified by the specific rules of engagement (ROE), special instructions (SPINs), and orders governing a given operation.
[30] DoD Dictionary 92
[31] LeMay Center for Doctrine, Annex 3-05, *Special Operations*, "Air Force Special Operations Command Core Missions," http://www.doctrine.af.mil/Portals/61/documents/Annex_3-05/3-05-D06-SOF-AFSOC-CORE-MSN.pdf?ver=2017-09-19-154201-940
[32] Major Angela Polsinelli, "The Constructive Use of Air Power: Aviation Enterprise Development as a Path to National Security" (master's thesis, School of Advanced Air and Space Studies, 2016), 6.
[33] Certainly, much more could be included on these and related definitions, and how various security cooperation activities are related and nested within service and joint doctrine. For an outstanding explanation of this complicated subject, see Polsinelli, "Constructive Use of Air Power," 2-10.

and partner nations, the United States intends to actively oppose violent anti-Western movements while freeing its main force and the bulk of its resources to prepare for near-peer conflict.

With these nuanced definitions in mind, we can begin to examine how these types of Air Force security cooperation efforts are supposed to advance the combatant commander's goals in-theater. In so doing, we may also foreshadow some of the issues analyzed in the case studies.

According to the *Air Force Future Operating Concept* (AFFOC), "Effective international partnerships…create desired multi-domain effects within a compressed planning process…This collaboration is critical for cases in which the United States must rely on partners to augment Air Force capacity, or for shared access to basing and other infrastructure in crisis regions."[34] The forward-looking document emphasizes the force-multiplying effects that allies capabilities and increased geographic access can provide.

In 2016 the office of the Deputy Under Secretary of the Air Force for International Affairs (SAF/IA) followed these enterprise-level publications with a 16-page document titled simply, *Security Cooperation with the United States Air Force*. The document provides "a common understanding and security cooperation lexicon for our international partners, industry, U.S. government interagency, and the joint force to refer to when focused on the air, space and cyberspace domains."[35] It emphasizes the myriad ways in which security cooperation supports national military objectives, and identifies three specific U.S. Air Force security cooperation goals:

- Enable the United States to operate in support of shared interests
- Enable partners to conduct operations in lieu of the United States
- Enable partners to operate with the United States[36]

These USAF goals mirror the first two objectives from the DoD security cooperation definition: advancing U.S. interests directly, and building partners' capacity—in order to defend themselves unilaterally, serve as proxies for US forces, or operate in U.S.

[34] Secretary of the Air Force and Chief of Staff of the Air Force, *Air Force Future Operating Concept* (AFFOC): *A View of the Air Force in 2035*, September 2015, 31.
[35] Secretary of the Air Force—International Affairs (SAF-IA), *Security Cooperation with the United States Air Force*, September 2016, 1.
[36] *Security Cooperation with the United States Air Force*, 5.

coalitions. The document later emphasizes the third definitional SC goal, access, both in the sense of geographic basing and logistical throughput, and in the sense of information-sharing.[37] As a view of the entire USAF security cooperation portfolio, the document paints a deliberately broad, multifaceted view. At the same time, *Security Cooperation with the United States Air Force* also offers valuable clarification on the Air Force's tailored approach, by describing a framework wherein specific, optimal SC activities are identified for three tiers of allied and partner nations: Developing Partners, Capable Partners, and Most Capable Partners.

Developing Partners are either states with very little extant air power capability, or states with which the United States is just beginning to build a security cooperation relationship. Sometimes both conditions may apply. SC activities for this tier focus on establishing high-level military and diplomatic relationships, as well as laying the groundwork for future cooperation through site surveys, capability assessments, and initial military-to-military visits short of training or exercises. Airmen such as attaches, foreign area officers (FAO), and Air Mobility Command's (AMC) two Mobility Support and Advisory Squadrons (MSAS) execute these sorts of engagements with developing partners.

Capable Partners are nations with which the "the U.S. Air Force employs a 'total package approach' tailoring security cooperation activities to partner requirements. This approach goes beyond delivering weapon systems to include addressing the partner's tactics, training, procedures and life cycle management."[38] The Air Force prescribes foreign military sales (FMS), sustainment, and training for this tier of partner, the middle of the bell curve. The airmen leading such activities will range from SAF/IA's FMS case workers and country desk officers for equipment initiatives, to SOF air commandos and expeditionary air advisors for bilateral or multilateral training, exercises, and real-world operations. "The result," writes SAF/IA, "is a deep core of airpower capability and capacity to support regional security requirements."[39] This project will focus primarily on security cooperation with these first two tiers, Developing and Capable Partners.

[37] *Security Cooperation with the United States Air Force*, 7.
[38] *Security Cooperation with the United States Air Force*, 7.
[39] *Security Cooperation with the United States Air Force*, 7.

Finally, Most Capable Partners "possess the means to employ and sustain operations for their own national security and contribute to multinational operations."[40] Examples of Most Capable Partners include many NATO allies, Australia, and Japan. With these highly-developed air forces, "The U.S. Air Force focuses on building interoperability across the air, space and cyberspace domains," through operational and professional military education (PME) personnel exchanges, complex multilateral exercises, high-level information and technology collaboration, and coalition operations.[41] A peer-to-peer mentality characterizes these more traditional, longstanding alliances. Most of the security cooperation activities at this tier have been fully institutionalized by all parties. Though subject to political shifts and negotiations of details and new projects, these traditional SC activities can be considered mutually beneficial, prudent, and sustainable. There is ample space for valuable research on security cooperation in the "Most Capable" tier, but this project is scoped toward air advising and aviation foreign internal defense—activities more appropriate for Developing and Capable Partners.

Security Cooperation with the United States Air Force concludes: "We are a global air force protecting global interests. Although the U.S. Air Force can deliver extraordinary capabilities, we are stronger with our international partners."[42] This passage suggests a pursuit of Dolman's "continuing advantage." At the same time, SAF/IA also wisely vows to "balance the demand for activities with international partners against the supply of U.S. Air Force Airmen and resources."[43] J.F.C. Fuller would applaud SAF/IA's attention to economy of force. This crucial balance of supply and demand provides a running theme for this research project. Airmen are a precious resource, and because strategy wears a dollar sign, security cooperation activities must be prioritized prudently, based on maximum demonstrable benefit to U.S. national security objectives. The opportunities for waste in this enterprise are legion. Cost-benefit analysis, demonstrable utility, and combat-proven concepts must rule.

[40] *Security Cooperation with the United States Air Force*, 7.
[41] *Security Cooperation with the United States Air Force*, 7.
[42] *Security Cooperation with the United States Air Force*, 14.
[43] *Security Cooperation with the United States Air Force*, 14.

Air Force doctrine and operational guidance correspond to the strategic *Security Cooperation with the United States Air Force* by recommending and expounding upon the value of a long-term, strategic approach. The Air Force intends to optimize security cooperation activities to improve specific capabilities of each partner nation—the capabilities which will reliably bolster U.S. national interests. USAF doctrine includes several annexes which provide recent, vetted institutional ideas and best practices for air advising and AvFID specifically: Annex 3-2, *Irregular Warfare*; Annex 3-05, *Special Operations*, and Annex 3-22, *Foreign Internal Defense.* These documents, as well as operational Air Force guidance such as Air Force Instruction (AFI) 10-4201 Vol 3, *Air Advising Operations*, are referenced throughout this project.

In general, Air Force doctrine and operational instructions reflect the long-term, tailored approach espoused by national and service-specific strategy. For example, AFDD 3-22 contains a section called "Optimal Solutions," which clearly reflects its authors' operational experiences during the last fifteen years. Optimal solutions, it says, "are those that are the most realistic for a given set of conditions in the host nation…Regardless of how obvious or desirable a particular capability or air platform may seem, the recommended assets must fit within the technological and financial resources, as well as the mission needs of assisted nations."[44] Similarly, operational Air Force guidance maintains that to be effective, "air advising activities should be part of a persistent presence with focused engagements by trained USAF personnel over a number of years…Activities should be tailored to the needs and the capabilities of the partner nation, based on economic, infrastructure, and human capital, to ensure the partner nation can operate and sustain their capabilities."[45] That is, such missions must display pragmatism and sustainability, so that the U.S. government and military can expect reliable contributions to U.S. national security as a result of air advising and AvFID.

Though *Security Cooperation with the United States Air Force* and related Air Force doctrine predate the new *NSS*, the tiered and partner-specific approaches to security cooperation espoused by the Air Force nest well within the *NSS*. Specific to this project,

[44] LeMay Center for Doctrine, Annex 3-22, *Foreign Internal Defense*, "Optimal Solutions," http://www.doctrine.af.mil/Portals/61/documents/Annex_3-22/3-22-Annex-FID.pdf?ver=2017-09-19-154935-737

[45] Air Force Instruction (AFI) 10-4201 Vol 3, *Air Advising Operations*, 17-20.

expeditionary air advising and AvFID consistently emerge throughout Executive Branch, DoD, and Air Force guidance as a strategic hedge—a relatively low-cost approach to stabilizing weak states, fighting violent non-state actors, and denying the goals of emerging regional threats.

Based on the extensive evidence in this chapter, I conclude that *USAF strategy and doctrine regarding security cooperation are consistent and theoretically sound*. It remains to be seen whether USAF security cooperation in actual practice is consistent with this conclusion.

Summary

The goal of this chapter was to establish a working knowledge of the concepts to be analyzed, and the enduring role of Air Force security cooperation—particularly AvFID and air advising—in U.S. national defense. Air Force aviation foreign internal defense and air advising constitute a proven, low-cost, small-footprint foreign policy tool which offers enormous potential to combatant commanders executing counterinsurgency, counterterrorism, shaping operations, and other varieties of hybrid or political warfare—despite such operations' inherent difficulties. As the Department of Defense shifts its primary focus toward readiness and modernization for major combat operations, AvFID and air advising can continue to pay dividends in terms of economy of force by bolstering allies' and partners' strength and sovereignty, thereby enabling U.S. and multilateral operations while expanding the competitive space in which our adversaries must contend.

Having established the strategic underpinnings and the *enduring utility* of security cooperation, air advising, and aviation foreign internal defense, a survey of the USAF security cooperation enterprise follows in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 introduces a loose narrative framework which is applied to several current USAF air advising and AvFID constructs in the subsequent chapters, in order to answer the core question of this research project: *How should the USAF organize and present forces for air advising and AvFID?*

Chapter 3

The USAF Security Cooperation Enterprise Today

This chapter provides a brief tour of the USAF security cooperation enterprise—with apologies to the organizations given short shrift—in order to give the reader an impression of what constructs currently exist and what initiatives are possible going forward.

The U.S. Air Force boasts an array of air advisor units, but the enterprise as a whole has major flaws. Air Force security cooperation takes place under a variety of authorities and commands, and therefore lacks unity of effort.[1] As a result, many advisor missions are performed in an ad hoc manner by airmen who, for a number of reasons, lack the right skills, training, or authority to achieve optimum results.[2] Furthermore, the different air advisor units are stove-piped within different major commands, each with different priorities. Any collaboration between the various air advisor units tends to be ad hoc, arranged only through the efforts of individual unit commanders and operations officers. The Air Force must strive for a more cohesive and sustainable air advising capability, in order to ensure future access to and interoperability with partner nations.

At the 2016 Air Force Association conference, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Joseph Dunford called training foreign allies an Air Force "core mission."[3] He cautioned against treating security cooperation as a secondary mission, because U.S. military strategy going forward is in part "based on building effective indigenous

[1] James S. Corum and Wray R. Johnson argued for devoting more Air Force organizations and resources to small wars and foreign internal defense in the conclusion to *Airpower in Small Wars: Fighting Insurgents and Terrorists* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2003). Since then, the Air Force has built up its security cooperation forces, but as this paper addresses, the enterprise, as a whole, remains under-resourced and disjointed. The demand from partner nations and potential strategic benefits justify continuing to build USAF security cooperation organizations. In the meantime, the Air Force must also unite and institutionalize the sustainable efforts already underway.

[2] It is not my intent to question the commitment or military professionalism of any airman, especially those who have made the great sacrifices required to perform the air advisor mission. But in the interest of good stewardship and mission effectiveness—or, economy of force and continuing advantage—the Air Force must address the negative consequences of sending non-volunteers to do air advising, versus airmen with the background, international fluency, and desire to train foreign forces.

[3] Aaron Mehta, "Dunford: US Air Force Should Incentivize Foreign Training Mission," *Defense News*, 26 September 2016.

forces."[4] (Recent operations against ISIS, as well as the 2017 *NSS*, only reinforce the Chairman's words.) General Dunford further warned, "If our young captains think doing something like building the Afghan Air Force is not something that makes them competitive and is not valued by the institution, then we won't get the right people to go….and we won't grow the right air force."[5] General Dunford's comments highlight a deficiency in the joint force—a strategically-significant mission that lacks unity of effort and proper prioritization.

Why would the Chairman need to remind the Air Force that it is responsible for organizing and presenting capable forces for security cooperation?[6] In fact, the Chairman had observed during a recent visit to Afghanistan that while the Air Force engages in a wide array of missions under the security cooperation banner, the organization still approaches many of these missions in an ad hoc fashion. As a result, the Air Force has thus far failed to translate its security cooperation strategy into a sustainable enterprise. Though unit-level enclaves of excellence exist within the force, at the service level the Air Force does not yet adequately organize, train, and equip for building partnerships with foreign militaries, despite this activity's stated importance in national strategy, joint doctrine, and USAF publications. The security cooperation enterprise and the air advisor mission reflect highest-level strategic guidance, as detailed in the previous chapter. But as General Dunford surmised, the Air Force continues to wrestle with how to resource and perform this mission set effectively. In practice, the Air Force has generally treated security cooperation as a secondary consideration, peripheral to combatant commanders' and service chiefs' main efforts.

Consider this data point: Among the Air Force functional major commands (entrusted with organizing, training, and equipping forces), only AFSOC counts AvFID or air advising among its core missions.[7] Meanwhile, in their official posture statements,

[4] Mehta, "Dunford."
[5] Mehta, "Dunford."
[6] JP 3-20, x, II-1.
[7] Lemay Center for Doctrine, Annex 3-05, *Special Operations*, "AFSOC Core Missions," accessed 14 March 2018. www.doctrine.af.mil/Portals/61/documents/Annex_3-05/3-05-D06-SOF-AFSOC-CORE-MSN.pdf. In fairness, some strategy and "leadership vision" documents from Air Education and Training Command, as well as Air Mobility Command, do mention training and advising foreign forces as command priorities, but these documents do not disprove the assertion that air advising is under-emphasized in Air Force doctrine and under-resourced by the service.

all 7 of the U.S. geographic combatant commands (COCOMs) expressly commit to building allies' and partners' military capacities. This clear disconnect leads to supply-and-demand and sustainment problems. There are simply not enough trained airmen and specialized units to perform all the air advising work demanded by the geographic combatant commands, and so the Air Force has settled into an unsustainable rut of tasking air advisor jobs and missions out on an ad-hoc, as-needed basis.[8] Over the long term, this approach cannot achieve optimum results for the combatant commands, nor does it build or institutionalize a robust air advising capability in the Air Force.

This is not to say the Air Force has not devoted time, thought, or resources to security cooperation activities, but rather that the Air Force's many security cooperation activities lack unity of effort. A review of these activities reveals an active but disjointed enterprise.

On one end of the spectrum, the Air Force has participated in operational and educational exchanges with its "Most Capable Partners" for decades. Pilots of widely-proliferated airframes, such as F-16 fighters and C-130 airlifters, participate in one-for-one individual exchange assignments with foreign air services, in order to increase wartime interoperability and maintain bilateral ties. When linked with the operation and maintenance of US-built weapons systems, exchanges support foreign military sales as well. Air Education and Training Command (AETC) also hosts thousands of international airmen each year in its many programs, from undergraduate pilot training to the Senior Non-Commissioned Officer Academy and the Air War College.[9] Another tried-and-true method of interaction is through multinational training and exercises, including foreign participation at exercises like Red Flag and Green Flag, and USAF foreign training deployments. The multinational aspect of such exercises adds realism and healthy challenges to the training scenarios, while also increasing familiarity with partners' tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs). All these activities are long-standing, fully-

[8] Somewhat surprisingly, *official USAF doctrine acknowledges the USAF air advisor shortfall*: "A variety of personnel throughout the Air Force can accomplish the assess, train, advise, and assist mission set; however, the need for these skills worldwide exceeds the number of specialized forces available." Lemay Center for Doctrine, Annex 3-22, *Foreign Internal Defense*, "Assess-Train-Advise-Assist Mission Set," accessed 14 March 2018. www.doctrine.af.mil/Portals/61/documents/Annex_3-22/3-22-D49-FID-Assess-Trn-Adv-Asst.pdf?ver=2017-09-19-154937-050

[9] Secretary of the Air Force, International Affairs (SAF-IA), *Security Cooperation with the United States Air Force*, September 2015, 5.

institutionalized ways in which the USAF general purpose force (as opposed to special operations forces) builds partnerships and interoperability.

A more specialized but long-running security cooperation asset is AFSOC's combat air advisor unit, the 6th Special Operations Squadron (SOS) "Air Commandos." Since 1994, the highly-selective 6 SOS has organized, trained, equipped, and deployed competitively-selected volunteers with demonstrated military aviation abilities, foreign language proficiency, and combat skills training to advise foreign air forces. Flights within the squadron are permanently aligned to different geographical areas of responsibility, allowing unit members to further develop their own linguistic abilities, cultural knowledge, and even personal relationships with foreign colleagues during their assignment to the 6th. The 6th provides a unique air-minded FID capability to the Department of Defense, and its services are always in high demand. Again, the unit takes only volunteers, selected for their demonstrated skills and aptitude for the FID mission, and then provides additional language and expeditionary training, making it a model for organizing, training and equipping airmen for security cooperation. The 6 SOS is examined in greater detail in Chapter 5.

Unfortunately, there is only one such squadron in the entire Air Force. This capacity problem forces combatant commanders to search for other options to meet security cooperation goals, such as expeditionary air advisors tasked and deployed on an ad hoc or even non-volunteer basis, with just-in-time training provided on the way to the combat zone. Collectively, these deployed, expeditionary air advisors have performed more than a decade of work rebuilding the air forces of Iraq (under the Combined Air Force Transition Team or CAFTT) and Afghanistan (primarily as NATO Train-Advise-Assist Command-Air or TAAC-Air). CAFTT is examined in greater detail in Chapter 6. To reiterate: because of the U.S. Air Force's lagging institutional capacity for air advising, many of the DoD's most critical advising activities—in its most well-known, resource-heavy combat zones—continue to be carried out by airmen with less desire, aptitude, and training for building partner capacity than their peers in the 6 SOS and other permanent units.

Newer USAF constructs with exciting prospects for long-term sustainability and impact are Air Mobility Command's Mobility Support Advisory Squadrons (MSAS), US

Air Forces Europe's (USAFE) and Pacific Air Forces's (PACAF) permanently assigned air advisor branches, and AETC's A-29 light attack aircraft training program for the Afghan Air Force. These units are mostly filled with volunteers, with the occasional non-volunteer required to meet operational requirements. These organizations have regional or even single-country alignments, and they focus on more niche capabilities needed by partner nations.

The two MSASs help develop partner nations' aviation support infrastructure, with a heavy focus on maintenance, logistics, and force protection.[10] The 517 MSAS is based at Travis AFB, California, and performs engagement missions in Latin America. The 818 MSAS out of Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst is aligned with AFRICOM. MSAS advisors receive air advisor basic training, 10-12 weeks of language class, and several more weeks of specific skills training. Utilizing a variety of funding sources and authorities, the MSASs plan engagements months or years in advance, usually with countries in SAF/IA's Developing Partners category. They deploy in small teams for periods of days to weeks. Each squadron performs dozens of engagements per year, providing "critical foundational-level ground training to partner nations in 30 aviation specialties."[11] While the MSAS works with partners on a variety of aviation enterprise development programs, it does not conduct actual flying training.[12]

Created in the early 2010s, each MSAS was originally designed to complement a Mobility Advisory Squadron. Manned by pilot-advisors operating a light mobility aircraft (LiMA) such as the Cessna 208 Caravan, the MAS would have trained partner nations in military air mobility with the goal of "increasing their capacity to govern through presence and persistence in otherwise inaccessible regions of the country."[13] Alongside MSAS teams, the MAS could have accelerated Developing Partners' operational flying programs while helping build the organizational competencies necessary to sustain more capable air forces. Because most foreign governments, particularly in developing countries, use their militaries for many civil missions as well as national security, the

[10] MSAS operational leader, email to author, 14 December 2017.
[11] Polsinelli, "Constructive Use of Air Power," 28.
[12] Polsinelli, "Constructive Use of Air Power," 28.
[13] Col Konrad Klausner, USAF, "Can Air Mobility Command Meet New Building Partnership Capacity Objectives?" (master's thesis, U.S. Army War College, 2011), 8.

MAS mission would have met with strong demand from Latin American, African, and Asian partners. This construct would have relieved some of the pressure on the 6 SOS, allowing them to focus on the special operations aviation and foreign internal defense mission sets. Unfortunately, the MAS/LiMA program was cancelled following the U.S. budget sequestration in 2013, leaving just the two Mobility Support Advisory Squadrons in AMC's two Contingency Response Wings.

USAFE and PACAF air advisors play a similar role to the MSASs. They tailor forces and missions to individual partners throughout their vast geographical areas of responsibility. Curiously, these units are mere "branches" instead of squadrons; a branch is level of USAF organization normally found in staffs, versus operational wings. These branches focus on the support and sustainment of partners' aviation enterprises, as well as short-notice advisory missions associated with continency response. They do not have a flying mission.

Finally, the A-29 presents a hybrid foreign military sales, direct commercial sales, training, and air advisor program intended to fill Afghanistan's critical need for organic armed reconnaissance and precision strike. The A-29 program is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7.

The MSASs, the USAFE and PACAF air advisor branches, and the A-29 program represent the cutting edge of USAF security cooperation. Although these programs have been generally successful to date, they face fundamental challenges in sustaining their capabilities and in providing their uniquely talented airmen sustainable career paths within their current commands.

Command structure challenges related to the funding and authorities of AMC's MSASs, USAFE and PACAF air advisors, and the A-29 squadron pose potential obstacles to the units' missions. The Air Force regulation on air advising explains: "To determine whether a Department of Defense appropriation is authorized for a proposed air advising activity, the specific legal authority authorizing the proposed activity must be identified."[14] Each funding authority has its own restrictions, which can limit the effectiveness of a given effort as well as the overall viability of a certain unit within a certain command. For example, the MSAS mission of building partners' capacity may

[14] Air Force Instruction (AFI) 10-4201 Vol 3, *Air Advising Operations*, 25 June 2015, 20.

not fit well within Air Mobility Command, whose primary Title 10 responsibility is the rapid global mobility of U.S. assets to provide combat forces to US combatant commanders. Similarly, AETC's priority is recruiting, accessing, training, and educating airmen for the US Air Force. Although the program and its airmen have garnered several command- and service- level awards, at an enterprise level the A-29 program is bound to be a "black sheep" among AETC's array of commissioning sources, aircrew training pipelines, and professional military education schools. Because each command has a different construct for air advising, there is still no established wing-level organization, community of practice, or established career path for USAF air advisors.

The service-level question for several of these programs is not so much their operational value—that has been proven in multiple real-world operations, as explained in the following case studies. Rather, the questions are *which* constructs work best, and why, and how their success can be replicated; whether these organizations are sustainable themselves in their current command structures; whether a service-level reorganization of the USAF security cooperation enterprise might beneficially co-locate these squadrons at a common base under a common command; or, whether they might better serve the needs of the Air Force and the combatant commands if aggregated at two or three forward bases, distributed among the GCCs (e.g., moving the Africa-oriented MSAS from its AMC wing in New Jersey to USAFE-AFAFRICA, combining it with USAFE's air advisor branch at Ramstein Air Base). These questions and other implications of the study are addressed in the concluding chapter.

Finally, the AFPAK Hands program provides an example of unsustainability within the DoD security cooperation enterprise. A joint program, AFPAK Hands assigns young field-grade officers from across the services—pilots, tank commanders, sailors, staff officers—to four-year security cooperation tours *outside their military specialties*. Participants learn rudimentary Pashto or Dari and attend expeditionary combat skills training, then spend two of the following three years embedded in the Afghan government or liaising between U.S. and Afghan authorities, in departments that rarely leverage their years of tactical and operational expertise.[15] At least half of the program's

[15] Capt James Muir, USN, "AFPAK Hands Program Overview," PowerPoint briefing, June 2012. http://www.public.navy.mil/bupers-

participants are selected on a non-volunteer-basis—"non-vol'ed," in military lingo.[16] The program's multiple long deployments and proven negative career impacts inspire fear, disdain, and even separation from the military among frontline officers.[17] Some of these reactions seem justified in light of the DoD's own findings on the program. *Foreign Policy* reports, "A leaked briefing from the Army G-1, the service's head personnel officer, to the Chief of Staff of the Army in 2014 confirmed that the AFPAK Hands program had become a dead end for military careers."[18] These negative impacts on some personnel might have been acceptable, had the program yielded some strategic successes in Afghanistan—but it is widely regarded as a failure, even as it continues to this day.[19]

The program's operational failures and negative impact on the joint force result largely from its incoherent pairing of means to desired ends: it is an ad hoc military program, using non-volunteer operators to address a long-term geopolitical challenge (poor Afghan governance and security).[20] In 2013, *Small Wars Journal* published an article written by an Air Force volunteer for the program, following his first deployment as a Hand. The author summed up the widespread disillusionment with the program:

> The Air Force has no difficulty recruiting pilots and the Army does not draft people into Special Forces. The question remains: why is the DoD unable to find 500 volunteers for the APH program? The answer is simply because the DoD does not care enough about the program to properly incentivize and support it. While the DoD has learned to pay lip service to the value of "human capital" and "relationships," it categorically refuses to realign itself in support of programs that do not

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npc/career/language_culture/Documents/AFPAK_Hands_Program_Brief_%2011JUN12.pptx; and, A.P. Hand (pseudonym), "Lament of an AFPAK Hand: I've been abandoned and misused in Kandahar," *Foreign Policy*, 7 July 2011. http://foreignpolicy.com/2011/07/07/lament-of-an-afpak-hand-ive-been-abandoned-and-misused-in-kandahar/

[16] Fernando Lujan, "Wanted: Ph.Ds Who Can Win A Bar Fight," *CNAS.org*, 8 March 2013. https://www.cnas.org/press/in-the-news/wanted-ph-ds-who-can-win-a-bar-fight; and, "AFPAK Hands—Opportunity Beckons," *FlyingSquadron Forums* by Baseops.net, (forum/message board). http://www.flyingsquadron.com/forums/topic/21736-afpak-hands-opportunity-beckons/?page=2

[17] "Who's Getting Riffed?" *WeaponsMan* (blog), 14 August 2014, http://weaponsman.com/?p=17225; and, "AFPAK Hands," *FlyingSquadron Forums* by Baseops.net, (forum/message board). http://www.flyingsquadron.com/forums/topic/20709-afpak-hands/

[18] Jason Dempsey, "Our Generals Failed in Afghanistan," *Foreign Policy*, 18 October 2016. Excerpts of the brief referred to in the article can be found here: http://weaponsman.com/?p=17225

[19] Dempsey, "Our Generals Failed."

[20] Maj Tyrell Mayfield, USAF, "Handcuffed: The Burden of Institutional, Management, and Leadership Problems on the AFPAK Hands Program," *Small Wars Journal*, 22 October 2013. http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/handcuffed-the-burden-of-institutional-management-and-leadership-problems-on-the-afpak-hand

> field a weapon system, secure funding, or deliver kinetic effects. This is the tragedy of the AFPAK Hands Program.[21]

The comments following the article, many from other AFPAK Hands, reveal similar sentiments. The Air Force continues to try to incentivize the program, offering limited flying opportunities to pilot participants and the opportunity for joint professional military education between the two yearlong deployments.[22] Given the program's reputation, however, these measures are unlikely to elicit the desired response. While AFPAK Hands represents an extreme case, the commentary regarding DoD's poor organization for advising and partnering corresponds to many broader critiques of the current USAF security cooperation enterprise.

Going forward, the Air Force must better institutionalize its air advising forces and missions, with an eye toward the service's three security cooperation objectives: "Enable the United States to operate in support of shared interests; enable partners to conduct operations in lieu of the United States; and enable partners to operate with the United States."[23] The slightly different aims of security cooperation as articulated in the DoD definition—U.S. interests, partners' capabilities, and U.S. access—should also be used to guide a reorganization of USAF air advisor units and capabilities. As stated previously, these objectives span the range and phases of military operations—from shaping and deterrence, to major combat operations and stabilization, and from unconventional warfare and foreign internal defense, to aggregating coalition combat power against a peer competitor. The broad utility of security cooperation and air advising reinforces General Dunford's admonishment that effective security cooperation must be a primary consideration for the Air Force.

If done well, partnerships can enable a joint force commander's efforts and advance his goals, while creating dilemmas for his adversaries. For instance, partner nation forces certainly will be called upon in future conflicts to defend their own airspace, coastlines, and bases, and support coalition efforts, while U.S. and coalition forces launch combat missions forward from those bases. Put another way, China does

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[21] Mayfield, "Handcuffed."
[22] David Max Korzen, "AFPAK Hands Enter the Cockpit, *RealClearDefense*, 14 February 2018. https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2018/02/14/afpak_hands_enter_the_cockpit_113056.html
[23] SAF-IA, *Security Cooperation with the United States Air Force*, 5.

not want U.S.-friendly southeast Asian air forces proficient in covert infiltration, personnel recovery, and ISR. Violent extremist organizations in the CENTCOM and AFRICOM areas of responsibility (AORs) do not want to fight sovereign governments with proficient light attack, ISR, and air mobility forces. Furthermore, relationships forged with partner nations through foreign internal defense or multinational exercises can provide critical access to airspace and airfields during times of crisis. These gains enable not just air domain access and air superiority, but logistics throughput and maneuver of land and sea assets as well. On the other hand, U.S. forces may find that they cannot effectively leverage a potential ally who *lacks* a baseline of interoperable infrastructure and equipment, or whose air forces lack experience working with US forces. In short, the security cooperation enterprise is critical to current and future operations—therefore its unity of effort and sustainability must be improved.

Air Force security cooperation doctrine is sound, but the implementation is lacking. The *Air Force Future Operating Concept* states, "Effective international partnerships…create desired multi-domain effects within a compressed planning process…This collaboration is critical for cases in which the U.S. must rely on partners to augment Air Force capacity, or for shared access to basing and other infrastructure in crisis regions."[24] Operational Air Force guidance maintains that to be effective, "air advising activities should be part of a persistent presence with focused engagements by trained USAF personnel over a number of years…Activities should be tailored to the needs and the capabilities of the partner nation, based on economic, infrastructure, and human capital, to ensure the partner nation can operate and sustain their capabilities."[25] That is, these missions must display unity of effort and sustainability.

[24] Secretary of the Air Force and Chief of Staff of the Air Force, *Air Force Future Operating Concept* (AFFOC): *A View of the Air Force in 2035*, September 2015, 31.
[25] AFI 10-4201 Vol 3, *Air Advising Operations*, 17-20.

Chapter 4

Case Selection, Research Design, and Methodology

As seen in the preceding chapters, **security cooperation** and **air advising** as terms represent a breadth of operations and missions. However, the case studies that follow focus on forward, expeditionary air advising and AvFID operations. The three cases chosen for analysis are: the 6th Special Operations Squadron (SOS) in the Philippines, 2002-2015; expeditionary air advisors in Iraq, 2004-2013; and the 81st Fighter Squadron, 2015-present. In accordance with George and Bennett's recommendations regarding social science case study selection, these cases exist within a single subclass of events relevant to an overarching research objective.[1] These were operations by airmen serving for at least one year in units dedicated specifically to air advising and FID missions. The cases lend themselves to academic analysis due to the similarity of the missions or activities performed, and the desired effects. That is not to say that Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines is similar, on the whole, to Operation Iraqi Freedom. Rather, it means that they are alike in specific ways relevant to this research project. A brief description of each case follows.

The Air Commandos of the 6 SOS conduct special operations air advising activities by, with, and through foreign air forces, on behalf of U.S. Special Operations Command. From 2002 to 2015, the 6 SOS deployed many small teams in support of Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines (OEF-P). The operation was a response to the rising international profile of several Islamic terror groups based in the southern Philippines, in the context of the early post-9/11 era and the United States' global war on terror. OEF-P serves as a representative case for the 6 SOS and the broader U.S. SOF approach to security cooperation. U.S. forces in OEF-P maintained an advisory role, with the partner force executing all combat operations. The U.S.-Philippine coalition seriously degraded an emerging transnational threat while keeping the U.S. footprint limited.

[1] Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 69.

During the same time period, the Multinational Security Transition Command-Iraq (MNSTC-I) required large groups of air advisors to reconstitute Iraqi military aviation. Lacking a large standing cadre of air advisors, the U.S. Air Force created ad hoc expeditionary units manned by airmen from all over its general purpose force. Many of these airmen lacked any prior advising experience. As the effort went on year after year, the Air Force made some improvements to the training process for expeditionary air advisors. While the U.S.-led rebuilding effort did produce some trained aircrews and viable military aviation capabilities for Iraq, the long-term legacy of this advisory effort is debatable. Even in the short term, U.S.-trained Iraqi forces failed to prevent ISIS from dominating large portions of northern and western Iraq in 2014.

While USAF air advising in Afghanistan continued many of the trends on display in Iraq, an innovative new advising construct has emerged in recent years. At the 81st Fighter Squadron, Moody Air Force Base, Georgia, about 50 USAF air advisors train Afghan Air Force pilots in a yearlong syllabus that combines elements of USAF undergraduate pilot training and combat flying courses. Members of the 81st also deploy to Afghanistan on a regular basis, where they provide further mission qualification training and advise the Afghans on combat employment. The Afghan A-29 pilots' combat record has garnered positive international headlines while making an impact on the counterterror and counterinsurgency fight.

In all three cases, the U.S. Air Force deployed airmen to assist a partner force in a long-term effort to defeat or contain a military threat. Each of these cases represents an attempt by a USAF unit to train, advise, and assist a foreign force in order to pursue a security interest shared by the United States and the partner nation. In each case, USAF forces were *deployed* to work and advise in the partner nation, differentiating these cases from other security cooperation activities where foreign personnel are simply integrated into ongoing USAF programs on U.S. territory (such as undergraduate pilot training, or professional military education). These cases represent the most operational side of air advising, in which USAF airmen serve alongside and airborne with partner nations' forces, often on the partners' turf and in their airspace, at times training and advising partner forces amidst an active insurgency or open conflict.

In order to present a true account of each case, and to offer well-supported evaluations and recommendations, a variety of primary and secondary sources are referenced, including: U.S. government documents; academic papers and articles; American and international news stories; new media sources; military reports and briefings; and interviews with participants in the events described.

Methodology

These three cases provide an opportunity to utilize a similar case study research approach, allowing one to trace variation among a few key independent variables in an effort to explain different outcomes. This method, described by George and Bennett, requires that cases be focused: "They should be undertaken with a specific research objective in mind and a theoretical focus appropriate for that objective. A single study cannot address all the interesting aspects of a historical event."[2] While readers of various stripes—military leaders, policymakers, participants in the events described—are sure to find this or that element lacking in a particular case or the overall work, the author hopes that this project constitutes an honest effort to address operational and organizational needs, and that others will take up the historic, strategic, and contextual challenges of security cooperation analysis wherever this project falls short.

The case studies "employ variables of theoretical interest for purposes of explanation," including "variables that provide some leverage for policymakers to enable them to influence outcomes."[3] Specifically, the independent variables in this project are the organization and presentation of air advisor forces to combatant commands and task forces. Those variables are evaluated in terms of the operational outcomes achieved through various air advisor units, as well as the sustainability and second-order effects of each construct.

This project's focus on USAF organizations reflects a search for variables that decision-makers can affect. Because the project is primarily intended to inform *military* decision-makers, more *political* aspects of security cooperation such as the culture and absorptive capacity of potential partners are addressed as important *contextual* factors.

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[2] George and Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development*, 69.
[3] George and Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development*, 69.

USAF leaders should accept that airmen will be called upon to train and advise partners in a wide variety of states, each with a different culture and capability level. Therefore, the U.S. Air Force should organize and present forces in a manner that offers sustainable, institutionalized, yet flexible advisor capabilities to the full range of combatant commanders and partner forces over the long term.

Due to the long-term and sometimes nebulous nature of security cooperation in general, evaluating an air advisor operation is not like evaluating a clash of land armies, nor is it like evaluating a conventional air war or combined-arms campaign. Stated objectives of an air advisor engagement are relatively easy to find, and short-term operational results can be found in most cases. These are included in this work wherever possible. However, long-term, strategic results are more difficult to pin down, because not every engagement includes or leads to a force-on-force clash with an objective outcome. Even when some measure of victory (or defeat) can be clearly tied to U.S. air advisor involvement, the strategic impact may still be unfolding, or the long-term legacy may remain unclear. As Carl von Clausewitz said, "In war, the result is never final."[4] These particular security cooperation and air advising missions are difficult to assess due to their recency and the ongoing nature of some of the conflicts. With all that said, referring back to Fuller, Brodie, and Dolman, strategic results having to do with economy of force and continuing advantage are included wherever possible. The threefold order of security cooperation—U.S. interests, partners' capabilities, and U.S. access—is also emphasized.

The selection of sources, and the structure of the case studies that follow, are designed to emphasize the aspects of each case most relevant to the policy-focused research question: How should the U.S. Air Force organize and present forces for air advising? To highlight the relevant factors, the cases are structured to assess similarities and differences across four areas.

The first area is *organization*. How was (or is) the air advisor unit organized? Under what command? With what authorities? Who are the personnel involved? How are they selected and trained?

[4] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 80.

The second area is *force presentation.* How does the air advisor unit present forces to the combatant commander or task force commander?

The third area is *operations*. What did the air advisors do? What does an air advisor operation with this unit look like in real life?

The final area is *evaluation*. What were the operational results? The strategic results? What lessons can be learned and applied to future security cooperation or air advisor efforts?

After addressing these questions for each of the cases, a final chapter presents an overall assessment of the results, drawing forth a few implications and recommendations for improving the USAF security cooperation enterprise.

The first case study examines the 6 SOS and their work during Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines.

Chapter 5

The 6th Special Operations Squadron in Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines

Deditissimus Vincit—The Most Committed Wins.
—6th SOS motto

The Air Force's premier, dedicated unit of advisors is AFSOC's 6th Special Operations Squadron (SOS), the "Air Commandos." Since 1994, the highly-selective 6 SOS has organized, trained, equipped, and deployed volunteers with demonstrated instructor abilities and unique skill sets to train foreign air forces. Teams within the squadron are permanently aligned to different geographical areas of responsibility, allowing unit members to further develop their own linguistic abilities, cultural knowledge, and personal relationships with foreign colleagues. Based out of Duke Field, Florida, adjacent to AFSOC Headquarters at Hurlburt Field, the 6th provides a unique air-minded FID capability to the Department of Defense, and its services are always in high demand.

In an interview, one seasoned AFSOC combat aviation advisor (CAA) emphasized that many facets of air advising—building relationships, building partners' capacity, pursuing shared security objectives, and more—come together in the performance of *combat* air advising missions. He said,

> If I'm leading a team in Afghanistan, we're not there to 'build the Afghan Air Force's capacity for special operations airlift.' We're there to *fight and defeat the Taliban and ISIS*—by, with, and through the Afghan Air Force. As far as 'building relationships,' yeah, we build relationships. But that still relates back to the *combat objective*: I've built great relationships with partner nation airmen all over the world—because we worked together applying military force to real-world, combat objectives.[1]

[1] The conversations referenced in this chapter took place during a series of interviews conducted by the author at Duke Field, FL, and Hurlburt Field, FL, on 31 January 2018. As all of the interviewees were experienced combat air advisors, and most are currently serving on active duty, names are withheld for operational security.

Thus, according to the operators, AFSOC CAAs do indeed perform security cooperation missions that synergistically advance *U.S. interests* and *partners' capabilities*, with enhanced *U.S. access* as a by-product.

AFSOC advertises that its Combat Air Advisors (CAAs) "are tasked to carry out Foreign Internal Defense, Security Force Assistance, and Unconventional Warfare missions on behalf of USSOCOM."[2] An official factsheet states that AFSOC CAAs "are trained in a wide range of specialized skills that they use to carry out SOF Mobility; Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance; Precision Strike; and Agile Combat Support."[3] The document also specifies that "USSOCOM employs mission-tailored CAA teams to support combatant commanders' regional objectives."[4] Before examining a case of these air advisors in a real-world operation, it is important to explain *who* these CAAs are—how they are selected, trained, organized, and sent forward as "mission-tailored teams."

Organization

The all-volunteer nature of the 6th, and the selectivity of its accessions process, ensure that only those with the greatest potential to be effective air advisors are gained and trained by the unit. The 371st Special Operations Combat Training Squadron (SOCTS) manages the assessment, selection, and training process in coordination with AFSOC Headquarters' Manpower and Personnel directorate (AFSOC/A1). The call for volunteers occurs twice a year. The Air Commandos recruit a variety of airmen with proven records in their Air Force specialties—aviators, maintainers, intelligence officers, tactical air controllers (TACPs), security forces, medical personnel, and more. The 6th does not recruit or accept applications directly from commissioning or accession sources. Rather, applicants must have a minimum of four years' experience in their specialty. Pilots must already be instructors in their airframe; TACPs must already be qualified as

[2] 492d Special Operations Wing (SOW), "Combat Aviation Advisor Application Procedures" (factsheet), 8 Aug 2017. http://www.afsoc.af.mil/Portals/86/Users/135/15/1415/CAA%20Application%20Procedures.pdf?ver=2017-08-08-113508-367
[3] 492d SOW, "CAA Application Procedures."
[4] 492d SOW, "CAA Application Procedures."

Joint Terminal Attack Controllers, and so on. Members of the 371st and AFSOC/A1 review volunteers' professional records, language aptitude and proficiency scores, and flying records (for aviators), selecting the most promising to advance to the assessment phase.

The assessment process is a closely-guarded secret, both for operational security reasons, and to ensure the integrity of the process (and thereby the quality of the product). Based on what operational leaders in the community were willing to share, the process is "a blend of art and science."[5] The hiring authorities conduct interviews and present realistic interactive scenarios designed to challenge applicants' personal communication, instruction, and negotiation skills. Hiring authorities assess applicants' interview answers and interactions based on their own experience in the field (operational art), as well as proven operational psychology measures and techniques from other units within the joint special operations community (science).

One operational leader in the community explained it this way: "We are looking for guys who want to eat the goat." He went on:

> There are a lot of good pilots, medics, and so on, who are great at what they do for the U.S. Air Force, but they might not make good air advisors. A lot of combat air advising is being able to listen to the partner forces, to approach operational problems on their terms, and—[he paused]—to *trust* them for your security and sustainment. We go out in small teams, so we're almost always 'outside the wire.' In a lot of places, there is no wire. So we need guys who are tactically skilled in their own specialty or their airframe—and we're going to build on those skills in our training pipeline—but they can also see a mission or a long-term threat through the partner's eyes. That's going to mean challenging operations, but it's also going to mean drinking a lot of tea with the partner force, and maybe eating a lot of goat meat.[6]

So, the applicant who wants to "eat the goat" is one who understands cross-cultural communication, and who is comfortable in non-Western professional and social settings—a person who, if his USAF professional record is also above average, might make a good Air Commando.

[5] Interview with AFSOC combat aviation advisor, 31 January 2018.
[6] Interview with AFSOC combat aviation advisor, 31 January 2018.

Acceptance rates for the 6th vary from year to year. They are not published, but a reasonable estimate is 30 to 40 percent. That is, 30 to 40 percent of applicants who meet the baseline qualifications are accepted into the training pipeline.[7] The open-source recruiting information put out by the 6th and its parent organization describes the CAA training process as follows:

> CAAs are required to complete a demanding four-phased, 12-18 month training program designed to produce foreign language proficient, regionally-oriented, politically astute, and culturally aware aviation experts. Graduates of the course are willing and able to operate autonomously in environments apart from a traditional base support structure, and in concert with other US and international SOF surface partners.[8]

The four phases of the CAA training pipeline are Advanced Tactical Fieldcraft, Advisor Tradecraft, Culture & Language Training, and Air Force Specialty Code (AFSC) Specific Training. Tactical fieldcraft includes weapons training, combat casualty care, and a "dynamic and defensive driving" course. Advisor tradecraft includes mission planning and training scenarios based on the unit's several decades of combat air advising missions. Culture and language training is fairly self-explanatory, and can vary in length from 80 to 160 days. Finally, AFSC-specific training could include pilot training in a new airframe, or other job-qualification training geared towards translating an airman's U.S. Air Force skill sets into more transferable, advisor-specific abilities.

An aviator example is perhaps the clearest illustration: an airman may come to the 6th as a highly-accomplished instructor pilot in the CV-22 Osprey, a multi-mission tiltrotor aircraft with advanced avionics, employed by the U.S. Air Force for special operations infiltration, exfiltration, and resupply missions. At $90 million per aircraft, most partner nations cannot afford and do not need CV-22s. Instead, they may operate less expensive systems such as the de Havilland DHC-6 "Twin Otter" short-takeoff-and-landing utility aircraft. The CV-22 pilot will require mission training and qualification in one of these less complex, more widely-proliferated airframes if he is to complete his conversion from USAF instructor pilot to combat aviation advisor.

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[7] Interview with AFSOC combat aviation advisor, 31 January 2018.
[8] 492d Special Operations Wing, "The Most Committed Wins: Combat Aviation Advisors" (recruiting pamphlet), 19 June 2017. http://www.afsoc.af.mil/Portals/86/Users/135/15/1415/CAALeaflet.pdf?ver=2017-06-19-133423-923

According to the AFSOC combat air advisors themselves, the model described here is a proven method for selecting, training, and organizing USAF advisor forces. To summarize, 6 SOS CAAs are competitively-selected, highly-trained volunteers. They spend one to two years in the assessment-selection-training pipeline, crossing over from their previous USAF units to join the AFSOC CAA community, where many of them will stay for most of their careers. This process ensures that CAAs have the aptitude, the will, and the training to perform the challenging advisory missions ahead. At an organizational level, the process also builds a community of practice, expertise, and institutional memory that is absolutely necessary to maintain air advising as an Air Force *capability*. It may not come as a surprise that two of the most influential studies of air power in limited and irregular wars have recommended that the U.S. Air Force build a wing-level air advisor organization based around the 6 SOS.[9]

Force Presentation

Having examined how AFSOC CAAs are organized, we can briefly discuss how they present forces to combatant commands and joint task force commanders, in order to further evaluate whether the 6 SOS presents a model construct for USAF air advising going forward.

The core deployable unit of the 6 SOS is the Operational Aviation Detachment: a team composed of 16 airmen with 16 different specialties, divided into 6 Unit Type Codes (UTCs). A UTC is the basic building block of deployable manpower in USAF mobilization and readiness reporting. Basically, it is a person or persons matched with a required operational capability. The OAD is patterned loosely after Army Special Forces' Operational Detachments. Table 1 depicts the generic template for a 6 SOS Operational Aviation Detachment:

[9] James S. Corum and Wray R. Johnson, *Airpower in Small Wars: Fighting Insurgents and Terrorists* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 437-439; and, Alan J. Vick et al., *Air Power in the New Counterinsurgency Era: The Strategic Importance of USAF Advisory and Assistance Missions* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2006), 136-146. https://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG509.html

Table 1: 6th SOS Operational Aviation Detachment (OAD)

UTC	Person	Specialty/Role	Operational Capability
1	1	Mission Commander	Team Command and Control
	2	Team Sergeant	
	3	Communications	
2	4	Special Operations Mobility Pilot	Special Operations Mobility
	5	Special Operations Special Missions Aviator (SMA)*	
3	6	Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance (ISR) Pilot	ISR
	7	ISR Sensor Operator	
4	8	Armed Reconnaissance Pilot	Precision Strike
	9	Armed Reconnaissance Sensor Operator	
5	10	Survival, Evasion, Resistance, Escape (SERE) Specialist	Surface Integration
	11	Force Protection Element	
	12	Aircrew Flight Equipment	
	13	Aircraft Maintenance Element	
	14	Intelligence Element	
	15	Medical Element	
6	16	Joint Terminal Attack Controller	Fires Integration

*The Special Mission Aviator (SMA) crew position in AFSOC is filled by a highly-trained enlisted aviator who performs the roles of flight engineer, loadmaster, and gunner, as required by the airframe and mission.

Source: "Foreign Internal Defense and the Combat Aviation Advisor," unclassified briefing, 6 SOS.

The 6th receives mission taskings through the following process. United States Special Operations Command (SOCOM) identifies an operational need for aviation capability improvement in a partner nation's air force. If the need is confirmed and prioritized by SOCOM and AFSOC staff and/or wing-level planners, a mission is then tasked to the operators at the 6 SOS, who exercise their own planning functions to designate or assemble an appropriate OAD, tailor the team as necessary for the given context, and schedule any required pre-deployment training and preparation. As mentioned previously, there is always more legitimate demand from partner forces than AFSOC has the air advisor capacity to fill.

The tailorable nature of the OAD is a significant force-multiplier for the 6th. Because the 6th is always in high demand, the squadron and its higher commands place a premium on efficient force presentation. Fortunately, the institutional memory and experience provided by nearly 25 years in the business enables AFSOC CAA planners and operators to consistently tailor their teams based on the state of the mil-to-mil partnership (new, developing, or established/ongoing) and the character of the advisory

mission (e.g., the specific capability to be improved, and the threat level in the area of operations).

For a simple example, an OAD might deploy for its first full engagement with a partner nation following a site survey or capabilities assessment by one or two unit personnel serving in a joint team. If the SOCOM tasking, confirmed by the assessment, requires an OAD to build a night-vision-goggle (NVG) employment capability with the partner's mobility and ISR squadron, then the OAD would have no need for the "Precision Strike" and "Fires Integration" UTCs. Those individuals in the squadron would then be available to augment other missions or continue their ongoing training regimen. Notably, in this example, the OAD would likely retain its "Surface Integration" UTC for this deployment. A consistent trend in developing partners' air forces is overinvestment in actual aircraft and pilots, without the required investment in the substantial support required to sustain military air operations. Aware of this tendency, the 6th will almost always include its support UTCs in advisory missions. This project will further address the trend of developing partners' neglect of aviation support functions in this and subsequent chapters.

Having thus explained the unit's organization and force-presentation, this case will examine the 6 SOS in a recent campaign to reveal aspects of the construct relevant to Air Force security cooperation going forward.

Operations

From 2002 to 2015, the 6 SOS deployed at least 18 teams to the Philippines for 2 to 4 months at a time. The CAAs initially worked under the auspices of Joint Task Force 510, and soon stood up Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines, executing Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines. The broad mission of the task force was to train, advise, and assist the armed forces of the Philippines in their campaign against the Abu Sayyaf Group and other Muslim insurgent groups based in the southern Philippine islands (Mindanao, Basilan, Jolo, and others in the Sulu archipelago).

Historical and Cultural Context

The United States and the Philippines share deep historical ties—ties complicated by the violence that punctuated each chapter of the relationship. The United States made its dramatic entrance into Philippine history during the Spanish-American War, when U.S. Navy Commodore George Dewey's Asiatic Squadron defeated the Spanish fleet and captured Manila harbor in May 1898. The United States soon gained possession of the Philippines under the 1898 Treaty of Paris, which formalized American victory in the war. For the next decade, American troops fought to defeat first the Philippine regular army, then a loose network of insurgent groups.

In the decades following, the United States granted the Philippines ever-increasing measures of political autonomy. However, Philippine independence was nearly undone by the Japanese invasion and occupation during World War II. The United States liberated the islands from the Japanese in 1944, and granted the Philippines full independence in 1946. U.S. forces then assisted the newly-sovereign Philippine government from 1946 to 1954, as they put down a rebellion by a Communist group called the Hukbalahap in the heart of the main island, Luzon. Many more years of tumult followed.

American political influence in the Philippines waned in the latter half of the twentieth century, though U.S. forces maintained a permanent presence at Clark Air Force Base and Subic Bay Naval Station. The bases provided a significant logistics hub during the Vietnam War. The United States began paying rent for basing rights after a treaty renegotiation in 1979. On 15 June 1991, a volcano eruption devastated Clark and caused a temporary evacuation of Subic. At the time, the United States was involved in another round of basing negotiations. Unable to extract its desired fee, the Philippine government demanded the withdrawal of permanent U.S. forces in December 1991. They were gone within a year. It would be just ten more years until OEF-P began—a period marked by the rise of Islamic insurgency in the southern islands. The most significant insurgent organization was the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG).[10]

[10] Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) was an Islamic rebel group with Al Qaeda ties that perpetrated a series of attacks, plots, and kidnappings in the 1990s and 2000s. The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) was an older, more political, umbrella organization that connected various southern rebel and terror groups.

Tensions had existed for decades between the northern Philippines—Catholic, developed, home to the national government—and the less developed, Muslim south. However, Islamic terrorism in the Philippines did not gain significant American attention until the mid-1990s. In 1995, in Islamabad, Pakistan, Pakistani and U.S. security services arrested Ramzi Yousef, who was on the run following a failed airline-bombing and assassination plot based out of Manila. This was the Ramzi Yousef who had planned and perpetrated the 1993 World Trade Center bombing. Yousef and his uncle, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed (the eventual mastermind of the 9/11 attacks), had planned the Manila airline-bombing operation with the financial support of Osama Bin Laden and the local support of the Abu Sayyaf Group. Given its history of violence against the Philippine government and its transnational terrorist ties, Abu Sayyaf constituted a significant threat to Philippine and American interests. The group gained further notoriety in mid-2001 for kidnapping numerous foreigners—including two American missionaries—and holding them for ransom. While ASG was still holding those hostages, the September 11th attacks reoriented the entire United States security apparatus almost overnight. The events of 9/11, combined with ASG's belligerence and its known ties to Al Qaeda, opened a window of opportunity for U.S. military involvement in the Philippines' counterterrorism fight.[11]

The colonial history between the United States and the Philippines figured heavily in the context of OEF-P. This context largely determined the U.S.-Philippine decision to fight Islamic insurgents and terrorists in the Philippines using a foreign internal defense approach, rather than a U.S.-led direct action campaign or large-scale counterinsurgency. Remember that a key aspect of air advising and foreign internal defense, according to current CAAs and the strategy they act out, is the ability to see a conflict through the partner nation's eyes. To do so requires *humility and self-examination, from the personal level to the strategic.* In the Philippines, a more heavy-handed approach by American forces probably would have backfired, given the post-colonial tensions informing the

Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) was a small, violent group based in Indonesia, with a presence in the Philippines. JI was responsible for the 2002 Bali bombings.

[11] Linda Robinson, "The SOF Experience in the Philippines and the Implications for Future Defense Strategy," *Prism: The Journal of Complex Operations* 6, no. 3 (2016): 152; and, Richard Swain, "Case Study: Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines," Report for U.S. Army Counterinsurgency Center (McLean, VA: Booz Allen Hamilton, October 2010), 2, 9.

U.S.-Philippine relationship. In the national security climate of 2001 and 2002, it seems the United States was destined to take on the Philippines' Islamic insurgency in some way. Given the American political context at the time of a "Global War on Terror," it is a strategic triumph that U.S. political and defense leaders pursued a FID operational approach.

Filipino statesmen and civilians remained wary of any U.S. involvement that might have been perceived as degrading the Philippines' sovereignty. Furthermore, with a war underway in Afghanistan, there was likely some inclination among U.S. planners to limit troop commitments in the Philippines. All of these strategic and political considerations led to a high-level agreement proscribing direct action for U.S. forces in the Philippines. The reservation of military force *exclusively* for Philippine forces helped increase the legitimacy of the Philippines government as perceived by the population of the southern islands.[12] By successfully incorporating historical and cultural context into their planning, and keeping the U.S. presence discrete, leaders of the SOF task force helped set the conditions for a successful counterinsurgency campaign.

Enter the 6th

Given the internal nature of the threat, and the desire to keep U.S. forces to a small contingent working in an advisory and support role, OEF-P provided an ideal scenario for the employment of 6 SOS CAAs. Two early visits helped set the tone and solidify relationships for a long-term effort to improve Philippine Air Force joint planning and counterinsurgency employment. In early 2002, a small group from the 6th (not an entire OAD) deployed to assess the state of the UH-1H helicopter fleet in the PAF 205th Tactical Helicopter Wing and provide preventative maintenance training. Advisors also taught a water survival course for the helicopter crews at the request by the PAF. Finally, the American advisors assessed the level of joint planning in the 205th, and conducted some fundamental sessions on the subject that other CAAs would build upon in subsequent engagements. This initial visit reflects the building-block approach favored by the 6th. Knowing that a campaign against militants in the southern islands could be made far more effective by building a joint air assault and extraction capability in the

[12] Swain, "Case Study: OEF-P," 3, 23-24, 27.

Philippine joint force, CAAs began building this capability with the assessment-and-fundamentals focus in their first visit. CAAs returned in late 2002, establishing a permanent CAA position within the JSOTF staff, and continuing engagements with PAF partner units.[13]

In subsequent years, teams of 6 SOS CAAs built on those initial deployments. Two larger missions in 2003 instructed several Philippine helicopter crews in night vision goggle flight operations and aerial gunnery, as well as the sustainment and training activities necessary to keep these capabilities viable in the absence of U.S. advisors. They also continued the joint planning lessons of the initial 2002 visits. In 2004, two successive OADs qualified additional Philippine NVG crews as well as an initial cadre for UH-1H NVG formation flying and casualty evacuation (CASEVAC).[14] The 2004 teams assessed the PAF OV-10 "Bronco" light attack squadron and the Philippine Army Light Reaction Company, with an eye toward improving the Philippine joint force's precision strike capabilities and close air support capabilities. Finally, the 2004 teams provided additional training in maintenance and aircrew flight equipment. In fact, one veteran of the campaign emphasized that maintenance and aircrew flight equipment training were a part of every 6 SOS engagement in OEF-P.[15] This emphasis on partner nation maintenance and sustainment is designed to ensure that the partner force can continue and build upon its new capabilities long after the last air advisor has departed.

Continuing to build and expand the Philippine military's joint air employment capabilities, teams in 2005 and 2006 began engaging with the Philippine C-130 heavy transport unit, while also certifying more UH-1 NVG instructor pilots, aircraft commanders, and crew chiefs.

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[13] This chronology is based upon two primary sources: Lt Col Nick Dipoma, "U.S. Foreign Policy and FID: History and Case Studies—Philippines, Pakistan, Indonesia," lecture for USAF Special Operations School, March 2018; and, Christopher Jacobs, "6th Special Operations Squadron: Philippines Operations Summary, 2001-2008," unclassified briefing for Joint Special Operations University. The highlighted emphasis areas of the successive engagements are those areas the author perceives as most important to this project; they do not constitute an exhaustive list of advisor interactions.

[14] There use of the word "qualified" here risks obscuring a relevant detail. All NVG training for the PAF's initial cadre of NVG helicopter crews was indeed conducted by 6 SOS instructors. However, once the crews met acceptable proficiency standards, the U.S. advisors then *recommended* to the Philippine Air Force that *they* officially certify the crews to operate on NVGs. This detail reveals the importance placed on partner force ownership and responsibility by AFSOC CAAs.

[15] Lt Col Nick Dipoma, USAF (Lorenz Fellow, Air University, Maxwell AFB, AL), interview by the author, 16 March 2018.

During this period, the CAAs also led the development of a PAF tactical flight medic program. The flight medic capability would pay dividends in the counterinsurgency campaign: more risk could be accepted in the planning process and on the battlefield with the knowledge that PAF Hueys could provide "dustoff" CASEVAC capability as well as on-scene or enroute medical care in the event of casualties.[16] Furthermore, from 2006 to 2008 more advisor resources were allocated to medical and civil action programs, including community engagements by the growing PAF medical force with local hospitals and villages in the southern islands.

Throughout most of this period, CAAs and other USAF personnel maintained a forward presence in the Liaison Coordination Element (LCE). The LCE personnel, based in the city of Zamboanga on western Mindanao, focused more on advising and assisting Philippine combat operations (whereas many of the CAAs were stationed further north on the island of Cebu, where they focused on training PAF airmen in new capabilities). The element leader position was filled by a 6 SOS CAA, but general purpose force airmen deployed and joined the team as well, advising in specialties such as close air support (often a USAF fighter pilot), airmobile operations (an Army helicopter pilot), and combat support functions. Together the LCE provided operational-level advising on ops-intel fusion and joint integration—higher-level capabilities vital to successful air power employment in any unpredictable, complex military endeavor.

In 2007 and 2008, another OAD continued building up helicopter night operations, OV-10 joint planning and strike capabilities, aircrew equipment sustainment, and airbase defense capacity. To enable more accurate and operationally effective airstrikes in support of ground operations, the teams also trained Philippine forward air controllers, using a program adapted from U.S. joint terminal attack controller training.[17] Later teams would continue to build the OV-10 unit into an all-weather, day-or-night, precision-strike unit that has since executed successful missions against insurgent leaders that mirror U.S. strikes in other parts of the world.[18]

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[16] Max Boot and Richard Bennet, "Treading Softly in the Philippines," *Weekly Standard*, 5 January 2009; and, Dipoma, interview.

[17] Senior USAF field grade officer/air advisor and 2007-2008 OEF-P participant, email to author, 22 March 2018.

[18] Ramon Farolan, "Air Force Broncos or U.S. Predators?," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 6 February 2012.

Note that many of the high-payoff joint capabilities described above—air assault, CASEVAC, close air support—require a great degree of cooperation between air operations, intelligence, and ground forces. These sorts of challenges can prove difficult even among highly-developed militaries. To advise a developing or capable partner force on such matters requires a highly-trained and experienced advisor force, and a long-term commitment from both sides. Given these input measures, and a focused, iterative effort, outstanding operational results can be achieved through this sort of campaign.

Evaluation

In 2009, *The Weekly Standard* reported on the campaign's operational successes. The authors, Max Boot and Richard Bennet, noted that it had been four years since Abu Sayyaf had perpetrated a high-profile attack. They also noted that the group's known membership had been reduced by more than fifty percent, and its links to Al Qaeda "severed." Boot and Bennet pointed out that many of the top leaders of Abu Sayyaf and another group, Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), had been eliminated by a "surgical," intelligence-driven campaign. This was according to one of the Philippine commanders; his words clearly reflect the advice and messaging of U.S. SOF.[19] Finally, the article pointed out that the group's remaining factions resembled organized crime groups more than an insurgency or political terror network.[20] Significantly, devolution into mere organized crime is one of the more positive ways (to broader society) that terror groups can *end*, according to Professor Audrey Cronin of American University.[21]

Subsequent studies confirm OEF-P's positive operational impact. A 2010 think-tank report prepared for the U.S. Army Counterinsurgency Center stated unequivocally, "The strategic situation has improved in the south and the active collaboration between the U.S. and Philippine government appears to have solidified their relationship."[22] That author continued, "the security and stability of an increasingly important U.S. ally has been reinforced and a sustained, albeit modest continuum of successful military

[19] Major General Juancho Sabban, quoted in Boot and Bennet, "Treading Softly."
[20] Boot and Bennet, "Treading Softly."
[21] Audrey Kurth Cronin, *How Terrorism Ends: Understanding the Decline and Demise of Terrorist Campaigns* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 205.
[22] Swain, "Case Study: OEF-P," 29.

collaboration, reestablished at a very reasonable costs."[23] With regard to those "very reasonable costs," another author researching small-scale interventions found that "the annual budget for OEF-P was expended once every three hours in Operation Iraqi Freedom."[24]

A more recent and comprehensive study by the RAND Corporation also concludes that OEF-P was an operational success: "With U.S. assistance, AFP (Armed Forces of the Philippines) forces disrupted enemy operations, denied safe havens, and controlled key terrain; AFP SOF conducted surgical operations against numerous key targets, facilitators, and resources."[25] The study explains further:

> Three types of evidence support this finding that the transnational terrorist threat in the Philippines has been significantly reduced during OEF-P:
>
> 1. A decline in enemy-initiated attacks
> 2. Reductions in the number of members of the ASG
> 3. Poll data showing decreased support for the ASG and increased satisfaction with government security forces.[26]

Thus, OEF-P serves as a fairly representative case for the 6 SOS and the broader U.S. SOF approach to security cooperation: working by, with, and through partners—in this case, with the partner force executing all combat operations—in order to combat an emerging transnational threat.[27] Due in part to the efforts of the 6th, OEF-P advanced all three broad goals of security cooperation from 2002 to 2015.[28]

If these sources agree that OEF-P was an operational success—a recent proof-of-concept for small-footprint SOF interventions and foreign internal defense—a reasonable

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[23] Swain, "Case Study: OEF-P," 29,
[24] Maj Nick Dipoma, USAF, "Right-sizing Intervention: The Philippines, El Salvador, and the Future of American Foreign Internal Defense" (master's thesis, School of Advanced Air and Space Studies, 2013), vi.
[25] Linda Robinson, Patrick B. Johnston, and Gillian S. Oak, U.S. Special *Operations Forces in the Philippines, 2001–2014* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2016), 114.
[26] Robinson, 114.
[27] OEF-P's execution reflects the strategy of *precautionary COIN* recommended by Vick et al, *Airpower in the COIN Era*, 5, 70, 72.
[28] One addendum to this story is that the rotary-wing advisory mission so central to the 6 SOS's success in OEF-P has since been reassigned to the U.S. Army. Hopefully the Army will be able to integrate some 6 SOS best practices in air advising with its own vast experience in helicopter operations and training foreign forces.

next question is whether it was a *strategic* success. Did it *economize* American military force while effectively accomplishing military objectives? Did it create conditions of *continuing advantage* (the hallmark of successful strategy, according to Professor Dolman)?[29]

In terms of *economy of force*, OEF-P achieved a strategic success. The articles and reports already mentioned each emphasize that while large-scale, *remedial* or *constabulary* counterinsurgencies churned in Iraq and Afghanistan, air advisors working by, with, and through a partner force defeated the Philippine insurgency at an infinitesimal fraction of the cost. In fairness, OIF and OEF COIN differed greatly in context, character, and scale from the *precautionary* counterinsurgency strategy employed in OEF-P.[30] Nevertheless, from the vantage point of 2018 going forward, Western political and military leaders might prefer the OEF-P model when they must confront the next violent extremist organization or insurgency. Operation Inherent Resolve (the coalition operation against ISIS) has already proven this point to a degree, as it leveraged the Iraqi armed forces and a coalition of indigenous troops, backed by American SOF, air power, and advisors to liberate 98% of ISIS-held territory in Iraq and Syria.[31]

It is difficult to say whether OEF-P created conditions of *continuing advantage* for the United States. The Philippines and the United States certainly had reason to celebrate the defeat of ASG, as well as the improved Philippine military and governance capabilities enabled by OEF-P. On the other hand, U.S.-Philippines relations have soured in recent years due to factors that seem exogenous to the OEF-P discussion. Since taking office in June 2016, Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte has repeatedly declared that the Philippines would pursue an "independent foreign policy," commonly understood as an

[29] Everett Carl Dolman, *Pure Strategy: Power and Principle in the Space and Information Age*, 2nd ed. (London, UK: Routledge, 2011), 18.
[30] Various types of COIN strategy described by Vick et al, *Airpower in the COIN Era*, 70-72.
[31] Lt. Gen. Jeff Harrigian, "How ISIS was defeated in Iraq (Hint: It's thanks in part to air-ground teamwork)," *Air Force News Service*, 22 December 2017. http://www.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/1403185/how-isis-was-defeated-in-iraq-hint-its-thanks-in-part-to-air-ground-teamwork/; and, Adam J. Hebert, "In Case You Missed it: Airpower Killed ISIS," *Air Force Magazine*, March 2018. http://www.airforcemag.com/MagazineArchive/Pages/2018/March%202018/In-Case-You-Missed-it-Airpower-Killed-ISIS.aspx

attempt to reduce U.S. influence.[32] Meanwhile, on an official visit to Beijing, Duterte proclaimed the Philippines' "separation from the United States" and expressed agreement with China's 'ideological flow," all while making significant diplomatic concessions to China over territorial issues in the South China Sea.[33] Yet the Philippine ambassador to China has publicly stated that the Philippines wishes to maintain its "historic alliance with the U.S."[34] A writer for *The Diplomat* posits that the Philippines is pursuing a hedging strategy, giving neighboring China its due respect as a rising power, while continuing to maintain "full-spectrum security cooperation" with the United States.[35]

A *Foreign Affairs* article offers a differing conclusion: that while Duterte may prefer Chinese ties to American, the Philippines' "powerful defense establishment," a group of "conservative generals, diplomats, statesmen, and opinion-makers in media and the academy, places a high premium on the Philippines' alliance with the United States and remains deeply suspicious of China."[36] To summarize, it remains to be seen whether the U.S.-Philippines relationship continues to benefit United States' interests, and whether the legacy of OEF-P has any long-term bearing on that outcome. It does seem that military cooperation and access constitute a competitive space wherein the United States still holds an advantage in the Philippines, due in no small part to the success of the U.S. FID approach in OEF-P.

[32] Mico A. Galang, "U.S., China, and Duterte's 'Independent Foreign Policy,'" *Diplomat,* 6 April 2017. https://thediplomat.com/2017/04/us-china-and-dutertes-independent-foreign-policy/
[33] Richard Javad Heydarian, "Duterte's Dance With China: Why the Philippines Won't Abandon Washington," *Foreign Affairs,* 26 April 2017. https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/philippines/2017-04-26/dutertes-dance-china
[34] Galang, "U.S., China, and Duterte."
[35] Galang, "U.S., China, and Duterte."
[36] Heydarian, "Duterte's Dance With China."

Chapter 6

Expeditionary Air Advisors in Iraq, 2004-2011

To select, organize, and deploy large groups of air advisors during the occupation of Iraq from 2004 to 2011, the Multinational Security Transition Command-Iraq (MNSTC-I) and the U.S. Air Force cobbled together a very different construct from that of AFSOC's small, selective 6 SOS. During that time, the Air Force created expeditionary air advisor units staffed by airmen selected and deployed on an individual basis from disparate home-station squadrons. Although armed conflict continues in Iraq today, and the long-term legacy of the advisory effort may still be debatable, the Iraq case offers some measure of historical finality due to the politically-mandated withdrawal of U.S. forces in December 2011 and the subsequent defeat of Iraqi forces by ISIS in 2014. (ISIS's eventual defeat in 2017, effected by U.S. air power and special operations troops supporting Iraqi and indigenous ground forces, is another story altogether.) Though air advisors achieved some isolated tactical successes in Iraq, the overall expeditionary air advisor construct proved faulty, producing negative organizational effects on the U.S. Air Force, and negligible strategic gains in Iraq.

Iraq presented a confluence of challenges to successful security cooperation and air advising—some structural, others self-imposed. One challenge was that of reconstituting a foreign air force which the United States itself had utterly destroyed, while an insurgency perpetuated combat throughout the country. Another challenge was the lack of governmental legitimacy and military absorptive capacity—owing in part to invasion and insurgency, and in part to internal politics, culture, and corruption among the many players involved. As a subset of absorptive capacity, challenges in acquisition and sustainment of new equipment arose, with strategic consequences. Finally, the prevalence of ad hoc air advisor units constituted in-theater (as opposed to the deployment of teams from permanent units) was a significant challenge.

Organization

The organization and force presentation of expeditionary advisors evolved along with the conflict in Iraq, but a general pattern emerged of deploying individual airmen on short notice to constitute ad hoc units in the combat zone. In 2004 and 2005, airmen were tasked to fill various advisory positions in the U.S. Army-led Coalition Military Assistance Training Team (CMATT), from "squadron mentors" embedded with brand-new Iraqi flying units, to C-130 Advisory Support Teams co-located with USAF C-130 units in southern Iraq. In late 2005, United States Central Command Air Forces (CENTAF) took a leadership role in the security cooperation effort, creating the Coalition Air Force Transition Team (CAFTT, pronounced "caff-tee"). CAFTT made some systematic improvements in Iraqi acquisitions, advisor training, and advisor organization in-theater. However, CAFTT continued to rely upon ad hoc manpower for the duration. Given the lack of a large, sustainable USAF advisor force, combined with the need for continuity in advising operations, CAFTT standardized most advisor deployments to either 179 or 365 days.[1] A more detailed look at these operations, starting with historical context, reveals several lessons for U.S. security cooperation and air advising efforts.

Historical Context

After decimating the Iraqi Air Force in 1991 during Desert Storm, the United States Air Force and Navy (along with Britain's Royal Air Force) enforced two no-fly zones in the north and south of the country from 1992 to 2003. Intended to protect Kurdish civilians in the north and Shi'ite civilians in the south, the no-fly zones encompassed nearly half of Iraqi territorial air space. Armed American and British fighters flew daily combat air patrols (CAPs). Iraq frequently challenged the CAPs, at times with its own fighters, and more often with surface-to-air missiles. The results were usually self-critiquing. Over the course of the two operations, the CAPs intercepted

[1] The 179-day tour length is significant because it was, at the time, the maximum amount of time an airman could deploy without receiving "short tour credit" in their official record. Short tour credit resets an airman's "short tour return date" (STRD) to the date the airmen returns from the given deployment. An airman's STRD is significant because it is often the primary factor in selection for individual deployments of 179 days or 365 days. The earlier an airman's short tour return date, the longer it has been since he "returned" from an overseas deployment, and therefore the more eligible he is for a future individual deployment. The take-away is that a 179-day deployment *maximizes* the airman's time in theater while *minimizing* the time until the Air Force can deploy him again.

dozens of Iraqi aircraft testing the no-fly zones, shooting at least one down, while responding with lethal force to numerous aggressive actions from air defense and surface-to-air missile sites. Iraqi air defenses were significantly degraded during this period, and the Iraqi Air Force's combat capability atrophied. However, their combat capability was not even tested during the subsequent 2003 U.S.-led invasion. Instead, Saddam Hussein ordered his air force to avoid combat. There were no air-to-air engagements in 2003, and most of Iraq's 300 aircraft were either destroyed on the ground by coalition airstrikes, or later found under heaps of sand, having been buried by the Iraqis themselves in the vain hope of preserving them.[2]

The Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) disbanded the Iraqi Air Force along with the rest of the Iraqi military on 23 May 2003. Less than three months later, the CPA authorized the rebuilding of the Iraqi armed services. By September 2003, the Army-led CMATT was recruiting former Iraqi Air Force aviators to return to service. In March 2004 the CPA handed over nominal control of Iraq's security forces to the new Iraqi Ministry of Defense (IqMoD). By that time Iraq had about 100 aviation trainees learning helicopter and transport operations (as well as command and support functions) from the Jordanian Air Force. The IqMoD quickly announced its intentions to expand the reborn Iraqi Air Force, and set about acquiring a disparate array of aircraft from a variety of sources—only a few of which ultimately proved useful.

From CMATT to CAFTT

Amid these tumultuous conditions, the U.S. Air Force began deploying individual airmen to serve in the CMATT staff and as advisors in the three operational IqAF units (a C-130 transport squadron, a helicopter squadron, and a light ISR squadron). Many of these early advisors had no prior advisor experience and were given little to no training in air advising and FID enroute to their deployment. In late 2004 CMATT began to engage with AFSOC's 6 SOS Combat Air Advisors in order to leverage their AvFID experience, but the 6th was only one squadron, with worldwide commitments. Nowhere in the Air

[2] George W. Cully, JD, *Adapt or Fail: The USAF's Role in Reconstituting the Iraqi Air Force, 2004-2007* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 2017), 4. Much of the historical narrative summarized herein relies upon Mr. Cully's highly detailed work; errors that remain are my own.

Force was there a deep bench of Arabic-speaking air advisors prepared for a massive effort in Iraq or elsewhere. Therefore, for the duration of the U.S. training missions in Iraq, the majority of expeditionary air advisors were merely experienced airmen from the general purpose force. For example, the C-130 Advisory Support Teams averaged 16 years of service, most of which would have been operational flying experience. "This ensured a high level of practical expertise," writes historian George Cully, "but did not mean selectees were qualified to advise foreign airmen. In particular, the C-130 AST members lacked Arabic language skills, and the short-notice nature of their assignments only left time for them to attend a three-day Middle East orientation course."[3]

The organization and training of the expeditionary air advisors in Iraq improved somewhat with the belated assumption of a greater leadership role by the U.S. Air Force. In late 2005, after successfully petitioning the MNSTC-I commander, CENTAF created the Coalition Air Force Transition Team to manage the security cooperation effort with the Iraqi Air Force. From late 2005 into 2007, CENTAF and CAFTT made some systematic improvements in advisor organization, advisor training, and Iraqi acquisitions.

Given that air advisor operations in 2004 and 2005 were disorganized, CENTAF and CAFTT took some steps from 2005 to 2007 to stabilize and guide the overall effort. On the recommendation of an October 2005 CENTAF assessment team, two successive CENTAF commanders worked with the Air Force Personnel Center and standardized CAFTT advisor deployment length to 179-day tours in some cases, and 365-day tours for most.[4] Based on feedback from the assessment team as well as CAFTT personnel themselves, the CENTAF commanders judged these longer tours absolutely necessary to achieve some modicum of continuity in Iraq air advisor operations.[5] Recall from Chapter 2 that security cooperation and advisor operations should, by doctrine and definition, be long-term efforts based on trust and mutual understanding among partner forces. While many airmen may not like long advisor tours, CENTAF clearly judged them to be operationally necessary based on the nature of the mission and the lack of a sufficient CENTAF-relevant advisor force.

[3] Cully, *Adapt or Fail*, 28.
[4] Cully, *Adapt or Fail*, 53, 63, 81.
[5] Cully, *Adapt or Fail*, 53, 63, 81.

CENTAF also took positive, if belated steps to institutionalize the advisor mission, at least within its own span of control. In 2007, three years after the first USAF air advisors had deployed to Iraq, CENTAF created a headquarters-level Air Advisor Division to coordinate all CONUS-based efforts supporting CAFTT as well as advisor efforts in Afghanistan. The division's purview included partner aircraft acquisitions, manpower sourcing, advisor pre-deployment training, and advisor placement and utilization in-theater.[6] By late 2007, in accordance with CAFTT's ambitious campaign plan, hundreds of USAF advisors were working at all levels of the Iraqi Air Force, from the service chief's staff to the aircraft cockpits, flightlines, and maintenance backshops.[7]

USAF advisor training evolved as well, reflecting the earnest efforts of the new organizations described above, yet mirroring their rather chaotic development. In 2006, at the request of the CAFTT commander, AFSOC's Special Operations School implemented a one-time training course for the incoming group of CAFTT advisors, consisting of 30 days' training in counterinsurgency theory, air advisor practices, Arabic language, Middle Eastern culture, and combat survival skills.[8] Not until the next year would the USAF Chief of Staff approve a plan for creating an air advisor training center for the general purpose force in the United States; the program took shape as an AETC air advisor course in late 2007.[9] In the meantime, advisors completed two-week combat skills and advisor mentoring courses adapted from the Common Battlefield Airmen Training program at Camp Anderson-Peters, Texas, along with other ad hoc arrangements as necessary and available for particular advisor taskings.

AETC's formal air advisor course came online in early 2008; its first class graduated in March of that year. The course was hosted by Air Mobility Command's (AMC) Expeditionary Center at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey. The formal course eventually grew into a standalone USAF Air Advisor Academy in 2012 (still under AETC authority). By then the school boasted a capacity to train 1,500 airmen

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[6] Cully, *Adapt or Fail*, 100.
[7] Robert R. Allardice, Maj Gen (sel), USAF, and Kyle Head, Maj, USAF, "The Coalition Air Force Transition Team: Rebuilding Iraq's Air Force," *Air and Space Power Journal* 21, no. 4 (Winter 2007): 6.
[8] Cully, *Adapt or Fail*, 71-72.
[9] Maj Gen Michael A. Keltz, USAF, "Getting Our Partners Airborne: Training Air Advisors and Their Impact In-Theater," *Air and Space Power Journal* 28, no. 3 (May-June 2014): 6. http://www.airuniversity.af.mil/Portals/10/ASPJ/journals/Volume-28_Issue-3/SLP-Keltz.pdf

per year. As of mid-2014 it had trained 4,300 advisors, including 1,227 in 2013 alone.[10] AMC's Expeditionary Center absorbed the academy into its own Expeditionary Operations School in 2015, but AETC still oversees the curriculum. As of early 2018, the Air Advisor Academy continues to train general purpose force airmen for deployments to Iraq, Afghanistan, and other missions.

Force Presentation

Readers with government or military experience might understand the initial haste, and the resulting disorganization and poor training of advisors from 2004-2007, especially given the immense political pressure from both sides to hand over sovereignty and self-defense to the Iraqis. Indeed, haste prevails as a running theme in Cully's history of early USAF-IqAF advisor operations. Given the pressure and haste of the time, deep-seated institutional culture and biases may have played an outsized role in USAF air advisor organization and force presentation.

The ad hoc expeditionary air advisor construct may represent a series of choices by USAF senior leadership guided by an unexpressed aim to simply outlast the COIN fight. These choices *not* to institutionalize a greater air advisor capability could have been motivated by a range of reasons, namely institutional culture, the perceived unpopularity of advisor jobs, and a desire to minimize advisor commitments for the Air Force as a whole over the long term. While these subconscious factors may have informed USAF decision-making, the *declared* policies and concerns of military decision makers of the time support a less cynical view. *The expeditionary air advisor construct resulted from a series of expedient choices to fill immediate needs*. Need an air advisor? Just task an Air Force instructor, and give him some training on the way to the combat zone. Need continuity? Keep him there for a year. Need more advisors? Repeat the process…for more than a decade.

However the construct emerged, the unfortunate truth is that these trends—just-in-time taskings of general purpose force airmen, with little language or advisor training, to ad hoc units and programs—continued for the duration of the U.S. training mission. In fact, for lack of having built itself a better option, to this day the Air Force continues to

[10] Keltz, "Getting Our Partners Airborne," 7.

task non-volunteers from the general purpose force for 365-day advisor deployments to Afghanistan.

Operations

Haphazard Acquisitions and Operations

Because USAF advisors in Iraq were literally building a new air force—rather than building new *capabilities* with a *functioning* partner force—air advisor operations were tied to aircraft acquisitions even more closely than they normally are. For that reason, the aircraft that entered service with the new Iraqi Air Force provide a useful and revealing lens through which to view advisor operations of the time period.

Cully summarizes the broader challenges of rebuilding the Iraqi Air Force, along with particular problems with acquisitions:

> Given the many challenges facing the Iraqi interim government (IIG) and its coalition partners, it should come as no surprise that, with one noteworthy exception, there was little or no focused, high-level attention given to the IqAF's mission, structure, and equipage requirements in 2004. The desperate need to forge a working polity while trying to suppress its mortal enemies left little time for the IIG to consider the needs of an air force that offered no real short-term military value. The sole exception—three ex-USAF C-130E transports delivered just before the first national elections held in early 2005—came about because of intense interest by officials at the very highest levels in both Baghdad and Washington, DC. In most other respects, the Iraqi air force's acquisition processes in 2004 and early 2005 presented a textbook case for learning how not to equip an air arm.[11]

In 2007, an independent U.S. government commission characterized IqAF acquisitions during this period as haphazard, with the Iraqi Ministry of Defense proving eager to buy and field aircraft, but neglecting to thoughtfully assess its needs beforehand, and to invest in maintenance and logistics to sustain new capabilities.[12] One

[11] Cully, *Adapt or Fail*, 13. The "noteworthy exception"—the USAF C-130 transfer and the training of a four-crew IqAF initial cadre—was quite a feat. The aircraft were transferred and the crews trained (by Royal Jordanian Air Force trainers followed by USAF advisors) in just four months, from the formal Iraqi government request for the aircraft to the activation of the Iraqi C-130 squadron and all-Iraqi crews flying operational missions (pages 25-29).
[12] Cully, *Adapt or Fail*, 122.

representative case is the Comp Air single-engine transport and ISR aircraft, which is tied to the air advisor story by tragedy.

In late 2004, the United Arab Emirates gifted seven Comp Air 7SLX aircraft to the Iraqi Air Force. The UAE apparently purchased the Comp Airs from their producer—a small kit-aircraft company in Florida—then assembled and modified the aircraft in the UAE before flying them to Basrah, Iraq.[13] Over the course of the next year, Iraqi crews and U.S. advisors noted numerous discrepancies in the assembly and modification of the Comp Airs, as well as unpredictable performance characteristics, some of which led to major mishaps.[14] Despite their shortcomings, the Comp Airs were immediately thrown into the counterinsurgency fight, primarily for reconnaissance, oil pipeline security, and light transport duty.

One Comp Air crashed during an operational mission on 30 May 2005, killing all on board: a USAF pilot/air advisor, Major William Downs, as well as an IqAF copilot, and three USAF special operations troops.[15] A U.S.-led investigation concluded that there was no evidence of hostile action nor of major mechanical failures, while reporting that the aircraft had taken off nearly 500 pounds over its technical maximum gross weight. Cully notes that the hot, dusty flight conditions, combined with the high gross weight and the IqAF Comp Airs' documented tendency to depart controlled flight could certainly have combined to create a deadly scenario.[16]

Cully also posits that organizational constructs were partially to blame. Instead of deploying with an Operational Aviation Detachment, as is their standard, a few individual 6 SOS advisors such as Major Downs were embedded in Iraqi units with little American oversight or support. "Mission goals," writes Cully, "may not have been fully and objectively assessed in every instance…Lack of higher headquarters oversight and direction was surely a contributing factor."[17] USAF training and operational flying

[13] Cully, *Adapt or Fail*, 15. The Comp Air 7SLX is still produced by Aero Comp, Inc. The seven Comp Airs assembled in the UAE and operated by the Iraqi Air Force had an unequivocally poor service record with multiple documented mishaps, but no judgment is inferred herein as to the quality of Aero Comp's products. http://www.aerocompinc.com/
[14] Cully, *Adapt or Fail*, 15-16.
[15] The IqAF pilot was Captain Ali Hussam Abass Alrubaeye. The passengers were Captain Jeremy Fresques, Captain Derek Argel, and Staff Sergeant Casey Crate.
[16] Cully, *Adapt or Fail*, 16, 41-44.
[17] Cully, *Adapt or Fail*, 44.

squadrons instill the principle in aircraft commanders, that what happens with their aircraft is ultimately their responsibility. However, almost every USAF flying mission also rests upon a foundation of mission planning and risk management performed by the aircrew themselves and an operations team within the flying squadron, as well as further planning and assessment performed at higher headquarters levels. In Major Downs' case, no such structures and safeguards existed on the American side of the operation; essentially, he and perhaps one other pilot/advisor *were* the American side of Comp Air operations.

In January 2006, another IqAF Comp Air was destroyed in a loss-of-control incident at low altitude, although thankfully with no fatalities. In the months that followed, the U.S. Air Force flew one of the remaining five Comp Airs—disassembled, in the belly of a USAF cargo aircraft—to Edwards AFB, California. At Edwards, the aircraft was rebuilt according to its original specifications, discarding the UAE mods, and replacing the engine, propeller, and wings. After extensive testing, the Air Force Materiel Command (AFMC) technical team at Edwards pronounced the rebuilt prototype airworthy for light transport and patrol in daytime, visual weather conditions—essentially, for conditions matching the flight profiles of the hobbyist aviators for whom it was designed. A deployed AFMC team reassembled two of the Comp Airs back in Iraq. But after additional testing and more incidents, including another departure from controlled flight, the AFMC team declared the Comp Airs unsuitable for flight under any conditions. The aircraft were grounded and disassembled. With the help of USAF personnel in theater and the USAF "Big Safari" rapid aircraft acquisition and modification program, the Iraqi government purchased six Beechcraft KingAir 350ER light transport aircraft modified for its future ISR needs.[18]

The Comp Air was the most painful representative of several ill-advised, poorly-supported aircraft acquisitions in the early days of rebuilding the Iraqi Air Force. However, as a result of belated-but-heavy USAF advisor commitment to the rebuilding effort from 2007 onwards, Iraqi acquisitions turned toward more proven American systems in the years that followed. The unique early success of the Iraqi C-130 transport squadron—in stark opposition to most of the other new units from 2004 to 2007—surely

[18] Cully, *Adapt or Fail*, 73-75.

played a role in this shift as well. Over the next few years, USAF air advisors and instructors would build a larger, more capable force of Iraqi pilots using Cessna 172s, Cessna 208s, and eventually T-6A Texan IIs.

The 52nd Expeditionary Flying Training Squadron

In October 2007, the 52nd Expeditionary Flying Training Squadron (EFTS) began teaching Iraqi Air Force pilot training at Kirkuk Air Base in northern Iraq. The squadron's mission and name were unique; though the U.S. Air Force activated its Combat Air Advisor squadron in 1994, it had never had a "flying training squadron"—typically a stateside, AETC unit—with the "expeditionary" prefix, signifying a deployed location. More simply: the U.S. Air Force was not in the business of teaching pilot training to a foreign force in an active combat zone.

The 52 EFTS soon had a small fleet of Cessna 172 basic trainers, as well as a handful of heavier Cessna 208 Caravans, intended for training and transport use. The Cessna 208s prepared Iraqi pilots for future duties in specially-converted RC-208s (equipped with ISR sensors) and AC-208s (equipped with laser designators and Hellfire missile capability, for armed ISR and light attack). By the end of 2009 the Iraqi Air Force operated three RC-208s and three AC-208s.[19] The 52 EFTS later moved to Tikrit, while the Cessna 172 and 208 training programs continued at Kirkuk as the IqAF 201st Training Squadron.

The U.S. Air Force maintained a trainer and advisor presence at Kirkuk, while mounting a major effort to build a more advanced IqAF pilot training program flying the T-6 at Tikrit. The T-6 is the same aircraft used for USAF primary pilot training (the first six months of the 1-year USAF program). From December 2009 until September 2011, USAF advisors at Tikrit taught a T-6 training syllabus that combined undergraduate pilot training and pilot instructor training.

One retired USAF officer who played an operational leadership role in the Iraqi T-6 program was kind enough to share some of his experience.[20] His insights brought up

[19] Arnaund Delalande, "Four Years After an ISIS Massacre, the Iraqi Air Force Opens a New Academy," *War is Boring*, 28 February 2018. http://warisboring.com/four-years-after-a-massacre-the-iraqi-air-force-opens-a-new-academy/

[20] The following section is based on my phone interview with a retired USAF colonel on 26 March 2018.

many themes of air advising that appear in the preceding narrative, and elsewhere in this work: the importance of cultural understanding and continuity; hedged volunteerism by USAF advisors; and a trend of partner governments investing in aircraft and pilots—for immediate combat power and prestige—without the requisite investments in logistical support.

In 2009, the officer was a lieutenant colonel in his first year of eligibility for squadron command. He learned through informal communications with deployed friends that there would be an opening in Iraq for a one-year position as a T-6 flight training squadron commander.[21] Given the good career opportunity and the chance to fly the T-6 again, the officer volunteered through official channels and was selected to command the 52nd Expeditionary Flying Training Squadron (EFTS) at Tikrit Air Base.[22]

The Iraqis had purchased T-6 Texan II advanced trainers through a foreign military sales (FMS) case administered by SAF/IA, with the details managed between CAFTT in Iraq and an air advisor office at AETC headquarters, Randolph AFB, TX.[23] The FMS case with the Iraqi government included a force of USAF instructor pilots (IPs)—a somewhat common clause in major foreign aircraft buys—and U.S. contract maintenance for the aircraft.

The airmen who would constitute the 52 EFTS were all trained, active T-6 instructor pilots. Their former commander estimates that as many as two-thirds were volunteers, but few volunteered out of a great interest in air advising or training foreign forces per se.[24] In 2009 and 2010, total U.S. troop levels in Iraq and Afghanistan peaked above 190,000 before declining to about 150,000. At that time, *many* USAF officers were being tasked for individual deployments to Iraq, Afghanistan, and support bases throughout the Middle East. Some of these deployments would have involved flying underpowered, thin-skinned Cessna 172s at Kirkuk, or Cessna 208s in Iraq or

[21] Squadron command is regarded as a pinnacle of achievement in an Air Force aviator's first 15-20 years of service. As a general rule, it is a requisite for any further career advancement.
[22] Most squadron commands are two-year assignments. The interviewee did not specify this as a personal reason for volunteering, but a one-year deployed command offers combat experience and faster completion of one's command tour, both of which can advance an officer's career ahead of his peers. In addition, the T-6 trainer is generally well-liked by USAF pilots for its performance characteristics.
[23] That office is known today as AETC/A3Q, Special Missions; it serves as the major command focal point for the Afghan A-29 program, among others.
[24] Retired U.S. Air Force colonel, phone interview with author, 26 March 2018.

Afghanistan. Many more of these deployments would have been non-flying positions, and many would have been a year long. So for current and qualified T-6 instructor pilots, a 4- or 6-month deployment teaching Iraqi T-6 training was desirable by comparison.

The USAF instructor pilots all went through the Air Advisor Course at the USAF Expeditionary Center. When asked to comment on the course's utility, the interviewee recalled many details of the course's cultural lessons that had later proven valuable as he attempted to connect the skills of his USAF IPs with the needs of Iraqi students. He also mentioned that the Arabic lessons, while brief, did provide the social confidence that comes with knowing just a few polite phrases and pleasantries. On the other hand, the former commander noted that the overall course structure at the time was a one-size-fits-all approach to sending airmen downrange in a variety of advisor roles. He recalled, "The defensive driving and convoy ops courses, AK-47 qualification and firing that thing on full auto—those were fun, but unnecessary. I spent the whole deployment either flying, or on the ground at Tikrit." Despite the unnecessary lessons, the officer's experience indicates that air advisor training had made significant strides since the 2004-2007 time period, largely thanks to the AETC-run, AMC-hosted Air Advisor Course.

At Tikrit, the instructor pilots of the 52nd trained a group of high-performing Iraqi pilots from the Cessna 172 and 208 programs in a syllabus that combined core elements of USAF Undergraduate Pilot Training (UPT) and T-6 Pilot Instructor Training (PIT). The goal of the program was "to advise, train, and assist in building an [IqAF] with foundational and enduring capabilities in flying training while establishing a continuing relationship between the United States and Iraqi air forces."[25] Essentially, they were training the future core of the Iraqi Air Force.

The irony of the 52nd's mission was not lost on its pilots. Another operational leader from the program, a USAF fighter pilot by trade, wrote, "This mission seems quite ironic considering that in my previous three deployments, the U.S.-led coalition mission ensured that no Iraqi military aircraft flew in zones north and south of Baghdad, and that several of the IqAF pilots we trained in the 52nd included some of the same individuals I

[25] Lt Col Andy Hamann, USAF, "Partnership between the US and Iraqi Air Forces: One Airman's Perspective," *Air and Space Power Journal* 26, no. 1 (January-February 2012): 2. http://www.airuniversity.af.mil/Portals/10/ASPJ/journals/Volume-26_Issue-1/Views-Hamann.pdf

prevented from flying in those zones—a situation that made for interesting discussions."[26]

Despite any irony or actual animosity that may have colored interactions, the USAF mission to build a core group of high-performing IqAF instructor pilots can be judged a modest success. Eleven of the twelve students in the first class graduated—a ratio that would be reasonable in any USAF pilot training pipeline. Furthermore, according to the interviewee (an experienced USAF pilot training instructor himself) several of the top Iraqi T-6 graduates could have credibly served as USAF T-6 IPs.

Yet ultimately the program failed to build an enduring pilot- and instructor-pilot training capability in the Iraqi Air Force. The primary reason had little to do with the advisors who were there—and everything to do with the advisors who were *not*. Although at times Iraqi maintainers had unofficially shadowed the contract maintenance personnel, the lack of an aircraft maintenance advisory effort doomed the Iraqi T-6s to rapid decay following the U.S. pullout.

Some would counter that this dependence on contract maintenance was a necessary short-term measure because of the Iraqis themselves. In 2013, U.S. Army Lt Gen Robert Caslen, the commander of the Office of Security Cooperation-Iraq, called the rapid deterioration of Iraqi hardware and bases a "cultural issue." He said, "Iraq has a desire to hire somebody to do the maintenance rather than doing unit maintenance themselves…When U.S. forces departed in December 2011, they effectively took with them the institutional base that logistically supported the Iraqi Armed Forces."[27] As the OSC-I commander, Lieutenant General Caslen was certainly in a position to make a well-informed judgment as to the causes of poor Iraqi readiness. On the other hand, we cannot know whether the Iraqis could have learned to maintain their T-6s, because the maintenance advisor capability was never organized and presented alongside the instructor pilots of the 52 EFTS. For that reason, some may argue that the U.S.

[26] Hamann, "Partnership between US and Iraqi Air Forces," 7n3.
[27] Lieutenant General Robert Caslen, U.S. Army, Chief of the Office of Security Cooperation-Iraq, quoted in Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, "Quarterly Report to the United States Congress," 30 April 2013. https://cybercemetery.unt.edu/archive/sigir/20131001091934/http://www.sigir.mil/files/quarterlyreports/April2013/Report_-_April_2013.pdf#view=fit

government was at least somewhat complicit in the eventual collapse of the Iraqi T-6 program.

The 52nd produced 11 IqAF instructor pilots before handing over the program to the Iraqis in September 2011.[28] Soon after the handover, American forces withdrew from Iraq altogether. When the governments of Iraq and the United States could not establish a status of forces agreement covering American troops and advisors, President Obama announced a complete U.S. withdrawal in October 2011, and the last remaining large unit of U.S. troops left on 18 December.[29] U.S. contractors remained at bases like Tikrit, but soon many of them withdrew as well. Without the constant support of U.S. forces and contractors, the airfield and the aircraft themselves soon fell into disrepair.[30] By early 2013, less than two years after the U.S. withdrawal, the IqAF T-6 fleet was in such disrepair that all 15 aircraft were put into long-term storage.[31] During the same time period, Iraq began ordering American F-16 advanced multirole fighter aircraft, and sending pilots to the United States for fighter training.

Post-Withdrawal

As IqAF T-6 operations ground to a halt in 2013, the Islamic State terrorist group (ISIS) took over much of eastern Syria and began to threaten western Iraq. With U.S. airmen and aircraft having long departed, and its F-16s still on the assembly line in Fort Worth, the Iraq government took desperate measures to muster some air power against the ISIS threat. They employed a fleet of Russian helicopters and acquired a handful of aged Russian-made attack aircraft. They flew their three AC-208s. They modified a few cargo aircraft for visual bombing. Some reports say the Iranian Air Force also came to

[28] Staff Sgt. Mike Meares, USAF, "T-6 advisory mission ceases, Iraqi pilots teach their own," *AF.mil*, 27 September 2011. http://www.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/112334/t-6-advisory-mission-ceases-iraqi-pilots-teach-their-own/

[29] Mark Landler, "U.S. Troops to Leave Iraq by Year's End, Obama Says," *New York Times*, 21 October 2011; and Tim Arango and Michael S. Schmidt, "Last Convoy of American Troops Leaves Iraq," *New York Times*, 18 Dec 2011. A small contingent of U.S. military personnel remained in Iraq under the auspices of the U.S. Embassy.

[30] Caslen in "Quarterly Report," 30 April 2013.

[31] "Iraqi Air Force to Bring Beechcraft T-6A Texan II Trainer Back to Active Flight Status," *Fightersweep.com*, 20 July 2017. https://fightersweep.com/8312/iraqi-air-force-bring-beechcraft-t-6a-texan-ii-trainer-back-active-flight-status/

Baghdad's aid and flew attack sorties against ISIS.[32] Yet on the whole, it is difficult to find evidence that any of these measures had any effect.

At least six Iraqi helicopter gunships were shot down, and one of the IqAF AC-208 aircraft was lost later in the campaign as well; ISIS claimed it downed the plane with a 57mm anti-aircraft gun.[33] Though it can be reasonably inferred that some of the Iraqi aviators and ground crews trained by USAF advisors from 2004 to 2011 contributed to the fight, USAF advisors were not present for these combat operations. Reports of IqAF operations during the spread of ISIS have been hard to obtain. However, at least to one journalist, the disappointing results of the total U.S. security cooperation effort seemed clear enough: from 2003 to 2012, the United States spent *$25 billion* rebuilding the Iraqi military—which then failed to prevent the terror group ISIS from seizing most of northern and western Iraq.[34]

The USAF-IqAF security cooperation story had not ended with the U.S. withdrawal, nor with the rise of ISIS. As mentioned earlier, the Iraqi Ministry of Defense began purchasing American F-16 fighters before U.S. troops withdrew. The U.S. DoD first announced the contract in September 2011. In 2012, Iraqi fighter pilot candidates began their F-16 training with U.S. Air National Guard instructor pilots of the 162d Wing in Tucson, Arizona. (In what is certainly a more sustainable model, many foreign air forces have trained in the United States over the years, often with a dedicated cadre of U.S. instructor pilots.[35]) Iraq took delivery of its first aircraft in June 2014, and IqAF F-16s began flying combat missions out of Balad Air Base, central Iraq, in September 2015. One defense blog reports that the Iraqi F-16s carried out dozens of airstrikes against ISIS

[32] Jassem Al Salami, "Iran's Flying Tanks in Iraq," *War is Boring*, 11 July 2014. https://warisboring.com/iran-s-flying-tanks-in-iraq/

[33] Eric Schmitt and Michael R. Gordon, "The Iraqi Army Was Crumbling Long Before Its Collapse, U.S. Officials Say," *New York Times*, 12 June 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/13/world/middleeast/american-intelligence-officials-said-iraqi-military-had-been-in-decline.html; and, "Iraqi Combat Caravan Shot Down By Daesh," *FighterSweep.com*, March 2016. https://fightersweep.com/4714/iraqi-combat-caravan-shot-daesh/#comment-2578719788

[34] David Lynch, "US counts on arming, training foreign forces despite years of failure." *The Stars and Stripes*, 8 April 2015. http://www.stripes.com/news/us-counts-on-arming-training-foreign-forces-despite-years-of-failure-1.339156

[35] Thousands of British airmen trained in the United States during World War II. Today, USAF instructors execute dedicated stateside flying training programs for airmen from Singapore, Afghanistan, and Lebanon. Many international students complete USAF undergraduate pilot training programs each year as well.

facilities, supplies, and forces in their first year of operations.[36] By then a U.S.-led air campaign of hundreds of sorties per month had destroyed thousands of ISIS targets; the Iraqi F-16 program's value may have been more political than military at that point.

The reader may experience some cognitive dissonance when learning that Iraq embarked on a multi-billion dollar advanced fighter aircraft purchase at the same time that its T-6 trainers were grounded due to lack of proper maintenance and sustainment. The dissonance may be resolved, somewhat, by an important detail of the Iraqi F-16 foreign military sales (FMS) case with the DoD. The Iraqi F-16 buy included comprehensive maintenance and equipment sustainment contracts worth hundreds of millions of dollars. In the case of the T-6, the Iraqi Air Force proved unable to maintain its own aircraft. Under the terms of the F-16 FMS case, Iraq and the United States pay U.S. contractors to maintain the Iraqi aircraft and their air base.[37]

Along with contractors supporting IqAF operations, another familiar construct has re-emerged. As of May 2017, the 370th Air Expeditionary Advisory Group boasted 80 USAF air advisors serving throughout Iraq, from IqAF staffs to aircraft, aerial ports, and maintenance backshops.[38] In February 2018, U.S. Air Forces Central Command established a higher-level organization called the Coalition Aviation Advisory and Training Team, or CAATT, whose stated goal is to "build upon our Iraqi partners' combat-proven capabilities to ensure a capable, affordable, professional, and sustainable Iraqi Aviation Enterprise."[39] While these sound like worthy goals, one cannot help but notice the similarity of the CAATT name to the "CAFTT" of 2005-2009—and the deeper

[36] Arnaund Delalande, "Iraq Got F-16s in September 2015 And Immediately Started Bombing ISIS: The 9th Fighter Squadron wasted no time," *War is Boring*, 2 October 2017. http://warisboring.com/iraq-got-f-16s-in-september-2015-and-immediately-starting-bombing-isis/

[37] "Contracts," Press Operations Release No. CR-019-18, U.S. Department of Defense, 30 January 2018, https://www.defense.gov/News/Contracts/Contract-View/Article/1428131/; and, Stephen Losey, "As Iraqi air force grows more confident, U.S. advisers provide guidance," *Air Force Times*, 22 May 2017. https://www.airforcetimes.com/news/your-air-force/2017/05/22/as-iraqi-air-force-grows-more-confident-u-s-advisers-provide-guidance/ Recall that the 6 SOS in OEF-P made Philippine military maintenance and equipment sustainment a constant focus throughout that 12-year campaign, in order to ensure that the new PAF capabilities would become self-sustaining. However, for the IqAF F-16s, the DoD seems to have settled on heavy U.S. logistical support for the foreseeable future.

[38] Losey, "U.S. advisers provide guidance."

[39] Lt. Gen. Jeffrey Harrigian, U.S. Air Forces Central Command commander, in "Coalition Aviation Advisory and Training Team established in Iraq," *AF.mil*, 6 February 2018. http://www.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/1433415/coalition-aviation-advisory-and-training-team-established-in-iraq/

similarities between the two organizations and their missions. To CAATT's credit, the new CAATT campaign plan includes a much-needed "Logistics" line of effort. But another aspect of CAATT may be disheartening to U.S. servicemembers and strategists: in the public release version at least, the new plan's timeline is indefinite.[40]

Evaluation

Having lamented what transpired with the USAF effort to rebuild the Iraqi Air Force, it may be revealing to consider what might have been. Given the task of rebuilding the Iraqi Air Force, the U.S. Air Force might have wished it had a large pool of air advisors already extant—either as a permanent wing-level unit organized, trained, and equipped for the purpose, or possibly as a group with special skills and training distributed throughout the general purpose force, the way weapons officers are today.[41] This group would have required only Iraq-specific training and typical pre-deployment training before its talents and capabilities were deployed to do the mission. It may not be useful to apply such 20/20 hindsight; it is difficult to imagine the Air Force of 2004 or 2005 having such a niche capability ready to go. Yet it seems significant that even as the need for greater air advisor capability became clear in Iraq (and Afghanistan), the Air Force neglected to build an enduring organizational construct.

Lacking a deep organization of air advisors in 2005, the Air Force might have pursued a more deliberate, special task force approach. It could have identified large groups well in advance of deployment—preferably numerous airmen or at least pairs from within specific squadrons—then constituted and trained a large unit stateside, and then sent the whole unit to Iraq. Once there, the group could have been parceled out into a CAFTT headquarters team and aircraft- or capability-specific teams. A group constituted this way may have been better able to coordinate operations and support, and perhaps even identify and address systemic problems. Preparing units stateside also

[40] "Coalition Aviation Advisory and Training Team established in Iraq," *AF.mil*, 5 February 2018. http://www.afcent.af.mil/News/Article/1432167/coalition-aviation-advisory-and-training-team-established-in-iraq/

[41] A weapons officer is a graduate of the USAF Weapons School, an intense, six-month course offered to top performers in most USAF warfighting specialties. Attendees complete challenging, graduate-level academic courses in between planning and flying complex, realistic training exercises that integrate a wide variety of USAF assets.

would have ameliorated some of the psychological burdens incurred by deploying individual airmen from disparate units for advisor jobs beyond their individual expertise. It seems the haste to do *something* among the various U.S. government players may have caused them to miss opportunities to prosecute more measured, organized efforts.

Another USAF officer suggested an alternate, hybrid construct in a 2008 master's thesis. His hybrid construct would have involved employing 6 SOS combat aviation advisors as deployed team leaders, with their teams consisting of the general purpose force, ad hoc expeditionary air advisors that were so prevalent at the time.[42] This approach would have leveraged the deep expertise of the 6th CAAs, while accounting for their scarcity as well. Such a construct, with a better blend of expertise and mutual support, may have guided efforts at the tactical level toward more effective outcomes. The officer also suggested moving many Iraqi training efforts to the United States, in order to reduce training risk, improve training quality, and ensure that advisory efforts in theater were oriented toward operationalizing combat capabilities (versus teaching fundamentals).[43] It is interesting to note that in the years following that author's thesis, both the Iraqi F-16 and Afghan A-29 flying training programs have been executed in the United States, with exactly the benefits he described. Either the special task force approach described previously or the hybrid approach would have demonstrated at least the same level of operational gains, and likely more, while exhibiting greater economy of force than the ad hoc approach that defined USAF air advisor operations in Iraq.

In terms of strategic results, USAF air advisor operations in Iraq from 2004 to 2011 *did not* create conditions of continuing advantage for the United States. Whether it was even possible for them to do so, given the strategic context, is essentially unknowable. It is not the intent of this project to lay the blame for the Iraqi military's failure against ISIS at the feet of U.S. advisors, even if the organization, training, force presentation, and practices of those advisors were suboptimal. This chapter offers evidence that the United States should avoid trying to rebuild military forces it has

[42] Maj Scott A. Grundahl, USAF, "Bridging the Gap Between Foreign Internal Defense and Starting From Scratch." (master's thesis, Air Command and Staff College, 2009), 27-30.
[43] Grundahl, "Bridging the Gap," 26-27.

recently destroyed, especially in countries with significant political, cultural, and economic impediments to U.S.-style organization, training, and equipment.

In Iraq from 2004 to 2011, a faulty air advisor construct, employed under incredibly difficult circumstances, failed to advance the general goals of American security cooperation. Air advising in Iraq did not demonstrably advance *U.S. interests*. The effort did improve the *partner's capabilities* somewhat, adding C-130 airlift and a small cadre of U.S.-trained flight instructors. However, a handful of cargo aircraft does not an air force make, and the IqAF trainer aircraft fleet was grounded by 2013. And although the issue was well beyond the scope of air advising, *U.S. military access* to Iraq was reduced to near zero by the end of 2011.

Chapter 7

The 81st Fighter Squadron and the Afghan A-29 Program

The first few years of USAF air advising in Afghanistan mirrored operations in Iraq. For the second time in as many years, in 2006 a U.S.-led coalition set out to rebuild an air force that it had recently destroyed in the CENTCOM AOR.[1] The context was difficult: a new, U.S.-backed government struggled for legitimacy; corruption pervaded the burgeoning war economy; and systemic challenges existed in Afghan air power that predated the U.S. invasion by more than a decade.

Following the U.S. invasion and ouster of the Taliban, Hamid Karzai and his interim Afghan government struggled to consolidate power from late 2001 to 2004. "By the time Karzai became the official president in 2004," writes a Karzai biographer, "the Taliban had regrouped, having realized that under U.S.-controlled Afghanistan they would find no place back into the political process. Their insurgency continues to this day."[2] Amid that insurgency, the western coalition began an array of efforts to improve Afghan security and governance, including a series of air power initiatives. Military historian Forrest Marion summarizes the early air advising operations:

> Following the reestablishment of a friendly Afghan government in Kabul in 2002, it was 2005 before U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld directed the development of an Afghan presidential airlift capability which initially was the lone objective for American air planners. By 2006, a few U.S. Army aviators based in Kabul, led by Col. John T. Hansen, conducted Mi–17 training flights with Afghan pilots on an ad hoc basis. Later that year, a U.S./coalition plan for the Afghan National Army Air Corps began to take shape. This plan, based on Hansen's work, became the basis for the U.S.-led Combined Air Power Transition Force-Afghanistan (CAPTF-A), activated in the spring of 2007, whose mission was to "set the conditions for a fully independent and operationally capable" air corps to meet Afghanistan's security needs.[3]

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[1] "Although the Iraq war did not begin until 2003, a year after the U.S.-led military operation in Afghanistan had apparently stabilized the security situation there, the approval of a development program of U.S./allies former enemies' air forces began, *first with Iraq in 2005*, and a year later with Afghanistan." Forest L. Marion, "Training Afghan Air Force Pilots, 2006-2011," *Air Power History* 63, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 24.

[2] Bette Dam, "The Misunderstanding of Hamid Karzai," *Foreign Policy*, 3 October 2014.

[3] Marion, "Training Afghan Air Force Pilots," 24.

To execute the CAPTF-A plan, many airmen were pulled from various USAF squadrons around the world, provided a few weeks of training, and deployed to expeditionary advisor units. The Air Force Personnel Center did not identify these airmen based on their aptitude or potential for air advising. Rather, most were selected based on their military specialties (e.g., mobility pilot) and their short tour return dates.[4] As in Iraq, many of these advisors were non-volunteers. Furthermore, many of them were sent to help the partner force employ old, dilapidated, or otherwise ill-suited aircraft donated by or purchased from coalition governments. Most notably, the Afghan C-27 debacle made national headlines in the United States, as a $486 million cargo fleet purchased by the United States became $32,000 worth of scrap metal within a few years.[5]

The Afghan Air Force also had serious human capital issues before the American invasion, which negatively affected coalition advising operations. Marion records that the Afghan Air Force had not trained a new pilot since 1992, "when the Afghan communist government fell to mujahideen warlords…A decade later when the U.S. military began to assess the human materiel available for rebuilding an Afghan air force, it found that nearly all the eligible former pilots were Soviet-trained Afghan aviators mostly in their forties. Moreover, nearly all were considered limited to daytime flying under visual flight rules."[6] Due to the Soviet training background still present in the Afghan Air Force at the time, some of the most effective advisors in the early stages of CAPTF-A were Mi-17 pilots from eastern European NATO countries, who were both proficient operators of the older Russian helicopters, and products of Soviet training themselves.[7]

As CAPTF-A tried to move beyond these early steps, Afghanistan's poor literacy rates and paucity of English speakers complicated the task of finding viable aviation

[4] Short tour return date: a calculated date in a member's personnel record that represents the amount of time since his last deployment, or his total days deployed relative to total time on active duty.
[5] In the early 2010s, the United States purchased 20 refurbished Italian G222 cargo aircraft (NATO designation C-27A) and a sustainment contract from Italian defense contractor Alenia for more than $486 million, in order to rebuild the air mobility arm of the Afghan Air Force. After experiencing "continuous and severe operational difficulties," including management, logistics and maintenance problems with the new AAF fleet, 16 of the aircraft were ultimately scrapped for $32,000, and the delivery of the last 4 aircraft cancelled. John F. Sopko, Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, to Charles T. Hagel, Secretary of Defense, memorandum, subject: SIGAR-15-04-SP Inquiry Letter: G222 Disposition Notification Request, 3 October 2014.
[6] Marion, "Training Afghan Air Force Pilots," 24.
[7] Marion, "Training Afghan Air Force Pilots," 25.

recruits. Nevertheless, by 2009, the first group of Afghan student pilots in several decades had begun the pilot training process in the United States.[8] More Afghan servicemembers came to the United States for instrument flying training and flight instructor upgrades. Training in the United States offered the obvious advantages of security and economies of scale—allowing training programs to proceed unimpeded by the Afghan insurgency, and leveraging existing, robust DoD flight training programs (instead of creating a program in-theater, as the Air Force had in Iraq). Furthermore, U.S.-based training avoided the significant investment risks that would have accompanied any pilot training program in Afghanistan.

Early rebuilding efforts were marred by waste and corruption. In the case of the C-27 debacle, it seems the DoD, the coalition, the defense contractor, and the Afghans all shared some blame. However, the Afghans were quite capable of misappropriating air assets and resources on their own. In the mid-2000s, multiple expeditionary air advisor squadron commanders observed that "the tendency of senior Afghan officers and high government officials to task flying units under their control with airlift missions, sometimes on very short notice and on occasion of questionable legitimacy, made U.S. and coalition advisors' attempts to train Afghan pilots more difficult than they needed to be."[9] Interviewees from the USAF special operations and logistics communities shared many similar stories from their time advising Afghan forces. Logistical competencies such as supply accountability were not just poor, but intentionally disregarded. With a constant flow of U.S. funding and supplies, there was little incentive for poorly-paid Afghan servicemembers to account for every item, and many incentives for them to appropriate war materiel for personal use or to supplement their own income.[10] It is difficult to develop a new air enterprise under such conditions. One result of all these challenges was an Afghan Air Force in the early 2010s still defined by its significant capability gaps, more than any demonstrated capabilities.

One of the most significant gaps was the Afghan Air Force's inability to perform armed reconnaissance and precision strike in support of Afghan ground forces. Though

[8] Marion, "Training Afghan Air Force Pilots," 25.
[9] Marion, "Training Afghan Air Force Pilots," 29.
[10] USAF officers/student members of Air Command and Staff College Flight 6, Academic Year 2017, interview by author, 9 April 2018.

Afghanistan employed secondhand, Russian-made Mi-35 helicopter gunships for a time, the helicopters were never a permanent solution for an Afghan military seeking its own self-sufficient, responsive air-to-ground capability. The heavily-armed but lumbering Afghan Mi-35s, already decades old, were approaching the end of their service life; they would no longer be airworthy as of January 2016.

The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), the NATO train-advise-assist organization in Afghanistan, identified the Afghan Air Force's growing need for attack aircraft to support Afghan ground troops. Such a capability would enable organic Afghan government COIN operations independent of coalition firepower. U.S. Air Force Materiel Command responded to the ISAF request in 2010, soliciting industry proposals for a light attack aircraft and associated logistical support. The aircraft was "to serve as both an advanced aircrew trainer and a light attack aircraft to support air interdiction and close air support training and operations for current and future Building Partnership Capacity (BPC) customers."[11] After many proposals, revisions, and other acquisitions issues, Sierra Nevada Corporation began producing a version of the Brazilian Embraer A-29 Super Tucano at a facility in Jacksonville, Florida, under a USAF contract. The Super Tucano is a 2-seat turboprop trainer and light attack aircraft that has seen military service in more than 10 nations since 2003. Sierra Nevada delivered its first A-29 on 26 September 2014, to Moody Air Force Base, Georgia.

On 15 January 2015, the U.S. Air Force officially reactivated the 81st Fighter Squadron at Moody. Once a worldwide-deployable A-10 attack squadron based in Europe, the reactivated 81st had a new and unique mission: training and advising Afghan Air Force A-29 pilots and maintainers. The unit's reactivation was expected to be temporary, with a scheduled end date in 2018, based on the projected milestone of U.S.-trained Afghan A-29 squadrons reaching full operational capability.

[11] Air Force Materiel Command, "Light Air Support (LAS) Aircraft" (Request for Proposals), solicitation number FA8637-10-R-6000, Section L, page 2. 12 August 2010. https://www.fbo.gov/utils/view?id=b554ba08f589c6bb3edf6057f1860229

Organization

Approximately 50 USAF air advisors—instructor pilots, maintainers, and aircrew flight equipment personnel—form the core of the 81st Fighter Squadron. Their day-to-day operations revolve around managing and instructing Afghan Air Force pilots through a yearlong syllabus that combines elements of USAF undergraduate pilot training and USAF combat aircraft qualification courses. Many of the pilots come from the A-10 community, with a few from the F-16 and F-15E. According to several sources close to the program, a few pilots volunteered for the assignment outright, while for many, it was a second choice. More specifically, many of the pilots might have desired another tour in their primary Air Force fighter, but still preferred the A-29 program to teaching USAF pilot training, flying remotely-piloted aircraft (drones), other potential air advisor assignments, or non-flying duties.[12]

The 81st is, uniquely, a combat-mission-ready fighter squadron under Air Education and Training Command. For operations and administrative purposes, the 81st reports to AETC's 14th Flying Training Wing at Columbus AFB, Mississippi. However, as mentioned previously, the 81st is physically located at Moody, an Air Combat Command (ACC) base. Moody already hosted A-10s, as well as a rescue group of HC-130s and HH-60 helicopters, when the A-29 mission was added to the base. Moody's live-fire range complex, configured for attack and rescue training—air-to-ground operations—made it a natural choice for the A-29.

Given the unique nature of the 81st mission, a host of other Air Force organizations are involved. At AETC headquarters, the AETC/A3Q Special Missions branch coordinates organize-train-equip issues for the unit. A Program Management Office under Air Force Materiel Command at Wright-Patterson Air Force base manages acquisition and sustainment issues associated with the A-29 aircraft itself. In addition, the unit regularly interacts with the international affairs divisions of AETC, ACC, and Air Force Headquarters at the Pentagon.[13] But of course, the heart and soul of the program are the USAF instructors and air advisors of the 81st.

[12] Author's interviews with USAF fighter and attack pilots, 1 March 2018, 7 March 2018.
[13] "81st Fighter Squadron Mission Brief," unclassified briefing, March 2018.

In contrast to the 12- to 18-month training pipeline of AFSOC's 6 SOS, it takes an average of just 8 weeks to get a new 81st instructor pilot up to speed. This rapid training is made possible by the organization's structure and its highly-focused mission (as opposed to the many scenarios for which 6 SOS airmen must prepare). The USAF pilots chosen for the mission are already proficient in complex USAF attack aircraft and weapons systems; most are already instructor pilots. Furthermore, nearly all USAF pilots trained in a similar aircraft to the A-29 (i.e., the T-6 Texan II) while earning their wings. In short, pilots recruited to the 81st bring experience and skill that *directly translates* to their advisor mission.[14] Their experience, and the well-suited Super Tucano platform, are fundamental elements of this well-designed program.

The Super Tucano's relative ease of operation and maintenance make it an ideal platform for teaching and executing the ground-attack mission. The Super Tucano is used by many nations as a primary training aircraft. The A-29 version was built to leverage the platform's simplicity and ruggedness, while maximizing lethality and operational impact for the Afghan Air Force. Such a platform is an excellent training and light attack tool in the hands of a well-trained pilot. Of course, before they could train Afghan attack pilots, the initial cadre of the 81st had to develop the details of the program themselves.

While the structure of the program—the facilities, the aircraft buy, a general timeline—were in place when the first planes began arriving, it was up to the officers of the 81st to develop tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) for employing the aircraft, *and* a syllabus for teaching those TTPs to the Afghan students. In late 2014, as the new aircraft started to arrive at Moody, the first USAF A-29 instructors were only just arriving as well. As the first Afghan class began training in early 2015, the USAF instructors taught basic maneuvers to the Afghan students on morning flights, then flew all-USAF attack formations in the afternoons in order to develop the TTPs and the syllabus they would teach later that year.[15]

Now in its third year of operations, the 81st is starting to cycle some of its initial cadre back out to other USAF assignments. Squadron members' outplacement to follow-on assignments reflects a well-led organization held in good esteem by the fighter

[14] Interviews with members of 81st Fighter Squadron, Moody AFB, 1 March 2018.
[15] 81 FS interviews.

community and the service. Several junior officers have returned to their primary weapons systems, while more senior members have gone on to competitive staff, professional military education, and operational leadership opportunities.[16] This good outplacement record is a triumph in a military personnel system that often fails to adequately reward air advisor duty and other non-standard career paths. In the meantime, the machine these airmen created continues to churn out combat pilots for the Afghan Air Force.

In early 2018, already past its initial shelf life, the 81st is training its third class of Afghan attack pilots, as well as pilots from Lebanon. The syllabus the USAF IPs created on the fly in 2015 has now graduated 18 pilots, who have delivered significant combat effects in Afghanistan with precision and proportionality.[17] The USAF advisors of the 81st have played a supporting role in A-29 combat operations as well.

Members of the 81st regularly deploy to Afghanistan, where they join the 438th Air Expeditionary Wing under Train Advise Assist Command-Air, or TAAC-Air (formerly known as NATO Air Training Command-Afghanistan). Their mission in Afghanistan is twofold: to instruct the Afghan pilots in a 15-sortie theater indoctrination/mission qualification syllabus, and to advise the Afghans in employing and sustaining their A-29s in the ongoing counterinsurgency campaign.[18]

Force Presentation

81st Fighter Squadron deployments differ significantly from the 365-day expeditionary air advisor construct described in the previous chapter. First, there is an element of *predictability* that other air advisor constructs lack. From the time they are assigned to the unit, members of the 81st know the military operation and the downrange unit to which they will deploy. They usually know at least an approximate deployment schedule as well. As a general rule, these airmen deploy for four months at a time, and

[16] 81st FS/CC, email to author, 12 March 2018.
[17] "81 FS Mission Brief."
[18] A theater indoctrination and mission qualification syllabus is a routine feature of USAF combat unit training programs. For example, after completing A-10 training at the formal training unit in Arizona, a USAF pilot arriving in Korea is required to complete a syllabus consisting of several flights. The purpose of these programs is to ensure new arrivals are familiar with local flying procedures and ready to employ the aircraft for their unit's specific combat missions.

are home for eight.[19] This predictability contributes to the great *unity of effort* between the 81st training programs at Moody and the work of its deployed airmen. The squadron works under a more traditional military train-and-deploy paradigm than the expeditionary advisor construct. The training work done by unit members and students in the United States—and the enhanced teamwork and trust that result—are expected to yield clear operational benefits downrange.

Ongoing relationships among the USAF crews, and between the USAF advisors and their Afghan counterparts, facilitate a more effective, high-performing pipeline from stateside training, to theater indoctrination and combat mission qualification, to Afghan A-29 employment.[20] When a member of the 81st deploys to Afghanistan, he is greeted and integrated into operations by 81st colleagues. Perhaps more significantly in the air advisor context, when he is deployed, the 81st airman is welcomed by the Afghans whom he worked hard to train in the United States.

Compare this situation, characterized by predictability, unity of effort, and ongoing relationships, with the plight of an expeditionary air advisor from the previous chapter: surprised by an air advisor assignment for which he did not volunteer, detached from his home unit and deployed individually to perform a mission for which he is barely trained, advising foreign airmen he had never met before arriving in the combat zone. The 81st construct better embodies the long-term, tailored approach favored by established DoD combat advisor units, and by Air Force doctrine.[21]

Whether the 81st was their first, second, or last choice of assignment, the USAF pilots, maintainers, and technicians currently serving in the 81st Fighter Squadron know exactly what they are doing, and why. Most of them had deployed to Afghanistan with USAF combat units long before the A-29 program existed, and they know that until Afghanistan has its own self-sufficient combat air force, the U.S. Air Force will maintain a fighter or attack aircraft presence there. The Air Force will do so despite U.S. leaders' stated intent to shift resources from counterinsurgency to readiness and modernization for peer-to-peer conflict—because as long as U.S. ground forces maintain a significant

[19] "81 FS Mission Brief;" and, 81 FS interviews.
[20] 81 FS interviews.
[21] See Chapter 5 on the 6 SOS, itself modeled after U.S. Army Special Forces in many respects. See also, Air Force Instruction (AFI) 10-4201 Vol 3, *Air Advising Operations*, 17-20.

presence in a combat zone, U.S. air power will be there to support them. That is as it should be. But if U.S. forces are ever to leave Afghanistan to secure its own territory and borders, Afghanistan will need the combat air power that is growing in its A-29 squadron.

Economy of Force, Effectiveness, and Legitimacy

Essentially, the unit's reason for being is J.F.C. Fuller's economy of force argument, which held that over time, victory would accrue to the side that "perfected the means of war—that is, by rendering them more and more efficient."[22] While the use of American fighter aircraft to support coalition and Afghan troops has been necessary and largely effective throughout the conflict, it has been grossly uneconomical at times. USAF Colonel Jon Wilkinson commanded the expeditionary operations group at Bagram Air Base in 2015. He observes, "With predominantly high-end capabilities, the USAF solution to airpower problems will tend to be high-end as well, even when a low-end solution is sufficient. This is partially why highly capable, multirole F-16s are constantly airborne in Afghanistan tasked to provide the support a low-end ScanEagle unarmed ISR platform is capable of providing."[23] As many USAF senior leaders and the pilots of the 81st have noted, the U.S. Air Force has been burning through the service life of its complex frontline fighters and attack aircraft in the permissive environment of Afghanistan, supporting the Afghan government's campaign for control and legitimacy.[24] How much more economical, and indeed more *effective*, might it be for the Afghan government to apply its own combat airpower to those ends?

At times, efficiency and effectiveness are discussed as opposing values in academic or bureaucratic settings. However, in Fuller's mind, they were not opposed. In the minds of the USAF pilots of the 81st, the harmony between the two is clear. The mission brief they present to visitors declares their intent to "replace themselves."[25] They have deployed in their previous roles as USAF combat pilots, and seen that in many

[22] Col J.F.C. Fuller, British Army, *The Foundations of the Science of War* (1926; repr., Fort Leavenworth, KS: US Army Command and General Staff College Press, 1993), 206.
[23] Col Jon Wilkinson, USAF, and Dr. Andrew Hill, "Airpower Against the Taliban: Systems of Denial," *Air and Space Power Journal* 31, no. 3 (Fall 2017): 48.
[24] Various guest speakers, Air Command and Staff College, Academic Year 2017, and School of Advanced Air and Space Studies, Academic Year AY2018; and, 81 FS interviews.
[25] "81 FS Mission Brief."

cases, an Afghan Air Force with less exquisite but reliable, sustainable reconnaissance and attack capability could have gotten the job done. And now, belatedly perhaps, the U.S. Air Force is building that capability with the Afghan Air Force—which may one day put the U.S. Air Force out of a job in Afghanistan.

A current operational leader in the USAF A-29 program linked a third virtue to the efficiency-and-effectiveness discussion: legitimacy. He mused, "What impression does it give when the Afghan government wants to be seen as sovereign and legitimate, but American air power has to be there to guarantee security?"[26]

Indeed, his question highlights a misalignment of means to ends. Colonel Wilkinson also emphasized this disconnect in a recent *Air and Space Power Journal* article.

> In [the author's] experience while commanding an operations group in 2014-15 at Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan, the [USAF] Air Operations Center (AOC) was attempting to win the hearts and minds of the Afghan population by having fighters constantly airborne to minimize the time to strike. The AOC assessed airpower's success through measures such as the hours of close air support (CAS) flown, the number of requests for CAS filled, the number of bombs dropped, the number of hits achieved, response time to a troops-in-contact situation, and whether or not the tactical ground commander's intent was met. These are all measures of success for achieving subordinate, tangible ends, but *they are grossly incomplete measures of achieving a higher end focused on the population's intangibles*. (emphasis added)[27]

These issues get to the heart of the air advisor and security cooperation concepts writ large, and to the sound force-presentation logic of the A-29 program. Replace high-dollar USAF fighter aircraft with indigenous, less-costly Afghan fighters—delivering similar effects in many cases—and you have an air power solution that is reasonably effective, *more* efficient, and *more* supportive of Afghan government legitimacy. Of course, at some point, the program's *logic* must be replaced by operational *results*.

[26] 81 FS interviews.
[27] Wilkinson and Hill, "Airpower Against the Taliban," 49.

Operations

The A-29 program has achieved impressive operational results thus far. The program met all its milestones for reaching operational capability, as listed in a 2013 SAF/IA presentation:

- Site activation: Aug-Oct 2014
- First aircraft available: Sep 2014
- USAF IPs start training: Oct 2014
- Afghan pilots start training: Feb 2015
- Initial Operational Capability: January 2016 (AAF conducts 2-ship combat/combat support missions in Afghanistan)
- Full Operational Capability: calendar year 2018 (AAF conducts sustained daytime combat operations)[28]

While meeting scheduled milestones may seem like a low standard for success to outside observers, those familiar with government acquisitions and new military programs will understand that holding to this schedule and *actually delivering real Afghan Air Force combat capability* is an achievement to be celebrated.

With respect to combat capability, the program has graduated 2 classes of Afghan A-29 pilots—18 pilots total—all of whom are flight-lead qualified, and 5 of whom are now instructor pilots themselves. 12 more pilots are in the training pipeline as of early 2018. 12 aircraft have been delivered to Afghanistan and are currently executing combat missions; another 7 are being used for the training program at Moody.[29]

In addition, the program has graduated 60 Afghan maintainers, with another 7 currently in training. The trained maintainers are now leading A-29 maintenance in Afghanistan.[30] The successful training of partner nation maintainers is of the utmost significance, given the trend in air advising and security cooperation of nations purchasing aircraft and training pilots, only to lose the capability within a few years due to poor sustainment.

[28] Brig Gen Lawrence Martin, USAF, "Afghan A-29 Training Strategic Basing," briefing for Congress, 2013.
[29] "81 FS Mission Brief."
[30] "81 FS Mission Brief."

Of course, program and training milestones mean little unless the desired combat capability is *activated*. On this score as well, the A-29 program must be called a success as of early 2018. To some degree, at least at the tactical and operational levels, a record of successful missions speaks for itself.[31] To date, the Afghan A-29 squadron's numbers reflect a well-designed program achieving desired combat effects:

- 311 successful air strikes
- 2427 enemy killed in action
- 226 enemy heavy weapons destroyed
- 301 insurgent vehicles destroyed
- 184 buildings destroyed (including numerous drug labs)
- 0 incidents of fratricide
- 0 reported incidents of civilian casualties[32]

A leader in the 81st noted that the *zeroes* above are at least as significant as the body count.[33] In a fight for legitimacy against an insurgent threat, one must indeed destroy or at least materially degrade the enemy, but one must do so with precision and discrimination.[34] Enabling indiscriminate violence by Afghan forces would run against American values, and be counterproductive as well. Only *selective* violence is appropriate and effective for counterinsurgency campaigns.[35]

Evaluation

The A-29's short but successful operational history in Afghanistan, and the demonstrated judgment and precision of its pilots, has garnered praise from the Afghan government and the Afghan press as well. The head of the Afghan parliament's defense commission recently praised the AAF A-29 unit, while asking the United States for more

[31] Strategists and analysts may quibble over such metrics being incomplete, misleading, or not telling the full story; nevertheless, an attack squadron must effectively *attack* to claim combat success.
[32] "81 FS Mission Brief."
[33] 81 FS interviews.
[34] Their demonstrated precision is even more remarkable, given that the AAF A-29s just dropped their first precision-guided munition, a GBU-58 laser-guided bomb, in March 2018. Franz-Stefan Gady, "Afghan Air Force Drops Laser-Guided Bomb for 1st Time in Combat," *The Diplomat*, 28 March 2018. https://thediplomat.com/2018/03/afghan-air-force-drops-laser-guided-bomb-for-1st-time-in-combat/
[35] Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 144-145, 388.

A-29s and a similar program with more advanced aircraft.[36] Afghanistan's TOLO News touted the A-29 as "a reliable and cost-effective aircraft for counterinsurgency and warfare scenarios."[37] The article continued, "Its ability to operate in rugged terrain, extreme climates, and austere locations with a small operational and maintenance footprint has resulted in successful operations from at least four bases in-country."[38] A Kabul-based watchdog group concedes that the U.S.-Afghan strategy of an intensified air campaign, with the Afghans playing a greater role, "makes sense" as long as battlefield gains against the Taliban are converted into political leverage for a negotiated solution.[39] Such grand-strategic problems endure in Afghanistan, and operational air power issues are but a small part.

With all the program's successes, there have been problems as well. An aircraft was lost during training in Georgia, the result of a partial engine failure, but both pilots ejected and survived with minor injuries. Seven Afghan students—six maintainers and a pilot—have departed their U.S. training bases without permission, never to return. Perhaps most significantly, especially in a strategic sense, are the challenges experienced by Afghan A-29 pilots back in Afghanistan. While Western backers laud their precision and judgment, many Afghan A-29 pilots have been chastised by Afghan army counterparts or superiors for not employing weapons when requested to do so (due to risk of fratricide or civilian casualties in those specific scenarios). And of course, the pilots fear for their families' security and safety from insurgents, and have repeatedly petitioned their government for better pay and secure housing. Aside from the training accident (a reality of military aviation), these issues indicate a challenging political and cultural context in which the entire A-29 program is just one of many bids for success.

A-29 operations are ongoing and challenges remain; no one is declaring "mission accomplished" just yet. Nevertheless, military organizations, senior military leaders, and

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[36] Tamim Hamid, "A-29s Carry Out One Third Of All Airstrikes," *TOLO News*, 14 April 2018. https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/29%E2%80%99s%C2%A0carry-out-one-third-all-airstrikes
[37] "US Orders Six More A-29 Super Tucano Aircraft For Afghanistan," *TOLO News*, 26 October 2017. https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/us-orders-six-more-29-super-tucano-aircraft-afghanistan
[38] TOLO News, "US Orders Six More."
[39] Kate Clark, "UNAMA Documents Slight Decrease in Civilian Casualties: Indications of new trends in the Afghan war," *Afghanistan Analysts Network*, 12 October 2017. https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/unama-documents-slight-decrease-in-civilian-casualties-indications-of-new-trends-in-the-afghan-war/

members of the U.S. government have begun to officially acknowledge the program's success. Within the USAF Air Education and Training Command, the program has been a popular public affairs headline and show pony, garnering a slew of command-level awards. More importantly, the program's operational successes have caught the notice of commanders in the combat zone, who have in turn reported those successes to senior military leadership and U.S. elected leaders.

In his February 2017 testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee, General John Nicholson, commander of U.S. forces in Afghanistan, touted the Afghan Air Force and the A-29 specifically as vital to the future success of the Afghan Ministry of Defense and the coalition assistance mission. From 2015 to 2016, the general said, the AAF increased self-generated strike missions by 268%, providing "prompt overmatch fire support to friendly troops in contact with the enemy."[40] He went on to note the vital importance of the Afghan Air Force and its organic targeting-and-strike process to the overall campaign: "Air support affects the entire range of the campaign from operational maneuver to soldier morale and is the most critical enabler for our partners."[41] Finally, General Nicholson highlighted the professionalism of the U.S.-trained aviators: "Nearly 20 air crews were added to the force this year and their training and education in U.S. schools helped further professionalize their force. These Afghan pilots demonstrated sound judgment, good flying skills, and the courage to dissent when there was risk of civilian casualties."

This high praise from the U.S. commander in-theater, based upon clearly demonstrated capabilities and realized positive effects on the battlefield, is the sort of hard evidence that often eludes security cooperation and air advisor initiatives. As such, it provides further support for the A-29 program as a model for future USAF constructs, and for building upon the program's current capability instead of proceeding with its scheduled deactivation in 2020.

Another reason that the program has attracted great institutional interest within the Air Force is that unlike many air advisor constructs, the 81st has many aspects that

[40] Statement of Gen John W. Nicholson, Commander of U.S. Forces-Afghanistan, in Senate, *Situation in Afghanistan: Hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee*, 115th Cong., 1st sess., 9 February 2017. https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Nicholson_02-09-17.pdf
[41] Nicholson, *Situation in Afghanistan*.

correspond to Air Force institutional history and culture.[42] The Air Force "worships at the altar of technology."[43] The spirit, culture, and capabilities of the service are inextricably linked to its hardware. And in the post-Vietnam era, the ethos of the fighter community has dominated Air Force culture and institutional priorities. Given these conditions, air advisor programs with no aircraft struggle to communicate their impacts, leading to institutional neglect. Special operations or mobility air advisor constructs—based around flying capability, but *not* kinetic weapons effects—have also struggled for resources, even in the counterinsurgency era.[44] The 81st, however, *looks like* the Air Force that elected leaders and the service's own senior leaders expect to see. It is a squadron of trainers and advisors, but it is a *Fighter Squadron*.

Due in part to the demonstrated success and appeal of the 81st, the U.S. Air Force continues to pursue its own light attack aircraft program, which is currently intended to include a primary USAF combat role for permissive theaters, as well as an air advisor component. With a second partner nation actively training with the 81st already, and at least one additional nation pursuing A-29 acquisitions, many airmen hope that the USAF A-29 program was more than just a good solution for Afghan air power—a noteworthy accomplishment in its own right—and that its success will translate to other partners, conflicts, and theaters.

The A-29 program has advanced the general goals of security cooperation. *U.S. interests* are well-served by the Afghan Air Force providing more reconnaissance and fires in support of Afghan military operations. The *partner's capabilities* have clearly been enhanced in a meaningful way. And while *U.S. access* to Afghanistan is beyond the scope of the A-29 program, the sustainable flow of personnel and materiel inherent to the program perpetuates and adds to healthy exchange and collaboration between the two governments.

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[42] For a fascinating description of Air Force institutional culture and its effects on strategy, see Lt Col Daniel J. Brown, USAF, "Institutional Memory and the US Air Force," *Air and Space Power Journal* 30, no. 2 (Summer 2016): 38-47.

[43] Carl H. Builder, *The Masks of War: American Military Styles in Strategy and Analysis* (Baltimore, MD.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 18-22.

[44] Despite its worldwide reputation and its status as the Air Force's premier combat air advisor force, the 6 SOS was nearly disbanded by AFSOC, or at least converted to a conventional SOF mobility squadron, following 2013 U.S. budget sequestration. And as discussed in Chapter 3, Air Mobility Command's early-2010s Mobility Advisory Squadron/Light Mobility Aircraft initiative never got off the ground.

Chapter 8

Toward a Cohesive, Capable, and Economical USAF Advisor Force

Security cooperation provides a rich medium through which to operationalize two of the United States' most significant comparative advantages—military strength and a strong network of allies. It is a way to pursue U.S. national interests and military objectives while supporting, enhancing, and leveraging a distributed network of allied military forces. Secretary Mattis reminds audiences, "Nations with allies thrive, and those without allies decline."[1] Reflecting that historical truth, the 2018 *National Defense Strategy* names *strengthening alliances and attracting new partners* as one of the DoD's three major lines of effort. The logic is straightforward: "The willingness of rivals to abandon aggression will depend on their perception of U.S. strength and the vitality of our alliances and partnerships."[2] Air advising operations, if planned and executed prudently, provide an economical method of bolstering those partnerships. Far from being relics of the counterterror/counterinsurgency era, security cooperation, advisory missions, and foreign internal defense provide innovative ways to expand the competitive space against strategic rivals, while confounding the efforts of regional spoilers and violent extremists.

As the United States shapes military strategy in 2018 and beyond, the benefits of security cooperation and advisory missions are best explained in terms of *economy of force* and creating conditions of *continuing advantage*. USAF air advising can help meet the need for economy of force as the United States continues to combat regional spoilers and violent extremists around the world. At the same time, the threefold benefits of successful security cooperation—U.S. interests, allies' capabilities, and U.S. access—serve the strategic imperative to leverage every possible advantage against peer competitors.

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[1] Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis (address, Air Force Association Air, Space, and Cyber Conference, National Harbor, MD, 20 September 2017).
[2] Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge*, January 2018, 5. https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf

In its strong alliances and partnerships, the United States already maintains a great comparative advantage over its challengers.[3] These networks are the product of decades—in some cases centuries—of deliberate cooperation and investment. The United States military has built a deep institutional capability for assessing, enhancing, and cooperating with partner militaries. Continuing to employ that skill set and build those networks will complicate strategy-making for America's rivals, while constricting regional challengers' decision space and room to maneuver. The U.S. Air Force has employed various security cooperation and air advisor constructs throughout its history, and continues to do so. USAF security cooperation today is a highly-active but disjointed enterprise crying out for greater cohesion and service-level investment.

Like most worthy endeavors, air advising is difficult. Contextual issues of cultural tensions, partner government legitimacy, and partner military absorptive capacity usually complicate security cooperation efforts. Because issues like these are common, and because they are often beyond the U.S. military's span of control, it is fruitless for the DoD or a military service to blame context or a partner nation when advisory missions are unsuccessful. True, policymakers and senior military leaders must consider those challenges before committing forces to advisory missions; but advisory missions will never be executed under conditions of cultural harmony, good governance, and exemplary partner capability. Such conditions would likely eliminate any need for an advisory mission! The point, for the U.S. Air Force, is that advisory missions are *intended* for difficult contexts and developing partners, so the service would do well to organize and present forces for these challenges in a more cohesive and sustainable manner.

Based on the literature, strategy, and cases examined herein, a range of options present themselves to Air Force senior leaders as they consider the future of the service, and the part security cooperation and air advisors will play. The service cannot simply rest on its history of successful coalition operations, nor can it simply add the phrase "allies and partners" to every speech and strategy document, and hope that our rivals are thereby deterred. The Air Force must carefully consider its recent history, learn the hard

[3] DoD, *2018 National Defense Strategy*, 4.

lessons of its mistakes, and take positive, concrete steps to build on the constructs that work.

Recommendations

Chapters 1-3, reviewing academic literature, U.S. and USAF strategy, and the state of USAF advisory missions today, showed that security cooperation and air advising are deeply ingrained in U.S. strategy and continue to be in high demand. Nevertheless, many have suggested that the Air Force neglects this mission set, for a variety of reasons. Advisory missions rarely sync with the exquisite systems and high-end-focused warfighting concepts the Air Force historically prefers. Air advising, with its historical ties to irregular warfare, fits poorly with the big-war, decisive victory ethos that dominates USAF institutional memory.[4] Air advising has often been seen by Air Force and joint leaders as a temporary, purely contextual mission requirement, even though the Air Force has engaged in such missions for most of its history. Finally, the results of air advising, particularly in non-kinetic operations, are sometimes difficult to assess, and thus poorly understood. As a result of these factors, USAF air advising is poorly rewarded at the individual career level, and poorly resourced at the institutional level.

Despite these challenges, the intent of U.S. strategy and Air Force doctrine is clear. Air advising is here to stay. Therefore, the Air Force must invest in the people and the capability. This is not a call for some sort of service-level reorientation towards security cooperation. On the contrary: the case studies in this work suggest a range of modest, actionable ideas that could fix this enterprise in a matter of a few years. *Recommendation: The U.S. Air Force as an institution should embrace the enduring relevance of the air advisor mission; build a more permanent, well-resourced community of practice; and better reward those who perform the mission well.*

Chapter 5, on the 6 SOS and OEF-P, suggests that small-footprint air advising and foreign internal defense can indeed enable partner nations to defeat threats to U.S. interests. The 6th is composed of highly-trained volunteers who prefer to operate as small teams in joint efforts. In OEF-P, their teams consistently pushed responsibility and

[4] Lt Col Daniel J. Brown, USAF, "Institutional Memory and the US Air Force," *Air and Space Power Journal* 30, no. 2 (Summer 2016): 39.

combat execution authorities to the partner force, while keeping their own presence discrete. This strategy enabled economy of force for the United States, while bolstering the capabilities and combat results of the partner military, and thereby the legitimacy of the partner government. The 6th in OEF-P is a case of Combat Air Advisors enabling continued advantage for the United States, as a significant terror group was defeated by a partner force, with the added strategic benefit of maintaining close ties with a significant-but-irascible ally. *Recommendation: The U.S. Air Force should build upon the AFSOC combat air advisor capability. It could create a second squadron co-located with the 6th in the 492nd Special Operations Wing at Hurlburt Field. Alternatively, it could create region-specific 6 SOS detachments or stand-alone advisor squadrons in the special operations wings at Mildenhall Air Base, United Kingdom, and Kadena Air Base, Japan.*

Furthermore, it may behoove the 6th and any similar AFSOC advisor units to acquire small fleets of specific U.S.-made, adaptable utility aircraft such as the Cessna Caravan, Beechcraft KingAir, and even the Lockheed C-130, and tie their operations more directly to those platforms. This shift would not preclude AFSOC CAAs from maintaining qualifications on additional aircraft, as they do today. However, packaging AFSOC air advising with proven, familiar platforms would improve outcomes for partner forces, while helping U.S. forces avoid debacles like the Iraqi Comp Air crash and the Afghan C-27 program. Furthermore, U.S. Air Force programs are generally better understood when tied to specific pieces of hardware, and programs receive more political support when their hardware is important to members of Congress. The Cessna Caravan, Beechcraft KingAir, and Lockheed C-130 are three examples of American-made aircraft that have been successfully modified and employed for various partner force missions, including battlefield ISR, precision strike, special operations, executive transport, and combat airlift. *Recommendation: Tying AFSOC air advisor programs to a few proven U.S.-made aircraft types that can be adapted to a variety of military roles will improve outcomes for partner forces, increase government and military understanding of AFSOC advisory operations, and build greater political support for the USAF air advisor mission.*

Chapter 6, on expeditionary air advisors in Iraq, teaches that ad hoc is not the right approach to air advising. The U.S. Air Force was unprepared for the challenge of

rebuilding the Iraqi Air Force, but both sides exacerbated the problem by acting in haste. An array of strategic and operational challenges were present. The U.S. Air Force chose to simply muddle through, and the results were unsatisfactory. It remains to be seen if today's CAATT will learn from the mistakes of CAFTT.

Today, with all the effort and manpower that was thrown at the advising problem during the Iraq war, one might expect that a sustainable construct for general purpose force air advising would have emerged. Instead, a non-volunteer, 365-day deployment model persists today despite its failure in Iraq and its negative effects on Air Force human capital. Over the long term, the non-vol, 365-day deployment model will turn more USAF aviators into civilian airline pilots than into USAF senior leaders. Because individual, yearlong air advisor deployments have often been particularly difficult for airmen (professionally and personally) *and* poorly rewarded by the Air Force, much of the force continues to view this construct as something to be avoided, whether or not there are strategic gains to be had. *Recommendation: A multi-pronged effort is needed to address the problems of general purpose force air advising in the short, medium, and long term.*

In the short term, the Air Force should do what it always does when it wants to incentivize a certain duty or skill set: throw money at the problem. The Air Force has historically used incentive pay, special duty pay, and bonuses to cultivate and retain certain abilities within its ranks. It is currently offering unprecedented retention and re-enlistment bonuses to aviators and a variety of enlisted specialties that it needs to retain due to operational demands. *Recommendation: If the Air Force wants to ease the strain of 365-day deployments and attract a larger pool of airmen to advisory missions while it builds a better long-term solution, it need only increase financial incentives—something it is well-accustomed to doing in similar circumstances.*

In the medium term, to support the *National Defense Strategy's* intent to strengthen alliances and attract new partners, the Air Force should promote more officers who have contributed to that line of effort or have skill sets that support it. The Secretary of the Air Force customarily provides promotion boards with written guidance to convey current priorities. Unfortunately, the current memorandum, from Secretary Heather Wilson, makes only passing reference to "international partnering and coalition-building"

in a laundry list of desirable officer qualities.[5] There is no specific mention of air advisors. On the other hand, some duty positions, such as remotely piloted aircraft operator and special victim's counsel, are specifically identified by the Secretary as "significant indicators of potential for promotion."[6] *Recommendation: If the Air Force wants to better incentivize duties that support strengthening alliances and attracting new partners—such as security cooperation and air advising—the Secretary of the Air Force need only say the word in her next memorandum of instruction to promotion boards.*

If the Air Force needs a better sense of what advisor capability may be latent among its current workforce, and a better sense of whether it currently rewards air advising duty in its personnel and promotion systems, a notional research proposal for these topics is included as an appendix.

Over the long term, it remains to be seen whether the U.S. Air Force perceives air advising as an economical way to leverage strategic advantages. The *National Security Strategy* and the *National Defense Strategy* make it clear that allies and partners are critical to the nation's defense, but air advising is just one activity within security cooperation, and a difficult activity at that. More ingrained programs like personnel exchanges, hosting foreign training, and multinational exercises may be more sustainable, less risky, and less disruptive to current USAF organizational structures and career paths. These programs must be continued, and should be increased to the degree that Air Force resources allow. More personnel exchanges, more foreign students in USAF training, and more multinational exercises will provide broader international exposure to a greater cross-section of the force.

At the same time, forward-deployed air advisors provide capabilities and benefits that other security cooperation methods cannot. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff believes training foreign forces is a core mission of the U.S. Air Force, and when he made that statement he was speaking specifically about forward-deployed air advisors.[7] Air advisor missions demonstrate a higher level of political commitment than stateside

[5] Hon Heather Wilson, Secretary of the Air Force (SECAF), memorandum, subject: Memorandum of Instruction for Management Level Reviews, 12 October 2017.
[6] SECAF memorandum, 12 October 2017.
[7] Mehta, "Dunford: US Air Force Should Incentivize Foreign Training Mission," *Defense News*, 26 September 2016.

training; these missions position airmen close to the fight so that they can help allies and partners deter, deny, or defeat imminent threats. And while air advisors have typically been employed in so-called "low-intensity conflict," the forward presence of U.S. advisors and the enhancement of partner air force capabilities will complicate planning for America's strategic competitors as well, whether those competitors are considering proxy warfare, hybrid warfare, or taking on a U.S.-led coalition directly.

The geographic combatant commands (GCC) already know these things, even if the Air Force has not fully caught on. Air advising is an inherently forward-deployable capability, and the forward geographic combatant commands each already have some sort of regionally-aligned advisor force (i.e., the MSASs for SOUTHCOM and AFRICOM, the USAFE and PACAF air advisor branches, and the AFCENT expeditionary advisors and Gulf Air Warfare Center). The current strength and momentum of USAF general purpose force advising exists in the geographic combatant commands. *Recommendation: The Air Force should enforce more standardization and predictable force presentation among its advisor units across the various GCCs, while preserving each unit's theater-specific capabilities. Instead of MSASs located at stateside AMC bases supporting SOUTHCOM and AFRICOM, and advisor branches in USAFE and PACAF, each GCC should simply have an Air Advisor Squadron co-located with its command headquarters or its numbered air force. Standardizing this general purpose force air advisor construct across the GCCs would create a more effective, well-understood community of practice through which to develop and employ USAF air advisors, while ensuring that advisory missions in each theater remain closely aligned with each combatant commander's objectives.*[8] *Further research would be required to optimize a standard unit structure, mission set, and tasking process.*

Alternatively, in a time of pilot shortages, long wars, and imperatives to restore readiness and modernize, the Air Force may simply lack the resources or the institutional interest in revamping its security cooperation and air advisor structures. In terms of

[8] These capabilities will be better institutionalized by the service, and the actual jobs more attractive, if the units have their own hardware—adaptable utility aircraft and fly-away kits for advising on maintenance, communication, air base protection, and so on. While stand-alone or small flying units are not the USAF norm, there is a precedent for such arrangements in the embassy & USAF Regional Affairs Strategist community, wherein some USAF pilots assigned to foreign embassies also operate C-12 (Beechcraft KingAir) transport/utility aircraft.

human capital, there may be continued resistance to air advising among a majority of the active duty force if significant short- and medium-term actions are not taken to incentivize the duty. Yet the demand from partner nations, and the political imperatives to support those nations with U.S. military expertise, seems likely to continue or increase. *Recommendations: If the Air Force cannot meet these demands with its active duty force, it should explore options for bolstering the National Guard's State Partnership Program (a security cooperation and advisory initiative administered by the National Guard Bureau), or for better integrating civilian contractors into combatant command security cooperation plans.*[9] *More research would be required to develop these options.*

Chapter 7, on the Afghan A-29 program, shows that there is ample opportunity for innovation in the fields of security cooperation and air advising. The Afghan A-29 pilots' operational record proves that USAF training and advising is a truly valuable commodity—a commodity largely latent in the general purpose force, that can translate to strategically significant combat effects when properly managed. The growing list of partners in the program shows that there is significant international demand for enhanced aerial ISR and strike capability, and that potential partners recognize U.S. primacy in these disciplines. The program shows that air advising can be performed by the general purpose force in a sustainable manner, with a 1:2 deploy-to-dwell baseline, and the majority of training performed in the United States. The high morale and good career prospects of USAF A-29 pilots (relative to most other USAF air advisors) shows that air advising can be compatible with Air Force culture, values, and personnel management structures. *Recommendation: The Air Force should fold the air advisor capabilities of the 81st Fighter Squadron into its own developing light attack program, ideally co-locating the first USAF combat squadron of light attack aircraft with the 81st. The Air Force should not deactivate the 81st after the Afghan training mission is complete, but rather maintain the squadron and its unique capabilities within the future USAF light attack wing.*

[9] National Guard Bureau Joint Staff, International Affairs Division, "State Partnership Program: 74 Partners, 25 Years," *NationalGuard.mil*. http://www.nationalguard.mil/Leadership/Joint-Staff/J-5/International-Affairs-Division/State-Partnership-Program/; and, National Guard Association of the United States (NGAUS), "Issue: Expand State Partnership Program," *NGAUS Issues and Advocacy*. https://www.ngaus.org/issues-advocacy/priorities-issues/expand-state-partnership-program

Implications

Professor Stephen Peter Rosen writes that for a military force to innovate—to truly change the way it does business, in order to head off emerging threats or respond to immediate challenges—senior military leaders must recognize the need for change, and build a community and a career path that supports the new desired capability.[10] Though there are air advisors scattered all over the Air Force, this study has shown that as yet, there is no service-wide community of air advisors, nor is the air advisor career path—if it exists at all—a very promising one. As a result, many airmen, particularly aviators, do not want to be air advisors…but some do, and more would, if the job was better resourced, recognized, and rewarded by the service. The current state of affairs is unsatisfactory, given the immense potential of air advising, and the nation's strategic commitment to allies and partners.

In air power and alliances, the United States holds asymmetric advantages over its rivals. To sustain and exploit those advantages, this project calls for greater USAF investment and cohesion in the air advising enterprise. Context, culture, and partners' absorptive capacity will usually present challenges to successful advisory missions. These factors should always be considered by decision-makers, but they will rarely fall within the USAF span of control. The Air Force must be prepared to conduct advisor missions in a variety of partner nations and scenarios. Working by, with, and through allies and partners, the Air Force can advance U.S. interests and access, while creating military and diplomatic dilemmas for its adversaries. Therefore, the Air Force must organize, train, and deploy air advisors in a more permanent, cohesive, and sustainable manner. The Air Force must reorganize and bolster its current array of advisor units, and better incentivize air advising, in order to build and ingrain the advisor capability that future operations will require. These recommendations will enable USAF advisor units and operations to better advance U.S. interests, enhance partner nations' capabilities, and assure U.S. access across the international system.

[10] Stephen Peter Rosen, *Winning the Next War: Innovation and the Modern Military* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 76.

Appendix

A Notional Research Proposal: Establishing Data Sets to Reveal Untapped Potential for Air Advising Among Current USAF Officers, and to Determine the Value Placed on Air Advising by the USAF

Abstract/BLUF

Despite its stated importance in joint doctrine, service doctrine, and military leaders' pronouncements, the mission set of security cooperation and air advising is poorly resourced and poorly rewarded by the U.S. Air Force. Data analysis of the junior officer force could reveal widespread untapped potential for air advising and other international affairs missions. Meanwhile, data analysis of career progression and opportunities among officer year groups currently reaching senior rank will shed light on the career impacts of air advising assignments, which are broadly perceived as negative by the Air Force rank and file.

Problem Definition, Purpose of Study

USAF air advisors are experienced airmen who are sent forward to train, advise, assist, and in some cases accompany foreign forces in missions of interest to the United States. It is the opinion of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, supported by the findings of multiple scholarly works, that *air advisor work is poorly resourced and poorly rewarded by the United States Air Force*.[1] If true, this twofold problem is having strategic negative effects on the USAF security cooperation enterprise and the international partnerships it seeks to strengthen, as well as on Air Force human capital and retention.

Two fundamental factors in this unsatisfactory state of affairs are:

1. A failure to effectively and sustainably hire the right airmen to air advisor positions.

[1] Aaron Mehta, "Dunford: US Air Force Should Incentivize Foreign Training Mission," *Defense News*, 26 September 2016; and, James S. Corum and Wray R. Johnson, *Airpower in Small Wars: Fighting Insurgents and Terrorists* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 437-439; and, Alan J. Vick et al., *Air Power in the New Counterinsurgency Era: The Strategic Importance of USAF Advisory and Assistance Missions* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2006). https://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG509.html.

2. A widespread perception among USAF officers that air advisors are not adequately incentivized with promotions and desirable career opportunities.

These related factors are especially troubling given the established importance of train-advise-assist missions in U.S. military doctrine, and the ongoing operational need for air advisors (validated by allies' requests and the U.S. military's own geographic combatant commands).

To put the problem in human terms, the following scenario has actually played out numerous times in recent years. First, a high-performing USAF officer with demonstrated potential for air advising does *not* pursue an open assignment or deployment as an air advisor, because he perceives that the service does not value the assignment at a level commensurate with the great challenges and sacrifices it will entail. Instead, he pursues another competitive opportunity or special program that may not leverage his military experience or special skills to the same degree, but will enhance his career prospects (for example, serving as a general's aide, exec, or action officer). In the meantime, because a combatant command has validated the operational requirement for the air advisor position, the Air Force will fill the job—likely with a less apt or interested airman, and perhaps even with a non-volunteer who is not competitive for the better opportunities referenced above. That airman's skill set or interest level will detract from his contribution to the mission: training partner forces in aviation enterprise capabilities, the bolstering of which would further shared security interests.

Therefore, the twofold problem is as follows: If air advising and security cooperation are indeed as important as doctrine and senior leaders say they are, the Air Force should improve the ways it selects airmen for air advisor jobs—selecting more for aptitude and interest than mere availability. Yet to incentivize airmen with greater aptitude to pursue air advisor jobs, the Air Force must counter the widespread perception (and likely, the reality) that those jobs are undesirable from a career-advancement standpoint.

The purpose of this 2-part study is to collect, curate, and use available data to establish whether there is an untapped supply of potential air advisors currently serving in

USAF, and to empirically test the perception that air advisor duty negatively affects careers and promotions.

Potential Impacts

The sponsor of the study, a researcher at the Air Force's Air University, believes many current USAF officers display a high aptitude for air advising, but do not view air advisor jobs as desirable; and that as a result, air advisor positions are filled via sub-optimal processes, *with negative strategic outcomes for mission accomplishment and Air Force human capital*.

This study could prove highly impactful to Air Force deployment and career-management practices (two frequent focus areas in officer-retention and pilot-retention conversations). If the study sheds light on suboptimal air advisor selection and USAF practices for resourcing this high-demand capability, then the study may also eventually help improve operational results in conflict areas where air advisors are deployed.

Proposed Study and Methodology, Part I

The study's sponsor proposes the following method for assessing the current active duty USAF officer force for air advisor aptitude. (Note: The numerical values suggested are notional, to illustrate the framework and the prima facie relevance of certain data points. The numerical values should be adjusted by the research team in accordance with their own expertise and the advice of subject matter experts in the operations, security cooperation, and personnel management fields.)

The following analysis would ideally be performed on the entire current target population of potential air advisors (or a large representative sample): line officers with 4-10 years time in service. Researchers would write software to scrape officers' official records for the following indicators. As depicted in Table A.1, more positive values indicate higher aptitude for air advising:

Table A.1: Assessing Air Advisor Potential in the Current Active Duty Force		
Indicator	**Context**	**Point Value**
Prior air advisor experience, tour length 179 days or greater (Note 1)		5
Prior experience as a **Regional Affairs Specialist (RAS)**	RAS officers often serve in Security Cooperation Offices, Defense Attaché Officers, and other overseas country team positions.	5
Experience as an **Olmstead Scholar or Mansfield Scholar**	Scholarships for active-duty members to pursue graduate education and language immersion at foreign universities.	5
Experience in the **Military Personnel Exchange Program** (MPEP)	MPEP participants spend one full assignment (typically 3 years) working in an ally's military service (e.g., a USAF F-16 pilot flying in a Portuguese Air Force F-16 squadron).	5
Expressed interest in any of the above on subject's Airman Development Plan (ADP) (Note 2)	The ADP is the Air Force's web-based assignment and career preference worksheet.	3
Participation in the **Language Enabled Airmen Program** (LEAP)	LEAP is a program offering scheduled, repeated temporary duty to cultivate, maintain, and leverage demonstrated foreign language abilities among currently serving Airmen.	3
Degree in foreign language or specific regional studies		3
Defense Language Proficiency Test (DLPT) scores of 2/2 or greater	The DLPT scores test-takers' reading and listening ability in a given language on a scale from 0 to 3. A "2/2" score indicates "Routine Knowledge" in reading and listening. Such a score also represents initiative on the part of the officer to study and to take the test.	3
Defense Language Aptitude Battery scores of 100 or greater	The DLAB assesses test-takers' ability to learn a new language, based on a series of questions requiring test-takers to learn or interpolate a made-up language with a consistent grammatical structure. The Air Force requires a DLAB score of 100 or greater for admission to the Defense Language Institute.	3
Military Competence in Specialty: No more than one checkride failure (aviators) or equivalent disqualifying event in career field		3

Military Competence, General: No more than one total failure to qualify at required marksmanship training (M9, M4, etc.), vehicle driver training (HUMVEE, forklift, etc.), or other required certification		3
Reporting of **"close and/or continuing contact" with a foreign national** on the officer's SF-86 security clearance paperwork		1 point per reported contact
Experience in **temporary-duty security cooperation missions** such as Military Training Teams (MTTs) or Building Partners' Capacity (BPC) events	Recorded on annual performance reports	0.5 points per mission

Source: author's original work

Note 1: While it may sound comical to assess air advisor potential based on whether subjects have already been air advisors, it is actually quite necessary for this study of USAF personnel. Because there is no "Air Advisor" career field or Air Force Specialty Code (AFSC), nor any Special Experience Identifier (SEI) in the records of those who may have performed deployed air advisor duties, there are many USAF officers with air advisor experience whose records do not reflect that experience unless given a full textual reading. Some prefer it that way—this point value is perhaps surprisingly low (given the purpose of the study) because many airmen have been deployed to air advisor positions on a non-volunteer basis and have little desire for more air advisor work.

Note 2: This portion of the proposal was inspired by a RAND study in which researchers used Google big data tools to analyze the Google search terms associated with potential Army recruits. They found that "search terms can serve as a measure of propensity and can be used to predict the overall proportion of highly qualified Army accessions." Salar Jahedi, Jennie W. Wenger, and Douglas Yeung, *Searching for Information Online: Using Big Data to Identify the Concerns of Potential Army Recruits* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2016), 1, 16. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1197.html

Hypotheses for Part I

For part I, the study sponsor makes the following hypotheses:

1. The proposed analysis will enable the research team to sort officers into three categories useful to the Air Force: High and/or Demonstrated Air Advisor Aptitude, Potential Air Advisor, and Not Recommended for Air Advisor Duty.

2. Those in the High/Demonstrated Aptitude category will constitute a small subset with an exponentially higher score tier, because *interest or participation in one of the programs listed often facilitates participation in another*. For example, an Airman with a good DLPT score who participates in LEAP as a Lieutenant will have increased opportunities for overseas duty and travel, and will be more likely to become an Olmstead Scholar, a RAS, or an exchange officer later in his career.

3. High Aptitude and Potential Air Advisors will be unevenly distributed among USAF installations and commands. Clusters of high-scoring records will be found in overseas bases, PME schools, and Washington D.C. Certain career fields will provide an outsized share of High/Demonstrated Aptitude and Potential Advisors, because those career fields attract airmen who prefer overseas travel, foreign cultures, and unpredictable lifestyles (i.e., special operations, mobility, and intel, as opposed to bomber pilots, missileers, and maintenance).[2]

If these hypotheses are proven valid, then in-service recruiting and incentives can be better targeted towards high-potential groups, which may lead to organizational and operational benefits over the long term.

Proposed Study and Methodology, Part II

Part II of the study will analyze the personnel records of a large representative sample of line officers. Career data should be included from the 4-year point to the 22-year point of subjects' careers—essentially, from their promotion to Captain (O-3) to

[2] Hypotheses 2 and 3 reflect the basic network concept of homophily: individuals with like characteristics (such as language ability or love of travel) tend to connect; and conversely, connected individuals tend to share common characteristics. Charles Kadushin, *Understanding Social Networks: Theories, Concepts, and Findings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 18-20.

most officers' last promotion opportunity to Colonel (O-6).[3] The sample must include a representative subset with air advisor experience.

The objective is to determine how air advisor duty affects promotions and career opportunities. Clearly a multitude of factors affects every individual career, so the results of Part II will be mere correlations. However, the larger the data set, the more informative strong correlations will be.[4]

Given a large representative sample, *each individual career could be scored on a point system that allocates points for promotions and desirable career opportunities* such as fellowships, in-residence professional military education, joint staff positions, and command. The notional scoring system in Table A.2 is provided for illustrative purposes only. The research team should determine the final scoring system based on their own expertise and the advice of subject matter experts in USAF personnel management and officer career mentorship:

Table A.2: Determining Career Impacts of Air Advisor Duty

Indicator	Context	Point Value
Early Promotion to Col (O-6)	2017 selection rate was approximately 2% of eligible line officers.	+10
Early Promotion to Lt Col (O-5)	2017 selection rate approx. 3%	+9
On-time Promotion to Col	2017 selection rate approx. 50%	+7
On-time Promotion to Lt Col	2017 selection rate approx. 70%	+5
Squadron Command		+5
Joint Staff	Required for eligibility to flag rank; commonly perceived as required for promotion to O-6.	+3
Professional Military Education (PME) Fellowships	Examples include the USAF Legislative Fellowship and the Chief of Staff Master's Program at Harvard.	+3
Advanced Studies Group	School of Advanced Air and Space Studies, School of Advanced Military Studies, etc.	+3
Aide, Exec, Action Officer for General Officer		+3

[3] "Line officers" are those in operational career fields (e.g., aviators, maintenance officers, intelligence officers, etc.,) as opposed to the medical, legal, or chaplain fields.
[4] Kenneth Cukier and Viktor Mayer-Schoenberger, "The Rise of Big Data: How It's Changing the Way We Think About the World," *Foreign Affairs* 92, no. 3, (May/June 2013): 29-30.

Headquarters USAF Staff		+2
Joint or foreign in-residence PME, non-fellowship		+2
Other in-residence PME		+1
Return to an operational unit (e.g., flying squadron) after staff, school, air advisor, or other career-broadening assignment	Returning to operations makes the officer immediately available to command.	+1
Separates from Air Force within one year of service commitment expiration		-10

Source: author's original work

The researchers could then sort the scored records into two groups—those with air advisor experience and those without—and assess the career impacts of air advising. Furthermore, based on the many other correlations-with-promotion that may emerge, this data set will be of great interest to many Air Force career fields, leaders, and mentors. It would also be valuable to the research project and to the Air Force human capital enterprise to illustrate the collected data regarding PME, staff duty, and command, along with air advisor duty, as a vacancy chain analysis. This graphical depiction would likely support the conventional USAF wisdom that "school and staff"—the more selective, the better—lead to promotions and command opportunities. Yet interposing the air advisor layer in the graph should also provide a piece of visual evidence as to whether air advisor jobs constitute dead ends, obstacles, off-ramps, or possibly on-ramps for officer careers.

Hypotheses for Part II

The study's sponsor hypothesizes that officers with air advisor experience are promoted and rewarded with desirable career opportunities less frequently than their peers, and as a result, many separate from the Air Force earlier than their peers.

Of course, an alternate explanation of poor promotion outcomes for air advisors may be self-selection. Volunteer air advisors may be more interested in continuing their air advisor or international affairs work than seeking more promotable opportunities, just as some pilots choose to continue flying rather than pursue PME or staff jobs.

An alternate finding of Part II might be that air advisors are promoted and rewarded more than the average for the whole sample, but less than peers who complete top-tier programs and assignments (such as Weapons School, Air Force Fellowships, and selective PME schools). Such programs already track their graduates' career

achievements, but to the study sponsor's knowledge, no such analysis exists for air advisors.

Summary of Hypotheses and Potential Impacts

Part II, the promotion/career and vacancy chain analysis, will likely indicate that there is no established career path for USAF air advisors. If in fact air advisor duty *is* rewarded by the service to a greater degree than is commonly perceived by airmen, then the service's task is simply to publicize those facts. But if air advisor work has a proven negative effect on careers, then the Air Force must better incentivize the mission and the jobs in order to attract the talented airmen that will very likely be highlighted by Part I.

Other Applications: Potential Cyber Professionals, The Value of Space

If the study's framework is judged to be robust and its results prove valuable to the Air Force's security cooperation and human capital strategies, a similar framework may be applied to any number of desired skill sets and target populations. One can easily imagine a study similar to Part I assessing untapped potential for cyber and network warfare in the general purpose force. Likewise, amid the current political fervor regarding USAF space forces, a study similar to Part II would lend some objectivity to the discussion of space enterprise careers, resourcing, and valuation by the U.S. Air Force.

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