



# Asymmetric Advantage

Air Advising in a Time  
of Strategic Competition

Michael M. Trimble  
Major, USAF

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***Asymmetric Advantage:***

*Air Advising in a Time of Strategic Competition*

**MICHAEL M. TRIMBLE  
MAJOR, USAF**

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## **About the Author**

Maj Michael Trimble has served most of his Air Force career in combat-mission-ready squadrons operating the C-130 Hercules. An experienced instructor pilot and flight examiner, he has deployed multiple times to Iraq and Afghanistan, and flown operational missions throughout the Middle East, Africa, Europe, and the Americas. He has served in a variety of operational and tactical leadership roles. He holds a master's degree in international relations from the University of Oklahoma, and a bachelor's degree with distinction in English from the University of Virginia.



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## **Abstract**

The United States Air Force (USAF) 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 USAF 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 USAF 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 unit constructs 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 USAF organize and employ air advisors in a more cohesive and sustainable manner.

## 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.<sup>1</sup> 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 (SC) provides a rich medium through which to sustain these intersecting comparative advantages—a way to pursue US 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 Department of Defense’s (DOD) three major lines of effort.<sup>2</sup> The logic underpinning this line of effort is straightforward: “The willingness of rivals to abandon aggression will depend on their perception of US strength and the vitality of our alliances and partnerships.”<sup>3</sup>

An array of organizations, authorities, and activities contribute to the United States Air Force’s (USAF) piece of the US SC portfolio—from the unified combatant commands, the US Department of State, and the International Affairs division of Headquarters (HQ) USAF (SAF/IA), to units from Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC), Air Education and Training Command (AETC), Air Mobility Command (AMC), and geographic combatant commands (GCC). USAF SC 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, SC advances US strategic objectives, hones US military prowess, and bolsters the US industrial base, while enhancing our partners’ capacity to defend themselves and to operate in US-led coalitions—an alluring array of benefits. Examples include the work of AFSOC combat aviation advisors (CAA)—often referred to as combat air advisors—in Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines (OEF-P), and AETC’s A-29 attack aircraft instructor pilots (IP) and advisors. Conversely, when organized in an ad hoc manner, SC can squander American military lethality while doing little to advance US or allied goals. Examples include the expeditionary air advisor

construct used throughout Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom.

A significant body of evidence suggests that some USAF SC 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 SC. 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 and problem by examining relevant academic theory, as well as US and USAF strategy, doctrine, and operational guidance (introduction and chapter 2). A broad overview of USAF SC 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 SC—air advisor operations and AvFID (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 US interests. The studies also consider contextual factors, such as partner government legitimacy and military 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 USAF should organize and present forces for air advising and AvFID*.

## **Theory and Literature Review**

It is important to note at this point that *military assistance*, *SC*, *advisory missions*, and other umbrella terms refer to an array of military-to-military interactions, such as initial senior leader engagements with new partner nations (PN), foreign military sales (FMS), large-scale training exercises and CAA operations with allies. Chapter 2 will provide more clarity on definitions and doctrines. For the sake of consistency, this academic literature review will use the broad term SC for the overall enterprise and the more specific “advisory missions” for personnel working with partner air forces.

## **Critiques of Security Cooperation**

Other authors have characterized the literature on US SC as follows: various groups with different motivations, publishing in different

sources, using different levels of analysis, and generally talking past one another.<sup>4</sup> Authors and professors of various ideological stripes have argued against US SC as a worthwhile pursuit, for a variety of reasons. Political realists have long contended that SC offers poor return on investment in terms of national interests. Thucydides' Nicias warned his fellow Athenians in 415 BC against entering into military partnerships "with people whom we must help in their need, and who can never help us in ours."<sup>5</sup> Contemporary realists carry on this tradition. According to John Mearsheimer, alliances require resources, maintenance, and patience and always involve discord.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> The contemporary realists' perspective regarding SC—particularly advisory missions—is that they are generally focused on countering regional threats and nonstate violent extremist organizations (VEO), and that such threats are not *existential* threats to the United States. Therefore, SC and advisory missions have a low ceiling in terms of potential return on investment.

Authors elsewhere on the ideological spectrum also argue against Western military interventions and security force assistance (SFA), on humanitarian grounds. This liberal-humanitarian school points out that interventions by Western powers in regional or intrastate clashes often (1) escalate conflicts, (2) kill civilians, (3) create deviant war economies, and (4) generally do more harm than good.<sup>8</sup> Like the realists, liberals have leveled these critiques at a wide variety of SC efforts, agnostic of the efforts' strategic objectives.

Whether it is intended to contain Communism or fight VEOs, critics of SC deem it equally misguided. There is an element of truth in the critiques. No one familiar with the subject would argue that SC or advisory missions are simple, nor that successful ones are scientific and easily reproducible. Realist, humanitarian, and other critiques of military assistance and US armed interventions were duly considered during the course of this project.

### **Strategy: Economy of Force and Continuing Advantage**

While there is much skepticism regarding SC in various corners of international relations literature and in strategy and policy circles, literature abounds *advocating* small-scale military interventions and recommending best practices.<sup>9</sup> Typified by a slew of RAND studies

and military journal articles, these sources highlight the advantages of SC in terms of *economy of force* and creating conditions of *continuing advantage* for the United States and its allies.

The 2018 NDS 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 also keeping pressure on regional actors and VEO’s.<sup>10</sup> 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.”<sup>11</sup> 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 DOD’s intent to leverage every possible advantage against strategic competitors and provides an economical way for the United States to fight regional spoilers and VEOs 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.<sup>12</sup> Because war is essentially the competitive expenditure of various types of force—mental, moral, and physical—he explains, the side that most economically expends the forces at its disposal will win.<sup>13</sup> A more American, more *economical* expression of the same idea comes from RAND strategist Bernard Brodie: “Strategy wears a dollar sign.”<sup>14</sup> 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 perform better tactical and operational actions, with strategic impacts that favor US interests. *Advisory missions and armed interventions leveraging local forces exemplify economy of force, because they provide a low-cost means 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 SC 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.<sup>15</sup> As the DOD pursues high-dollar, high-end focused, third-offset answers to strategic competitors’ challenges—the most *lethal* threats—the DOD 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, SC and advisory missions offer a potential way to leverage the current US 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, Prof. Everett Dolman's definition of strategy, "a plan for continuing advantage," seems inherent to the logic of SC.<sup>16</sup> SC 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 SC 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."<sup>17</sup> True to this idea, SC is an inherently long-term pursuit and based on a buildup of trust 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.<sup>18</sup> SC rejects the short, tactical-victory-based time horizons prevalent in many military endeavors and seeks to create conditions of continuing advantage.

In addition to its longer time horizon, SC 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). SC is about building a resilient network, rather than an impenetrable fortress. As such, SC, though an old practice, is a strategy well suited to the information age. SC 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.<sup>19</sup> The idea of SC as a method of pursuing continuing advantage dovetails nicely with the DOD's stated intent to expand the space in which potential US adversaries must compete.

The DOD's new NDS states, "Long-term strategic competitions with China and Russia are the principal priorities for the Department."<sup>20</sup> 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 improving the USAF air

advising enterprise rests on two familiar ideas: (1) the need to maintain and leverage every possible advantage against strategic competitors and (2) the need for greater economy of force as the United States continues to combat regional spoilers and VEOs around the world.

### **Advocacy from Academics, Think Tanks, and the Military**

In addition to being a focal point of the 2018 NDS, some academics ardently support the maintenance and leveraging of strong alliances. G. John Ikenberry, an international relations scholar, explored this comparative advantage in detail. Ikenberry reported active US military partnerships with 60 nations—a very low estimate—compared to Russia’s eight and China’s one.<sup>21</sup> Ikenberry elegantly summarized the benefits in a passage that would fit perfectly into today’s National Security Strategy (NSS) or NDS: “Not only do alliances provide a global platform for the projection of US power, but they also distribute the burden of providing security. The military capabilities aggregated in this US-led alliance system outweigh anything China or Russia might generate for decades to come.”<sup>22</sup> 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.<sup>23</sup> Ikenberry’s fusion of expedience- and values-based arguments supporting SC indicates the broad, enduring appeal of the enterprise to many Western strategists.

Various think tanks have also invoked SC 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 the US government improve partners’ own defensive and interoperability capabilities with US forces through arms transfers and iterative multinational training.<sup>24</sup> 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.”<sup>25</sup> 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.”<sup>26</sup> Finally,



a Brookings Institution author argues for increased US 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 submarines.”<sup>27</sup> Another “access-insensitive” capability that would fit this list is covert aerial infiltration and exfiltration—a long-standing skill set within the USAF special operations community. AFSOC already boasts a cadre of trained CAAs prepared to build this capability in partner air forces.<sup>28</sup>

In another USAF example, an *Air and Space Power Journal* article published in 2014 invokes both the main advocacy arguments I have identified. To the authors, Air Force SC 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.”<sup>29</sup>

Current practitioners emphasize the same array of benefits, echoing the claim that these benefits transcend the counterinsurgency (COIN) and counterterror doctrinal frameworks in which military professionals usually discuss air advising and AvFID.<sup>30</sup> 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 a 2012 *Air and Space Power Journal* article, describe SC and air advisors in the context of COIN-era US grand strategy. SC in general would cultivate partner militaries’ tactical and operational competence as well as their professionalism.<sup>31</sup> Air advising in particular was to help a partner more rapidly and effectively use force against internal threats. Improved air power would also help a state “inform, support, and secure its population,” enabling better day-to-day governance and increasing the partner government’s legitimacy.<sup>32</sup> Enhanced air power also proves vital to upholding a state’s legitimacy

during humanitarian crises and natural disasters.<sup>33</sup> Finally, RAND argued air advising would build the partner's military capabilities, as well as interoperability with US and US-aligned military forces, increasing aggregate capability to respond to internal and external military threats.<sup>34</sup> In a COIN paradigm, all of these benefits increase the legitimacy of the sovereign partner government, which in turn prevents or retards the growth of insurgent and transnational 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

SC 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, academic circles have neither rigorously examined that enduring role nor has it been adequately programmed and resourced by the USAF. Other US 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 US leaders and strategists—a need exists for updated theoretical discussions and more contemporary, relevant policy recommendations vis-à-vis military advisory missions.

It is possible the advocates correctly say the USAF should build greater SC capability within its special operations or even its general purpose force. It is also possible the advocates are correct; however, the Air Force is already adequately organized for SC, to the degree financial realities and the Air Force's many responsibilities allow. Finally, it is possible recent historical cases validate the many critiques of SC, and therefore the DOD or the Air Force need to 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 SC and advisory missions.

## Notes

(Notes appear in shortened form except where indicated. For full details, see the appropriate entry in the bibliography.)

1. Mattis, Address; and Mattis, “A New American Grand Strategy.”
2. Department of Defense (DOD), *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy*, 5.
3. DOD, 5.
4. Mott, *Military Assistance*, 8; and Dipoma, “Right-sizing Intervention,” 17–25.
5. Strassler, *Landmark Thucydides*, 369.
6. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 156–57.
7. For a deep explanation of the domestically focused, antiglobalist Jacksonian tradition making a resurgence in American society, see Mead, “The Jacksonian Revolt.”
8. Kaldor, *New and Old Wars*, 117; and Norris, “American Assistance is Spread too Widely.”
9. For two representatives of the policy and advocacy literature, see Vick et al., *Air Power in the New Counterinsurgency Era*; and Rolleston, Trimillos, and Gill, “Aviation Security Cooperation, 92–117.
10. DOD, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy*, 4.
11. DOD, 4.
12. Fuller, *Foundations of the Science of War*, 194–202.
13. Fuller, 201–02.
14. Brodie, *Strategy in the Missile Age*, 358.
15. DOD, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy*, 1.
16. Dolman, *Pure Strategy*, 18.
17. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 3-20, 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. Frazier and Hutto, “The Socialization of Military Power,” 392–93.
19. Dolman, *Pure Strategy*, 5, 7, 9, 179–80.
20. DOD, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy*, 4.
21. Ikenberry, “The Illusion of Geopolitics,” 82.
22. Ikenberry, 82.
23. Ikenberry, 81–87.
24. Kelly, Gompert, and Long, *Smarter Power, Stronger Partners*, 151.
25. Cheng, “U.S. Needs an Integrated Approach.”
26. Cheng.
27. Rehman, “Great Power Rivalry.”
28. 6th Special Operations Squadron, “The Most Committed Wins.”
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.
32. Vick et al., 94–95; and Wachter, “Air-Mindedness,” 55.
33. In the United States, for instance, air power has recently played a very visible role while 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 Kilcullen, *Out of the Mountains*, 116–68.

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

## 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.*

—US Department of Defense  
*Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy*

An effective analysis of US Air Force SC 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 SC 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 SC—particularly air advising—in US national defense. This chapter shows 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 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 multi-national operations, and provide United States forces with peacetime and contingency access to allied and partner nations.”<sup>1</sup>

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 SC—interests, partners, and access*—any or all of which may be served by a particular SC activity. These aims are as follows: (1) directly promote US security interests, (2) build PN’s military capacity, and (3) provide US forces with access.<sup>2</sup> Note the DOD definition *assumes* SC effectively serves these ends. Later chapters examine the validity of that assumption in order to refine current and future SC plans.<sup>3</sup>

With the three specific aims, the definition offers a simple rubric for evaluating specific SC missions or future proposals—does the activity advance US interests, partners’ capabilities, and/or US access?

Logically, a given SC 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. US 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 SC definition—directly promoting US interests—is really a super-objective: an objective itself, and the overall objective of the whole enterprise, in which the other two objectives (partners’ capabilities and US geographic access) serve.

To dissect the potential problem a bit more, witness the long-running, anxious American dialogue over China’s 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 US operation depends on a certain international port or airway.<sup>4</sup> Whether planning for potential major war or sustaining a current COIN campaign, *access* is a necessity for US forces. Access represents a natural intersection of US interests and partners’ capacity to collaborate. *Therefore, the tension at the core of many SC activities is the relationship between objective one, the super-objective of promoting specific US security interests, and objective two, developing allies’ and partners’ own military capabilities.*

If there is any limit to US 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 US interests.<sup>5</sup> Some of the case studies suggest this positive relationship is often assumed and too rarely questioned or refined in US and USAF strategy.

## Security Cooperation in US Grand Strategy

The concept of SC has maintained a remarkably stable role in post-Cold War US grand strategy, despite dramatic swings in American politics. SC’s durability is evident in the emphasis it received in the two most recent NSSs (2015 and 2017), which originated from starkly different presidential administrations.

President Obama’s 2015 NSS professed a heavy reliance upon SC 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.”<sup>6</sup> This posture reflected the Obama administration’s desire to reduce US military commitments abroad, particularly in the Middle East, and distance itself from the perceived unilateralism of the Bush administration, while continuing to advance US security interests through military means.

All administrations face a central dilemma of advancing the nation’s global interests while minimizing expenditure of US blood and treasure. To that end, the 2015 NSS “redoubled our commitment to allies and partners” in its first paragraph.<sup>7</sup> On the whole, the 35-page document’s 110 references to “allies,” “partners,” and “collective action” animate the strategic thrust of nearly every line of operation and effort—from geopolitics to counterterrorism and from the Arctic to the Horn of Africa. It seems at some point, *SC became a central pillar of US 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 SC. 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 NSS. The op-ed confirmed SC would remain a mainstay of US military operations. Titled “America First Doesn’t Mean America Alone,” the piece affirmed America’s commitment to its allies, and eschewed unilateralism.<sup>8</sup> The authors’ main points and language affirmed *even in a so-called “America First” foreign policy, SC 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.<sup>9</sup> Even following a sea change in governing ideologies, the behavior of established, constitutional governments often differs marginally at most.<sup>10</sup> So *unsurprisingly*, while US troop levels rose incrementally in Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan during 2017, strategies in both theaters continued to rely upon US support to indigenous forces. Such continuity of SC efforts supports the notion that current US grand strategy, with regard to irregular warfare, will change



incrementally if at all in the near term. SC and advisory missions are not going away.

While the 2015 NSS referred to SC 110 times, the 2017 NSS goes even further, using the words “partner” or “partnerships” nearly 150 times, along with 75 references to “allies.”<sup>11</sup> While declaring an ideology of principled realism, the 2017 NSS contains references to allies and partners in nearly every line of effort. The following statement from the document clearly indicates SC is considered a strategic tool for fighting VEOs and denying them safe havens: “The campaigns against ISIS [Islamic State of Iraq and Syria] 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.”<sup>12</sup>

To summarize: though Trump’s 2017 NSS relies on a very different political ideology and uses very different rhetoric than the Obama-era document, SC remains a cornerstone of US national security policy. In the near term, policy makers and service members should expect most campaigns, and especially irregular warfare and counter-terrorism 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 US resources, by enabling local actors and proxy forces. Consistent with the realist ideology espoused in the 2017 NSS and the “selective engagement” strategy it favors, this small-wars hedging has influenced US national security since at least Nixon’s 1969 “Vietnamization” program.<sup>13</sup> Some would date the method to Kennedy’s small wars emphasis and the creation of the Army’s Green Berets.<sup>14</sup> In theory, small-scale advisory and assistance missions provide a way to effectively fight or contain a fringe insurgency or other nonexistential threat with a small resource commitment, while avoiding the potential pitfalls of large-scale US involvement. Of course, a campaign based on this theory would require the United States remain committed to the strategy, and avoid escalation and large-scale commitments, unless vital national interests are threatened.

A RAND study titled, *Air Power in the New Counterinsurgency Era*, states US interventions in civil or irregular conflicts often “carry the seeds of their own defeat,” as US 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.”<sup>15</sup> The 2017 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.”<sup>16</sup> The 2006 report advocates a precautionary strategy of using advisory and assistance missions early and often, which RAND believed 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.”<sup>17</sup> The success of the 2016–17 campaign against ISIS—relying upon indigenous ground forces, supported by US special operations forces (SOF) and air power—and the language of the 2017 NSS, indicate the now decade-old trends toward indirect approaches in irregular warfare will continue in US strategy for the foreseeable future.

In addition to its benefits in irregular warfare and COIN, the relatively light footprint of forces conducting train-advise-assist-accompany missions, as opposed to large-scale combat operations, benefits US 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 US military forces to organize, train, and equip for a major war, or fight one if necessary. In this sense, SC 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 US military commitments abroad, particularly in the Middle East, while continuing to use the military to advance US security interests and influence in ways other than large-scale conflict. Where the Obama administration sought a dramatic deviation from large-scale military commitments toward liberal institutionalism, the Trump administration articulates a realist preparation of America’s military forces for potential war with a peer state. Yet in the wide gulf that separates the two worldviews, the SC enterprise maintains a constant allure.

The unclassified summary of the 2018 NDS declares 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).”<sup>18</sup>

As highlighted in the previous chapter, Ikenberry explained the US alliance advantage. He writes, “Washington enjoys a unique ability to win friends and influence states,” and this ability is a security-multiplier: it increases US power while distributing its burdens, strengthens like-minded liberal governments, and extends US reach.<sup>19</sup> This argument is remarkably consistent with the previously mentioned DOD rubric of advancing *US 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.”<sup>20</sup>

Another explanatory passage in the NDS clearly reflects the defining, stable objectives of US SC—advancing US interests, bolstering partners’ capabilities, and enabling US 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 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).<sup>21</sup>

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

Note the portion of the NDS above places value on a favorable balance of power—traditionally associated with great power politics. Overall, the NDS declares a shift in focus toward strategic competitors—a framework in which the role of SC is based on the logic of economy of force. At the same time, the DOD remains unequivocally committed

to thwarting nonstate actors' efforts against US 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 SC as a relatively low-cost means to advance US interests and amplify US power without large-scale commitments of general purpose forces. From a strategic and doctrinal standpoint, SC 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 (JP) 3-20, *Security Cooperation*, provides an expanded definition of SC, 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 *US interests*; enable partner nations (PNs) to provide the US *access* to territory, infrastructure, information, and resources; and/or to build and apply *their capacity and capabilities* consistent with US defense objectives (emphasis added)."<sup>22</sup> 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 SC:

Military departments and Services support combatant commander (CCDR) campaign plans and simultaneously pursue Service-specific SC objectives consistent with national and theater strategic objectives.<sup>23</sup>

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 [area of responsibility] typically requires a combination of assigned and attached forces, composed of conventional forces (CF) and SOF.<sup>24</sup>

These passages from JP 3-20 re-emphasize DOD policy, unchanged since 2010, in Department of Defense Instruction (DODI) 5000.68, "Security Force Assistance." 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, and
- develop military department service-specific strategy for SFA capabilities.<sup>25</sup>

JP 3-20, DODI 5000.68, and the aforementioned strategy documents establish SC maintains an enduring role in US grand strategy and military operations. The more operational, forward aspects of SC such as foreign internal defense (FID) and air advising, are often characterized in US strategy as an efficient, low-cost way to defeat terrorist movements and deny VEOs the safe havens they need to mature into international threats. As the introduction noted, these forces and activities also hold promise for complicating strategic competitors' decision calculus—and ideally, disincentivizing 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: air advising and AvFID.

The USAF 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.”<sup>26</sup> This air advising definition requires only that a partner's “national security needs” be complementary to US interests. Though many of the activities within this field are commonly associated with internal COIN or counterterror threats, the United States often uses air advising to bolster an ally's national defense and expeditionary capabilities. However, also note the definition seems to eschew the possibility of air advisors *accompanying* PNs in combat. While the reader can generally assume deployed US forces are authorized to defend themselves, air advisors are usually complementary to the combatant commander's strategy but separate from US or coalition forces prosecuting combat operations.

Whereas the “air advising” definition above provides a broad description, the USAF also provides a definition of *air advising activities* that better captures the *operational* role of air advising as a subset of SC. Air advising activities are “security cooperation efforts conducted in support of combatant commander and/or COMAFFOR/TSOC [commander, Air Force forces/theater special operations command] objectives across the range of military operations.”<sup>27</sup>

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 military operations” seems to leave leeway for advisors to accompany partner forces in combat if the commander deems it necessary.<sup>28</sup>

Finally, the DOD defines 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.”<sup>29</sup>

AvFID is simply a subset of FID conducted by Airmen to bolster PN’s airpower employment, sustainment, and integration.<sup>30</sup> FID expressly *includes* combat operations. The inclusion of a proactive combat role distinguishes AvFID units—usually SOF—from other, general purpose air advisory units.<sup>31</sup> While FID is typically directed at a PN’s internal threats, most “internal” threats meriting a military response are at least externally connected, if not externally supplied or directed.<sup>32</sup> It is possible a new term is needed to describe US support of a sovereign government against a transnational threat, but for the time being, FID is the term of record.

FID became a common US military activity in the latter half of the twentieth century as part of the overarching US 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 and PNs, the United States intends to 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 Air Force SC 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*, “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.”<sup>33</sup> The forward-looking document emphasizes the force-multiplying effects ally capabilities and increased geographic access provides.

In 2016, the Deputy Under Secretary of the Air Force for International Affairs (SAF/IA) published a 16-page document, *Security Cooperation with the United States Air Force*. The document provides “a common understanding and security cooperation lexicon for our international partners, industry, US government interagency, and the joint force to refer to when focused on the air, space and cyberspace domains.”<sup>34</sup> It emphasizes the myriad ways in which SC supports national military objectives, and identifies three specific USAF SC goals:

1. Enable the United States to operate in support of shared interests
2. Enable partners to conduct operations in lieu of the United States
3. Enable partners to operate with the United States<sup>35</sup>

These USAF goals mirror the first two objectives from the DOD SC definition: advancing US interests directly, and Building Partners Capacity (BPC) in order to unilaterally defend themselves, serve as proxies for US forces or operate in US coalitions. The document later emphasizes the third SC goal—access—regarding both geographic basing and logistical throughput, and information sharing.<sup>36</sup> Regarding the entire USAF SC portfolio, the document paints a deliberately broad, multifaceted view. Furthermore, *Security Cooperation with the*

*United States Air Force* clarifies the Air Force's tailored approach to ensuring optimal SC activities by delineating three tiers of allied and PN: 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 SC 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 attachés, foreign area officers, and AMC's two mobility support and advisory squadrons (MSAS) execute these engagements with developing partners.

Capable partners are nations which the "the U.S. Air Force employs a 'total package approach' tailoring SC activities to partner requirements. This approach goes beyond delivering weapon systems to include addressing the partner's tactics, training, procedures and life cycle management."<sup>37</sup> The Air Force prescribes FMSs, 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."<sup>38</sup> This project will focus primarily on SC with these first two tiers, developing and capable partners.

Finally, most capable partners "possess the means to employ and sustain operations for their own national security and contribute to multinational operations."<sup>39</sup> 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.<sup>40</sup> A peer-to-peer mentality characterizes these more traditional, long-standing alliances. Most of the SC 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 SC in the “most capable” tier, but this project is scoped toward air advising and AvFID—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.”<sup>41</sup> 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.”<sup>42</sup> 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, SC activities must be prioritized prudently, and based on maximum demonstrable benefit to US national security objectives. The opportunities for waste in this enterprise are legion. Cost-benefit analysis, demonstrable utility, and combat-proven concepts must rule.

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 SC activities to improve specific capabilities of each PN—the capabilities which will reliably bolster US national interests. USAF doctrine includes several annexes that 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, Air Force doctrine document 3-22 contains a section called “Optimal Solutions,” which clearly reflects its authors’ 15 years of operational experience. 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.”<sup>43</sup> 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.”<sup>44</sup> That is, such missions must display pragmatism and sustainability, so that the US government and military can expect reliable contributions to US 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 approaches to SC espoused by the Air Force nest well within the NSS. Specific to this project, 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 nonstate actors, and denying the goals of emerging regional threats.

Based on the extensive evidence in this chapter, the research concludes that *USAF strategy and doctrine regarding SC are consistent and theoretically sound*. It remains to be seen whether USAF SC 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 SC—particularly AvFID and air advising—in US national defense. Air Force AvFID and air advising constitute a proven, low-cost, small-footprint foreign policy tool which offers enormous potential to combatant commanders executing COIN, counterterrorism, shaping operations, and other varieties of hybrid or political warfare—despite such operations’ inherent difficulties. As the DOD 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 US and multilateral operations while expanding the competitive space in which our adversaries must contend.

Having established the strategic underpinnings and the *enduring utility* of SC, air advising, and AvFID, a survey of the USAF SC enterprise follows in chapter 3. Chapter 4 introduces a loose narrative framework applied to several current USAF air advising and AvFID constructs in the subsequent chapters. These case studies are presented to answer the core question of this research project: *How should the USAF organize and present forces for air advising and AvFID?*

## Notes

1. Department of Defense (DOD), *DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, 206.

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*, xxix, IV–15.

4. For a few samples, see DOD, *AirSea Battle*; Wermeling, “Defeating Anti-Access/Area Denial”; and Mashal and Masood, “Cutting off Pakistan.”

5. Brodie, *Strategy in the Missile Age*, 358.

6. President of the United States (POTUS), *National Security Strategy*, 9.

7. POTUS, 1.

8. McMaster and Cohn, “America First Doesn’t Mean America Alone.”

9. Allison and Zelikow, *Essence of Decision*, 180.

10. Allison and Zelikow, 180.

11. POTUS, *National Security Strategy*.

12. POTUS, 11, 33, 39.

13. POTUS, 1, 55; and Art, “Geopolitics Updated,” 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.”

14. Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, 364.

15. Vick et al., *Air Power in the New Counterinsurgency Era*, 4.

16. Vick et al., 5.

17. Vick et al., 5.

18. DOD, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy*, 4.

19. Ikenberry, “Illusion of Geopolitics,” 82.

20. DOD, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy*, 2.

21. DOD, 8.

22. Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCOS), Joint Publication (JP) 3-20, v.

23. JCOS, x.

24. JCOS, II–1.

25. Summarized in Finch and Garretson, “Air Advising,” 35. Original source: Department of Defense Instruction (DODI) 5000.68, *Security Force Assistance*, 11.

26. Air Force Instruction (AFI) 10-4201 Vol 3, *Air Advising Operations*, 43.

27. AFI 10-4201 Vol 3, 43.

28. Such considerations will usually be clarified by the specific rules of engagement, special instructions, and orders governing a given operation.

29. *DOD Dictionary*, 92.

30. LeMay Center for Doctrine, Annex 3-05, *Special Operations*.

31. Polsinelli, “The Constructive Use of Air Power,” 6.

32. 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.

33. Secretary of the Air Force and Chief of Staff of the Air Force, *Air Force Future Operating Concept*, 31.
34. Secretary of the Air Force—International Affairs (SAF-IA), *Security Cooperation with the United States Air Force*, 1.
35. SAF-IA, 5.
36. SAF-IA, 7.
37. SAF-IA, 7.
38. SAF-IA, 7.
39. SAF-IA, 7.
40. SAF-IA, 7.
41. SAF-IA, 14.
42. SAF-IA, 14.
43. LeMay Center for Doctrine, Annex 3-22, *Foreign Internal Defense*.
44. AFI 10-4201 Vol 3, *Air Advising Operations*, 17–20.

## Chapter 3

# **The United States Air Force Security Cooperation Enterprise Today**

This chapter provides a brief tour of the USAF SC 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.

Although the USAF boasts an array of air advisor units, the enterprise as a whole has major flaws. Air Force SC takes place under a variety of authorities and commands, and therefore lacks unity of effort.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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 PNs.

At a 2016 Air Force Association conference, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) Gen Joseph Dunford called training foreign allies an Air Force “core mission.”<sup>3</sup> He cautioned against treating SC as a secondary mission, because US military strategy is “based on building effective indigenous forces.”<sup>4</sup> (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 [AAF] 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.”<sup>5</sup> 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 SC?<sup>6</sup> 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

SC 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 SC 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 SC enterprise and the air advisor mission reflect highest-level strategic guidance, as detailed in the previous chapter; however, 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 SC 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.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, in their official posture statements, *all 7 US GCCs* expressly commit to building allies' and partners' military capacities. This clear disconnect leads to sustainment problems. There are simply not enough trained Airmen and specialized units to perform all the air advising work demanded by the GCCs, 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.<sup>8</sup> 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 SC activities, but rather the Air Force's many SC 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 FMS as well. AETC also hosts thousands of international Airmen each year in its many programs, from undergraduate pilot training to the Senior Noncommissioned Officer Academy and the Air War College.<sup>9</sup> Another tried-and-true method

of interaction is through multinational training and exercises, including foreign participation in 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 institutionalized ways in which the USAF general purpose force (as opposed to SOFs) builds partnerships and interoperability.

A more specialized but long-running SC asset is AFSOC's CAA 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 6 SOS. The 6 SOS provides a unique air-minded FID capability to the DOD, and its services are always in high demand. 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 SC goals, such as expeditionary air advisors tasked and deployed on an ad hoc or even nonvolunteer 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 [CAFTT]) and Afghanistan (primarily as NATO Train-Advise-Assist Command-Air [TAAC-Air]). CAFTT is examined in greater detail in chapter 6. To reiterate: because of the USAF'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 BPC than their peers in the 6 SOS and other permanent units.

Newer USAF constructs with exciting prospects for long-term sustainability and impact are AMC's MSAS, United States Air Forces Europe's (USAFE) and Pacific Air Forces' (PACAF) permanently assigned air advisor branches, and AETC's A-29 light attack aircraft



training program for the AAF. These units are mostly filled with volunteers, with the occasional nonvolunteer required to meet operational requirements. These organizations have regional or even single-country alignments, and they focus on niche capabilities needed by PNs.

The two MSASs help develop PNs' aviation support infrastructure, with a heavy focus on maintenance, logistics, and force protection.<sup>10</sup> The 517 MSAS is based at Travis Air Force Base (AFB), California, and performs engagement missions in Latin America. The 818 MSAS out of Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst is aligned with United States Africa Command (USAFRICOM). 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."<sup>11</sup> While the MSAS works with partners on a variety of aviation enterprise development programs, it does not conduct actual flying training.<sup>12</sup>

Created in the early 2010s, each MSAS was originally designed to complement a mobility advisory squadron (MAS). Manned by pilot-advisors operating a light mobility aircraft (LiMA) such as the Cessna 208 Caravan, the MAS would have trained PNs in military air mobility with the goal of "increasing their capacity to govern through presence and persistence in otherwise inaccessible regions of the country."<sup>13</sup> Alongside MSAS teams, the MAS could have accelerated Developing Partners' operational flying programs and help build the organizational competencies necessary to sustain air forces that are more capable. Because most foreign governments, particularly in developing countries, additionally use their militaries for many civil missions, the 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 FID mission sets. Unfortunately, the MAS/LiMA program was cancelled following the US budget sequestration in 2013, leaving just the two MSASs 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 a 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 contingency response. They do not have a flying mission.

Finally, the A-29 presents a hybrid mission, comprised of FMS, direct commercial sales, training, and air advising 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 SC. 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.”<sup>14</sup> Each funding authority has its own restrictions, which can limit the effectiveness of a given effort and the viability of a certain unit within a certain command. For example, the MSAS mission of BPC may not fit well within AMC, whose primary Title 10 responsibility is the rapid global mobility of US assets to provide combat forces to US combatant commanders. Similarly, AETC’s priority is recruiting, accessing, training, and educating Airmen for the USAF. Although the A-29 program and its Airmen have garnered several command- and service-level awards, at an enterprise level it is bound to be a “black sheep” among AETC’s array of commissioning sources, aircrew training pipelines, and PME schools. Because each command has a different construct for air advising, there is still no established wing-level organization, community of practice, or career path for USAF air advisors.

The service-level questions for these programs is not of their operational value—that has been proven in multiple real-world operations, as explained in the following case studies. Rather, the questions are whether these organizations are sustainable themselves in their current command structures, and if a service-level reorganization of the USAF SC enterprise might beneficially colocate 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-USAFRICOM, combining it with USAFE's air advisor branch at Ramstein Air Base). The concluding chapter addresses these questions.

Finally, the Afghanistan-Pakistan (AFPAK) Hands (APH) program provides an example of unsustainability within the DOD SC enterprise. A joint program, AFPAK Hands assigns young field grade officers from across the services—pilots, tank commanders, sailors, and staff officers—to four-year SC 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 US and Afghan authorities in departments that rarely leverage their years of tactical and operational expertise.<sup>15</sup> At least half of the program's participants are selected on a nonvolunteer-basis.<sup>16</sup> The program's long deployments and proven negative career impacts inspire fear, disdain, and even separation from the military among frontline officers.<sup>17</sup> 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."<sup>18</sup> Had the program yielded some strategic successes in Afghanistan—but it is widely regarded as a failure, even as it continues to this day—negative impacts on some personnel might have been acceptable.<sup>19</sup>

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 nonvolunteer officers to address a long-term geopolitical challenge (poor Afghan governance and security).<sup>20</sup> 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 field a weapon system, secure funding, or deliver kinetic effects. This is the tragedy of the AFPAK Hands Program.<sup>21</sup>

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 PME between the two yearlong deployments.<sup>22</sup> 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 SC enterprise.

Going forward, the Air Force must better institutionalize its SC forces and missions, with an eye toward the enterprise’s three overarching 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.”<sup>23</sup> The slightly different aims of SC as articulated in the DOD definition—US interests, partners’ capabilities, and US 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 FID, to aggregating coalition combat power against a peer competitor. The broad utility of SC and air advising reinforces General Dunford’s admonishment that effective SC must be a primary consideration for the Air Force.

If done well, partnerships can enable a joint force commander’s efforts and advance the commander’s goals. For instance, PN forces will be certainly called upon in future conflicts to defend their own airspace, coastlines, and bases, and support coalition efforts, while US and coalition forces launch combat missions forward from those bases. Put another way, China does not want US-friendly Southeast

Asian air forces proficient in covert infiltration/exfiltration, personnel recovery, and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR). VEOs in the United States Central Command (CENTCOM) and USAFRICOM AORs do not want to fight sovereign governments with proficient light attack, ISR, and air mobility forces. Furthermore, relationships forged with PN through FID 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. However, US 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 SC enterprise is critical to current and future operations, therefore its unity of effort and sustainability must be improved.

Air Force SC 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 US must rely on partners to augment Air Force capacity, or for shared access to basing and other infrastructure in crisis regions.”<sup>24</sup> Operational Air Force guidance maintains 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 nations can operate and sustain their capabilities.”<sup>25</sup> That is, these missions must display unity of effort and sustainability.

## Notes

1. Corum and Johnson, *Airpower in Small Wars*, 423. In the conclusion to their book, Corum and Johnson argued for devoting more Air Force organizations and resources to small wars and foreign internal defense: 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 nonvolunteers to do air advising, versus Airmen with the background, international fluency, and desire to train foreign forces.

3. Mehta, “Dunford.”

4. Mehta.

5. Mehta.

6. Joint Publication (JP) 3-20, *Security Cooperation*, x, II-1.

7. Lemay Center for Doctrine, Annex 3-05, *Special Operations*. 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.

8. Lemay Center for Doctrine, Annex 3-22, *Foreign Internal Defense*. 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.”

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

10. MSAS operational leader, email to author, 14 December 2017.

11. Polsinelli, “Constructive Use of Air Power,” 28.

12. Polsinelli, 28.

13. Klausner, “Can Air Mobility Command Meet New Building Partnership Capacity Objectives?” 8.

14. Air Force Instruction (AFI) 10-4201 Vol 3, *Air Advising Operations*, 20.

15. Muir, “AFPAK Hands Program Overview”; and Hand, “Lament of an AFPAK Hand.”

16. Lujan, “Wanted: Ph.Ds Who Can Win A Bar Fight”; and AFPAK Hands, “Opportunity Beckons.”

17. Hognose, “Who’s Getting Riffed?”; and AFPAK Hands, “General Discussion.”

18. Dempsey, “Our Generals Failed in Afghanistan.”

19. Dempsey.

20. Mayfield, “Handcuffed.”

21. Mayfield.
22. Korzen, "AFPAK Hands Enter the Cockpit."
23. SAF-IA, *Security Cooperation with the United States Air Force*, 5.
24. Secretary of the Air Force and Chief of Staff of the Air Force, *Air Force Future Operating Concept*, 31.
25. AFI 10-4201 Vol 3, *Air Advising Operations*, 17–20.

## **Case Selection, Research Design, and Methodology**

As seen in the preceding chapters, SC 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 6 SOS in the Philippines, 2002–15; the expeditionary air advisors in Iraq, 2004–13; and the 81st Fighter Squadron (FS), 2015–present. In accordance with Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett’s recommendations regarding social science case study selection, these cases exist within a single subclass of events relevant to an overarching research objective.<sup>1</sup> 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 their desired effects. That is not to say that OEF-P is similar, on the whole, to OIF. 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 US Special Operations Command (USSOCOM). From 2002 to 2015, the 6 SOS deployed many small teams in support of 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 US SOF approach to SC. US forces in OEF-P maintained an advisory role, with the partner force executing all combat operations. The US-Philippine coalition seriously degraded an emerging transnational threat while keeping the US footprint limited.

During the same time, 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 USAF created ad hoc expeditionary units manned by Airmen from 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 US-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, US-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 81 FS Moody AFB, Georgia, about 50 USAF air advisors train AAF pilots in a yearlong syllabus that combines elements of USAF undergraduate pilot training and combat flying courses. Members of the 81 FS 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 COIN fight.

In all three cases, the USAF 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 PN. In each case, USAF forces were *deployed* to work and advise in the PN, differentiating these cases from other SC activities where foreign personnel are simply integrated into ongoing USAF programs on US territory (such as undergraduate pilot training, or PME). These cases represent the operational side of air advising, in which USAF Airmen serve alongside PN 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: US 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.”<sup>2</sup> While readers of various backgrounds—military leaders, policymakers, participants in the events described—are sure to find an 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 SC 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.”<sup>3</sup> 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 SC such as the culture and absorptive capacity of potential partners are addressed as important *contextual* factors. USAF leaders should accept 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 USAF 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 SC, evaluating an air advisor operation is not like evaluating a land war, 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 engagement with an objective outcome. Even when some measure of victory (or defeat) can be clearly tied to US 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.”<sup>4</sup> These particular SC and air advising missions are difficult to assess due to their recency and the ongoing nature of some of the conflicts. With 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 SC—US interests, partners’ capabilities, and US access—is also emphasized.

The selection of sources, and the structure of the following case studies, are designed to emphasize the aspects of each case most relevant to the policy-focused research question: how should the USAF organize and present forces for air advising? To highlight the relevant factors, the cases are structured to assess similarities and differences across four areas:

1. *Organization*—How was the air advisor unit organized? Under what command? With what authorities? Who are the personnel involved? How are they selected and trained?
2. *Force presentation*—How does the air advisor unit present forces to the combatant commander or task force commander?
3. *Operations*—What did the air advisors do? What does an air advisor operation with this unit look like in real life?
4. *Evaluation*—What were the operational results? The strategic results? What lessons can be learned and applied to future SC 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 SC enterprise. The first case study examines the 6 SOS and their work during OEF-P.

## **Notes**

1. George and Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development*, 69.
2. George and Bennett, 69.
3. George and Bennett, 69.
4. Clausewitz, *On War*, 80.

## Chapter 5

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

*Deditissimus Vincit—The Most Committed Wins.*

—6 SOS motto

The Air Force's premier, dedicated unit of advisors is AFSOC's 6 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 HQ AFSOC at Hurlburt Field, the 6 SOS provides a unique air-minded FID capability to the DOD, and its services are always in high demand.

In an interview, one seasoned AFSOC CAA emphasized that many facets of air advising—building relationships, BPC, 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.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, according to the operators, AFSOC CAAs perform SC missions that synergistically advance *US interests* and *partners' capabilities*, with enhanced *US access* as a by-product.

AFSOC advertises that its CAAs “are tasked to carry out Foreign Internal Defense, SEA, and Unconventional Warfare missions on behalf of USSOCOM.”<sup>2</sup> 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.”<sup>3</sup> The document also specifies that, “USSOCOM employs mission-tailored CAA teams to support combatant commanders’ regional objectives.”<sup>4</sup> Before examining a case of these air advisors in a real-world operation, it is important to explain *who* the CAAs are—how they are selected, trained, organized, and sent forward as “mission-tailored teams.”

## Organization

The all-volunteer nature of the 6 SOS, 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 HQ AFSOC, Directorate of Manpower and Personnel (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 control parties (TACP), security forces, medical personnel, and more. The 6 SOS 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 IPs in their airframe; TACPs must already be qualified as joint terminal attack controllers (JTAC), and so on. Members of the 371st SOCTS 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.”<sup>5</sup> 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 USAF, 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.<sup>6</sup>

So, applicants who want to “eat the goat” are those who understand cross-cultural communication, and who are comfortable in non-Western professional and social settings—a person who, if their USAF professional records are above average, might make good Air Commandos.

Acceptance rates for the 6 SOS 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.<sup>7</sup> The open-source recruiting information put out by the 6 SOS 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.”<sup>8</sup>

The four phases of the CAA training pipeline are advanced tactical fieldcraft, advisor tradecraft, culture and 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 toward translating an Airman's USAF skill sets into advisor-specific abilities.

An aviator example is perhaps the clearest illustration: an Airman may come to the 6 SOS as a highly accomplished IP in the CV-22 Osprey, a multimission, tiltrotor aircraft with advanced avionics, employed by the USAF for special operations infiltration, exfiltration, and resupply missions. At \$90 million per aircraft, most PNs 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 the pilot is to complete his conversion from USAF IP to CAA.

According to AFSOC CAAs, 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 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 USAF build a wing-level air advisor organization based around the 6 SOS.<sup>9</sup>

## 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.

The core deployable unit of the 6 SOS is the operational aviation detachment (OAD): a team composed of 16 Airmen with 16 different specialties, divided into six unit type codes (UTC). 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 OAD:

**Table 1. 6th Special Operations Squadron Operational Aviation Detachment**

<i>UTC<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>Person</i>	<i>Specialty/Role</i>	<i>Operational Capability</i>
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 SMA <sup>b</sup>	
3	6	ISR <sup>c</sup> pilot	ISR
	7	ISR sensor operator	
4	8	Armed reconnaissance pilot	Precision strike
	9	Armed reconnaissance sensor operator	
5	10	SERE <sup>d</sup> 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

Source: 6th Special Operations Squadron, "Foreign Internal Defense and the Combat Aviation Advisor," Unclassified briefing, no date.

<sup>a</sup> Unit type code

<sup>b</sup> Special missions aviator. A highly trained enlisted aviator who performs the roles of flight engineer, loadmaster, and gunner, as required by the airframe and mission fills the SMA crew position in Air Force Special Operations Command.

<sup>c</sup> Intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance

<sup>d</sup> Survival, evasion, resistance, and escape

The 6 SOS receives mission taskings through the following process. USSOCOM identifies an operational need for aviation capability improvement in a PN's air force. If the need is confirmed and prioritized by USSOCOM 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 predeployment 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 6 SOS and because it 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 of operations enables AFSOC CAA planners and operators to consistently tailor teams based on the state of the military-to-military 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).

As an example, an OAD might deploy one or two unit personnel serving in a joint team for its first full engagement with a PN following a site survey or capabilities assessment. If the USSOCOM 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 6 SOS 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 SC.

## Operations

From 2002 to 2015, the 6 SOS deployed at least 18 teams to the Philippines for two to four months at a time. The CAAs initially worked under Joint Task Force 510, and stood up Joint Special Operations Task Force–Philippines, executing OEF–P. 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 (ASG) 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 US Navy Commodore George Dewey’s Asiatic Squadron defeated the Spanish fleet and captured Manila harbor in May 1898. The United States 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 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. US forces then assisted the newly sovereign Philippine government from 1946 to 1954, together putting down a rebellion by the Hukabalahap Communist group 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 US forces maintained a permanent presence at Clark AFB, Philippines, and Subic Bay Naval Station, Philippines. The bases provided a significant logistics hub during the Vietnam War. The United States began paying for basing rights after a treaty renegotiation in 1979. On 15 June 1991, a volcano eruption devastated Clark AFB 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 US forces in December 1991; forces departed 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 ASG.<sup>10</sup>

Tensions 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 US 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 planned and perpetrated the 1993 World Trade Center bombing. Yousef and his uncle, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed—the eventual mastermind of the 9/11 attacks—planned the Manila airline bombing operation with the financial support of Osama bin Laden and the support of the local ASG. 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 held the hostages, the September 11, 2001 attacks reoriented the entire United States security apparatus almost overnight. The events of 9/11, combined with ASG's belligerence and known ties to Al Qaeda, opened a window of opportunity for US military involvement in the Philippines' counterterrorism fight.<sup>11</sup>

The colonial history between the United States and the Philippines figured heavily in the context of OEF-P. This context largely determined the US-Philippine decision to fight Islamic insurgents and terrorists in the Philippines using a FID approach, rather than a US-led direct-action campaign or large-scale COIN. Remember that a key aspect of air advising and FID, according to current CAAs and the strategy they act out, is the ability to see a conflict through the PN'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 influencing the US-Philippine relationship. In the national security climate of 2001 and 2002, it seems the United States

was destined to counter the Philippines' Islamic insurgency in some way. Given the American political climate at the time of a "Global War on Terror," it is a strategic triumph that US political and defense leaders pursued a FID operational approach.

Filipino statesmen and civilians remained wary of any US involvement that might have been perceived as degrading the Philippines' sovereignty. Furthermore, with a war underway in Afghanistan, there was inclination among US 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 US forces in the Philippines. The reservation of military force *exclusively* for Philippine forces helped increase the legitimacy of the Philippine government as perceived by the population of the southern islands.<sup>12</sup> By successfully incorporating historical and cultural context into their planning, and keeping the US presence discrete, leaders of the SOF task force helped set the conditions for a successful COIN campaign.

### **Enter the 6th Special Operations Squadron**

Given the internal nature of the threat, and the desire to keep US 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 (PAF) joint planning and COIN employment. In early 2002, a small group from the 6 SOS (not an entire OAD) deployed to assess the state of the UH-1H helicopter fleet in the PAF 205th Tactical Helicopter Wing (THW) 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 205 THW, 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 6 SOS. Knowing 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 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 Joint Special Operations Task Force staff, and continuing engagements with PAF partner units.<sup>13</sup>

In subsequent years, teams of 6 SOS CAAs built on those initial deployments. Two larger missions in 2003 instructed several Philippine helicopter crews in NVG flight operations and aerial gunnery, as well as the sustainment and training activities necessary to keep these capabilities viable in the absence of US 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).<sup>14</sup> 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 (CAS) 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.<sup>15</sup> This emphasis on PN 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 IPs, aircraft commanders, and crew chiefs.

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 COIN campaign: more risk could be accepted in the planning process and on the battlefield with the knowledge that PAF UH-1 Iroquois helicopters could provide "dustoff" CASEVAC capability as well as on-scene or en route medical care in the event of casualties.<sup>16</sup> 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). 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 CAS (often a USAF fighter pilot), airmobile operations (an Army helicopter pilot), and combat support functions. Together the LCE provided operational-level advising on operational intelligence 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 US JTAC training.<sup>17</sup> 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 US strikes in other parts of the world.<sup>18</sup>

Note that many of the high-payoff joint capabilities described above—air assault, CASEVAC, CAS—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. Outstanding operational results can be achieved through this sort of campaign with these input measures and a focused, iterative effort.

## 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 the group's known membership had been reduced by more than fifty percent and its links to Al Qaeda "severed."<sup>19</sup> Boot and Bennet pointed out many of the top leaders of Abu Sayyaf and another group, Jemaah Islamiyah, had been eliminated by a "surgical," intelligence-driven campaign. This was according

to one Philippine commander; his words clearly reflect the advice and messaging of US SOF.<sup>20</sup> Finally, the article pointed out the group's remaining factions resembled organized crime groups more than an insurgency or political terror network.<sup>21</sup> Significantly, devolution into mere organized crime is one of the positive ways (to broader society) that terror groups can *end*, according to Prof. Audrey Cronin of American University.<sup>22</sup>

Subsequent studies confirm OEF-P's positive operational impact. A 2010 think tank report prepared for the US Army Counterinsurgency Center stated unequivocally, "The strategic situation has improved in the south and the active collaboration between the US and Philippine government appears to have solidified their relationship."<sup>23</sup> 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 collaboration, reestablished at a very reasonable costs."<sup>24</sup> 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."<sup>25</sup>

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."<sup>26</sup> The study explains further:

Three types of evidence support the aforementioned 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, and
3. poll data showing decreased support for the ASG and increased satisfaction with government security forces.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, OEF-P serves as a representative case for 6 SOS and the broader US SOF approach to SC: 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.<sup>28</sup> Due in part to the efforts of the 6 SOS, OEF-P advanced all three broad goals of SC from 2002 to 2015.<sup>29</sup>



If these sources agree that OEF-P was an operational success—a recent proof-of-concept for small-footprint SOF interventions and FID—a reasonable 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)?<sup>30</sup>

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* COINs 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* COIN strategy employed in OEF-P.<sup>31</sup> 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 percent of ISIS-held territory in Iraq and Syria.<sup>32</sup>

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. However, US-Philippines relations have soured in recent years due to factors that seem outside 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 attempt to reduce US influence.<sup>33</sup> 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.<sup>34</sup> Yet the Philippine ambassador to China has publicly stated that the Philippines wishes to maintain its “historic alliance with the U.S.”<sup>35</sup> 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.<sup>36</sup>

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.”<sup>37</sup> To summarize, it remains to be seen whether the US-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 US FID approach in OEF-P.

## Notes

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

2. 492nd Special Operations Wing (SOW), “Combat Aviation Advisor Application Procedures.”

3. 492 SOW.

4. 492 SOW.

5. Interview with Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) combat aviation advisor (CAA), 31 January 2018.

6. Interview, AFSOC CAA.

7. Interview, AFSOC CAA.

8. 6th Special Operations Squadron (SOS), “The Most Committed Wins.”

9. Corum and Johnson, *Airpower in Small Wars*, 437–39; and Vick et al., *Air Power in the New Counterinsurgency Era*, 136–46.

10. Abu Sayyaf Group 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 was an older, more political, umbrella organization that connected various southern rebel and terror groups. Jemaah Islamiyah was a small, violent group based in Indonesia, with a presence in the Philippines. Jemaah Islamiyah was responsible for the 2002 Bali bombings.

11. Robinson, “The SOF Experience in the Philippines,” 152; and Swain, “Case Study: Operation Enduring Freedom–Philippines (OEF–P),” 2, 9.

12. Swain, “Case Study: OEF–P,” 3, 23–24, 27.

13. This chronology is based upon two primary sources: Dipoma, “U.S. Foreign Policy and FID; and Jacobs, “6th Special Operations Squadron.” 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. Their use of the word “qualified” here risks obscuring a relevant detail. All night-vision-goggle (NVG) training for the Pacific Air Force’s initial cadre of NVG helicopter crews was indeed conducted by 6 SOS instructors. However, once the crews met acceptable proficiency standards, the US 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 combat aviation advisors.

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

16. Boot and Bennet, “Treading Softly in the Philippines”; and Dipoma, interview.

17. Senior USAF field grade officer/air advisor and 2007–08 OEF–P participant, email to author, 22 March 2018.

18. Farolan, “Air Force Broncos or U.S. Predators?”

19. Boot, and Bennet, “Treading Softly in the Philippines.”

20. Maj Gen Juancho Sabban, quoted in Boot and Bennet, “Treading Softly in the Philippines.”

21. Boot and Bennet, “Treading Softly in the Philippines.”

22. Cronin, *How Terrorism Ends*, 205.

23. Swain, “Case Study: OEF-P,” 29.

24. Swain, 29.

25. Dipoma, “Right-sizing Intervention,” vi.

26. Robinson, Johnston, and Oak, *US Special Operations Forces in the Philippines*, 114.

27. Robinson, Johnston, and Oak, 114.

28. OEF-P’s execution reflects the strategy of *precautionary COIN* recommended by Vick et al, *Airpower in the COIN Era*, 5, 70, 72.

29. One addendum to this story is that the rotary-wing advisory mission central to the 6 SOS’s success in OEF-P has since been reassigned to the US Army. Ideally, the Army will integrate some 6 SOS best practices in air advising with its own vast experience in helicopter operations and training foreign forces.

30. Dolman, *Pure Strategy*, 18.

31. Vick et al, *Airpower in the COIN Era*, 70–72. Various types of COIN strategy are described within.

32. Harrigan, “How ISIS was Defeated in Iraq”; and Hebert, “In Case You Missed it.”

33. Galang, “U.S., China, and Duterte.”

34. Heydarian, “Duterte’s Dance with China.”

35. Galang, “U.S., China, and Duterte.”

36. Galang.

37. Heydarian, “Duterte’s Dance with China.”

## Chapter 6

# **Expeditionary Air Advisors in Iraq, 2004–11**

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 USAF 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 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 US forces in December 2011 and the subsequent defeat of Iraqi forces by ISIS in 2014. (ISIS's eventual defeat in 2017, effected by US 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 USAF, and negligible strategic gains in Iraq.

Iraq presented a confluence of challenges to successful SC and air advising—some structural, others self-imposed. One challenge was that of reconstituting a foreign air force that 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 Iraqi conflict, 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 US Army-led Coalition Military Assistance Training Team (CMATT), from “squadron mentors” embedded with brand-new Iraqi flying units, to C-130 Advisory Support Teams colocated with USAF C-130 units in southern Iraq. In late 2005, United States Central Command Air Forces (USCENTAF) took a leadership role in the SC effort, creating the CAFTT. 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.<sup>1</sup> A more detailed look at these operations, starting with historical context, reveals several lessons for US SC and air advising efforts.

### Historical Context

After decimating the Iraqi Air Force (IqAF) in 1991 during Operation Desert Storm, the USAF 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 (CAP). 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 dozens of Iraqi aircraft testing the no-fly zones, shooting down at least one, 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 IqAF’s combat capability atrophied; however, their combat capability was not tested during the subsequent 2003 US-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.<sup>2</sup>

The Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) disbanded the IqAF 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 IqAF 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 IqAF, and set about acquiring an 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 USAF 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 CAAs in order to leverage their AvFID experience, but the 6 SOS was only one squadron, with worldwide commitments. Nowhere in the Air 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 US 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."<sup>3</sup>

The organization and training of the expeditionary air advisors in Iraq improved somewhat with the belated assumption of a greater

leadership role by the USAF. In late 2005, after successfully petitioning the MNSTC-I commander, USCENTAF created the CAFTT to manage the SC effort with the IqAF. From late 2005 into 2007, USCENTAF and CAFTT made some systematic improvements in advisor organization, advisor training, and Iraqi acquisitions.

Given air advisor operations in 2004 and 2005 were disorganized, USCENTAF and CAFTT took some steps from 2005 to 2007 to stabilize and guide the effort. On the recommendation of an October 2005 USCENTAF assessment team, two successive USCENTAF 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.<sup>4</sup> Based on feedback from the assessment team as well as CAFTT personnel themselves, the USCENTAF commanders judged these longer tours absolutely necessary to achieve some modicum of continuity in Iraq air advisor operations.<sup>5</sup> Recall from chapter 2 that SC 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, USCENTAF clearly judged them to be operationally necessary based on the nature of the mission and the lack of a sufficient USCENTAF-relevant advisor force.

USCENTAF 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 deployed to Iraq, USCENTAF created a HQ-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 predeployment training, and advisor placement and utilization in theater.<sup>6</sup> By late 2007, in accordance with CAFTT's ambitious campaign plan, hundreds of USAF advisors were working at all levels of the IqAF, from the service chief's staff to aircraft cockpits, flightlines, and maintenance backshops.<sup>7</sup>

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 COIN theory, air advisor practices, Arabic language, Middle Eastern culture, and combat survival skills.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> 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 activated in early 2008; its first class graduated in March of that year. AMC's Expeditionary Center at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey hosted the course. The course eventually grew into a stand-alone USAF Air Advisor Academy in 2012 (still under AETC authority). By then the school boasted a capacity to train 1,500 Airmen per year. As of mid-2014, it trained 4,300 advisors, including 1,227 in 2013 alone.<sup>10</sup> 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 to 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 senior USAF leadership choices 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 long-term Air Force advisor commitments. 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 US training mission. In fact, to this day, for lack of having built itself a better option, the Air Force continues to task nonvolunteers 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 more closely tied to aircraft acquisitions than they normally are. For that reason, the aircraft that entered service with the new IqAF provide a useful and revealing lens to view advisor operations of the time period.

Cully summarizes the broader challenges of rebuilding the IqAF, 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.<sup>11</sup>

In 2007, an independent US 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 invest in maintenance and logistics to sustain new capabilities.<sup>12</sup> One representative case is the Comp Air single-engine transport and ISR aircraft that is tied to the air advisor story by tragedy.

In late 2004, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) gifted seven Comp Air 7SLX aircraft to the IqAF. 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.<sup>13</sup> Over the course of the next year, Iraqi crews and US 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.<sup>14</sup> Despite their shortcomings, the Comp Airs were immediately thrown into the COIN 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, Maj William Downs, as well as an IqAF copilot, and three USAF special operations troops.<sup>15</sup> A US-led investigation concluded that there was no evidence of hostile action nor of major mechanical failures, while reporting the aircraft carried nearly 500 pounds over its technical maximum gross weight. Cully notes 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.<sup>16</sup>

Cully also posits that organizational constructs were partially to blame. Instead of deploying with an OAD, 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."<sup>17</sup> USAF training and operational flying 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-HQ 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, thankfully with no fatalities. In the months that followed, the USAF 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. The UAE modifications were discarded and the engine, propeller, and wings were replaced. 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 future ISR needs.<sup>18</sup>

The Comp Air was the most painful representative of several ill-advised, poorly supported aircraft acquisitions in the early days of rebuilding the IqAF. 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 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 IqAF pilot training at Kirkuk Air Base in northern Iraq. The squadron’s mission and name were unique; though the US Air Force activated its CAA 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 USAF 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 IqAF operated three RC-208s and three AC-208s.<sup>19</sup> The 52 EFTS later relocated to Tikrit Air Base, Iraq, while the Cessna 172 and 208 training programs continued at Kirkuk as the IqAF 201st Training Squadron.

The USAF 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. From December 2009 to 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 held an operational leadership role in the Iraqi T-6 program was kind enough to share his experience.<sup>20</sup> His insights mirror many themes of air advising that appear 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 there would be an opening in Iraq for a one-year position as a T-6 flight-training squadron commander.<sup>21</sup> 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 52 EFTS at Tikrit Air Base.<sup>22</sup>

The Iraqis purchased T-6 Texan II advanced trainers through a FMS case administered by SAF/IA, with the details managed between CAFTT in Iraq and an air advisor office at HQ AETC, Randolph AFB, Texas.<sup>23</sup> The FMS case with the Iraqi government included a

force of USAF IP—a somewhat common clause in major foreign aircraft buys—and US contract maintenance for the aircraft.

The Airmen who would constitute the 52 EFTS were trained, active T-6 IPs. Their former commander estimates that as many as two-thirds were volunteers, but few volunteered out of great interest in air advising or training foreign forces.<sup>24</sup> In 2009 and 2010, total US troop levels in Iraq and Afghanistan peaked above 190,000 before declining to about 150,000. At that time, *many* USAF officers were tasked for individual deployments to Iraq, Afghanistan, and support bases throughout the Middle East. Some of these deployments involved flying underpowered, thin-skinned Cessna 172s at Kirkuk, or Cessna 208s in Iraq or Afghanistan. Many of these deployments were non-flying positions, and a yearlong. Therefore, for current T-6 IPs, a 4- or 6-month deployment teaching Iraqi T-6 training was desirable by comparison.

The USAF IPs went through the Air Advisor Course at the USAF Expeditionary Center. When asked to comment on the course's utility, an interviewee recalled the course's cultural lessons that later proved valuable as he attempted to connect the skills of USAF IPs with the needs of Iraqi students. He mentioned the Arabic lessons, while brief, provided the social confidence that comes with knowing a few polite phrases and pleasantries. On the other hand, the former commander noted the overall course structure 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 air advisor training made significant strides since the 2004-2007 time period, largely thanks to the AETC-run, AMC-hosted Air Advisor Course.

At Tikrit, the IPs of the 52 EFTS 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 and T-6 Pilot Instructor Training. 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."<sup>25</sup> Essentially, they were training the future core of the IqAF.

The irony of the 52 EFTS's mission was not lost on its pilots. Another operational leader from the program, a USAF fighter pilot, wrote, "This mission seems quite ironic considering that in my previous

three deployments, the US-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 52 EFTS included some of the same individuals I prevented from flying in those zones—a situation that made for interesting discussions.”<sup>26</sup>

Despite any irony or actual animosity that may have colored interactions, the USAF mission to build a core group of high-performing IqAF IPs can be judged a modest success. Eleven of the 12 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 IP 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 IqAF. 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 US departure.

Some would counter dependence on contract maintenance was a necessary short-term measure because of the Iraqis themselves. In 2013, US Army Lt Gen Robert Caslen, the commander of the Office of Security Cooperation-Iraq (OSC-I), 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.”<sup>27</sup> 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. However, we cannot definitively know whether the Iraqis could have maintained their T-6s; the maintenance advisor capability was never organized and presented alongside the IPs of the 52 EFTS. For that reason, some may argue that the US government was somewhat complicit in the collapse of the Iraqi T-6 program.

The 52 EFTS produced 11 IqAF IPs before handing the program to the Iraqis in September 2011.<sup>28</sup> 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 US withdrawal in October 2011, and the last remaining large unit of US troops left 18 December 2011.<sup>29</sup> Although US contractors were not formally included in the removal of troops and some remained at bases like Tikrit, many of them eventually withdrew as well. Without the constant support of US forces and contractors, the airfield and the aircraft fell into disrepair.<sup>30</sup> By early 2013, less than two years after the US withdrawal, the IqAF T-6 fleet was in such disrepair that all 15 aircraft were put into long-term storage.<sup>31</sup> During the same time, Iraq began ordering American F-16 advanced multi-role 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, ISIS took over much of eastern Syria and began to threaten western Iraq. With US Airmen and aircraft long departed, and Iraqi 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 Baghdad's aid and flew attack sorties against ISIS.<sup>32</sup> Yet it is difficult to find evidence that any of these measures were effective.

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 57-millimeter, anti-aircraft gun.<sup>33</sup> 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 advancement of ISIS have been hard to obtain. However, at least to one journalist, the disappointing results of the US SC effort seemed clear enough: from 2003 to 2012, the United States spent \$25 billion rebuilding the Iraqi military—that then failed to prevent the terror group ISIS from seizing most of northern and western Iraq.<sup>34</sup>

The USAF-IqAF security cooperation story did not end with the US withdrawal, nor with the rise of ISIS. As mentioned earlier, the Iraqi Ministry of Defense began purchasing American F-16 fighters before US troop withdrawal. The US DOD first announced the



contract in September 2011. In 2012, Iraqi fighter pilot candidates began F-16 training with US Air National Guard IPs of the 162nd 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 US IPs.)<sup>35</sup> 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 air-strikes against ISIS facilities, supplies, and forces in their first year of operations.<sup>36</sup> By then a US-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 multibillion 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 somewhat resolved by an important detail of the Iraqi F-16 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 IqAF proved unable to maintain its own aircraft. Under the terms of the F-16 FMS case, Iraq and the United States government pay US contractors to maintain the Iraqi aircraft and their air base.<sup>37</sup>

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.<sup>38</sup> In February 2018, US CENTCOM established a higher-level organization called the Coalition Aviation Advisory and Training Team (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.”<sup>39</sup> While these sound like worthy goals, one cannot help but notice the similarity of the CAATT name to the “CAFTT” of 2005–09, and the deeper 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 US servicemembers and strategists: in the publicly released version, the new plan’s timeline is indefinite.<sup>40</sup>

## Evaluation

Having lamented what transpired with the USAF effort to rebuild the IqAF, it may be revealing to consider what might have been. Given the task of rebuilding the IqAF, the USAF 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, similar to how weapons officers are dispersed today.<sup>41</sup> This group would have required only Iraq-specific training and typical predeployment training before its talents and capabilities were deployed. 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 ready to go niche capability. Yet it seems significant that 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 deployed the whole unit to Iraq. Once there, the group could have been parceled out into a CAFTT HQ 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 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 US government players 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 involved employing 6 SOS CAAs as deployed team leaders, with teams consisting of the general purpose force, ad hoc expeditionary air advisors that were so prevalent at the time.<sup>42</sup> This approach leveraged the deep expertise of the 6 SOS 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 advisory efforts in theater were oriented toward operationalizing combat capabilities (versus teaching fundamentals).<sup>43</sup> 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 author's special task force approach or the hybrid approach would have demonstrated same level of operational gains, and likely more, while exhibiting greater economy of force than the ad hoc approach defined by 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 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 US 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 recently destroyed, especially in countries with significant political, cultural, and economic impediments to US-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 SC. Air advising in Iraq did not demonstrably advance *US interests*. The effort did improve the *partner's capabilities* somewhat, adding C-130 airlift and a small cadre of US-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. In addition, although the issue was well beyond the scope of air advising, *US military access* to Iraq was reduced to near zero by the end of 2011.

## Notes

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.

2. Cully, *Adapt or Fail*, 4. Much of the historical narrative summarized herein relies upon Mr. Cully’s highly detailed work; errors that remain are my own.

3. Cully, 28.

4. Cully, 53, 63, 81.

5. Cully, 53, 63, 81.

6. Cully, 100.

7. Allardice, and Head, “Coalition Air Force Transition Team,” 6.

8. Cully, *Adapt or Fail*, 71–72.

9. Keltz, “Getting Our Partners Airborne,” 6.

10. Keltz, “Getting Our Partners Airborne,” 7.

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, 122.

13. Cully, 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, 15–16.

15. The IqAF pilot was Capt Ali Hussam Abass Alrubaye. The passengers were Capt Jeremy Fresques, Capt Derek Argel, and SSgt Casey Crate.

16. Cully, *Adapt or Fail*, 16, 41–44.

17. Cully, 44.

18. Cully, 73–75.

19. Delalande, “Four Years after an ISIS Massacre.”

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

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 USAF colonel, phone interview with author, 26 March 2018.

25. Hamann, "Partnership between the US and Iraqi Air Forces," 2.

26. Hamann, 7, n3.

27. Caslen, US Army, Chief of the Office of Security Cooperation-Iraq, quoted in Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, "Quarterly Report to the United States Congress"

28. Meares, "T-6 advisory mission ceases."

29. Landler, "U.S. Troops to Leave Iraq by Year's End"; and Arango and Schmidt, "Last Convoy of American Troops Leaves Iraq."

30. Caslen in "Quarterly Report."

31. Fighter Sweep Staff, "Iraqi Air Force to Bring Beechcraft T-6A."

32. Salami, "Iran's Flying Tanks in Iraq."

33. Schmitt and Gordon, "The Iraqi Army Was Crumbling"; and Fighter Sweep Staff, "Iraqi Combat Caravan Shot Down."

34. Lynch, "US counts on arming."

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.

36. Delalande, "Iraq Got F-16s."

37. Department of Defense (DOD), "Contracts for Jan. 30, 2018"; and Losey, "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 US logistical support for the foreseeable future.

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

39. Harrigian, "Coalition Aviation Advisory and Training Team."

40. Harrigian.

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.

42. Grundahl, "Bridging the Gap between Foreign Internal Defense, 27–30.

43. Grundahl, 26–27.

## 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 US-led coalition set out to rebuild an air force that it had recently destroyed in the US CENTCOM AOR.<sup>1</sup> The context was difficult: a new, US-backed government struggled for legitimacy; corruption pervaded the burgeoning war economy; and systemic challenges existed in Afghan air power that predated the US invasion by more than a decade.

Following the US 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.”<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

To execute the CAPTF-A plan, Airmen were pulled from various worldwide USAF squadrons, 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.<sup>4</sup> As in Iraq, many of these advisors were nonvolunteers. 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.<sup>5</sup>

The AAF had serious human capital issues before the American invasion, which negatively affected coalition-advising operations. Marion records that the AAF 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.”<sup>6</sup> Due to the Soviet training background still present in the AAF 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.<sup>7</sup>

As CAPTF-A tried to move beyond these early steps, Afghanistan’s poor literacy rates and lack of English speakers complicated the task of finding viable aviation recruits. Nevertheless, by 2009, the first group of Afghan student pilots in several decades began the pilot training process in the United States.<sup>8</sup> 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, US-based training avoided the significant investment risks that 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 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, “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 US and coalition advisors’ attempts to train Afghan pilots more difficult than they needed to be.”<sup>9</sup> Interviewees from the USAF special operations and logistics communities shared many similar stories. Logistical competencies such as supply accountability were not just poor, but intentionally disregarded. With a constant flow of US 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.<sup>10</sup> It is difficult to develop a new air enterprise under such conditions. One result of these challenges was an AAF in the early 2010s still defined by its significant capability gaps, more than any demonstrated capabilities.

One significant gap was the AAF’s inability to perform armed reconnaissance and precision strike in support of Afghan ground forces. Though Afghanistan employed secondhand, Russian-made Mi-35 helicopter gunships, 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 AAF’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. US AFMC 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 CAS training and operations for current and future BPC customers.”<sup>11</sup> 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 two-seat turboprop trainer and light attack aircraft that has served in



more than 10 nations since 2003. Sierra Nevada delivered its first A-29 on 26 September 2014, to Moody AFB.

On 15 January 2015, the USAF officially reactivated the 81 FS at Moody. Once a worldwide-deployable A-10 attack squadron based in Europe, the reactivated 81 FS had a new and unique mission: training and advising AAF 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 US-trained Afghan A-29 squadrons reaching full operational capability.

## Organization

Approximately 50 USAF air advisors—IPs, maintainers, and aircrew flight equipment personnel—form the core of the 81 FS. Their day-to-day operations revolve around managing and instructing AAF 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, and 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 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, other potential air advisor assignments, or non-flying duties.<sup>12</sup>

The 81 FS is, uniquely, a combat-mission-ready FS under AETC. For operations and administrative purposes, the 81 FS reports to AETC's 14th Flying Training Wing at Columbus AFB, Mississippi. However, the 81 FS 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 81 FS mission, numerous other Air Force organizations are involved. At HQ AETC, the AETC/A3Q Special Missions Division coordinates organize-train-equip issues for the unit. A program management office under AFMC at Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio, 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 HQ USAF at the Pentagon.<sup>13</sup> Despite this collection of organizations, the USAF instructors and air advisors are the heart and soul of the 81 FS.

In contrast to the 12- to 18-month training pipeline of AFSOC's 6 SOS, it takes an average of just eight weeks to get a new 81 FS IP trained. 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 IPs. Furthermore, nearly all USAF pilots earned their wings training in a similar aircraft to the A-29 (i.e., the T-6 Texan II). In short, pilots recruited to the 81 FS bring experience and skills that *directly translates* to their advisor mission.<sup>14</sup> Their experience, and the well-suited Super Tucano aircraft, 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 AAF. Such a platform is an excellent training and light attack tool in the hands of a well-trained pilot. Before they could train Afghan attack pilots, however, the initial cadre of the 81 FS had to develop the details of the program.

While the structure of the program—the facilities, the aircraft buy, a general timeline—were in place when the first planes arrived, it was up to the 81 FS to develop TTPs for employing the aircraft, *and* a syllabus for teaching those TTPs to 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 students on morning flights, and then flew all USAF attack formations in the afternoons to develop the TTPs and the syllabus USAF instructors would teach later that year.<sup>15</sup>

As of 2018, its third year of operations, the 81 FS is cycling some of its initial cadre out to other USAF assignments. Squadron members' outplacement to follow-on assignments reflects a well-led organization held in good esteem by the fighter community and the service. Several junior officers returned to their primary weapons systems,

while members that are more senior went to competitive staff, PME, and operational leadership opportunities.<sup>16</sup> This outplacement record is a triumph in a military personnel system that often fails to adequately reward air advisor duty and other nonstandard career paths.

In early 2018, already past its initial shelf life, the 81 FS is training its third class of Afghan attack pilots, as well as pilots from Lebanon. The syllabus the USAF IPs created in 2015 has now graduated 18 pilots, who have delivered significant combat effects in Afghanistan with precision and proportionality.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to their training mission stateside, the USAF advisors of the 81 FS play a supporting role in A-29 combat operations as well. Members regularly deploy to Afghanistan, where they join the 438th Air Expeditionary Wing under 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 COIN campaign.<sup>18</sup>

## Force Presentation

Eighty-First FS 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 81 FS know the military operation and the downrange unit to which they will deploy. They usually know an approximate deployment schedule as well. As a general rule, these Airmen deploy for four months and are home for eight.<sup>19</sup> This predictability contributes to the great *unity of effort* between the 81 FS 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 and theater indoctrination to combat mission qualification and Afghan A-29

employment.<sup>20</sup> Members of the 81 FS deployed to Afghanistan are greeted and integrated into operations by 81 FS colleagues. Perhaps more significantly in the air advisor context, deployed 81 FS Airmen are welcomed by the Afghans who they trained 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, and advising foreign airmen he had never met before arriving in the combat zone. The 81 FS construct embodies the long-term, tailored approach favored by established DOD combat advisor units, and by Air Force doctrine.<sup>21</sup>

Whether the 81 FS was their first, second, or last choice of assignment, the USAF pilots, maintainers, and technicians currently serving in the 81 FS know exactly what they are doing and why. Most of them deployed to Afghanistan with USAF combat units long before the A-29 program, and they know that until Afghanistan has its own self-sufficient combat air force, the USAF will maintain a fighter or attack aircraft presence. The Air Force will do so despite US leaders' stated intent to shift resources from COIN to readiness and modernization for peer-to-peer conflict. As long as US ground forces maintain a significant presence in a combat zone, US air power will deploy to support them. However, in the future, if Afghanistan is to secure its own territory and borders, Afghanistan will need the combat air power of its growing A-29 squadron.

### **Economy of Force, Effectiveness, and Legitimacy**

Essentially, the 81 FS 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."<sup>22</sup> While the use of American fighter aircraft to support coalition and Afghan troops has been necessary and largely effective, it has been grossly uneconomical at times. Col Jon Wilkinson, USAF, commanded the expeditionary operations group at Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan, 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.”<sup>23</sup> As many USAF senior leaders and pilots of the 81 FS have noted, the USAF has been burning through the service life of its complex frontline fighters and attack aircraft in the permissive environment of Afghanistan.<sup>24</sup> How much more economical, and indeed more *effective*, might it be for the Afghan government to apply its own combat airpower?

At times, efficiency and effectiveness are discussed as opposing values in academic or bureaucratic settings; although, in Fuller’s mind, they were not opposed. In the minds of the 81 FS USAF pilots, the harmony between the two is clear. The mission brief they present to visitors declares their intent to “replace themselves.”<sup>25</sup> They deployed in their previous roles as USAF combat pilots, and saw in many cases, an AAF with less exquisite but reliable, sustainable reconnaissance and attack capability could have gotten the job done. Now, belatedly perhaps, the USAF is building that capability with the AAF—which may one day put the USAF 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?”<sup>26</sup>

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).<sup>27</sup>

These issues get to the heart of air advisor and SC concepts writ large, and to 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 and *more* efficient and supportive of Afghan government legitimacy. Of course, at some point, the program’s *logic* must be replaced by operational *results*.

## Operations

The A-29 program has achieved impressive operational results. 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)<sup>28</sup>

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 holding to this schedule and *delivering real AAF combat capability* is an achievement to be celebrated.

With respect to combat capability, the program has graduated two classes of Afghan A-29 pilots—18 total—all of who are flight-lead qualified, and five of who are now IPs. Twelve more pilots are in the training pipeline as of early 2018. Twelve aircraft have been delivered to Afghanistan and are currently executing combat missions; another seven are being used for the training program at Moody.<sup>29</sup>

In addition, the program has graduated 60 Afghan maintainers, who are leading A-29 maintenance in Afghanistan.<sup>30</sup> The successful training of PN maintainers is of the utmost significance, given the trend in air advising and SC of nations purchasing aircraft and training pilots, only to lose capability within a few years due to poor sustainment.

Program and training milestones mean little unless the desired combat capability is *activated*. The A-29 program must be called a success as of early 2018; at the tactical and operational levels, a record

of successful missions speaks for itself.<sup>31</sup> To date, the Afghan A-29 squadron's numbers reflect a well-designed program achieving desired combat effects:

- 311 successful air strikes
- 2,427 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<sup>32</sup>

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

## 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 A-29s and a similar program with more advanced aircraft.<sup>36</sup> Afghanistan's TOLONews touted the A-29 as "a reliable and cost-effective aircraft for COIN and warfare scenarios."<sup>37</sup> 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."<sup>38</sup> A Kabul-based watchdog group concedes that the US-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.<sup>39</sup> 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 US 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). The pilots also 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 members of the US government have begun to officially acknowledge the program's success. Within the USAF AETC, the program is a popular public affairs headline and has garnered 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 reported those successes to senior military leadership and US elected leaders.

In his February 2017 testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee, Gen John Nicholson, commander of US forces in Afghanistan, touted the AAF and the A-29 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 percent, providing "prompt overmatch fire support to friendly troops in contact with the enemy."<sup>40</sup> He went on to note the vital importance of the AAF 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."<sup>41</sup> Finally, General Nicholson highlighted the professionalism of the US-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.”<sup>42</sup>

This high praise from the in-theater US commander, based upon clearly demonstrated capabilities and realized positive effects on the battlefield, is the sort of hard evidence that often eludes SC 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 the program has attracted great institutional interest within the Air Force is that unlike many air advisor constructs, the 81 FS has many aspects that correspond to Air Force institutional history and culture.<sup>43</sup> The Air Force “worships at the altar of technology.”<sup>44</sup> The spirit, culture, and capabilities of the service are inextricably linked to its hardware. In addition, 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 without aircraft struggle to communicate the programs’ 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 COIN era.<sup>45</sup> The 81 FS, however, *looks like* the Air Force that elected leaders and the service’s senior leaders expect to see. It is a squadron of trainers and advisors, but it is a FS.

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

The A-29 program has advanced the general goals of SC. *US interests* are well served by the AAF 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 *US 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.

## Notes

1. Marion, “Training Afghan Air Force Pilots,” 24. “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.”

2. Dam, “The Misunderstanding of Hamid Karzai.”

3. Marion, “Training Afghan Air Force Pilots,” 24.

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. Sopko to Hagel, memorandum. 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 (AAF). 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 four aircraft cancelled.

6. Marion, “Training Afghan Air Force Pilots,” 24.

7. Marion, 25.

8. Marion, 25.

9. Marion, 29.

10. USAF officers/student members of Air Command and Staff College Flight 6, Academic Year 2017, interview by author, 9 April 2018.

11. Air Force Materiel Command, “Light Air Support (LAS) Aircraft.”

12. USAF fighter and attack pilots, interview by author, 1 March 2018, 7 March 2018.

13. 81st Fighter Squadron (FS), “81st Fighter Squadron Mission Brief.”

14. Members of 81 FS, interview by author, Moody AFB, 1 March 2018.

15. 81 FS, interview.

16. 81 FS commander, email to author, 12 March 2018.

17. 81 FS, “81st Fighter Squadron 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.

19. 81 FS, “81st Fighter Squadron Mission Brief”; and 81 FS, interview.

20. 81 FS, interview.

21. See chapter 5 on the 6 Special Operations Squadron (SOS), itself modeled after US Army Special Forces in many respects. See also, Air Force Instruction (AFI) 10-4201 Vol 3, 17–20.

22. Fuller, *Foundations of the Science of War*, 206.

23. Wilkinson and Hill, “Airpower Against the Taliban, 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, interview.

25. 81 FS, “81st Fighter Squadron Mission Brief.”

26. 81 FS, interview.

27. Wilkinson and Hill, “Airpower Against the Taliban,” 49.

28. Martin, “Afghan A-29 Training Strategic Basing.”

29. 81 FS, “81st Fighter Squadron Mission Brief.”

30. 81 FS.

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, “81st Fighter Squadron Mission Brief.”

33. 81 FS, interview.

34. Gady, “Afghan Air Force Drops Laser-Guided Bomb.” 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.

35. Kalyvas, *Logic of Violence in Civil War*, 388.

36. Hamid, “A-29s Carry Out One Third of All Airstrikes.”

37. TOLONews, “US Orders Six More.”

38. TOLONews.

39. Clark, “UNAMA Documents Slight Decrease.”

40. Nicholson, *Situation in Afghanistan*.

41. Nicholson.

42. Nicholson.

43. For a fascinating description of Air Force institutional culture and its effects on strategy, see Brown, “Institutional Memory and the US Air Force,” 38–47.

44. Builder, *Masks of War*, 18–22.

45. Despite its worldwide reputation and its status as the USAF’s premier combat aviation advisor force, the 6 SOS was nearly disbanded by the Air Force Special Operations Command, or at least converted to a conventional Special Operations Forces mobility squadron, following 2013 US 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**

SC 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. SC is a way to pursue US 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.”<sup>1</sup> Reflecting that historical truth, the 2018 NDS 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 US strength and the vitality of our alliances and partnerships.”<sup>2</sup> Air advising operations, if planned and executed prudently, provide an economical method of bolstering those partnerships. Far from being relics of the counterterror/COIN era, SC, advisory missions, and FID 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 SC 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 SC—US interests, allies' capabilities, and US access—serve the strategic imperative to leverage every possible advantage against peer competitors.

In its strong alliances and partnerships, the United States already maintains a great comparative advantage over its challengers.<sup>3</sup> 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 networks will complicate strategy-making for America's

rivals, while constricting regional challengers' decision space and room to maneuver. The USAF has employed various SC and air advisor constructs throughout history, and continues to do so. USAF SC today is a highly active but disjointed enterprise demanding 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 SC efforts. Because issues like these are common, and because they are often beyond the US military's span of control, it is fruitless for the DOD or a military service to blame context or a PN 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. USAF 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 SC 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 our rivals are thereby deterred. The Air Force must carefully consider its recent history, learn the hard lessons of its mistakes, and take positive, concrete steps to build on the constructs that work.

## Recommendations

Chapters 1 through 3, reviewing academic literature, US and USAF strategy, and the state of USAF advisory missions today, showed that SC and air advising are deeply ingrained in US strategy and continue to be in high demand. Nevertheless, many have suggested that the Air Force neglects this mission 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.<sup>4</sup> Air advising has often been seen 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 nonkinetic 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 US strategy and Air Force doctrine is clear. Air advising is here to stay, and the Air Force must invest in the people and the capability. This is not a call for service-level reorientation toward SC. 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 USAF 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 FID indeed enables PNs to defeat threats to US interests. The 6 SOS is composed of highly trained volunteers who prefer to operate as small teams in joint efforts. In OEF-P, teams consistently pushed responsibility and 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 6 SOS in OEF-P is a case of CAAs 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 USAF should build upon the AFSOC CAA capability. It could create a second squadron co-located with the 6 SOS in the 492 SOW [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 benefit the 6 SOS and similar AFSOC advisor units to acquire small fleets of US-made, adaptable utility aircraft such as the Cessna Caravan, Beechcraft KingAir, and even the Lockheed C-130, and tie unit 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 US forces avoid debacles like the Iraqi Comp Air crash and the Afghan C-27 program. Furthermore, USAF programs are generally better understood when tied to specific pieces of hardware, and programs receive more political support when their hardware is important to 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 proven US-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 air advising is not the right approach. The USAF was unprepared for the challenge of rebuilding the IqAF, but both sides exacerbated the problem by acting in haste. An array of strategic and operational challenges were present. The USAF chose to simply muddle through, with unsatisfactory results. It remains to be seen if today's CAATT will learn from the mistakes of CAFTT.

Today, with all the effort and manpower 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 nonvolunteer, 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 nonvolunteer, 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 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 multipronged 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 incentivize the desired duty and skill set. 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 increase financial incentives.*

In the medium term, to support the NDS'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 (SAF) 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.<sup>5</sup> There is no specific mention of air advisors; however, 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."<sup>6</sup> *Recommendation: If the Air Force wants to better incentivize duties that support strengthening alliances and attracting new partners—such as SC and air advising—the SAF should clearly articulate as such in the next memorandum of instruction to promotion boards.*

If the Air Force needs a better sense of latent advisor capability among its 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 USAF perceives air advising to economically leverage strategic advantages. The NSS and the NDS make it clear allies and partners are critical to the nation's defense, but air advising is just one SC activity, 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 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 other SC methods cannot. The CJCS believes training



foreign forces is a core mission of the USAF, and specifically, forward-deployed air advisors.<sup>7</sup> Air advisor missions demonstrate a higher level of political commitment than stateside training; these missions position Airmen close to the fight so 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 US 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 US-led coalition directly.

The 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 GCCs each have some sort of regionally aligned advisor force (i.e., the MSASs for SOUTHCOM and US-AMCOM, the USAFE and PACAF air advisor branches, and the Air Forces CENTCOM expeditionary advisors and Gulf Air Warfare Center). The current strength and momentum of USAF general purpose force advising exists in the GCCs. *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 USAMCOM, and advisor branches in USAFE and PACAF, each GCC should simply have an Air Advisor Squadron co-located with its command HQ 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 advisory missions in each theater remain closely aligned with each combatant commander’s objectives.*<sup>8</sup> 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 modernize and restore readiness, the Air Force may simply lack the resources or the institutional interest in revamping its SC and air advisor structures. In terms of 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 PN, and the political imperatives to support those nations with US 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 SC and advisory initiative administered by the National Guard Bureau), or better integrate civilian contractors into combatant command SC plans.<sup>9</sup> More research would be required to develop these options.*

Chapter 7, on the Afghan A-29 program, shows there is ample opportunity for innovation in the fields of SC and air advising. The Afghan A-29 pilots' operational record proves 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 there is significant international demand for enhanced aerial ISR and strike capability, and that potential partners recognize US primacy in these disciplines. The program shows 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 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 81 FS into its own developing light attack program, ideally co-locating the first USAF combat squadron of light attack aircraft with the 81 FS. The Air Force should not deactivate the 81 FS after the Afghan training mission is complete, but rather maintain the squadron and its unique capabilities within the future USAF light attack wing.*

## 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.<sup>10</sup> Though there are air advisors scattered all over the Air Force, this study has shown 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 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 PNs and scenarios. Working by, with, and through allies and partners, the Air Force can advance US 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 current and future operations will require. These recommendations will enable USAF advisor units and operations to better advance US interests, enhance PNs' capabilities, and assure US access across the international system.

## Notes

1. Mattis, address.

2. Department of Defense (DOD), *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy*, 5.

3. DOD, 4.

4. Brown, “Institutional Memory and the US Air Force,” 39.

5. Wilson, memorandum.

6. Wilson.

7. Mehta, “Dunford.”

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.

9. National Guard Association of the United States, “Issue: Expand State Partnership Program”; and National Guard Bureau Joint Staff, International Affairs Division, “State Partnership Program.”

10. Rosen, *Winning the Next War*, 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**

Despite its stated importance in joint doctrine, service doctrine, and military leaders' pronouncements, the mission set of security cooperation (SC) and air advising is poorly resourced and poorly rewarded by the USAF. 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 senior ranking officers 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**

United States Air Force (USAF) air advisors are experienced Airmen who are deployed 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 USAF*.<sup>1</sup> If true, this twofold problem is having strategic negative effects on the USAF SC 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.
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 US military doctrine, and the ongoing operational need for air advisors—validated by allies' requests and the US 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 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, executive, 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 nonvolunteer 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 of 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 (SC) 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) those jobs are undesirable from a career-advancement standpoint.

*The purpose of this two-part study is to collect, curate, and use data to establish whether there is an untapped supply of potential air advisors currently serving in USAF, and to empirically test the perception 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; the result being, air advisor positions are filled via suboptimal processes, *with negative strategic outcomes for mission accomplishment and Air Force human capital.*

This study could prove 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 proposed 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, SC, 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 to 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**

<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Context</i>	<i>Point Value</i>
Prior air advisor experience, tour length 179 days or greater (Note 1)*		5
Prior experience as a RAS <sup>a</sup>	RAS officers often serve in SC <sup>b</sup> 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 MPEP <sup>c</sup>	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 ADP <sup>d</sup> (Note 2)**	The ADP is the USAF's web-based assignment and career preference worksheet.	3
Participation in the LEAP <sup>e</sup>	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
DLPT <sup>f</sup> 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
DLAB <sup>g</sup> 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 USAF requires a DLAB score of 100 or greater for admission to the Defense Language Institute.	3



Table A.1. (continued)

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 <sup>h</sup> , 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 SC missions such as military training teams or BPC <sup>i</sup> events	Recorded on annual performance reports	0.5 points per mission

Source: Author’s original work.

- <sup>a</sup> Regional affairs specialist
- <sup>b</sup> Security cooperation
- <sup>c</sup> Military Personnel Exchange Program
- <sup>d</sup> Airman Development Plan
- <sup>e</sup> Language Enabled Airmen Program
- <sup>f</sup> Defense Language Proficiency Test
- <sup>g</sup> Defense Language Aptitude Battery
- <sup>h</sup> High mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicle
- <sup>i</sup> Building Partners’ Capacity

**\*Note 1:** While it may sound nonsensical 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 AFSC, nor any special experience identifier 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

**Table A.1. (continued)**

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 nonvolunteer 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 tools to analyze Google search terms associated with potential Army recruits. They found "search terms can serve as a measure of propensity and can be used to predict the overall proportion of highly qualified Army accessions."<sup>2</sup>

## 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:
  - a. high and/or demonstrated air advisor aptitude,
  - b. potential air advisor, and
  - c. not recommended for air advisor duty.
2. Those in the high and/or 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 Defense Language Proficiency Test score who participates in the Language Enabled Airmen Program as a lieutenant will have increased opportunities for overseas duty and travel, and will be more likely to become an Olmstead Scholar, a regional affairs specialist, or an exchange officer later in 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, professional military education (PME) schools, and Washington, DC. Certain career fields will provide an outsize 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 intelligence, as opposed to bomber pilots, missileers, and maintenance).<sup>3</sup>

If these hypotheses are proven valid, then in-service recruiting and incentives can be better targeted toward 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 most officers' last promotion opportunity to colonel (O-6).<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup>

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 PME, 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

<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Context</i>	<i>Point Value</i>
Early promotion to colonel (O-6)	2017 selection rate was approximately 2% of eligible line officers.	+10
Early promotion to lieutenant colonel (O-5)	2017 selection rate approximately 3%	+9
On-time promotion to colonel	2017 selection rate approximately 50%	+7
On-time promotion to lieutenant colonel	2017 selection rate approximately 70%	+5
Squadron command		+5
Joint staff	Required for eligibility to flag rank, commonly perceived as required for promotion to O-6.	+3
PME <sup>a</sup> 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, executive, action officer for general officer		+3
Headquarters USAF staff		+2
Joint or foreign in-residence PME, nonfellowship		+2

Table A.2. (continued)

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.

<sup>a</sup> Professional military education

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 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 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 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 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 in order to attract 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 SC 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 USAF.

## Notes

1. Mehta, “Dunford”; Corum and Johnson, *Airpower in Small Wars*, 437–39; and Vick et al., *Air Power in the New Counterinsurgency Era*.
2. Jahedi, Wenger, and Yeung, *Searching for Information Online*, 1, 16.
3. Kadushin, *Understanding Social Networks*, 18–20. 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.
4. “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.
5. Cukier and Mayer-Schoenberger, “Rise of Big Data,” 29–30.

## **Abbreviations**

A2/AD	anti-access/area denial
AAF	Afghan Air Force
ACC	Air Combat Command
ADP	Airman Development Plan
AETC	Air Education and Training Command
AETC/A3Q	Air Education and Training Command/ Special Missions Division
AFMC	Air Force Materiel Command
AFPAK	Afghanistan-Pakistan
AFSC	Air Force specialty code
AFSOC	Air Force Special Operations Command
AFSOC/A1	Air Force Special Operations Command, Directorate of Manpower and Personnel
AMC	Air Mobility Command
AOC	Air Operations Center
AOR	area of responsibility
APH	Afghanistan-Pakistan Hands
ASG	Abu Sayyaf Group
AvFID	aviation foreign internal defense
BPC	Building Partner Capacity
CAA	combat aviation advisor
CAATT	coalition aviation advisory and training team
CAFTT	combined Air Force transition team
CAP	combat air patrol
CAS	close air support
CASEVAC	casualty evacuation
CCDR	combatant commander
CENTCOM	United States Central Command
CF	conventional forces
CJCS	Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff
CMATT	coalition military assistance training team



COIN	counterinsurgency
COMAFFOR	commander, Air Force forces
CPA	Coalition Provisional Authority
DLAB	Defense Language Aptitude Battery
DLPT	Defense Language Proficiency Test
DOD	Department of Defense
EFTS	expeditionary flying training squadron
FID	foreign internal defense
FMS	foreign military sales
FS	fighter squadron
FSF	foreign security forces
GCC	geographic combatant command
HQ	headquarters
IIG	Iraqi interim government
IP	instructor pilot
IqAF	Iraqi Air Force
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
ISR	intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance
JTAC	joint terminal attack controller
LCE	liaison coordination element
LEAP	Language Enabled Airmen Program
LiMA	light mobility aircraft
MAS	mobility advisory squadron
MNSTC-I	Multinational Security Transition Command-Iraq
MSAS	mobility support and advisory squadron
NDS	National Defense Strategy
NSS	National Security Strategy
NVG	night-vision-goggle

OAD	operational aviation detachment
OEF-P	Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines
OIF	Operation Iraqi Freedom
PACAF	Pacific Air Forces
PAF	Philippine Air Force
PME	professional military education
PN	partner nation
RAS	regional affairs specialist
SAASS	School of Advanced Air and Space Studies
SAF	Secretary of the Air Force
SAF/IA	Deputy Under Secretary of the Air Force for International Affairs
SC	security cooperation
SERE	survival, evasion, resistance, and escape
SFA	security force assistance
SMA	special missions aviator
SOCTS	special operations combat training squadron
SOF	special operations forces
SOS	special operations squadron
TAAC-Air	Train Advise Assist Command-Air
TACP	tactical air control party
THW	tactical helicopter wing
TSOC	theater special operations command
TTP	tactics, techniques, and procedures
UAE	United Arab Emirates
USAFE	United States Air Forces Europe
USAFRICOM	United States Africa Command
USC	United States Code
USCENTAF	United States Central Command Air Forces
USSOCOM	United States Special Operations Command
UTC	unit type code
VEO	violent extremist organization

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