

# The Combined Air Power Transition Force

Building Airpower for Afghanistan

Brig Gen Michael R. Boera, USAF



What does “airpower” mean in the struggle for Afghanistan’s future? An objective perspective of what airpower is and what it can deliver is difficult to find in the US armed forces—rare is the informed military leader who approaches the topic without a strong ideological bent. Gen Stanley McChrystal, the top US commander in Afghanistan, recently said that “air power contains the seeds of our own destruction.”<sup>1</sup> His accusation was not without merit in his intended context, coming as it did after a missile attack on a residential compound. Because air strikes can kill innocent civilians as well as enemy combatants, the kinetic effects of airpower sometimes aid the efforts of the insurgency

that they seek to defeat. The aspects of airpower other than kinetic strike, though, are often the most quickly forgotten in debate.

This other face of airpower carries balloting materials to outlying areas of Afghanistan, granting elections a chance to have broad credibility throughout the country. It affords battlefield mobility to indigenous troops, allowing confrontation with and defeat of insurgents. This kind of airpower provides mobility to Afghan citizens, filling logistical gaps that the budding commercial market struggles to meet. It welcomes young people into the service of their nation, giving them a reason to strive for excellence in working for government organizations that have awakened to new,



promising days after three bleak decades of uninterrupted armed struggle.

In any discussion of “airpower” in Afghanistan, there is reason for caution in painting all of its forms with a single broad brush. Evidence for airpower’s effectiveness exists in one of the most exciting and rewarding endeavors in which the US Air Force and its joint-service partners participate today. Most people know that an international coalition is partnering with the nation of Afghanistan. The shared goal calls for strengthening Afghanistan’s national institutions while reducing the influence and capabilities of insurgents who want to see that country returned to a state of chaos. Fewer people know about the full range of actions that our Airmen are contributing toward lasting security in Afghanistan. Airpower capabilities rising from their efforts are sowing the seeds of a brighter future there.

The Combined Air Power Transition Force (CAPTF), part of the international community’s effort to rebuild Afghanistan’s national institutions, features three supporting pillars that focus on governance, security, and socioeconomic development.<sup>2</sup> International agreements have established the United States as the lead nation for instituting reform in Afghanistan’s security forces, and the CAPTF is part of the military organization led by the United States and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) that works with Afghanistan’s military and police leaders to develop sustainable security capabilities.<sup>3</sup> The command’s mission is straightforward: work alongside Afghan soldiers and airmen to help build a “strong, capable, and sustainable” Afghan National Army Air Corps (ANAAC) that will meet Afghanistan’s security requirements.<sup>4</sup> The ANAAC is an essential part of the Afghan National Army (ANA), which will play a pivotal role in Afghanistan’s fight to provide security for its citizens as long as armed insurgency remains a threat.

Three goals motivate and structure this article. First, I want to share the importance of airpower in Afghanistan’s future. Second, I wish to outline the activities with which the CAPTF assists the ANAAC throughout Afghanistan. Third, I would like to share some of the important, impending developments in the realm of Afghan airpower. The evidence suggests that airpower is critical to Afghanistan’s struggle for a peaceful existence and that our recent progress puts Afghanistan on the verge of an airpower breakthrough, though one quite different from the image that airpower conjures in the minds of many military leaders.

## Airpower in Afghanistan

The ongoing struggle in Afghanistan is a counterinsurgency (COIN) fight. In a summary of lessons learned from studying wars against terrorists and insurgents, airpower scholars James Corum and Wray Johnson remind us of some important lessons that must shape our approach in Afghanistan. The first is that a comprehensive strategy—allocating diplomatic, political, military, and economic resources to attain a political goal—must drive the overall effort.<sup>5</sup> The CAPTF is positioned for success in that respect because it touches on every element of a linked grand strategy. Our close mentoring relationships with Afghanistan’s government and military leaders give us insight into the political and social challenges here. We channel resources provided by the international community to increase military capability, and we have a hand in ensuring good stewardship of those resources. This resulting increase in military capability bolsters the legitimacy of the Afghan government and at the same time enables it to provide better security for the population. Thus, the building of Afghan airpower capacity that the CAPTF facilitates reaches

across all strategic areas and furthers the political goal at the heart of COIN success.

A second lesson applied by the CAPTF in Afghanistan is that support aviation—airlift and battlefield mobility, for example—is often the most important role that airpower can play in this type of conflict.<sup>6</sup> As discussion of our ongoing activities will show, the CAPTF focuses its present efforts almost entirely on providing exactly those capabilities, via both fixed- and rotary-wing platforms. Just a few moments of looking at the geography of Afghanistan, with population centers isolated from each other by tall mountains and harsh deserts, reveal the wisdom of concentrating on airlift.

Afghanistan's landlocked position in Southwest Asia and its isolated geographic regions make it a "natural" air power.<sup>7</sup> Mountain ranges and desert expanses divide the country, isolating its urban centers, and robust road networks do not exist. The lack of ground infrastructure has been a challenge since efforts to rebuild Afghanistan began. NATO nations have realized that tactical airlift and helicopters are necessary to support the provincial reconstruction teams that do most of the infrastructure rebuilding in Afghanistan.<sup>8</sup> In the CAPTF, we have observed that the capabilities afforded by tactical airlift are vital to the elected leaders of Afghanistan, giving these officials their only opportunity to forge meaningful cooperation and trust in the federal government across the disparate regions of the country. Afghanistan is a natural air power because it cannot function as a modern state without the mobility that airpower alone can provide.

Next, the CAPTF takes to heart the lesson that "aerial campaigns that target insurgents and terrorists located in or very near population centers are generally counterproductive."<sup>9</sup> They are doubly so when the enemy's most effective information-operations tactic involves drawing attention to the national government's reliance on "occupiers and infidels."<sup>10</sup> Even with the United States' ability to conduct so-called surgical strikes, the best-intentioned ground commanders

have exhibited an ability to anger civilian populations and give public-relations victories to insurgents. The unfortunate circumstances that unfolded in Kunduz when Taliban insurgents hijacked two petroleum tanker trucks offer a recent reminder of this conundrum.<sup>11</sup> The natural remedy is to provide Afghanistan with an organic airpower capability. The ANAAC's ability to deliver its own Afghan soldiers to the fight will reduce the demand for air strikes conducted by outside air forces. This, in turn, compromises the insurgents' claim that the government is a puppet of the West, even as the ANA undermines the ability of the Taliban, al-Qaeda, and other groups to conduct attacks.

Even with excellent battlefield mobility, airpower's kinetic-strike capability retains a role in battling insurgency. In the Afghan COIN arena, however, the politics of the struggle dictate that indigenous capabilities become much more valuable to overall victory than those of any outside nation. On this front, the ANAAC is working to train forward observers who, from positions on the ground, can clear and coordinate airborne fires. Their first milestone calls for acting as observers for Mi-35 attack helicopters, interfacing with live-fire missions on ranges around Afghanistan (fig. 1). The CAPTF is assisting with the challenges of instituting close-coordination procedures that will work on the Afghan battlefield and



CAPTF / Department of Defense (DOD) photo

**Figure 1. An Mi-35 on a live-fire training mission**

that will eventually include fixed-wing attack platforms. For the same reason that indigenous ground troops are better than foreign troops, an ANAAC enabled to conduct its own COIN battles from the air will mean lasting stability of a kind that does not come with outside military involvement.

A fourth lesson from Corum and Johnson maintains that a “low-tech” approach to airpower can have dramatic, positive effects in COIN.<sup>12</sup> Although the Western world in general, and America in particular, traditionally favor high-tech military solutions, this approach will not work in Afghanistan. As the school-building mountaineer Greg Mortenson learned in his personal efforts to advance peace, the patience of Afghan culture is staggering by our standards. Sometimes we need to “listen to the mountains” and accept the fact that modest capability built with patience represents the most effective way to leave Afghanistan with enduring airpower capability.<sup>13</sup> Current operations and training use airframes familiar and well suited to Afghanistan, including Mi-17 and Mi-35 helicopters along with the fixed-wing An-32 airlifter (fig. 2). The C-27 Spartan, which is joining the air fleet, offers increased airlift, battlefield mobility, and instrument flight but resembles the An-32 in its simplicity and ruggedness; moreover, our Afghan partners are comfortable operating it. In building up capability to employ these airframes, the CAPTF and the ANAAC



CAPTF/DOD photo

**Figure 2. An An-32 aircraft at Kabul International Airport**

are pursuing ends that will prove sustainable after outside advisors depart.<sup>14</sup>

Fifth, we understand that “joint operations are essential for the effective use of air power.”<sup>15</sup> The CAPTF’s position within NATO’s training and mentoring forces affords us the chance to shape the ANAAC in a way that complements the development of the larger ANA it supports, because we interact with the individuals who mentor the leaders and future leaders of the ground army. We have the opportunity to help Afghanistan forge an air corps capable of independent action—and to do so in a way that ensures growth commensurate with the army it supports. Our actions will produce a flexible, strategically and tactically capable air force that gives critical support to ground troops.

Efforts to cultivate Afghanistan’s airpower stretch beyond jointness, embracing the efforts of several coalition partners. At the Kabul International Airport alone, members of no fewer than 36 nations eat together every day at the dining facility. A Spanish commander currently oversees the installation, with this responsibility rotating among the NATO nations. Belgians provide and demonstrate ground security to the ANA. Czech operational mentors assist Afghan helicopter crews as they learn to become more effective in combat. The CAPTF, in addition to its mentoring efforts, strives to break down barriers so that coalition involvement with Afghan security forces can expand even further.

Finally, it is evident in the CAPTF that airpower “provides the flexibility and initiative” that insurgents normally enjoy in the COIN battle.<sup>16</sup> The need for the involvement of ground troops in COIN will never go away, but certain functions of airpower—airlift, battlefield mobility, and light attack—are a terrific force multiplier in that fight. With responsive airpower available, force requirements of 20 to 25 soldiers for every 1,000 indigenous residents—commonly considered the gold standard for COIN—may shrink substantially, allowing a relatively small force to conduct effective

operations against insurgents.<sup>17</sup> Having set forth the case for why the CAPTF's role in developing airpower in Afghanistan is so important, I will now address our current collaborative activities with the ANAAC.

## Current Airpower Development

By training, assisting, and mentoring the ANAAC, the CAPTF seeks to create sustainable capacity in four areas, but our goals transcend these easily quantified lines of operation. At first glance, our efforts (1) build the supply of aircraft available to the force, (2) create a trained, motivated, and talented group of airmen for the force, (3) build and improve airfields and related infrastructure throughout Afghanistan, and (4) concurrently support ongoing operations critical to Afghanistan's survival as a nation. Most importantly, we seek to embed improved institutional processes, command and control (C2) functions, and a culture of training throughout the ANAAC, interweaving them into Afghan military culture across the four mission areas upon which we focus. I will briefly highlight our ongoing activities in each of these areas.

Unsurprisingly, airlift capabilities have dominated the ANAAC's aircraft build thus far. Afghanistan's terrain and the need to support ground forces engaged in a COIN fight justify this concentration. The workhorses of the ANAAC fleet are the Mi-17 (fig. 3) and An-32. A utility helicopter, the Mi-17 is ideally suited to high-altitude operations in Afghanistan's mountainous ter-



Combined Security Transition Corps-Afghanistan (CSTC-A) photo

**Figure 3. An Mi-17 delivers ANA troops.**

rain, and the An-32, a fixed-wing airlifter, is capable of short-field takeoffs and landings on unimproved surfaces. Daily operations for these aircraft include personnel movement, medical transport, and cargo delivery. Some capabilities that we tend to take for granted in the West have recently sprung to life in the ANAAC and will become a bedrock foundation for the further development of a professional Afghan military. Let me relate an example.

In late September 2009, two ANA soldiers wounded in the Kandahar province arrived in Kabul on an An-32. ANAAC flight medics transferred the soldiers to National Military Hospital medics on the ramp at Kabul and helped load the patients onto an Mi-17 configured with litters for aeromedical transport. The soldiers arrived at the National Military Hospital, their care uninterrupted and provided completely by Afghan aircrews and medical personnel.<sup>18</sup> The ability to provide care of this quality to the ANA's soldiers builds confidence and trust among its members. Our continued mentoring and investment in such capabilities will enable Afghan security forces to recruit and retain the best and brightest of Afghanistan's rising generation, preventing recruitment by insurgent organizations.

To continue building on the success enabled by airpower, we must recognize the importance of one particular event occurring right now in the CAPTF and the ANAAC with respect to the aircraft build—the delivery of refurbished C-27 aircraft (fig. 4). Delivered directly from Italy since November 2009, the aircraft adds a pallet-and-roller cargo system, airdrop system, and dedicated medical-evacuation capability to the existing fleet of short- and unimproved-field aircraft in the inventory. The C-27 will eventually become the core of Afghanistan's fixed-wing airlift fleet. The coalition military-training mission to Afghanistan has facilitated the refurbishment of eight aircraft to be delivered through fiscal year 2010, with 18 aircraft planned for delivery by 2012.<sup>19</sup>

The development of the rotary-wing fleet is no less dynamic. The fleet of Mi-17s



CSTC-A photo

**Figure 4. A C-27 Spartan refurbished for the ANAAC**

grows every month, and the Mi-35 attack helicopter has conducted successful live-fire training missions at ranges throughout Afghanistan in recent months. The Mi-17 fleet, critical to battlefield mobility and medical transport missions, is a reliable mode of transport for government officials. It is slated to more than double in size by 2013. The Mi-17's reliability, high-altitude capability, compatibility with neighboring nations, and availability of maintenance assets make it the right helicopter for Afghanistan.<sup>20</sup> Building a robust rotary-wing fleet for Afghanistan is a good bet for sustainable capabilities in the ANAAC because helicopters will remain essential for movement in the nation's rugged terrain.

It is not enough merely to provide aircraft for the ANAAC. To have an effective force, we must foster the development of skilled and motivated airmen. This is the most difficult and rewarding effort in which

the CAPTF engages, and it will have the most enduring impact. Our efforts span all levels of the ANAAC organization, with Afghans and Americans collaborating on everything from C2 decision-making processes to the best way to load cargo on an An-32. American mentors offer advice adapted to the Afghan way of doing business, with a keen eye for carrying out the mission and ensuring safety.

Subject-matter experts on every function performed at a US Air Force flying wing are in Afghanistan offering training, advice, and mentoring. From civil engineers to airfield managers, Americans work with Afghans to share experiences and develop best practices for Afghan airpower. The first Afghan loadmaster class in over 30 years finished a three-month course of training in July 2009, certifying eight basic loadmasters and preparing them for transition to the C-27.<sup>21</sup> Additionally, intensive training in the English

language allows aircrews and other Afghans who must function in the international flight system to perform there with safety and competence. Our mentors and instructors come from all military branches and include civilian contractors. The largest group lives and works in Kabul, but the CAPTF oversees a group at Kandahar Air Field and detachments in all regions of Afghanistan.

Training and mentoring does not occur just in Afghanistan. In July 2009, 30 An-32 pilots traveled to the Defense Language Institute in San Antonio, Texas, for intensive training in the English language. They will follow this with an instrument flight-training course and C-27 transition training.<sup>22</sup> Despite the sometimes substantial language and cultural barriers, Americans and Afghans who work with each other report a sense of satisfaction, mutual respect, and accomplishment as they partner to complete missions and build a better ANAAC. This progress is evident among any group of mentors and Afghans who work together every day. Everyone is on the same team.

Trained aircrews, support personnel, and aircraft are effective only with a robust airfield structure within which to operate. The CAPTF is consolidating its headquarters at the Kabul Afghanistan International Airport, improving synergy with the ANAAC and the newly established International Security Assistance Force Joint Command, also at the airport. In addition to development at Kabul, air facilities in Kandahar, Jalalabad, Shindand, Herat, Gardez, and Mazar-e-Sharif benefit from planning and construction facilitated by the CAPTF. On 5 October 2009, the Kandahar Air Wing celebrated its official establishment. Affiliated with the ANA's 205th Corps, Kandahar joins the Kabul Air Wing as the second wing established in the nation since 2001.

Operations constitute the CAPTF's fourth and final area of mission concentration. Because flight operations have never stopped in Afghanistan, the expression "building the airplane while flying it" is an apt description of the CAPTF and the ANAAC's team effort. Our desire to increase training and

institute new means of C2 is in constant tension with a limited fleet of aircraft, a never-ending list of urgent missions, and a combat-operations tempo that can never stand down for a "reset."

Besides day-to-day combat and other military operations, the flying on the CAPTF's radar scope that receives the most attention today includes support of national elections, the annual Muslim hajj to Mecca, and increased levels of flight training—particularly for the Mi-17. The ANAAC supported the main 2009 Afghan election superbly, and its assets were retained without hesitation to support a planned runoff election. Although a candidate's late withdrawal caused cancellation of the runoff, Afghan Mi-17s diligently carried balloting materials around the country, ready for a second round. The ANAAC provides airlift for Muslim pilgrims in remote areas to regional air transport hubs in Afghanistan. Because of the cultural importance of the hajj, this support makes the ANAAC a valued institution in the eyes of all Afghans. In 2009 the hajj occurred in late November, when the start of winter weather put extra strain on an already difficult logistical undertaking.

Although flight training is a normal sustainment function of any air force, the unique demands on the ANAAC make allocating resources dedicated to training a difficult proposition. Because many of the regular pilots in the ANAAC have years of flight experience, training sometimes receives less priority than the urgent operational missions demanded by Afghanistan's current COIN struggle. By increasing the numbers of aircraft available, increasing the pool of available pilots, and establishing training centers in Afghanistan, the CAPTF is helping the ANAAC build a culture of training that prioritizes regular proficiency requirements as an integral part of safe and effective military flight operations.

It is evident that much is taking place right now in Afghanistan to advance the development of airpower capability. Each program reveals several places where more resources and capabilities would do im-

measurable good. The next section provides a glimpse of plans for the CAPTF and the ANAAC.

### Flight Plan for the Future

As we move forward, I want to emphasize the absolute necessity for the CAPTF's plans to embrace the plans of Afghanistan's military and political leaders. It is critical that we do not *impose* on Afghanistan an air corps patterned after our own US Air Force. We have made progress in convincing Afghan leaders that an empowered, centrally commanded organization is an effective way to control airpower, but an existing culture of close control by senior leaders over all decisions means that change in this aspect of military culture

Plans to expand the aviation infrastructure throughout Afghanistan are likewise ambitious. The recent establishment of the Kandahar Air Wing is a good omen for future development of flying units around the country. By 2016 Afghanistan should take pride in permanent ANAAC detachments at Mazar-e-Sharif, Jalalabad, Gardez, and Herat. Along with an air wing and training center at Shindand and the existing air wings at Kabul and Kandahar, these will function as the backbone of an ANAAC that will have substantial capability on call in every region of the country (fig. 5).

As we consider these exciting plans for the ANAAC's growth, it is difficult to overstate the importance of patience. As two well-known experts in Afghanistan COIN put it, "The hosts doing something tolerably

---

It is critical that we do not *impose* on Afghanistan an air corps patterned after our own US Air Force.

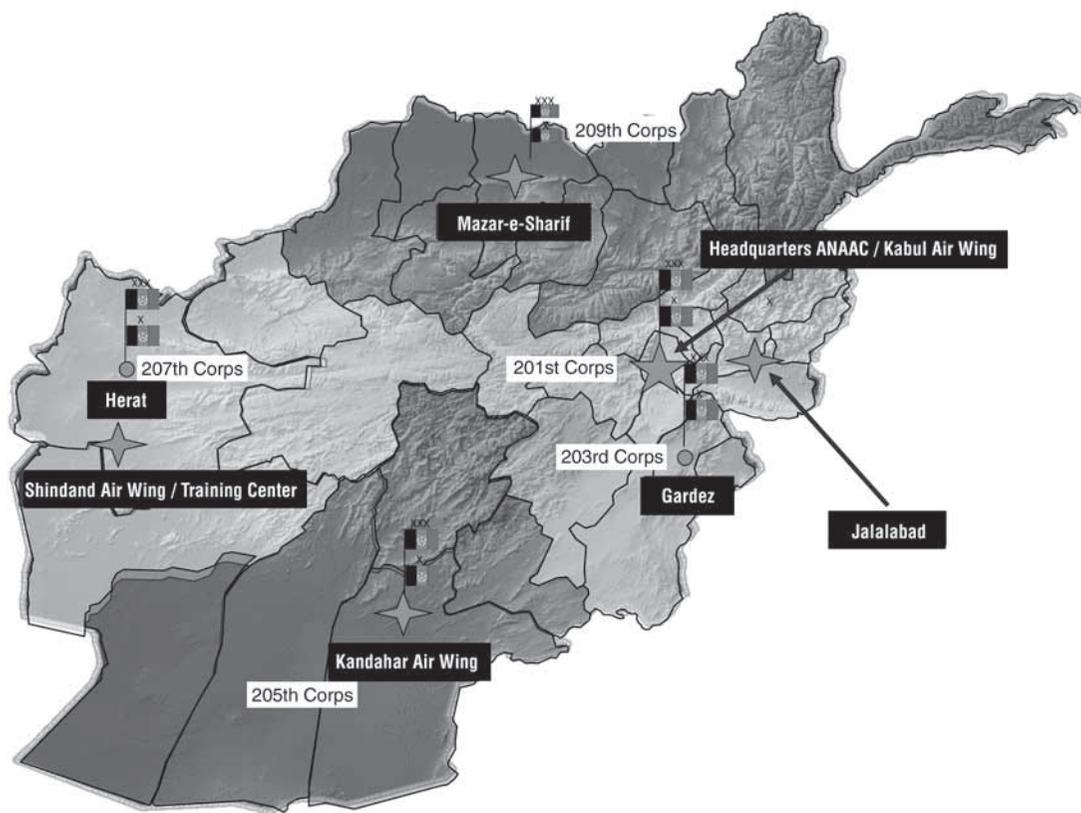
---

will come slowly at best. Further, the frenetic pace at which US Airmen restructure their own organizations is itself anathema to Afghan culture and would thus prove unsustainable. With those caveats in mind, several promising developments for the ANAAC loom just over the horizon.

In the area of aircraft procurement, the ANAAC will continue to develop its Mi-17 and C-27 fleets. Moreover, we are looking at possible additional rotary- and fixed-wing trainer aircraft and a light attack platform. Concurrently, the number of trained operators and support personnel in the ANAAC will grow to complement the additional airframes. Current plans envision enlarging the overall fleet size from 43 to 154 aircraft while increasing the number of personnel from the current 2,700 airmen to over 8,000 by 2016.<sup>23</sup>

is often better than foreigners doing it well."<sup>24</sup> In our zeal to help Afghanistan develop its airpower, we must never outstrip the ability of our hosts to adapt and learn new ways of doing things for themselves. Failure to appreciate this constraint turns our "help" into an obstacle and means that blood and treasure will have been spent in vain. On the other hand, patience that leads to new capabilities internalized by the next generation of Afghan airpower operators and leaders will become the kind of investment that leads to victory in this complex theater of war.

Along with cultivating patience and perseverance, the COIN warrior in Afghanistan must grasp the essential art of understanding the realm of the possible. Readers familiar with Corum and Johnson's argument about airpower in COIN efforts will recog-



**Figure 5. ANAAC facilities in 2016.** (From CSTC-A/CAPTF.)

nize the premise that “small wars are intelligence intensive” and may wonder about the airpower focus on intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) as it relates to Afghanistan.<sup>25</sup> The COIN fight here is certainly intelligence intensive, and the Afghan military excels at collecting and exploiting human intelligence. Fused with the high-tech platforms available to coalition partners, the collective ISR effort in Afghanistan has yielded hundreds of successful operations.

Despite this synergy, rushing to give Afghanistan a computer-based, high-tech intelligence infrastructure of the kind used by industrial nations would be misplaced right now; training efforts would be wasted. Instead, Afghanistan needs time to build a

pool of technology-savvy recruits able to fill potential billets. More importantly, the Afghan military as a whole needs an opportunity to develop and internalize institutional processes that would make a technologically enabled intelligence system worth its cost. Pushing ISR in the mold of the US military on Afghanistan now would do more to dismantle an excellent existing human-intelligence capability than it would build a viable new system.

## Conclusion

Corum and Johnson have noted that “small wars are long wars.”<sup>26</sup> A constant reality that must inform any strategy for Af-



ghanistan is the possibility that the COIN struggle here may well outlast the staying power of Western governments. According to Nathaniel Fick and John Nagl, “Some of the best weapons do not shoot.”<sup>27</sup> Developing security capabilities *within* Afghanistan rather than attempting to wear down a determined insurgency from without is itself a kind of domestic development, enabling more visible measures such as making available electricity, water, jobs, and education. The two observations together suggest that the best investments we can make in Afghanistan are those that allow people to provide security and good governance for themselves after outside involvement has run its course.

As a recent historical account challenges us, America needs to “solidify victory within a chaotic political environment” by helping Afghanistan “get back

on its feet.”<sup>28</sup> Involvement of the CAPTF in building airpower for Afghanistan by mentoring Afghan airmen is a textbook effort in building capacity for a partner nation. The new capabilities being instilled in the ANAAC will form an enduring legacy. The new “eagles” soaring over Afghanistan will secure internal national security even as they prevent foreign terrorists’ exploitation of that country’s remote regions.<sup>29</sup> Together, these professionals and their committed mentors will forge demonstrable, sustainable advances in capabilities and capacities for Afghanistan’s security forces. Some oft-forgotten aspects of airpower have great potential to carry the nation into an era of peace and stability. This is a victory for the whole world, and we are excited to be at the heart of it in the CAPTF. ✪

---

## Notes

1. Dexter Filkins, “Stanley McChrystal’s Long War,” *New York Times Magazine*, 14 October 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/18/magazine/18Afghanistan-t.html> (accessed 17 November 2009).

2. *Afghanistan National Development Strategy [ANDS], 1387–1391 (2008–2013): A Strategy for Security, Governance, Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction* (Kabul: Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 21 April 2008), i, [http://www.ands.gov.af/ands/final\\_ands/src/final/Afghanistan%20National%20Development%](http://www.ands.gov.af/ands/final_ands/src/final/Afghanistan%20National%20Development%20) (accessed 17 November 2009). The ANDS serves as Afghanistan’s Poverty Reduction Strategy in accordance with its World Bank Country Assistance Strategy. See also “Bank Publication 2.11 – Country Assistance Strategies” (Washington, DC: World Bank, June 2005), <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/PROJECTS/EXTPOLICIES/EXTOPMANUAL/0,,contentMDK:20064541~isCURL:Y~pagePK:64141683~piPK:64141620~theSitePK:502184,00.html> (accessed 17 November 2009).

3. The most important of these is the “Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan pending the Re-Establishment of Permanent Government Institutions” [Bonn Agreement (Afghani-

stan)] (Bonn, Germany: United Nations, 5 December 2001). The term *security forces* refers to both the military (MoD) and the police (MoI) in Afghanistan. Formally, the United States is the lead nation for military reform per an Afghan Security Assistance Meeting in Geneva on 17 May 2002, but it also undertakes a substantial police-reform effort alongside the European Union’s Police Mission for Afghanistan (EUPOL).

4. Brig Gen Michael R. Boera, USAF, CAPTF, Kabul, Afghanistan, predecisional draft briefing, subject: Afghan National Army Air Corps, 2009.

5. James S. Corum and Wray R. Johnson, *Airpower in Small Wars: Fighting Insurgents and Terrorists* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 425–26.

6. *Ibid.*, 427.

7. Colin Gray called the United States a natural air power. Many of the geostrategic factors that underpin Gray’s claim about the US predilection for airpower also apply to Afghanistan. Among these are Afghanistan’s continental geography, its geopolitical isolation, and its lack of sea power. The technological base and nuclear-deterrent capability attributed in Gray’s US list obviously do not apply to

Afghanistan today. See Colin S. Gray, *Explorations in Strategy* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 85.

8. Andy Nativi, "Afghan Airpower," *Aviation Week and Space Technology* 160, no. 4 (26 January 2004): 48–49.

9. Corum and Johnson, *Airpower in Small Wars*, 428.

10. "From Insurgency to Insurrection," *Economist* 392, no. 8645 (22 August 2009): 22.

11. Nicholas Kulish and Judy Dempsey, "Germany Defends Decision on Afghan Airstrike," *New York Times*, 8 September 2009, A4.

12. Corum and Johnson, *Airpower in Small Wars*, 430.

13. Greg Mortenson and David Oliver Relin, *Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to Fight Terrorism and Build Nations—One School at a Time* (New York: Viking, 2006), 149.

14. Histories of the Afghan Air Corps report that "the helicopter [was] the single most important weapon in the Soviet-Afghanistan war"; they also reveal that An-32s and An-26s have been closely intertwined in the struggle to carve order out of chaos within the government and military leadership since the fall of the Taliban. See "A Short History of the Afghan Air Force, 1919–2009," unpublished draft (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air Force Historical Research Agency, 2009).

15. Corum and Johnson, *Airpower in Small Wars*, 433.

16. *Ibid.*, 434.

17. Other force-structuring ratios put the ideal number at 10 soldiers for each insurgent. Since the

insurgent population in Afghanistan is unknown, the population-based ratio makes better sense. See Nathaniel C. Fick and John A. Nagl, "The U.S. Army / Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual: Afghanistan Edition," *Foreign Policy*, no. 170 (January/February 2009): 46.

18. TSgt Misti Adams, USAF independent duty medical technician, 438th Air Advisory Group, Kabul International Airport, interview by the author, 12 October 2009.

19. Boera, briefing.

20. *Ibid.*

21. Lt Col Mark Hersant, USAF, "Afghan C-27A Program Takes Flight," *Air Force Link*, 3 September 2009, <http://www.af.mil/news/story.asp?id=123166178> (accessed 17 November 2009).

22. *Ibid.*

23. Boera, briefing.

24. Fick and Nagl, "U.S. Army / Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual," 46.

25. Corum and Johnson, *Airpower in Small Wars*, 434.

26. *Ibid.*, 435.

27. Fick and Nagl, "U.S. Army / Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual," 45.

28. Stephen Tanner, *Afghanistan: A Military History from Alexander the Great to the Fall of the Taliban* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2002), 325.

29. Translation of the official Dari motto of the ANAAC recruiting initiative: "Be an Eagle for Afghanistan." Boera, briefing.



#### **Brig Gen Michael R. Boera**

General Boera (BS, University of Colorado–Boulder; MA, Central Michigan University; MSS, Air War College) is commanding general, Combined Air Power Transition Force, Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan, Kabul, Afghanistan, and commander, 438th Air Expeditionary Wing. Prior to his current assignment, he was deputy director for operations at US Pacific Command. He has served on a major command and combined air operations center staff, and has commanded a fighter squadron, cadet group, fighter operations group, wing, and the 613th Air and Space Operations Center. During Operation Allied Force, General Boera led his F-16CJ squadron in the first attack in Serbia. Additionally, he led his squadron on deployments in support of Operations Southern Watch, Northern Watch, and Deliberate Forge. A command pilot with more than 5,500 flying hours, he has flown 160 combat missions in the F-16. He also deployed in support of Operations Desert Shield, Desert Storm, Provide Comfort, and Unified Assistance, the tsunami humanitarian-relief effort in South Asia. General Boera is a graduate of Squadron Officer School, Army Command and General Staff College, and the Air War College.

The conclusions and opinions expressed in this document are those of the author cultivated in the freedom of expression, academic environment of Air University. They do not reflect the official position of the U.S. Government, Department of Defense, the United States Air Force or the Air University.