



AIR ADVISING

A Critical Component of Joint Engagement

By NICOLE S. FINCH and PETER A. GARRETSON

Over the past few years, the U.S. Air Force has developed a scalable capability for air advising that is designed to enhance access, build relationships, and create partner capabilities that enable and create synergies for the joint force. This article discusses air advising, the future joint environment and the impetus for the creation of an air advisor capability, benefits of air advising for the joint force, standing air advising units, aviation enterprise development, the future of air advising in the joint force, and how the members of the joint community can engage and leverage the air advising capability.

Air advising is happening around the world. Kyrgyz firefighters learn coalition techniques for responding to airfield emer-

gencies. Iraqi pilots attend the international F-16 schoolhouse in Tucson, Arizona. U.S. Airmen in mobility support advisory squadrons (MSAS) spend a month with their compatriots in Honduras, exchanging information on everything from survival training to logistics to air traffic control. Each of these diverse activities includes a central strategic feature: long-term relationship-building for the purpose of advancing U.S. national interests. These partner nation security forces now have U.S. military contacts and affiliations to last them throughout their careers as they advance to positions of leadership. In turn, Airmen have done their best to prepare the

operational environment, first and foremost to reduce U.S. employments abroad and share the burden of necessary international action with partner nations, and also to provide global access to the U.S. joint force.

Air Advising Defined

Air advising is “the act of communicating professional knowledge and skills to partner nation personnel in order to improve their airpower capabilities. Air advising includes five basic activities: assessing, training, advising, assisting, and equipping.”¹ The Air Force assists partner nations by helping them develop, enhance,

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and sustain their *aviation enterprises*, defined as “the sum total of all air domain resources, processes, and culture, including personnel, equipment, infrastructure, operations, sustainment, and airmindedness.”²

Air advising is a critical component of the Air Force response to direction in Department of Defense (DOD) Instruction 5000.58, “Security Force Assistance” (SFA), which instructs the military Services, among other things, to:

- support DOD efforts to organize, train, equip, and advise foreign military forces
- provide scalable capabilities to meet the requirements of SFA activities
- develop military department Service-specific strategy for SFA capabilities.

Future Joint Environment and Impetus for Air Advising

U.S. leaders have directed the military to focus on more efficient means to achieve security and stability, teaching that we can get the most “bang for the buck” by preventing the types of conflicts overseas that can affect us within our borders or require U.S. intervention abroad. To achieve the endstates in this national-level guidance, DOD and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff have issued directives and instructions for security force assistance, counterinsurgency, stability operations, and irregular warfare. The Air Force vision is to employ a strategy of developing and enhancing partner nations’ respective aviation enterprises via air advising as part of targeted security force assistance. Over the past few years, the Air Force has developed a scalable capability for air advising designed to enhance access, build relationships, and create partner capabilities to enable and create synergies for the joint force.

Benefits for the Joint Force

The dynamics of the international environment mean we cannot plan the specifics of future joint force employment with certainty, but we do know that whenever U.S. forces are employed abroad, they will need appropriate support elements and force multipliers. For American forces to be timely and effective, they often need to be air mobile, arriving via an aerial port of debarkation (APOD). The joint force has the option of using airpower combined with indigenous forces to achieve certain military and politi-

cal endstates without placing U.S. surface forces at risk, thus providing a wider range of options. Therefore, both airpower and surface operations benefit from more capable partners. Successful deployment and employment require the cooperation of partners who can provide APODs in various regions of the world, who can provide aviation support in mobility and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) missions, and who are capable of operating with U.S. forces. Air advising provides our partners with the capability and professionalism to perform such missions as ISR and moving land forces, whether working alone, with regional partners, or in concert with U.S. joint forces and interagency organizations.

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Air advising benefits the joint force in four specific ways: prevention, burden-sharing, legitimacy, and access. Air advising has the potential to reduce U.S. employments abroad while increasing compatibility and interoperability for coalition and allied operations, leading to more opportunities for burden-sharing with other nations when future conflicts arise. A rising tide lifts all boats, so to speak, when it comes to aviation enterprise development: what helps our partner nations helps us. Building professionalism in partner air forces, as well as improving their overall infrastructures, helps lead to the legitimacy of partner nation governments within their own borders. Air advising also opens the door for access to and shaping of nonpartner nations, either holding up our partner nations as examples for others to emulate, or via our partners advising other neighbors who may not be as anxious for a U.S. presence on their soil or our involvement in their affairs.

Air advising assists the joint force and the Nation in reaching desired defense and security goals in multiple ways. From the beginning, Airmen consider joint and interagency needs and synergies. Air Force air advising is executed in concert with the other military Services and other governmental organizations. For example, military engagements will necessarily be focused on building the capacity and capability of partner nations

to withstand internal threats and external aggression. However, advancing a partner nation’s aviation enterprise also typically advances that partner’s dual-use aviation capabilities, serving larger U.S. development goals. While air advising could span the full spectrum of partner air forces, the capability that the Air Force is expanding is aimed principally at developing nations with underdeveloped aviation enterprises. Therefore, the Service anticipates that it will be part of a team with other government agencies, such as the Federal Aviation Administration, U.S. Agency for International Development, Department of Commerce, and Department of State, which will handle other aspects of civilian and military aviation development

as part of a larger, whole-of-government-planned effort. The Air Force will also cooperate with international organizations such as the International Civil Aviation Organization, International Air Transport Association, and various financing organizations such as, for example, the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, Millennium Challenge Corporation, and Asian Development Bank.³ Such civil-military relationships may be established through the U.S. Embassy Country Team in each partner nation as well as through interagency organizations within the national capital region and elsewhere.⁴

Standing Units in Special Operations and General Purpose Forces

Air advising takes a variety of forms. Current examples include Airmen deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan who advise on a full-time basis. Some Airmen assigned in partner nations as part of security cooperation organizations within U.S. Embassies may perform air advising on a part-time basis. Some base-level maintenance personnel and aircrew may perform air advising activities routinely, as members of mobile training teams, to partner nations or during exercises and personnel exchanges with partner nation personnel.⁵ The standing units of execution, education, and training for air advising in the Air Force are 6th Special Operations Squadron (6 SOS), two mobility support aviation squadrons in

the general purpose forces (GPF) that provide an expeditionary capability, and the Air Advisor Academy (AAA), which provides education and training for air advisors assigned to the MSAS as well as predeployment training.

6th Special Operations Squadron.

While air advising and aviation enterprise development are becoming more prominent in Air Force strategy, the Service has performed these roles since its inception. The

Although only established in 2011, the squadrons have already been successful in their first engagements. In April 2012, 571 MSAS participated in an information exchange with the Honduran air force, which was described by participants as “a success from every aspect.” During this engagement, 15 members of the 571 MSAS demonstrated a capability to conduct seminars in airbase defense, aircraft maintenance, aircrew safety, aircrew survival, air

advisory capability for steady-state protracted IW requirements to complement existing special operations force advisory capabilities.” The strategy directed the creation of “an aviation advisor schoolhouse, which will preserve the hard-won experience gleaned from current efforts to stand up the Iraqi Air Force and the Afghan Air Force.”⁹

The AAA mission, as described in its April 2010 charter, is “to provide a rigorous, relevant, and flexible continuum of education and training to Airmen so they are capable of applying their aviation expertise to assess, train/educate, advise, assist, and equip partner nations in the development and application of their aviation resources to meet their national needs in support of all security cooperation activities.” It combines the core air advisor skills with language, region, and culture instruction, as well as fieldcraft skills to Airmen of all ranks.¹⁰ Depending on mission requirements, courses, which start almost every week, can range between 1 and 4 weeks in duration. Longer courses meet U.S. Central Command theater-entry requirements, counterinsurgency training standards, and security force assistance training standards. The AAA was initially focused on training personnel deploying to Iraq and Afghanistan but has now expanded its scope to support global requirements for air advisors. It reached its initial operational capability in July 2012, and will eventually have a throughput of up to 1,500 students per year.

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oldest organization dedicated to air advising is Air Force Special Operations Command 6 SOS, which was established as a squadron in 1994 but with lineage dating back to 1944.⁶ These combat aviation advisors (CAAs) do not conduct initial qualification training. Moreover, their core mission is not to develop a partner nation’s broader aviation enterprise. Instead, CAAs specialize in training foreign forces in advanced or tactical employment of aviation resources operated by the partner nation—often equipment and aircraft produced by the former Soviet Union.⁷ Combat aviation advisors from 6 SOS have been working over the past decade to increase the aviation counterinsurgency capability and capacity in both Iraq and Afghanistan. Their efforts have been so successful that Congress mandated that 6 SOS double in size in 2006 and again in 2010. Meanwhile, DOD asserted the importance of institutionalizing similar capabilities in the GPF so special operations forces can remain “special” while the GPF responds to a broader mission set.

Mobility Support Aviation Squadrons. Since 2008, the Air Force has been working to achieve a capability similar to that of 6 SOS within the GPF. Toward this end, and drawing on lessons learned by Air Force Special Operations Command combat aviation advisors, the Air Force established 571 and 818 MSAS. While the MSAS are trained and able to support any country, the Air Force has chosen to create each squadron as a regionally aligned force: 571 MSAS is aligned to support U.S. Southern Command and 818 MSAS is aligned to support U.S. Africa Command, allowing these commands to build long-term relationships with partner nations.

traffic control, communications, generator maintenance, and fuels assessment. Commensurate with the Air Force commitment to increase language and culture skills, the ability of many members of this unique squadron to speak Spanish improved the engagement, and the after-action report recommended more language training for all squadron members. The 818 MSAS has participated in engagements in Africa including the March 2012 African Partnership Flight, a 2-week military-to-military multilateral and regional engagement event in Ghana. In this multilateral engagement, the 818 MSAS demonstrated its capability to conduct classroom instruction including such courses as cargo preparation, search and rescue, airfield security, public affairs, flight and ground safety, aerospace physiology, and fixed-wing aircraft maintenance. In addition to imparting knowledge, these activities opened the door for truly lasting partnerships.

Air Advisor Academy. An air advisor is not entirely born or made. Air advising begins with a certain type of individual—not everyone is cut out for the job. Just as a good aviator does not necessarily make a good instructor, a good instructor does not necessarily make a good advisor. The successful air advisor empathizes with the partner’s situation, feelings, and motives and has enough patience to adapt to the slow process of partner nation improvement.⁸ Once identified, the air advisor, preferably with these basic personality traits, attends training at the Air Advisor Academy to learn the tools of the air advising trade.

The AAA was officially established in May 2012 to fulfill the 2009 Air Force Irregular Warfare (IW) Strategy’s goal of establishing “a permanent general purpose force . . .

Aviation Enterprise Development

Many in the joint force understandably care about partner air capabilities to support land forces and combined air-land operations. But aviation does not begin and end at close air support, and a partner nation cannot have aviation operations until it has developed an aviation infrastructure. Aviation enterprise development is an Air Force-led initiative to engage with less capable partner nations to build aviation capabilities, capacities, and institutions and to strengthen the U.S. global defense posture. The aviation enterprise development initiative begins with guidance from the President, Secretary of Defense, and Joint Staff to make thoughtful choices supporting partnership-building to achieve desirable foreign policy effects in peacetime. *Airpower capabilities* include “all air, space, and cyberspace capa-



U.S. Air Force (Lesley Waters)

Air traffic controller and air advisor review arrival-runway separation procedures with Honduran military air traffic controllers

bilities germane to a given engagement with a partner nation.¹¹ For some partner nations, air advising must begin with the development of the aviation enterprise—that is, having the ability to consistently get even the simplest aircraft into the sky—before it can move on to the major capabilities typically associated with Air Force operations.

To meet that challenge, 571 and 818 MSAS assess, train, and advise partner nation air forces in those critical agile combat support activities (command and control, communications, air operations, aerial port, aircraft maintenance, aeromedical evacuation, and support functions) that assist in aviation enterprise development and open the door to economic development and future aviation operations. A nation with little or no aviation enterprise would then move on to developing mobility capabilities, providing more operational reach over wide expanses of ungoverned or undergoverned territory, reducing the space

and safe havens beyond state reach that provide the freedom of action sought by insurgents, extremists, criminals, and terrorists. The same light aircraft initially used for mobility operations can then be modified to perform ISR and strike operations.

The overall goal of aviation enterprise development is for a nation's airpower capabilities to be “employed, supported, and integrated into the larger context of the partner nation's national security strategy” and the geographic combatant command's theater campaign plan.¹² An important part of a functional aviation enterprise is aerospace-enabled governance. Mobility, ISR, and strike capabilities are critical to a nation's internal stability and legitimacy and are interactive and mutually supportive of the less visible comprehensive, whole-of-government, and military-civil interaction and interoperability that likewise allows the functioning area of a state to expand. The Air Force incorporates the whole-of-aviation enterprise in its

approach, from initial assessment of a partner nation to planning, execution, and lessons learned, with the end goal of empowering the partner nation to extend its state reach through aerospace-enabled governance.

Development Planning

The Air Force has an exceptional system to service the needs of near-peers who can afford the type of advanced aircraft that provide the United States with air superiority. These near-peers already have a well-developed aviation enterprise and a history of aviation professionalism, and they are interoperable with U.S. capabilities. The Air Force is increasing its emphasis on GPF air advisors, who fill a vital niche and service critical security cooperation partners with nascent or even nonexistent aviation enterprises. These advisors assess the partner nation's ability to meet its goals, along with U.S. desired security endstates, and formulate a plan to help the nation reach those goals and endstates.

Air advising absorbs critical lessons learned from previous attempts to partner with nations with less-developed aviation enterprises. Failure to fully develop the “back-end” of aviation through advising efforts has many times resulted in delivering inappropriate equipment to partner nations, and sometimes even in airframes “rotting on the ramp”: expensive aircraft sitting unused because they lack operators, maintainers, and spare parts. These failed partnership efforts yield no increased partner capability for self-defense, diminish the treasuries of both nations, and are outcomes that the Air Force seeks to avoid in its shaping of the operational environment. To do the job right, the Air Force is in the process of developing a deliberate planning system intent on building long-term partnerships and coming to an understanding of what the partner nation actually needs, not just what may bring prestige or sales to the United States.

Guidance

Although Air Force personnel have been involved in air advising activities for many years, there has been a lack of an “overarching framework that guides and integrates all of these efforts towards the common goal of meeting geographic combatant commander . . . requirements.”¹³ Until recently, air advisors relied on common sense and the experience of predecessors to get the job done, and they have done a commendable job. But to truly institutionalize the air advising mission, the Air Force has developed guidance that preserves the lessons learned over the past 10 years in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as those from the decades before the 9/11 era. Air advising is now addressed through the following:

- Air Advising Operating Concept and associated Air Force Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures (AFTTP) 3-4.5, *Air Advising*
- Irregular Warfare Operations Roadmap
- Air Component Campaign Support Plan.

The Air Advising Operating Concept was published in February 2012 and lays out the capabilities for performing air advising, as well as the sequenced steps for air advising activities. The concept proclaims that “air advising is a long-term activity undertaken in partnership with the U.S. Government



U.S. Air Force advisor shows Afghan airmen proper way to take temperature reading of fuel sample

U.S. Air Force (Nadine Barclay)

Country Team, joint force, and partner nation government and military,” and that it cannot consist simply of selling or giving a partner nation equipment and then leaving. The goal of improving a partner nation’s aviation enterprise starts long before any equipment is procured or delivered and continues after any equipment is fielded.

Members of the joint force who want to learn more about air advising can reference AFTTP 3-4.5, *Air Advising*, published in July 2012. The publication takes an even more detailed look at how to perform air advising including the principles and skills of air advisors, the role of culture in air advising, logistical support for air advisors, and step-by-step mission execution. The AFTTP is an invaluable handbook for air advisors, capturing lessons learned that previously did not exist. The Irregular Warfare Operations Roadmap provides the blueprint for integrating GPF and special operations forces and seeks to create the systems that support coherent air advising capability. The Air Component Campaign Support Plan is the document in which air components of the geographic combatant commands will lay out how air advising activities support command endstates and the theater security cooperation plan.

Future of Air Advising in the Joint Force

Air advising can be pursued both jointly with other Services and through the

total force including Active-duty, Reserve, and Air National Guard Airmen, as well as Department of the Air Force civilians. A current example of joint air advising is Air Force–Army rotary-wing advising. An example of total force air advising is Air National Guard participation in the National Guard Bureau’s State Partnership Program. Joint special operations and Air Force GPF also work together in air advising.

Joint advocacy is vital to air advising. It is important for surface components to articulate their air advising requirements through their geographic combatant commands and the integrated priority list process to help the Air Force better support those needs. While some Air Force parties believe their Service could more effectively partner and train with developing partner nations if it maintained smaller, more affordable aircraft in its own inventory, the demand signal was not clear enough to support the requirement in the current fiscal climate. For example, light mobility and light attack/armed reconnaissance aircraft were programmed to diversify the Air Force’s air advising capability beyond agile combat support. These light aircraft were designed to be transferrable, affordable, modular, and interoperable. The program was a victim of defense budget cuts, but the Air Force is still within a time period where it could easily restart the program office with a simple and relatively small infusion of resources—if the strategic case could be made for how it sets conditions favorable to

U.S. interests and the Department decided it should be an area of investment.

How the Joint Force Can Engage

The key entry point for engaging Air Force air advising capabilities is through the geographic combatant command air component staff planning organizations. These bodies develop the individual Air Force country plans for partner nations in their respective areas of responsibility and the overall Air Component Campaign Support Plan, which details all planned security cooperation engagements for the theater. All of these plans are in direct support of the command's theater campaign plans. The joint force has a number of tools to help get even better leverage from air advisors. Through the Global Force Management process, combatant commands can request scalable, tailorable air advising units for their planned security cooperation activities. Commands also produce annual integrated priority lists that

traveling to this country regularly for the past 2 years and has built personal relationships. Although the bilateral relationship was tentative at first, this Airman and other members of his squadron have built trust through a process of working within the partner nation's needs and budget and providing appropriate, affordable solutions rather than following a one-size-fits-all checklist developed with a Western point of view. Over time, the partner nation has made sustainable progress, developing both military and civilian resources and following international best practices for aviation. It has gained control of its undergoverned areas, won legitimacy in the eyes of the population, and made positive economic strides. The United States has gained an ally in the region with the infrastructure and inclination to allow U.S. joint access and basing in the event of a future contingency. Such are the outcomes that air advising seeks to advance.

capabilities as part of a coherent national effort supporting the enterprise.

Airmen are already engaged in air advising around the world every day and are helping partner nations develop their aviation enterprises and improve their political, military, and economic stability and security. However, the Air Force can deliver even more positive foreign policy outcomes and further support the national security goals articulated in the Guidance for Employment of the Force, the Strategic Defense Guidance, and the National Security Strategy. The Service will lead in preventing, shaping, and gaining access through the air advising function it is developing for the joint force. **JFQ**

NOTES

¹ U.S. Department of the Air Force, "Air Advising Operating Concept," Department of the Air Force, February 10, 2012, 6.

² *Ibid.*, 8.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁶ U.S. Air Force, 1st Special Operations Wing, 6th Special Operations Squadron Fact Sheet, February 24, 2011, available at <www2.hurlburt.af.mil/library/factsheets/factsheet.asp?id=3496>.

⁷ Richard L. Ingram, *Aviation Security Force Assistance: A 21st Century Imperative* (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College, 2012), 13–14.

⁸ Air Force Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures 3–4.5, *Air Advising* (Fort Dix, NJ: U.S. Air Force Expeditionary Center, July 2012).

⁹ U.S. Air Force, "The 21st Century Air Force: Irregular Warfare Strategy," Department of the Air Force, January 2009.

¹⁰ Air Education and Training Command, "Air Advisor Education and Training Program," Air Advisor Academy Mission Briefing, July 2012.

¹¹ "Air Advising Operating Concept," 6.

¹² *Ibid.*, 21.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

combatant commands can request scalable, tailorable air advising units for their planned security cooperation activities

are used during the Air Force budget submission process to help direct resources to match combatant commander needs. Combatant commands can also use the air components in their normal planning processes. The two existing MSAS have the capability to perform air advising anywhere in the world, but with a fully developed demand signal, the Air Force can begin to program for more air advising units similarly aligned with other geographic regions and prepared for long-term engagements with our regional partners.

The Air Force supports air advising based on the Guidance for Employment of the Force and the National Defense Strategy. These documents provide guidance to assist fragile or vulnerable partners in withstanding internal threats and external aggression and dictate the priority of building capability and capacity to particular partner nations.¹⁴

Conclusion

Imagine this scenario: A U.S. Airman deploys to a partner nation for a month to assess that nation's progress in developing its aviation enterprise. He arrives to a hearty welcome by his partner air force counterparts largely because he has been

The U.S. Air Force is committed to providing air advising capability to the joint force. It seeks to proactively shape the environment by empowering partner nations to see to their own security and improve access and influence for the United States. Responding to national direction to "develop innovative, low-cost, and small-footprint approaches to achieve our security objectives," the Air Force has developed and is expanding an air advising capability available to the combatant commands via the mobility support advisory squadrons and the 6 SOS, with a well-trained force through its Air Advisor Academy. The key activities of air advising—assess, train, advise, assist, and equip—are addressed in the guidance contained in the Air Advising Operating Concept. The key components of this concept are the permanent, professionally trained units that train and educate in the AAA and execute air advising in the special operations and general purpose forces. The Irregular Warfare Operations Roadmap aims for an integrated force of general purpose and special operations Airmen deliberately organized, trained, equipped, educated, and sustained to analyze irregular environments and present tailored